

Dhyanas for dummies [Part 2 of 2]

How to be cleverer than your Guru

Source: Anupada Sutta (M 111), SD 56.4 (3.2.1)

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3.2.1.3 THE 3RD DHYANA [§§7-8] opens with “**the fading away of zest,**” on account of which the meditator dwells “**in equanimity, and mindful and clearly comprehending, still feeling pleasure with the body**” [§7]. The active aspect of zest disappears, leaving a greater sense of equanimity, and yet a clear mind that fully feels joyful. Worldly language has broken down here: we are using meditative lingo. Although we use familiar words, they have broader, profounder senses that often overlap or envelop the senses so that they need to be teased out and relived with our Dharma-inspired meditation.

(2) These are not technical terms (since they do not refer to fixed or known processes): this is sometimes called “**intentional language.**” This is the language of direct experience of profound mental states, and they are words that, do not freeze meaning but rather frees us from preconceptions. It prepares us to taste the experience first, and then speak of it in some helpful way. In other words, this is the language of Dharma-spirited meditators speaking of their profound meditative experiences.

(3) Hence, we speak of equanimity (*upekkhā*) and also speak of enjoying “pleasure with the body” (*sukhañ ca kāyena*). By “**equanimity**” is meant “mental balance” (*majjhataṭṭā cittassa*): the mind is neither thinking nor feeling in the sense-based manner; there is neither liking nor disliking; there is no knowing in the worldly sense.

In other words, there is no mediation in the perception (*saññā*), which is *direct*—we are, as it were, what we experience. There is neither subject nor object. A simple example is when a musical performer plays some really good music, and “loses” himself in it: there is no more musician and instrument—the musician *is* the music; the music *is* the musician. In fact, we can even say: there is only the music.

(4) It is this “centredness of the mind” (*majjhataṭṭā citassa*) that is equanimity we are able to fully and directly experience as **pleasure** (*sukha*) with the totality of our being: this is the meaning of “**with the body**” (*kāyena*). Our experience is purely mental: it seems to be a timeless experience. Indeed, we are beyond space and time (as we know them) in dhyana. Only on emerging from dhyana, we will notice that a long time has actually passed; but the meditation moment is always, as it were, an eternal “one”—this is the “**mental oneness**” (*citt’ek’aggatā*).

(5) In musical experience MOZART writes in a familiar manner:

“... provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarged itself, becomes methodized and defined, and the whole, though it be long, stands almost finished and complete in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue, at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once. ...

When I proceed to write down my ideas, I take out of the bag of my memory, if I may use that phrase, what has previously been collected into it in the way I have mentioned. For this reason the committing to paper is done quickly enough, for everything is, as I said before, already finished ... ”*

[*Mozart, undated letter (prob written in Berlin, 1789, not Prague,1783). Edward Holmes, *The Life of Mozart, including his correspondence*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1845:317 f (digital ed Cambridge,CUP, 2009). Published as “Letter of Mozart to a friend,” in *The Boston Musical Gazette* 2,19, 11 Oct [1847](#):146.]

(6) Hence, the 3rd dhyana is said to have **these states**: joy, mindfulness, clear comprehension and mental oneness [§8.1b]. On account of this equanimity (the absence of the opposition of feelings), the mind is joyfully focused and crystal clear.

3.2.1.4 THE 4TH DHYANA [§§9-10] is characterized by “**the abandoning of pleasure and pain**” (*sukhassa pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā*), that is, physical feelings, and “**the previous disappearance of joy and grief**” (*pubbe’va somanassa,domanassānaṃ atthagamā*), that is, mental feelings. The meditation language here is “intentional.” The *physical* feelings are “abandoned” (*pahāna*), that is, consciously pushed away. The *mental* feelings are not so easily removed, but subside only when the mind is calmed. In this sense, they have “previously” or “earlier” (*pubbe*) “disappeared” (*atthagama*). The meaning here is that since all mental feelings have subsided, there are also no physical feelings.*

[*On the nature of being “percipient but not sensing,” see SD 55.19.]

(2) Hence, the 4th dhyana has only “**neither-pain-nor-pleasure**” (the absence of liking and disliking) and “**the purity of mindfulness due to equanimity**” (*upekkhā,sati,parisuddhi*) [§9]. “This mindfulness, because of that equanimity, is unobstructed, very pure, very clear. Therefore, it is called ‘purity of mindfulness due to equanimity’.”

(3) **The states** (*dhammā*) present in the 4th dhyana are: equanimity (that is) a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, mental unconcern due to tranquility, purity of mindfulness, and **mental oneness** [§10.1b]. Of special significance is “mental oneness” (*citt’ek’aggatā*), which is the only state that is present in all the 4 formless attainments, and implicitly in the 4th formless attainment since perception is absent therein. In other words, the 4 formless attainments are each a more refined form of the 4th dhyana.

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