

1b

The Buddha Discovered Dhyana

The nature of dhyana as a basis for liberation

An essay¹ by Piya Tan ©2010

1 Significance of dhyana

1.1 TWO IMPORTANT MEANINGS OF JHĀNA

1.1.1 Dhyana (P *jhāna*; Skt *dhyāna*) is as old as Buddhism itself, probably older. In early Buddhism, however, it developed into a progressive 4-stage suprasensory experience of altered consciousness, and has become uniquely Buddhist.² The importance of dhyana in early Buddhism is attested by the fact that we have numerous discourses where the Buddha describes his experiences of them.³ In such discourses, the Buddha frequently admonishes his disciples to cultivate dhyana (*jhāna*).

1.1.2 In the suttas, we also see the word *jhāna* used in both its two basic Buddhist senses: the general sense of “meditation,” and as “dhyana” or “mental absorption,” such as in this **Eka,dhamma Accharā Saṅghāṭa Sutta** (A 1.20):

If a monk cultivates the first dhyana (*jhāna*) for even the duration of a mere finger-snap, then, bhikkhus, he is called a monk who dwells as one whose meditation is not in vain (*aritta-j,jhāna*): a doer of the Teacher’s teaching, a follower of his advice. He does not eat the country’s alms in vain [for nothing].⁴

(A 1.20/1:38), A:B 1.394

This passage is actually the first in a series of 191 variations (Gethin 2001:269) or 181 variations (A:B 1.394-574) of the formula, each substituting the reading “cultivates the first dhyana” for a meditation-related subject. These include the other 3 dhyanas, the mental liberation of the 4 divine abodes, the 4 satipatthanas, the 4 right efforts, and various other forms of meditation, that is, the whole of **the Vagga** (A 1:38-43).⁵

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² See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (7).

³ See esp **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,15-18/1:163-167), SD 1.11 (details of the 2 teachers); **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,44-61/1:77-82), SD 1.13 (details of self-mortification); **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,20-31-44/1:242-249), SD 1.12 (self-mortification); **Bhaya Bherava S** (M 4/1:16-24), SD 44.2 (overcoming fear in solitary practice).

⁴ *Accharā,saṅghāta,mattam pi ce bhikkhave bhikkhu paṭhamam jhānam bhāveti ayam vuccati bhikkhave bhikkhu aritta-j,jhāno viharati satthu sāsana,karo ovāda,paṭikaro amogham raṭṭha,piṇḍam bhuñjati*. This passage is actually the first of a series of 191 variations (or 181 according to A:B 1.394-574) of the formula, each substituting the reading “cultivates the first dhyana,” ie incl the other 3 dhyanas, the mental liberation of the 4 divine abodes, the 4 satipatthanas, the 4 right efforts, and various other forms of meditation: see **Accharā Saṅghāṭa Vagga** (A 1:38-43; A:Se 20:20, 50-55; Thai tr A:MMR 32:106 f, 33:214-219). The full list also at A 1.20. Cf *anirakata-j,jhana*, “not neglecting dhyana”: M 6/1:33,10 (SD 59.1); It 45/39,11 (SD 41.4). See Gethin 2001: 269.

⁵ A 1:38-43 = A:B 1.394-574; A:Se 20:20, 50-55; Thai tr A:MMR 32:106 f, 33:214-219. For the full list, see A 1.20; see also Gethin 2001: 269.

1.1.3 *Jhāna* as such has both the senses of any kind of Buddhist meditation as well as the well known sense of deep meditative absorption. We also noted above that “meditation” here covers a whole range of practices related to mind-training, the second of the 3 trainings.⁶

In this connection, we should reflect on what is perhaps the key reason for the popular meditation teacher, **Brahmavamso’s** view that “the Buddha discovered *jhāna*,” that there was *no jhāna* before that. In the opening of his insightful paper on “The Jhānas” (2003), he writes:

In the original Buddhist scriptures, **there is only one word for any level of meditation.** *Jhāna* designates meditation proper, where the meditator’s mind is stilled from all thought, secluded from all five-sense activity and is radiant with other-worldly bliss. Put bluntly, if it isn’t *Jhāna* then it isn’t true Buddhist meditation! Perhaps this is why the culminating factor of the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path,⁷ the one that deals with right meditation [ie *sammā,samādhi* or right concentration], is nothing less than the *Jhānas*.

(Brahmavamso 2003:5; underscore added)⁸

Note that he says that *jhāna* “is only one word for any level of meditation,” but from the rest of his explanation, it is clear that he sees it as applying (with a summary, even strong, hint) that it is “Buddhist meditation”! Monastics, scholars and students who are familiar with suttas will at once see the difficulties here. [2.1]

1.2 DHYANAS, MUNDANE AND SUPRAMUNDANE

1.2.1 Any of the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*) (and also the 4 formless attainments, *ārūpa*) even as mundane states of deep calm in the preliminary stages in the path to awakening, help to provide us with a *basis for insight or wisdom to arise*. Dhyana as calm (*samatha*), in other words, is the basis for insight (*vipassanā*), which when properly cultivated, in turn, helps to deepen the calm, and so on.⁹

1.2.2 The 4 dhyanas, in other words, emerge again in a later stage in the cultivation of the path, *arising in direct connection with insight*, when they are regarded as supramundane (*lok’uttara*) dhyanas. These supramundane dhyanas are the levels of concentration pertaining to the 4 levels of awakening called “the supramundane path” (*lokuttara,magga*) and the stages of deliverance resulting from them, the 4 spiritual fruits (*fruits*).¹⁰

1.2.3 Even after awakening (*bodhi*) is achieved, the mundane dhyanas are still useful to the liberated person as a part of his daily meditation experience. Even for the Buddha, throughout his life, he constantly abides in his “divine dwelling” (*dibba,vihāra*), living happily here and now.¹¹

⁶ On the 3 trainings, see *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6.

⁷ Right concentration is the one-pointedness of the mind through the four dhyanas. A full def is given in terms of dhyana description and factors in **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141.31/3:252).

⁸ See **The Layman and dhyana** (SD 8.5), which shows that Bodhi’s view does not exactly concur with Brahmavamso’s view, highlighted here (underscored), and yet there are important areas where they concur.

⁹ See **Samatha and vipassana**, SD 41.1.

¹⁰ See **Samatha and vipassana**, SD 41.1 esp (6.3.6).

¹¹ D 3:220; DA 3:1006. On the 4 benefits of dhyana experience, see **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.1.11(5)/3:222 f), & **Samādhi Bhāvanā S** (A 4.41/2:44-46), SD 24.1, see also SD 33.1a (3.2).

2 The Buddha and dhyana

2.1 BRAHMAVAMSO'S CLAIM

2.1.1 Not only does Brahmavamso regard dhyana as being of key importance in Buddha's meditation system, he also declares that "the Buddha discovered *jhāna*" [1.1.3], asserting that there was *no* dhyana before him.¹² We shall here examine this statement in some detail. What is meant by *jhāna* here?¹³ Is it true that there was no dhyana before the Buddha's time? What happens during dhyana? [6.5]. Do we examine our experiences with insight while in dhyana or after emerging from it? [6.2].

To substantiate his claim, Brahmavamso quotes **the Pañcāla,caṇḍa Sutta** (S 2.7). Since it is a very short sutta, it is here translated in full:

SD 33.1b(2.1)

(Deva,putta) Pañcāla,caṇḍa Sutta

The (Devaputra) Pañcāla,caṇḍa Discourse¹⁴ | S 2.7/1:48

Traditional: S 1.2.1.7 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 1, Sagāthā Vagga 2, Devaputta Saṃyutta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 7

Theme: The Buddha discovers dhyana

- 1 Originating in Sāvattihī.
- 2 At one time, the devaputra Pañcāla,caṇḍa stood in the presence of [before] the Blessed One and addressed him with this verse:

3 *Sambādhe vata okāsaṃ
avindi bhūri,medhaso,
yo jhānam,bujjhi¹⁵ buddho
paṭilīna,nisabho munī ti.*

In the midst of the confined, the opening
the sage of vast wisdom found—
the Buddha who awakened to [discovered] dhyana:
the lone lordly bull of a sage is he.¹⁶ = A 9.42/4:449¹⁷

[The Buddha:]

4 *Sambādhe vā'pi vindanti¹⁸
(pañcāla,caṇḍā ti bhagavā)
dhammaṃ nibbāṇa,pattiyā,
ye satim paccalattamsu¹⁹
sammā te susamāhitī ti.²⁰*

Even in the midst of the confined, they find it,
(O Pañcāla,caṇḍa, said the Blessed One,)
the Dharma for the attaining of nirvana—
those who have gained mindfulness,
those who are fully well concentrated.

— evaṃ —

¹² See *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006:127-130.

¹³ On def of *jhāna*, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (3).

¹⁴ Or, "The Discourse to Pañcāla,caṇḍa," in **(Pañcāla,caṇḍa) Sambādha S** (A 9.42/4:449-451), SD 33.2.

¹⁵ So Be WT; Ce *ghanam,budhā* (another MS: *jhānam buddhābuddho*); Ee *jhānam abuddhi*; Se *ghanam abuddhi*.

¹⁶ *Sambādhe gataṃ okāsaṃ, avudā bhūri.medhaso | yo jhānam abujjhi buddho, paṭilīna,nisabho munī ti*. For *abujjhi* here, S (PTS ed) has vl *abuddhi* (with no change in meaning). S:B tr: "The one of broad wisdom has indeed found | The opening in the midst of confinement, | The Buddha who discovered jhāna | The chief bull, aloof (from the herd), the sage." See S:B 386 n151.

¹⁷ S 2.7/1:48 = A 9.42,1/4:449 (SD 33.2).

¹⁸ So Be Ce WT; Se *sambādhe'pi ca tiṭṭhanti*.

¹⁹ So Be Se WT; Ce *pacalatturṃsu*.

²⁰ So Be Ce WT; Se *susamāhitā ti*.

2.1.2 Notice that the key stanza here that Brahmavamso cites also appears in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, in the (Pañcāla,caṇḍa) **Sambādha Sutta** (A 9.42), whose protagonist is Ānanda. Also note that in the Saṃyutta account, the same stanza is spoken by a deva named Pañcala,caṇḍa before the Buddha, and in the (Pañcāla.caṇḍa) **Sambādha Sutta**, it is Ānanda who gives a full explanation of it to the monk Udāyī.²¹ In other words, in both cases, the stanza is not spoken by the Buddha himself.

2.1.3 The Saṃyutta Commentary, explaining the phrase “in the midst of the confined” (*sambādhe*), says that there are 2 kinds of confines: the confines of mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇa,sambādha*) and the confines of the cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma,guṇa.sambādha*), and that the former is meant here (SA 1:106). The Commentary is being somewhat technical, as we can take *sambādhe* just as well here to mean “in the household life.” After all, we often find *sambādha* (“crowded”) in the phrase *sambādho ghara,vāso* (“the crowded household life”).²² It is also likely that the Buddha is alluding here to his experience of the 1st dhyana as a young boy (M 36).²³

2.1.4 Bodhi translates *jhānam abujjhi buddho* as “the Buddha who discovered jhāna,” by which he apparently takes “discovered” figuratively, in the sense that the Buddha “has awakened to” or understood dhyana. **Brahmavamso**, on the other hand, takes *abujjhi* literally as “discovered,” in the sense that the Buddha “found” what no one before him had found in our history.²⁴ Brahmavamso explains:

When it is said that the Buddha discovered *Jhāna*, it is not to be understood that no one had ever experienced *Jhāna* before. For instance, in the era of the previous Buddha Kassapa, countless men and women achieved *Jhāna* and subsequently realized Enlightenment. But in the India of twenty six centuries ago, all knowledge of *Jhāna* had disappeared. This was one reason that there is no mention at all of *Jhāna* in any religious text before the time of the Buddha.²⁵

(Brahmavamso 2003:5)

2.2 THE BODHISATTVA AND DHYANA

2.2.1 Brahmavamso goes on to explain that the Bodhisattva’s meditation training under Āḷāra Kālāma (from whom he learns to attain the sphere of nothingness) and Uddaka Rāma,putta (through whom he masters *his father* Rāma’s teaching and attains the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception).²⁶ [3.1]

However, these two attainments could not have been connected to *Jhāna*, because the Bodhisattva recalled, just prior to sitting under the Bodhi Tree, that the only time in his life that he had

²¹ A 9.42/4:449-451.

²² **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,41/1:63), **Subha S** (D 10,29/1:1206), **Tevijja S** (D 31,41/1:250); **Cūḷa Hatthipadōpama S** (M 27,12/1:179), **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,12/1:240), **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,32/1:267), **Kandaraka S** (M 51,-13/1:344), **Ghoṭa,mukha S** (M 95,15/2:162), **Saṅgārava S** (M 100,9/2:211), **Devadaha S** (M 101,31/2:226), **Cha-b,-bisodhana S** (M 112,12/3:33), **Danta,bhūmi S** (M 125,14/3:134), **Civara S** (S 16.11/2:219), **Thapati S** (S 55.6/5:350); **Attantapa S** (A 4.198/2:208), **Upāli S** (A 10.98/5:204), **Soṇa S** (U 5.6/59).

²³ On *sambādha*, see further **Sambādh’okāsa S** (A 6.26/3:314-317) + SD 15.6 (2.3.3).

²⁴ On explanation of “discovery” (*buddhi* etc), see KhpA 15 f = KhpA:Ñ 7 f.

²⁵ **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142) mentions the “outsider free from lust for sense-pleasures” (*bāhirakā kāmesu vitarāga*) that is, a worldly dhyana-attainer²⁵ (M 142.5/ 3:255). If such a meditator existed before the Buddha’s time in India or exists outside of Buddhism, then Brahmavamso’s assertion that “the Buddha discovered *Jhāna*” may need to be re-examined (Brahmavamso 2003:5). See **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5(11c).

²⁶ See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,15.1-17/1:163-167).

experienced any *Jhāna* was as a young boy, while sitting under a Rose-Apple Tree as his father conducted the first-ploughing ceremony (M 36).

One of the reasons why *Jhāna* was not practised before the Buddha's enlightenment was because people then either indulged in seeking pleasure and comfort of the body or else followed a religion of tormenting the body. Both were caught up with the body and its five senses and knew no release from the five senses. Neither produced the sustained tranquillity of the body necessary as the foundation for *Jhāna*. When the Bodhisatta began the easy practices leading to such tranquillity of the body, his first five disciples abandoned him in disgust. Such a practice was not regarded as valid. Therefore it was not practised, and so *Jhāna* never occurred.

(Brahmavamso 2003:6)

2.2.2 In other words, according to Brahmavamso's argument, if we accept the 7-year-old Bodhisattva's jambul-tree dhyana experience [4.4.1] as true, we cannot accept his tutelage under the two teachers, Āḷāra Kālāma²⁷ and Uddaka Rāma,putta [3.1], as true, too. However, I think his argument seems a little forced.

2.2.3 In fact, it is easier to understand why the Bodhisattva *so easily* masters the meditation teachings of the two teachers—*because* he has mastered dhyana or at least able to attain it at such a tender age! Of course, it is possible that the story of the two teachers might have been a later interpolation, in which case, we would have no problem at all with the jambul-tree dhyana account anyway. But it would give more weight to Brahmavamso's view that the Buddha "discovered" dhyana.

3 The 2 teachers

3.1 RĀMA AND UDDAKA RĀMA,PUTTA

3.1.1 The Bodhisattva's visits to Āḷāra and to Uddaka are recorded in a pericope preserved in a number of important discourse, namely, **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 29), **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), **the Bodhi Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 85) and **the Saṅgarava Sutta** (M 100).²⁸ We have possible evidence from **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), that Āḷāra knows dhyana. It is recorded that Pukkusa, a follower of Āḷāra Kālāma's, relates to the Buddha how, once, his (Pukkusa's) 500 carts trundling near the meditating Āḷāra Kālāma do not trouble him at all. In other words, Āḷāra is not troubled by external sounds.²⁹

3.1.2 Uddaka is very interesting because scholars have sometimes mistaken him for his father, Rāma. E J Thomas, in his *Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*, notes that "[t]he visit to Uddaka Rāma,putta is

²⁷ Āḷāra, one of the Bodhisattva's early teachers, taught him meditation up to the sphere of nothingness (*ākāṅkhaṇī'āyatana*). Buddhaghosa says that Āḷāra was also called Dīgha,piṅgala; Kālāma was his family name (DA 2:569 = MA 2:171). The story of the Bodhisattva's first two teachers is found in **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26.15/1:163-168), **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36/1:240; **Saṅgarāva S** (M 100/2:212); **Madhyam'āgama** of the Sarvāstivāda (T26.776b5-777a4; **Vinaya** of the Dharmaguptakas (T1428.780bt-c19); cf J 1:66; DhA 1:85; ApA 71; BA 6; DhsA 34; MahvsṬ 66. See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26), SD 1.11(15).

²⁸ M 26,15-17/1:163-166 (SD 1.11) = 36,14-16/1:240 = 85,11-13/2:93 = 100,10-12/2:211 f respectively.

²⁹ D 16,4.27/2:130 (SD 9). On someone in the first dhyana not being able to hear anything, see **Vitakka,vicāra**, SD 33.4 (1.2).

then described in almost the same terms [as for Āḷāra Kālāma], but here the doctrine was that which had been realized and proclaimed by Rāma, the *father* of Uddaka” (1949:63).³⁰

Bodhi is aware of this, for in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, his translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, he notes in his translation of the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta that:

Both Horner in [*Middle Length Sayings*] and Ñ[āṇamoli] in MS err in their translations of the account of Bodhisatta’s meeting with Uddaka Rāmaputta by assuming that Uddaka is identical with Rāma. However, as his name indicates, Uddaka was the son (*putta*) of Rāma, who must have already passed away before the Bodhisatta arrived on the scene. It should be noted that all references to Rāma are in the past tense and the third person, and that Uddaka in the end places the Bodhisatta in the position of teacher. Though the text does not allow for definite conclusions, this suggests that he himself had not yet reached the fourth immaterial attainment.

(Bodhi, 2001:1217 n303; 1995, 2nd ed 2001)

However, it is clear from **the Uddaka Sutta** (S 35.103), that Uddaka Rāma,putta has no high spiritual attainment at all:

Bhikkhus, though Uddaka Rāmaputta was not himself a knowledge-master [*vedagū*], he declared: “I am a knowledge-master.” Though he was not himself a universal conqueror, he declared: “I am a universal conqueror.” Though he had not excised the tumour’s root [craving], he declared: “I have excised the tumour’s root.” (S 35.103/4:83. Bodhi’s tr; notes added)³¹

3.1.3 It is possible that the ascetic **Rāma**³² was the first (apparently the oldest)³³ of the eight wise brahmins who attended the nativity and performed the “protection rites” (*rakkha,kamma*, Miln 236) for the child Siddhattha. **The Milinda,pañha** lists the 8 brahmins as follows: Rāma, Dhaja, Lakkhaṇa, Mantī, Yañña, Suyāma, Subhoja and Sudatta (Miln 236).

The Jātaka Commentary gives the same names with minor variations, that is, Koṇḍañña (for Yañña) and Bhoja (for Subhoja) (J 1:56). According to the Jātaka Commentary, seven of the brahmins raised two fingers, prophesizing that the Bodhisattva would either become a universal monarch (*cakka,vatti*) (if he remains in the world), or the Buddha (if he renounces the world) (J 1:56).

3.1.4 Amongst those scholars who think that the tradition of the two teachers’ instructing the Bodhisattva was a *fabrication* were André Bareau,³⁴ Tilmann Vetter,³⁵ and Johannes Bronkhorst.³⁶ Those who have proven the two-teacher episode to be *historical* include Ghirgo Zafiropulo³⁷ and Alexander Wynne.³⁸ It is instructive to carefully study the works of these two groups of scholars to have an idea of the depth and insight of their respective researches.³⁹

³⁰ Peter Skilling discusses this point in detail in “Uddaka Rāma,putta and Rāma,” *Pāli Buddhist Review* 6,2 1981-82a:99-105. See **Saṅgārava S** (M 100,11 f) in SD 10.9. See also A Wynne, “How old is the Suttapiṭaka?” 2003:22-28 Internet ed; see esp Wynne, *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*, 2007: 9-26.

³¹ **Uddaka S** (S 35.103/4:83 f), SD 94.2.

³² The 8 wise brahmin augurs who, on the 5th day of the Bodhisattva’s birth, visit him to foretell his future, viz, Rāma (father of Uddaka Rāma,putta), Dhaja, Lakkhaṇa, Mantī, Koṇḍañña (youngest of these eight, but the eldest of the 5 monks), Bhoja, Suyāma, and Sudatta (J 1:55 f). Rāma is not listed in DPPN.

³³ The youngest is said to be Koṇḍañña (J 1:55 f).

³⁴ *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha dans les Sutrapitaka et les Vinaya anciens I*, Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1963.

³⁵ *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, Leiden: E J Brill, 1988.

³⁶ *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1986; New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993.

3.2 THE BUDDHA “DISCOVERED” DHYANA (BRAHMAVAMSO)

3.2.1 The story of the Buddha and the two early meditation teachers is found in the most ancient Buddha-story we have, that is, the one preserved in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 29), and repeated in other early suttas.⁴⁰ Here, it is said that the Bodhisattva learns and masters the two highest formless meditations from the two teachers.⁴¹ He masters the attainment of the sphere of nothingness (*ākiñcaññ'āyatana*)⁴² from Ālāra Kālāma, and the attainment of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n'eva,saññā,nāsaññ'āyatana*) using the late Rāma's method taught through his son, Uddaka⁴³ [3.1].

However, the Buddha explains, they do *not* “lead to revulsion (with the world), to cessation (of suffering), to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana,” but only to rebirth in that particular realm. The reason for this is quite clear: these meditations are based on the idea of an abiding self, such as that found in the early Upaniṣads.⁴⁴ Since the meditator is still held back by such a false view, he is unable to free himself from the subtleties of the highest formless attainment. Hence, the Buddha, having attained these formless dhyanas as taught by the two teachers, rejects them.⁴⁵

3.2.2 Now, the question we need to ask is this: **Did the two teachers teach dhyana or had they ever experienced it?** We know from the Uddaka Sutta (S 35.103) that Uddaka is not awakened [3.1], and there is no mention of whether he is skilled in dhyana or not. Nor do we have any similar information on Ālāra, except for a remark by Pukkusa, a pupil of his, recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), testifying to Ālāra's expertise in deep meditation.⁴⁶ Technically, it is impossible to attain the formless attainments without first mastering the form dhyanas. So, theoretically speaking, if we accept that the two teacher's teachings are authentic, it is possible that they *have* experienced dhyana themselves.

3.2.3 **Brahmavamso**, however, does not think so (to him, the two teachers did *not* teach dhyana). His view is that although there *was* dhyana before the Buddha's time, it was in the remotely distant past, in the times of past Buddhas, such as Kassapa (the Buddha just before our Buddha). Dhyana meditation, however, he views, was forgotten after that, that is, until our Buddha teaches it again.

In his book, *The Jhānas*, Brahmavamso gives the following arguments why the two teachers did *not* teach dhyana. Most of the arguments are simply impossible to defend, as they are merely conjectural or

³⁷ *L'illumination du Buddha: de la quête à l'annonce de l'Éveil: essais de chronologie relative et de stratigraphie textuelle* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1993). He argues against Bareau's thesis.

³⁸ A Wynne, “How old is the Suttapiṭaka?” St John's College, 2003:22-28 Internet ed.

³⁹ On the historicity of the account of **the 2 teachers**, see SD 1.11 (4.2).

⁴⁰ **M 26,15-16/1:163-166** (SD 1.11) = **36,14-15/1:240** = **85,11-12/2:93** = **100,10-11/2:211** f respectively.

⁴¹ Buddhaghosa tells us indirectly that the Bodhisattva has mastered the 4 form dhyanas: “By the conclusion of the base of nothingness, the seven attainments have been known to me” (*ākiñcaññ'āyatana,pariyosānā satta sam-āpattiyo maṃ jānāpesi*, MA 2:171,22-23). The “seven attainments” are the 4 form dhyanas and the first 3 formless attainments.

⁴² **M 26,15/1:163-165** (SD 1.11).

⁴³ **M 26,16/1:165** f (SD 1.11).

⁴⁴ Eg, Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.1, when “consciousness” (*vijñāna*), is the principle of intelligence “proceeds to continue in a new life.” See Norman 1990:24 f.

⁴⁵ On the Bodhisattva's boyhood dhyana and the problem of the 2 teachers, see Norman 1990:30.

⁴⁶ The Sutta records how Pukkusa Malla,putta, Ālāra's pupil, claims that Ālāra is an accomplished meditator, who, in his meditation, is totally undisturbed by the incessant rumblings of 500 carts passing close by (D 16,4.27/2:130 f), SD 9.

at best wishful statements. The possible objections or rebuttals are noted within [square brackets] at the end of each point with references to the suttas and scholarly works (where relevant):

- (1) [The 7-year-old Bodhisattva’s dhyana experience was] spontaneous ... untaught, unplanned and since forgotten.⁴⁷ If that was the only *Jhāna* experienced by the Bodhisattva prior to his experience under the Bodhi Tree, then the two teachers Āḷāra Kālāma and Ud[d]aka Rāmaputta could not have taught *Jhāna* at all.

[This is purely argument from silence, and so is weak. See Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26), where the Bodhisattva is said to have quickly and easily attained dhyana following their teachings⁴⁸—which means that they *had* taught dhyanas. For the significance of the child Siddhattha’s first dhyana, see Analayo, 2014:29-31.]

- (2) ... in the Mahāsaccaka Sutta (M 36), the Bodhisatta is shown rejecting the experiences under the two teachers as not leading to Enlightenment, and then exhausting just about every form of ascetic practice before concluding that that, too, did not lead to Enlightenment.⁴⁹ (Then he recalls his first dhyana experience, and turns to the middle way.)

[The Bodhisattva rejects the methods of the 2 teachers because he has attained all those meditative states they had taught and attained, but found that they do not lead to awakening.]

- (3) One of the reasons why *Jhāna* was not practised before the Buddha’s Enlightenment was because people either indulged in seeking pleasure and comfort of the body or else followed a religion of tormenting the body. Both are caught up with the body and its five senses and knew no release from the five senses. Neither produced the sustained tranquillity of the body necessary as the foundation for *Jhāna*.

[This argument is speculative at best. We will see below [4] that there are overwhelming internal evidence that dhyana was known before and during the Buddha’s time.]

- (4) When the Bodhisatta began the easy practices leading up to **such** tranquillity of body, his first five disciples abandoned him in disgust. Such a practice was not regarded as valid. Therefore it was not practised, and so *Jhāna* never occurred.

[This statement is not historically right. The 5 monks leave after the Bodhisattva takes a sumptuous meal of milk-rice by the lady Sujātā.⁵⁰ Then he goes into meditation and fully awakens to buddhahood. Then he spends the next 49 days without any food.⁵¹]

- (5) After the Buddha’s Enlightenment, the very first teaching that He gave, even before the famous Four Noble Truths, was the exposition of the Middle Way, a way which had not existed before (except long ago in the eras of previous Buddhas), a way which leads automatically to *Jhāna* and then to Enlightenment.

[This is a serious error. The “middle way” does *not* “automatically” lead to the dhyana and awakening. We need to overcome the mental hindrances before we can ever attain any dhyana. Then we need to cultivate the perception of the 3 characteristics⁵² to see directly into true reality and be awakened.]

⁴⁷ Analayo insightfully comments that “[p]ossibly his ability to enter the first *jhāna* so easily at this particular moment during his early youth was related to *samatha* practice undertaken in a previous life, an ability lost during his adolescence and later sensual indulgence as a young man, so that he had to develop it anew.” (2003:76 n42)

⁴⁸ M 26/1:164,25+166,7 @ SD 1.11.

⁴⁹ M 36,14-17/1:240 = **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,15-16/163-166), SD 1.11.

⁵⁰ See 1:68-70.

⁵¹ See **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31-43/1:246-249), SD 49.4.

⁵² On the 3 characteristics, see **Atam,mayatā**, SD 19.13 (1).

- (6) It was as if, the Buddha said, that He had discovered a long lost path leading to an ancient city (S 12.65).⁵³ The ancient city was *Nibbāna* (Enlightenment) and the long lost path was the the Eightfold Path culminating in *Jhāna*. Since the Buddha rediscovered the path, it can be said that the Buddha rediscovered *Jhāna*.

[This is not exactly correct. The eightfold path does *not culminate* in dhyana, but in right freedom (*sammā, vimutti*), which is the attainment of arhathood.⁵⁴ Although dhyana is listed as the 8th and last limb of the path, in practice, it must be attained through the 2nd training, that of mental cultivation.⁵⁵] (2003:5-7)

3.2.4 Even from all we have discussed so far (and there is more to come), we can safely conclude that there was dhyana before the Buddha’s time. Furthermore, there is no good reason to reject the account of the 2 teachers and the Bodhisattva’s attaining of dhyana as a fabrication [3.1.4]. If we accept them as being historical, then the fact that the Bodhisattva is able to reach either the 3rd or the 4th formless attainment implies that he has mastered the 4 dhyanas. However, at this early stage, he still lacks the right view regarding their significance.⁵⁶

4 Dhyana before and during the Buddha’s time

4.1 SOURCE CRITICISM

4.1.1 I think that any informed Buddhist or scholar would find it difficult to fully agree with Brahmavamso’s arguments presented above [3.2.3]—especially if we are to carefully examine the early texts.⁵⁷ It is quite clear from textual evidence that dhyana *was* indeed known before the Buddha’s time. Here, I have found Israeli Buddhist scholar **Keren Arbel**’s conference paper, “Buddhist or Not? Thinking anew the role of the jhānas in the path of awakening” (2008), to be very helpful.⁵⁸

I am confident that we can reconcile the two seemingly contradicting views—that dhyana was known and practised *before* the Buddha’s time, and that the Buddha *discovered* dhyana. In her investigation here, she uses the method of “**source criticism**” (which presupposes that an ancient text carries imprints of the historical environment of its origin) to examine Buddhist and related Indian sources.⁵⁹

⁵³ **Nagara S** (S 12.65.19-21/2:105 f), SD 14.2.

⁵⁴ **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117) says, “Thus, bhikshus, the learner on the path is endowed with 8 factors, the arhat with 10 factors” (M 117,34), SD 6.10 (2.3).

⁵⁵ The 10 rightness (*sammattā*) is meant here: see **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117,34), SD 6.10.

⁵⁶ See SD 49.4 (1.2.5) Remark.

⁵⁷ At the end of the 19th century, T W Rhys Davids noted that “the four ghānas were regarded by the early Buddhists as older than Buddhism” (D:RD 1:51 n1). De la Valée Poussin, makes the same point: “The four famous ecstasies (*dhyāna*) ... were regarded by the early Buddhists as older than Buddhism” (1922:223). See Analayo 2015:19 f.

⁵⁸ 2008:4-14. My grateful thanks to Keren Arbel for her generosity in promptly sending me her conference paper.

⁵⁹ **Source criticism** started with western scholars investigating the texts of Classical antiquity (esp Homer’s Iliad). In the 18th century, Jean Astruc, a French professor of medicine, adapted this method to his own investigation into the sources of the Book of Genesis, which he anonymously published. As used in biblical criticism, it refers to the attempt to establish the sources used by the author and/or redactor of the final text. The term “literary criticism” is occasionally used as a synonym. Subsequently considerably developed by German scholars, it was known as “the Higher Criticism,” a term no longer widely used. In general, the closer a source is to the event which it purports to describe, the more one can trust it to give an accurate description of what really happened. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Source_criticism_\(Biblical_studies\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Source_criticism_(Biblical_studies)).

4.1.2 Those who have some knowledge of non-Buddhist texts and systems before or around the Buddha's time, will notice that a significant number of Buddhist terms are also found in other systems (especially the brahminical), that is to say,

- adopted terms given new senses, such as *aggi* (fire), *amata* (the death-free), *brahma, cariya* (the holy life), *brahma, vihāra* (the divine abodes), *jhāna* (dhyana), *uposatha* (precept-day), *veda* (knowledge);
- common terms with Jainism, such as *buddha* (awakened one), *pacceka, buddha* (self-awakened individual), *jina* (conqueror), *nibbāna* (nirvana), *tathāgata* (one thus come), *bhāvanā* (cultivation), *āsava* (influx), *kamma* (karma), *samaṇa* (ascetic), *pabbajjā* (renunciation);
- terms referred to but rejected, such as *attā* (abiding self or soul), *vaṇṇa* (colour, caste, class).⁶⁰

4.1.3 As **Arbel** has noted:

Although we do not have access to all possible influences on early Buddhism, we do have three valuable sources—the Saṃhitas [the three Vedas], the Older Upaniṣads,⁶¹ and references to practices exercised by other *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, recorded in the Nikāyas themselves. Other non-Buddhist texts such as Jaina materials,⁶² the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali⁶³ and some later Upaniṣads (such as the Maitrī Upaniṣads), which contain references to similar states, or better say, what looks similar, cannot be dated before the beginning of the Christian era.⁶⁴

... we can assume justifiably that they might exhibit influences of Buddhist practice, and not the other way around.⁶⁵ (Arbel 2008:4 f; Sujato footnotes added)

4.1.4 During the Buddha's time, there were only three Vedas:

- (1) the Ṛg-veda, hymns to Vedic deities; the oldest of which go back to 1500 BCE,
- (2) the Sāma-veda, sacred hymn-book for the Udgātṛ or Vedic cantor; and
- (3) the Yājur-veda, Vedic mantras and instructions on their proper usage in Vedic rituals.

By the Buddha's time, Vedic literature comprised several different classes:

- (4) the four collections (*saṃhita*) of Vedic verses attributed to ancient seers (*iṣī*, Skt *ṛṣī*),
- (5) the ritual manuals (*brāhmaṇa*) on the elaborate Vedic sacrificial rituals, and
- (6) the "forest books" (*āraṇyaka*), explaining the esoteric meanings of such rituals.
- (7) the Upaniṣads (*upaniṣad*) teaches universal spirit and individual soul.

The Upaniṣads, the last class of Vedic literature, containing further esoteric commentary on the rituals, were still in the formative stage.⁶⁶

4.1.5 **Edward Crangle**, who has explored meditation in the early Indian contemplative texts, observes that none of the Vedas or Saṃhitas give any indication of the doctrine of karma, or offer any clear

⁶⁰ For further details, see **Why the Buddha hesitated**, SD 12.1 (6).

⁶¹ See Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, 2005:128-136.

⁶² See Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, 2005:147-152.

⁶³ See Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, 2005:142-147.

⁶⁴ According to Jain tradition, Mahāvīra's teachings, the "old texts" (*Pūva*) were lost. The council which compiled the Jain texts dated from the 5th or 6th cent CE. As for the Yoga Sūtra, most scholars believe that its author, Patañjali, lived around the 2nd or 3rd cent CE. The Maitrī Upaniṣad, which have echoes of Buddhist practices, dates from around the 1st cent CE. [Arbel's fn; abridged]

⁶⁵ For an instructive study on how non-Buddhist sources and early Buddhism influences one another, see Edward Crangle 1994.

⁶⁶ These Upaniṣads are the Brhad-āraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Taittirīya, Aitareya and Kausītaki. See **Tevijja S** (D 13,13/-1:238), SD 1.8 (2); see also Arthur Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, 2nd ed Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971:197.

method for liberation.⁶⁷ Even in the Upaniṣads, he notes, terms such as *mokṣa* and *mukti* (both denoting spiritual liberation) do not occur often (1994:70). The Āraṇyakas and the Brāhmaṇas, too, show only initial recognition of the power of the mind or meditation techniques, even though they show a shift from external sacrifice to internal worship or meditation (*upāsana*).⁶⁸

4.2 UPĀSANA

4.2.1 In the older (that is, pre-Buddhist) Upaniṣads,⁶⁹ words derived from √DHYĀ (to think)⁷⁰ (from which we get *dhyāna*, *P jhāna*) occur only 26 times. In the Nikāyas, on the other hand, the four dhyanas occur in at least 86 different places.⁷¹ In the early Upaniṣads, we hardly find the word *dhyāna* or its related forms, but words derived from *upa + VĀS* (to sit)—such as *upāsana* mentioned earlier—appear at least 188 times.⁷²

4.2.2 Dhyana and *upāsana*

4.2.2.1 Edward Crangle (1994), following Neela Velkar (1967), has studied the term *upāsana* (meaning “sitting, being near or being near at hand; attending to”) in detail, and lists the its frequency.⁷³ In the Brhad Āraṇyaka, *upāsana* occurs 63 times, *dhyāna* 12 times, and *yoga* twice. In the Chāndogya, *upāsana* occurs 115 times, *dhyāna* 12 times, and *yoga* twice.⁷⁴ It is difficult to ascertain its meaning or meanings, but has been translated sometimes as “worship” and sometimes as “meditation.”⁷⁵ Here is a passage from the Brhad Āraṇyaka, where it occurs:

Next, this breath, water is the body, its light-form is that moon. As far as the breath extends so far extends water and that moon. These are all alike, all endless. Verily, he who meditate/worships (*upāsana*) them as finite wins a finite world. But he who meditates/worships them as infinite wins an infinite world. (BĀU 1.5.14)

4.2.2.2 Crangle explains *upāsana* as “a contemplative process wherein the object of worship is an object of concentration” (1994:74). Sujato observes that it “in fact seems to embody the shift from an external worship and ritual towards the inner contemplation.” (2005:131).

4.2.2.3 Crangle interestingly suggests that *upāsana* is related to the Buddhist term *satipaṭṭhāna* (Skt *smṛtyupasthāna*), especially the last element of the compound, that is, *upaṭṭhāna* (Skt *upasthāna*) (1994: 198 f). Sujato agrees and adds that

This may be supported on a number of grounds. The sound of the words is almost identical, especially in Sanskrit (*upasthāna* and *upāsana*). Though they form from different roots, the

⁶⁷ Crangle, *The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices*, 1994:5 f.

⁶⁸ Crangle 1994:61 f.

⁶⁹ That is, Brhad-āraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Taittirīya, Aitareya and Kausītaki Upaniṣads.

⁷⁰ Martin T Adam 2006:75 & Keren Arbel 2008:6 give this root as √DHYAI; but I follow W D Whitney, *The Roots, Verb-forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language*, 1885:85.

⁷¹ Paul Griffiths, “Buddhist Jhāna: A form-critical study,” *Religion* 13, 1983:57.

⁷² E Crangle 1994:72.

⁷³ Neela Velkar, *Upāsana in the Upaniṣads*, unpublished PhD thesis, Bombay, 1969. E Crangle, *The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices*, Wiesbaden, 1994.

⁷⁴ Crangle 1994:71.

⁷⁵ But see esp Crangle 1994:59-62, 72-138.

construction and basic meanings are similar: *upa + as* means to “sit near”; *upa + sthā* means to “stand near.” From there they both developed the sense of “wait upon, serve, attend,” and then to “pray, worship.” In a more specifically meditative context they are both used largely in the sense of the initial grounding on the meditative/contemplative object, rather than the resulting state of absorption. We also note that some of the meditation objects for *upāsana* are also found in satipatthana: the breath, water, fire, space, bliss, mind, etc. So it seems that Crangle’s suggestion can be accepted. The major contemplative practice of the pre-Buddhist period is *upāsana*, and this practice finds its closest Buddhist connection, surprisingly enough, not with jhana or samadhi, but with satipatthana. (2005:131 f; see further pp 132-136)

4.3 FORMATIVE TEACHINGS

4.3.1 Any research into pre-Buddhist meditation terminology is hampered by the fact that the Vedas and the early Upaniṣads have very little or nothing on meditation. The earliest clear descriptions of meditation outside of Buddhism are in the Upaniṣads and Jain texts, which are, however, later than the Buddhist suttas. Hence, they are more likely to be cases of Buddhist influences, although there is a possibility that even late texts could preserve some ancient traditions.

4.3.2 Recent scholarship has cast doubt on the accepted wisdom that the early Upaniṣads were pre-Buddhist. We find no mention of the Upaniṣads in the suttas, except perhaps for **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13), which in fact mentions the names of some of the early Upaniṣads (still in their evolving stages)—Adhvaryu, Taittirīya, Chāndogya and Bahvṛcā⁷⁶ and also the names of early Vedic sages—Aṣṭaka, Vāma-ka, Vāma,deva, Viśvā,mitra, Jamad-agni, Aṅgi,rasa, Bhāra,dvāja, Vāsiṣṭha, Kaśyapa, and Bhagu.⁷⁷

4.3.3 **K N Jayatilleke**, in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, gives the following concordance for the Adhvaryu, Taittirīya, Chāndogya and Bahvṛcā brahmins:⁷⁸

<u>School</u>	<u>Text</u>
Ṛgveda-bavhārijā Brāhmaṇā (Bahvṛcas)	Bahvṛvas Brāhmaṇa (lost) but incorporated in the Aitareya and Kauṣitaki Brāhmaṇas.
Sāma,veda-chandogā Brāhmaṇa (Chandogas)	Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa.
Yajur,veda-tittiriyā Brāhmaṇā (Taittiriyas)	Taittiriyā Brāhmaṇa.
Yajur,veda-addhariyā Brāhmaṇa (Adhvaryus)	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

4.3.4 This suggests that the Upaniṣadic schools existed in the Buddha’s time, but their teachings were still formative. **Sujato** proposes that

Perhaps the Upaniṣads that we have today derive from the later settled tenets of each of these strands of Brahmanical thought.⁷⁹ But whether or not the Upaniṣads in their current form existed

⁷⁶ D 2,10/1:237 + SD 1.8 (2). These are the original Sanskrit forms of the Pali: *Addhariyā, Tittiriyā, Chandokā, Chandāvā, Brahmacariyā*. According to TW Rhys Davids, the first three were skilled in liturgy generally and probably referred to those adept in the Yajur, Sāma and Ṛg Vedas respectively, and notes that “If we adopt the other reading [ie *Brahmacariyā*] for the last in the list, then those priests who relied on liturgy, sacrifice or chant would be contrasted with those who had ‘gone forth’ as *religieux*, either as *Tāpasas* or as *Bhikshus*.” (D:RD 1:303 n2).

⁷⁷ D 2,13/1:238 + SD 1.8 (2). See also V 1:245; D 1:104, 242; A 3:224, 229; M 2:200. For identification of these seers’ names, see *Vinaya Texts* (tr Rhys Davids & Oldenberg) 2:130 n3 & V:H 4:337 nn5-9.

⁷⁸ Jayatilleke 1963:479-481. See further Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, 2005:132-136.

⁷⁹ See O H de A Wijesekera, “A Pali reference to Brāhmaṇa-caraṇa,” *Adyar Library Bulletin* 20 1956.

at the Buddha's time, there is no doubt that ideas we can call "Upaniṣadic" were prominent. In the sphere of metaphysics we can cite the Buddha's critique of such ideas as that the self is infinite (*anantavā attā*), or that the self is identical with the world (*so attā so loko*), or that "I am He" (*eso'ham-asmi*); or indeed the Buddha's condemnation of the suggestion by a certain brahmin cosmologist that "All is oneness" (*sabbam ekattaṃ*). It would seem only natural to connect such metaphysics with samatha attainments, as implied by the Brahmajāla Sutta [D 1]. (2005:133)

4.4 EARLY BUDDHIST SOURCES

4.4.1 Dhyana before the Buddha's time

4.4.1.1 THE BODHISATTVA'S THE FIRST DHYANA. Although we are generally familiar with dhyana as being taught by the Buddha and practised by his early disciples (as often detailed in the suttas), there are at least two occasions recorded in the Nikāyas where dhyana *as a meditation experience* is definitively described as the Bodhisattva's practice. The first is the well known episode of the child Bodhisattva experiencing the first dhyana under the jambu tree during the ploughing festival, as recounted in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36)⁸⁰ [5.2]. In the first-dhyana episode, the experience is recounted in the language of the 1st-dhyana stock passage:

Then, Aggī, vessaṇa, I thought thus, "I recall that when my father the Sakya was occupied while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sense-objects, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the 1st dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, zest and joy born of seclusion."

(M 36,31/1:246), SD 1.12; MA 2:290 f; J 1:57

4.4.1.2 THE BREATHINGLESS MEDITATION. The second account is also found in the same Sutta (M 36), where the Buddha describes his asceticism before his awakening. Several of such self-mortifying practices include what is said to be the "breathless meditation" (*appaṇāka jhāna*).⁸¹ Indeed, here *jhāna* clearly has the non-technical or generic sense of "meditation," but is used to refer to a method used in the Bodhisattva's self-mortification, as described, for example, in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36).

In fact, before the Buddha's time, it is only here, apparently, only in these two places, is the term *jhāna* associated with a specific meditation technique, that is, the Bodhisattva's first-dhyana experience under the jambul-tree [5.2], and the "stopping of the in-and-out-breath" (*assāsa, passāse uparundhiraṃ*), which uses the significant verb *jhāyeyyaṃ* ("What if I were to meditate on the breathingless meditation? *Appāṇakaraṃ jhānaṃ jhāyeyyaṃ*)—this latter, as a part of the Bodhisattva's ascetic practice.⁸²

Arbel hypothesizes that, in the context of the "breathless meditation"—that is, the "stopping of the in-and-out-breath" (*assāsa, passāse uparundhiraṃ*) (as recounted in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta**, M 36), the verb *jhāyeyyaṃ* could have come from the root $\sqrt{\text{KṢAI}}$ (or $\sqrt{\text{KṢĀ}}$) (to burn, be consumed), and not from $\sqrt{\text{DHYAI}}$ (or $\sqrt{\text{DHYĀ}}$) (to think), and therefore the term *jhāna* here, "might point to an ascetic practice, in which the Bodhisattva tried to gain control over the breath; control which 'burns' or 'consumes' past karma ... Yet this exertion, this severe practice, caused him to be exhausted, and did not lead him to awakening." (2008:9).

⁸⁰ M 36,31/1:246 @ SD 29.4. Also MA 2:290; J 1:57.

⁸¹ The Sutta recounts him as reflecting, "What if I were to meditate on the breathingless meditation? (*appaṇākaṃ jhānaṃ jhāyeyyaṃ*). (M 1:36.21/1:243), SD 49.4

⁸² M 36.31/1:243,5 (SD 29.4).

Such an account is also found in **the Mahāvastu** (Mvst 3.149), which relates how a hermit's son falls in love at his first meeting with a beautiful girl. Preoccupied with thoughts of her, he fails in his daily duties. Noticing this, his father asks, *kin*⁸³ *tuvaṃ dhyānaṃ dhyāyasi*, “what kind of dhyana are you meditating on?” or more simply, “what are you thinking about?”⁸⁴ The Pali version of this story is **the Naḷinikā Jātaka** (J 526), which instead reads *kiṃ nu mando'va jhāyasi* (“what are you thinking stupidly about?”).⁸⁵

4.4.1.3 TWO MEANINGS OF JHĀNA. We can translate the verb *jhāyati* (Skt *dhyāyati*) either generally to mean “he meditates” or more specifically to mean “he attains dhyana.” But we have another pair of possible meanings, as shown in the Mahāvastu story and its Jātaka counterpart above, that is, *jhāyati* (Skt **dhyāyati*) can either mean “he meditates (on)” or “he thinks about, broods over.” A further fifth meaning is possible, that is, *jhāyati* (Skt *kṣāyati*), “he burns” or figuratively, “he is consumed (by).” All these meanings (except as “dhyana”) can apply to the hermit's son in the two stories.

In other words, the Buddhist Sanskrit form, *dhyāna* has two senses: from √KṢĀ (to burn) we have the Sanskrit verb *kṣāyati*, or the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit verb **dhyāyati*, and Pali *jhāyati* (it burns; it is consumed), and from √DHYAI or √DHYĀ (to think), we have *dhyāyati*, Pali *jhāyati* (he meditates). However, Edgerton's Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (BHSD) lists **dhyāyati* as a starred form, that is, it is a reconstructed word or a back-formation, and does not really exist.⁸⁶

Arbel's hypothesis might well be plausible, but I think there is simpler explanation. The term *dhyāna* existed in pre-Buddhist times, but it refers to some kind of mystical or self-mortifying meditation, and not to the *jhāna* of the Buddha. In fact, what Arbel says further here clearly supports my proposition:

It is important to note that only in two contexts the term *jhāna* is associated with this verb, and in both of them the Buddha refers to a type of *jhāna* he does not recommend. In all other places, except from this occurrence, the *jhānas* are mostly associated with description of awakening, and always as a model of four gradual states, in which a person enters (*upasampajja*) and abides in (*viharati*) without any reference to the practice of stopping the breath or other ascetic practices. That is, the *jhānas* in the fourfold model are never referred to as *appāṇakarṇ jhānaṃ*. They are mostly described by an adjective that indicates their number in this mode—namely, the first *jhāna*, the second *jhāna*, the third *jhāna* or the fourth *jhāna*. Sometimes only the first *jhāna* is described, and then it is also called “the first *jhāna*,” which indicates again, that it is a part of a series of states. (Arbel 2008:9)

4.4.1.4 THE DOṆA BRĀHMAṆA SUTTA. An interesting discourse in the Aṅguttara, called **the Doṇa Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (A 5.192), clearly states that the brahmins before the Buddha's time practised the four dhyanas. When the brahmin Doṇa complains to the Buddha that he disrespects the venerable brahmin elders, the Buddha explains to him that there are five kinds of brahmins, everyone of whom lived as a celibate student, that is, under tutelage (*koṃāra, brahmacariya*) for 48 years, thus:

- (1) the brahma-like brahmin (*brahma, sama brāhmaṇa*), who then renounces the world to practise the 4 divine abodes,
- (2) the deva-like celibate brahmin (*deva, sama brāhmaṇa*), who then renounces the world to practise the four dhyanas (which are listed by way of the traditional pericopes),

⁸³ Basak reads *kiṃ* here (2004:92,6).

⁸⁴ Senart 1897:149,2; Mvst:J 3:144.

⁸⁵ J 526/5:201. For a detailed study of the different versions of this story, see Heinrich Lüders 1940b.

⁸⁶ On the meanings of *jhāna* and *jhāyati*, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (3).

- (3) the bounded brahmin (*mariyāda brāhmaṇa*), who keeps to the brahminical code, but does not meditate,
- (4) the bound-breaking brahmin (*sambhinna brāhmaṇa*), who supports himself only through the charity of others, but marries any woman for pleasure as well as for procreation, and
- (5) the outcaste brahmin (*caṇḍāla brāhmaṇa*), who who engages in any kind of work, marries any woman for pleasure as well as for procreation. (A 5.192/3:223-230), SD 36.14

It is clear from such internal evidence that meditation, at least from the early Buddhists' viewpoint, that meditation and dhyana were practised and experienced well before the Buddha's time. We need, therefore, to discover and define the uniqueness of Buddhist dhyana elsewhere.

4.4.2 Dhyana in the Buddha's time

4.4.2.1 As regards the early Buddhist sources, most of **the 4 Nikāyas**—the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara—along with much of **the Sutta Nipāta** form the earliest strata, dated before the rise of the various early Buddhist schools (around 3rd century BCE), for whom these probably form a common scripture.⁸⁷ These ancient texts have also been preserved in Chinese translation, called Āgama.⁸⁸

4.4.2.2 It is interesting, as Arbel notes (2008:8), that in these ancient Buddhist texts, the dhyanas are never associated with Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (most likely Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism),⁸⁹ or with the Ājīvikas.⁹⁰ In fact, in **the Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta** (S 41.8), both Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta and Acela (naked ascetic) Kassapa are described as not believing that dhyanas are possible.⁹¹ And as we have noted [3.2], meditation as an organized system apparently did not exist before the Buddha's time.⁹² Whatever hint of meditation we find in pre-Buddhist India (according to the ancient texts) were sporadic and formative.

4.4.2.3 Furthermore, as Arbel has noted (id), the dhyanas always appear in the Nikāyas as being attained by the Buddha and his disciples. This is, as a rule, contrary to accounts of asceticism and meditation done by the Bodhisattva (that is, before the Great Awakening), and which are proclaimed by the Buddha to be not conducive to the spiritual quest, such as stated in **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11) and **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36).⁹³ No such declaration is ever made by the Buddha regarding the 4 dhyanas.

⁸⁷ For a detailed study, see Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, 2005:19-91.

⁸⁸ The early sutras, called Āgama Sūtras or simply Āgama (Chin 阿含經 *Āhánjīng*; Jap 阿含部 *Agon-bu*); see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_\(Buddhism\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_(Buddhism)). They are preserved in vols 1-2 (order 1-151) of the 100-volume Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō (大正新脩大藏經) (The Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka). See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taisho_Tripitaka. For the Taisho database: http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/index_en.html. Today they are a valuable source for source-critical and comparative studies of the Pali suttas.

⁸⁹ Johannes Bronkhorst, in "The riddle of the Jainas and the Ājīvikas in early Buddhist literature," suggests that Nātaputta and Mahāvīra were not the same person (2000:517). He refers to the two Jain sects: "The followers of Pārśva, who wore clothes, and the followers of Mahāvīra, who were naked." The latter might have been included in the category of Ājīvikas, and not the disciples of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (2000:512). [From Arbel's fn]

⁹⁰ A generic name for sectarian naked ascetics, incl Makkhali Gosāla and Pūraṇa Kassapa. The term *acela* or *acelaka* prob is a general term for a naked ascetic who does not belong to any particular sect. See A L Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, 1951:107-109.

⁹¹ S 41.8/4:298-302 (SD 40a.7). On Jain beliefs, see **Upāli S** (M 56), SD 27.1 (2.1).

⁹² See Arbel 2008:8 f.

⁹³ See, respectively, S 56.11,3/5:420 (SD 1.1), & M 36.20-31/1:242-247 (SD 49.4).

4.4.2.4 The Cūḷa Hatthi, padôpama Sutta (M 27) alludes that the 4 dhyanas are known *outside* of the Buddha’s teaching. Not only that, it also says that even with the attainment of the 3 knowledges (*te, vijjā*)⁹⁴—those of past lives recollection, of the “divine eye” (how karma works), and even of the 4 noble truths—the noble disciple does not yet come to the conclusion thus: “The Blessed One is the fully self-awakened one. | The Dharma is well spoken by the Blessed One. | The community of disciples is well-practised.”⁹⁵

In other words, those who have not attained full awakening are still outsiders (*bāhiraka*). Here, an “outsider,” however, might only attain the first two superknowledges, that is, those of rebirth and of karma; but the third knowledge, if attained, is only superficial and garbled. In other words, all the 3 knowledges would still be imperfect in them, and they would have wrong views (usually based on eternalism) about them. They have still not reached the “conclusion” (*niṭṭhaṅ, gata*) of the teaching (MA 2:217,25).⁹⁶

4.4.3 Jhāna as meaning “meditation”

4.4.3.1 PRE-BUDDHIST DHYANA. From the external accounts and internal evidence of the use of the term *dhyāna* (*P jhāna*) that we have examined so far, we can safely say that the term and its various forms were known even before the Buddha’s time. As Poussin has proposed in 1917, the Buddha probably borrowed *the term* (but not the method) from a “common store of mystical devices.”⁹⁷

In the **Aggañña Sutta** (D 27), where the Buddha recounts how in ancient times, people were known according to their vocations or professions (in the old senses of the words, meaning “calling” and “occupation,” respectively). The brahmins, for example, “keep away” (*bāhenti*) from evil and unwholesome things; hence, they are called *brāhmaṇa* (brahmin).⁹⁸ The Sutta then adds that there were then two kinds of brahmins: those who “meditated” (*jhāyantīti kho vāsetṭha jhāyakā*) and those who “could not meditate” (*na dān’ime jhāyantīti kho vāsetṭha ajjhāyakā*).⁹⁹ The point here is that *jhāyati* and its noun, *jhāna*, are used here in the sense of “meditation” in reference to non-Buddhists (here the ancient brahmins).

4.4.3.2 THE 4 DHYANAS. When we closely study the suttas, we will often come across references to the 4 dhyanas (as taught by the Buddha) either in brief, or fully defined in stock passages, such as these:

BRIEF STATEMENT ON DHYANA

Bhikshus, if a monk should wish, “May I become one to obtain at will, without trouble, without difficulty, *the 4 dhyanas*, the higher minds, dwelling happily here and now,” let him fulfill

⁹⁴ See **Te, vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8.

⁹⁵ M 27,19.3 etc (refrain) + SD 47.1 (1.3.7).

⁹⁶ **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1) mentions some of those outsiders who are able to attain deep dhyana and recall many past lives (D 1,31-37) + SD 25.1 (5.2) + 25.2. (**Sotāpanna**) **Nandiya S** (S 55.40) effectively says that only the stream-winners onwards are *not* outsiders (S 55.40,4) + SD 47.1 (1.1.2). See also **Cūḷa Hatthi, padôpama S** (M 27,25.4) n + SD 40a.5 (1.1.2).

⁹⁷ Poussin, *The Way to Nirvana*, 1917:163.

⁹⁸ See D 27,22/3:94 @ SD 2.19 n (*brāhmaṇa*).

⁹⁹ D 27,22/3:94 (SD 2.19). There is a wordplay here: *ajjhāyaka* (from *na jhāyaka*) means “one who does not meditate,” but it also means “reciter” (from *ajjhāyati*; cf Skt *ādhyāyika*, *adhyāyin*, one who studies or is skilled in the Vedas; cf also *sajjhāyati*, to rehearse, repeat, study).

moral virtue, be devoted to inner mental calm, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, resort to empty abodes.¹⁰⁰ (Ākaṅkheyya Sutta, M 6,9/1:33), SD 59.1¹⁰¹

Note here that in the phrase “**not neglect meditation**” (*anirākata-j,jhāna*), *jhāna* can only mean “meditation,” otherwise it would sound redundant, as the 4 dhyanas (*catunnaṃ jhānānaṃ*) have already been mentioned earlier. However, the term is a pregnant one, and can include dhyana (*jhāna*) itself.

STOCK PASSAGE ON THE 4 DHYANAS (From **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta**, D 2)

(1) Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, he attains and dwells in **the 1st dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and with zest and joy *born of solitude*.¹⁰² He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body¹⁰³ with the zest and joy born of solitude.¹⁰⁴

(2) And, furthermore, maharajah, with the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in **the 2nd dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy *born of concentration*.¹⁰⁵ He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the zest and joy born of concentration.

(3) And furthermore, maharajah, with the fading away of zest, he dwells equanimous, mindful and clearly aware,¹⁰⁶ and experiences joy with the body. He attains and dwells in **the 3^d dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in *equanimity and mindfulness*.’ He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the joy free from zest.

(4) And furthermore, maharajah, with the abandoning of joy and pain¹⁰⁷—and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—he attains and dwells in **the 4th dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity. He sits, pervading the body with *a pure, bright mind*,¹⁰⁸ so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by a pure, bright mind. (D 2,77+79+81+83/1:73-76), SD 8.10¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰ *Ākaṅkheyya ce bhikkhave, catunnaṃ jhānānaṃ ābhicetasikānaṃ diṭṭha,dhamma,sukha,vihārānaṃ nikāma,-lābhī assa akicchā,lābhī akasīra,lābhī ti, sīlesv’ev’assa paripūra,kārī ajjhataṃ ceto,samatham anuyutto anirākata-,j,jhāno vipassanāya samannāgato brūhetā suññāgārānaṃ.*

¹⁰¹ See also **Paṭisallāna S** (It 2.2.8/39 f), SD 41.4.

¹⁰² “Born of solitude,” *viveka,ja*; ie it is the result of abandoning the hindrances: on the 3 kinds of solitude, see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (1.5). On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The Layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

¹⁰³ Here “body” (*kāya*) refers to the “mental body” (*nāma,kāya*), ie feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) (Vism 4.175/169).

¹⁰⁴ These are the dhyana factors: *vitakka vicāra pīti sukhasa ek’aggatā*, respectively.

¹⁰⁵ In **Kolita S** (S 21.1), the 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya,tuṅhī,bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained thought (*vitakka,vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech of any kind cannot occur (S 21.1,3-4/2:273), SD 24.12b. Cf **Kāma,bhū S** (S 41.6), where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī,saṅkhāra*), the mental factor responsible for speech (S 41.6,7/4:293), SD 48,7; also **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12. In **Ariya, Pariyesanā S** (M 26), the Buddha exhorts the monks, when assembled, to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate) (M 26,4/1:161), SD 1.11.

¹⁰⁶ On how mindfulness and awareness work during the 3rd dhyana, see SD 60.1e (1.3.8).

¹⁰⁷ “Joy and pain,” *sukha,dukkha*, refers to the physical feelings. The next phrase—“pleasure and displeasure,” *domanassa-somanassa*—refers to mental feelings, which have been transcended earlier. Mental feelings need to be overcome first so that the mind is not distracted by itself, as it were. Then, all the other feelings (arising from physical sense-contacts) are transcended. On the significance of this, see **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5.

¹⁰⁸ See **Accharā Vagga** (A 1.6.1-2): “Monks, this mind is radiant (*pabhassara*), but it is defiled by defilements from outside. The ignorant ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. As such, for him there is no per-

4.4.3.3 DHYANA AS MEDITATION AND MEDITATING. Occasionally, we will notice (as in the quote under “Brief Statement on Dhyana” above) [4.4.3.2] that the word *jhāna* means simply “meditation” (that is, not specifically dhyana as an altered state of consciousness). This is also the case in **the Jhāna Saṃyutta** (S 34) where, ironically, the word *jhāna* is not mentioned at all. Instead, the word *samādhi*, here meaning “meditation” as practice is used. In other words, *jhāna* in the Saṃyutta title means “meditation.”¹¹⁰

The Eka Nipāta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya has a chapter—**the Aparā Accharā, sāṅghāta Vagga**—which lists all the Buddhist meditations and practices (eg the eightfold path),¹¹¹ beginning with this exhortation:

Bhikkhus, if even for just the moment of a finger-snap a monk cultivates (*bhāveti*) (the first dhyana, etc), he is called a monk. His meditation is not in vain (*aritta-j, jhāno*). He acts in accordance with the Teacher’s teaching. He follows his advice. He does not eat the country’s alms in vain. How much more so if he were to often cultivate it!¹¹² (A 2.20,2/1:38)

The expression *aritta-j, jhāna* (“his meditation is not in vain”) applies to all the meditations *that do not lead to dhyana* (such as the loathsomeness of food, analysis of the elements, the 6 recollections, and recollection on peace), and also practices like the individual limbs of the eightfold path, the 5 spiritual faculties, and so on. Clearly, *jhāna* here generically means “meditation,” and not dhyana (that is, as a profoundly blissful altered state of consciousness).

We have already noted above, that in the phrase “not neglect meditation” (*anirākata-j, jhāna*) as a verb, an action. Similarly, in this well known passage, the Buddha exhorts us to *meditate*, thus:

These, bhikkhus, are the foot of trees,¹¹³ these are empty huts.¹¹⁴ Meditate,¹¹⁵ bhikkhus! Be not heedless! Regret not later! This is our instruction to you.”¹¹⁶

4.4.3.4 WRONG DHYANA. In fact, the general rule is that the verbs *jhāyati* (3rd sg indicative), *jhāyasi* (2nd sg imperative), *jhāyatha* (2nd pl imperative), *jhayeyya* (3rd sg optative), and so on, all refer to the *act of*

sonal development.” (A 1:10). On reaching the 4th dhyana, the practitioner becomes directly aware of the truly and naturally pure nature of the mind. See also A:ÑB 1999 §4.

¹⁰⁹ Further, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

¹¹⁰ There is another **Jhāna Saṃyutta** (S 53) which *jhāna* refers to dhyana. See (S 34.1/3:263 f) + SD 41.12 (1.1).

¹¹¹ The traditional ref (Chaṭṭha Saṅgayaṇa & World Tipiṭaka) is **A 1.18.1-181** (Aṅguttara Nikāya 1, Ekaka Nipāta 18, Aparā Accharāsaṅghata Vagga 1-181).

¹¹² *Accharā, sāṅghāta, mattam pi ce, bhikkhave, bhikkhu paṭhamam jhānam bhāveti, ayam vuccati, bhikkhave—bhikkhu aritta-j, jhāno viharati, satthu, sāsana, karo ovāda, patikaro, amogham raṭṭha, piṇḍam bhuñjati. Ko pana vādo ye nam bahulī, karontī ti* (A 2.20/1:38-43).

¹¹³ “Those are the foot of trees,” *etāni rukkhā, mūlāni*. “Foot” here is usually single, like “bottom.”

¹¹⁴ Sometimes rendered as “empty place”.

¹¹⁵ “Meditate!” *jhāyatha*, lit “cultivate *jhāna*” (M 1:45, 118; S 4:133, 4:359, 361, 362, 368, 373; A 3:87, 89, 4:139, 392). Syn *bhāveti* (2nd pl), “cultivate!”

¹¹⁶ *Etāni bhikkhave rukkhā, mūlāni, etāni suññāgarāni. Jhāyatha bhikkhave, mā pamādattha, mā pacchā vippaṭṭisārino*. This is stock: **Sallekha S** (M 8,18/1:46), SD 51.8; **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19,27/1:118), SD 61.1; **Āneñja, sappāya S** (M 106,15/2:266 f), SD 85.13; **Indriya, bhāvanā S** (M 152,18/3:302), SD 17.13; (**Nava Purāṇa**) **Kamma S** (S 35.-146/4:133), SD 4.12; **Kāya S** (S 43.1/4:359), SD 12.21(1); & all suttas in the same **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta** (S 43.2-44/-4:360-373); **Bhikkhun’upassaya S** (S 47.10/5:157), SD 24.2; **Dhamma, vihārī S 1** (A 5.73/3:87), SD 44.4; **Dhamma, vihārī S 2** (A 5.74/3:89), SD 44.5; **Araka S** (A 7.70,4/4:139), SD 16.17; cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507). The sentence “**regret not later**” (*mā pacchā vippaṭṭisārino ahuvattha*), in the second para, also occurs at **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.19+20/ 2:147, 16,6.5/2:155 ×3, the Buddha’s last words) = **Kusinārā S** (A 4.76/2:79 f); **Devatā S** (A 9.19/4:392), SD 57.14; cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507). For comy, see MA 1:195 f; SA 3:111 f, 266 f. A search for *jhāyatha* in the Sutta Piṭaka reveals about 70 occurrences. See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (3): Def of *jhāna*.

meditating, not necessarily for the attaining of dhyana or abiding in it. In **the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta** (M 108), Ānanda explains to the brahmin Vassa, kāra, chief minister of Magadha, that “the Blessed One does not praise all types of dhyana” (*so bhagavā sabbaṃ jhānaṃ na vaṇṇesi*). In this case, a person meditates with his mind troubled by a hindrance (*nīvaraṇa*)¹¹⁷ but he does not understand it as it really is, nor the escape from such a hindrance. In this misdirected “dhyana,” one “meditates, over-meditates, under-meditates, out-meditates” (*jhāyati pajjhāyati nijjhāyati apajjhāyati*).¹¹⁸

Here, we clearly see the word **jhāna** as having the general sense of “meditation,” and the verb *jhāyati* meaning “he meditates.” On the other hand, the four dhyanas that the Buddha approves of are, namely, the first dhyana, the second dhyana, the third dhyana, and the fourth dhyana, are well defined through the Nikāyas (as shown in the “Stock Passage on the Four Dhyanas,” above). If *jhāna* is here used in a generic way, it would include “dhyana,” that is, the four stages of Buddhist *jhāna*, too. Its particular sense should be teased out from its context.

Thus, Arbel observes,

In all other places, except from this occurrence, the *jhānas* are mostly associated with description of awakening, and always as a model of four gradual states, in which a person enters (*upāsampajja*) and abides in (*viharati*) without any reference to the practice of stopping the breath or other ascetic practices. That is, the *jhānas* in the fourfold model are never referred to as *appānakam jhānaṃ*. (2008:8 f)

4.4.3.5 THE FALSE INDIVIDUAL’S DHYANA. The Sappurisa Sutta (M 113) warns us against spiritual arrogance, that is, priding ourselves in religious learning, practices and attainments. It is interesting that the Sutta states that even a “false person” (*asappurisa*) may be able to attain dhyanas and the formless attainments, but he would not be able to attain the cessation of perception and feeling.¹¹⁹

This is very significant in our study of dhyana in the Buddha’s time. It shows that almost *anyone* is capable of attaining dhyana, but not everyone, especially a “false person” (*asappurisa*), is capable of gaining liberation from it. Indeed, a false person might try to gain dhyana *not* for the sake of awakening, but for priding himself or for religious one-upmanship.

4.4.3.6 DHYANA AND RIGHT VIEW. Or, perhaps, the false person could use dhyana for heavenly rebirth, for “eternal life” in heaven, as elaborated in two parallel discourses, **the (Nānā, karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 1** (A 4.152)¹²⁰ and **the (Nānā, karaṇā) Puggala Sutta** (A 4.123).¹²¹ While the former shows how the 4 divine

¹¹⁷ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*) are: (1) sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkucca*), (4) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*). For occurrences, see **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39,13/1:274); also **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,13); **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36) on how to deal with the hindrances during meditation; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,68/1:71), SD 8.10 (def of dhyana with imageries). For discussions, see: (1) **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (8.2), (2) **Mental hindrances** (SD 32) & (3) **Saṅgāra S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12.

¹¹⁸ M 108,26-27/3:13 f (SD 33.5). In a manner of speaking (*pariyāyena*), we could associate the last 3 terms with the 3 unwholesome roots: *pajjhāyati* is to meditate “consumed” by greed (*lobha*) or lust (*rāga*), *nijjhāyati* is weighed “down” by hate, and *apajjhāyati* is led astray and “way out” by delusion. In a negative sense, *jhāyati* here, following the text, is to meditate troubled by the 5 hindrances. I don’t think the suttas use these terms technically, but only in a reiterative and mnemonic sense, simply meaning “to meditate troubled by the 5 mental hindrances,” which the first and key should be understood in this context.

¹¹⁹ *Saññā, vedayita, nirodha* or *nirodha, samāpatti*, M 113/3:37-45 @ SD 23.7. It is listed as the 9th or last stage of as the 9 “progressive abidings” (*anupubba, vihāra*), ie the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*), the 4 formless dhyanas (*arūpa jhāna*), and the cessation of perception and feeling (D 3:265, 290; A 4:410). See M 43.25/1:296 & Vism 23.51/709; cf S 22.95/3:143*; Dh 41.

¹²⁰ A 4.125/2:128 f (SD 33.9).

abode (*brahma, vihāra*) can bring about heavenly rebirths, the latter shows how dhyanas can do the same, too. But once the heavenly spell is broken, the being falls into a subhuman plane reborn as a hell-being, an animal or a preta.

All this shows that noble as dhyana experience may be, it could be used for baser purposes. Or, perhaps, it might be true that such a person starts off quite rightly with his practice of dhyana, but he lacks right view. That right view is necessary is clear. As such, when in **the (Dasaka) Cetanā’karaṇīya Sutta** (A 10.2) and **the (Ekā, dasaka) Cetanā’karaṇīya Sutta** (A 11.2), the Buddha says, “It is the nature of things, bhikkhus, that the *concentrated* will know and see according to reality,”¹²² in the context of the *nibbidā* model,¹²³ the “concentration” here is clearly “right concentration” (*sammā samādhi*), the one with right view.¹²⁴ As such, it is only when dhyana is attained with right view that it brings about full spiritual benefits. [5]

4.4.3.7 In **summary**, we have the following meanings of *jhāna* and its verbs, as used in the Nikāyas:

- (1) as a general term for *meditation* (such as the imperative verbs, *jhāyasi, jhāyatha*, etc),
- (2) as a term referring to any non-Buddhist meditation, especially wrong ones,
- (3) as *dhyana meditation* or mental absorption, found (as a noun) only amongst the Buddhists, and
- (4) as *dhyāna* with right view.¹²⁵

5 Dhyana and awakening

5.1 DHYANA AS RIGHT CONCENTRATION

5.1.1 Let us return to our original question: **Did the Buddha discover dhyana or not?** We will take a closer look at some of the internal evidence and summarize our arguments. Why is the Buddha’s discovery of dhyana unique and different from the other teachings and systems? Firstly, as mentioned, the story of the two teachers and the Bodhisattva’s attaining of the two highest formless attainments are found in the earliest Buddha biography (the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta) and repeated verbatim in a number of other early texts. As such, there is no good reason to reject the authenticity of this story.

5.1.2 Secondly, this ancient sutta account *does* mention the 2 attainments. Ālāra himself tells the Bodhisattva that the level he has attained is the sphere of nothingness (*ākāṅkamaññ’āyatana*), while Uddaka declares that his father, Rāma, *had* attained the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n’eva, -saññā, nā, saññāyatana*). Besides these two statements, we do not seem to have any other evidence showing that these are actually the formless attainments taught by the Buddha himself. Conversely, there is no

¹²¹ A 4.123/2:129 f (SD 23.8a).

¹²² *Dhammatā esā bhikkhave yaṃ samāhito yathā, bhūtaṃ jānāti passati*

¹²³ In this case, **the *nibbidā* model** begins with our being morally virtuous → guilt-free → joyful → zestful minded → calm in body → happy → concentrated → seeing true reality → being revulsed → becoming dispassionate, On the *nibbidā* model or formula, see ***Nibbidā***, SD 20.1.

¹²⁴ A 10.2,7/5:3,10 @ SD 41.6 & A 11.2,7/5:313,1 @ SD 33.3b. This point was conveyed to me by a **Sinhala bhikkhu** (who requested anonymity), who, during the vassa of 2012 (Perth, Australia), conferred with Brahmavamso who confirmed that he emphasized dhyana based on right view and not one lacking it. In his talks, Brahmavamso mentions Christian monks who were said to have attained dhyana-like states when “they surrender their will to the God, which sounds like giving up the doer”—this suggests the possibility of non-Buddhists attaining dhyana, but of a mundane kind, ie, without right samadhi. On Christian mystic experience (incl dhyana), see **Miraculous stories**, SD 27.5b (1.3). On the “doer,” see SD 17.6 (8.4).

¹²⁵ On the meanings of *jhāna* and *jhāyati*, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (3).

evidence for denying that they are not the same states as those of the Buddhist system. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, let us accept that the two attainments are similar to those taught by the Buddha.

5.1.3 Thirdly, even if we accept that the two formless spheres taught by the two teachers are similar to the Buddhist ones, there is an important factor missing from these attainments of the two teachers. **The Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 115) tells us that right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) must be present in the dhyana for it to be right concentration (*sammā samādhi*).¹²⁶ It is not just a matter of being able to attain dhyana, no matter how profound, but as stated in **the Saṅganikā, rāma Sutta** (A 6.68), without purifying view, it is impossible to cultivate right concentration,¹²⁷ much less to attain nirvana.

5.1.4 As such, Ājāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāma,putta (or his late father Rāma before him), despite their ability (or claim)¹²⁸ to attain dhyana, or even the formless attainments, *their practices lack right view*. If these practices were endowed with right view, the Bodhisattva would have awakened through any of these attainments. As such, it is not just a matter of attaining dhyana, but such an attainment must be attended by right view, too.¹²⁹ It is useful to reflect on what **Sujato** has written on this vital point:

Elsewhere it is said that ordinary people attain samadhi (here the four jhanas (A 4.123)¹³⁰ and the four divine abidings¹³¹), are reborn in the Brahmā realms, and after a long period of bliss fall back into lower realms.¹³² But noble disciples, after reaching the Brahmā realms, attain Nibbana from there.

The difference is not in the states of samadhi as such—these are just manifestations of the mind at peace. The difference is in the views and interpretations, the conceptual wrapping that the experience is bundled up in. The path must be taken as a whole.

If one starts out with wrong view, one's meditation experiences are likely to simply reinforce one's preconceptions. If one practises samadhi with the view that one's soul will become immersed in some exalted state of being, well, one will get what one wishes for.

(Sujato, *A History of Mindfulness*, 2004b: 95 f; 2005b: 137 f; normalized)

5.1.5 In conclusion, we can say that Brahmavamso is, to some extent, right in claiming that “the Buddha discovered dhyana,” but we need to qualify the statement in at least two ways. Firstly, that the Buddha borrowed the term *jhāna* from a common religious vocabulary. Yet, secondly (and more importantly,) it is something new: it is **dhyana with right view** [5.2]. The two teachers—Ājāra and Rāma (Uddaka's father)—too, must have experienced dhyana, but it is *without* right view (that is to say, they still held some self-view or have not really directly seen the nature of non-self).

¹²⁶ **M 117**,2-3/3:71 + 35/3:76 (SD 6.10).

¹²⁷ A 6.68/3:423 (SD 65.12).

¹²⁸ See **Uddaka S** (S 35.103), where the Buddha declares that Uddaka is *not* awakened but claims to be so (S 35.-103/4:83 f), SD 96.2.

¹²⁹ Further see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26), SD 1.11 (4.1): “Did Ājāra & Rāma teach dhyana?”

¹³⁰ (**Nānā,karaṇā**) **Puggala S** (A 4.123/2:126-128), SD 23.8a.

¹³¹ Eg (**Nānā,karaṇa**) **Mettā S 1** (A 4.125/2:128 f), SD 33.9.

¹³² See eg **Brahmā Nimantanika S** (M 49). The Buddha relates to the Brahmā Baka how he, from being a 4th-dhyana Brahmā of **Veha-p,phalā** (**Abundant Fruit**), passes away from there and is reborn as a 3rd-dhyana Brahmā of **Subha,kinnā** (**Radiant Glory**), and then as a 2nd-dhyana Brahmā of **Ābhassarā** (**Streaming Radiance**). From there he is reborn into the present 1st-dhyana world of **Mahā Brahmā**. This is in fact a spiritual devolution, a gradual falling from high places! (M 49,10/1:326-1331), SD 11.7.

5.1.6 Around the Buddha's time, there was such a religious fervour, with a significantly large number of people practising meditation. It is not hard to stretch our imagination in saying that there were many others who had experienced dhyana—in the sense of transpersonal concentration or samadhi, but *without* right view. As such, it is the Buddha who discovers dhyana with *right view*, which brings about liberation.¹³³

5.2 THE BUDDHA DISCOVERED DHYANA WITH RIGHT VIEW

5.2.1 In his first public discourse, **the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), the Buddha proclaims that the path to liberation must avoid the two extremes of preoccupation with the body, that is, either indulging in bodily pleasure or in self-mortification. Only in keeping to the middle way (the eightfold path), can liberation be reached.¹³⁴

5.2.2 The Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 36) records how, after realizing the mortal danger and utter futility of self-mortification, the Bodhisattva seeks a middle way to liberation. He recalls that when he is only 7, against the backdrop of the ploughing festival, sitting under a jambul tree, focused on his breath, and attaining the first dhyana [4.4.1]. Reflecting on his meditative bliss on that occasion, he realizes that he has nothing to fear regarding *a pleasure that is wholesome*.¹³⁵ Thus, directing his mind to his breath, the Bodhisattva attains dhyana, and, through his own effort, gains self-awakening.¹³⁶

5.2.3 It is important to understand here that dhyana *alone* would not bring awakening. After all, the child Bodhisattva has attained the first dhyana under the jambul tree, but does not gain spiritual liberation [4.4.1]. Although the two early teachers—Ājāra Kālāma and Rāma—are able to reach even the formless attainments (meaning that they have mastered the form dhyanas, but without right view), they have not realized nirvana.

Even after mastering the two highest formless attainments from the two teachers, the Bodhisattva does not win liberation. So he decides to practise on his own. Using the breath meditation that he is familiar with, the Bodhisattva quickly lets go of all mental hindrances, and gains the 4 dhyanas. Emerging from the fourth dhyana, he directs his mind to attain the knowledge of the recollection of his own past lives (*pubbe, nivāsānussati, ñāṇa*) during the first watch (10.00-2.00 am) of Vesak Day, 2600 years ago.

5.2.4 Using this rebirth knowledge, the Buddha is able to *recall his most spiritually significant past life*, as confirmed by **the Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81), that is, as the monk Jotipāla, a disciple of the immediate past Buddha, Kassapa,¹³⁷ under whom he would have surely learned the Dharma, especially the teachings of rebirth, karma and non-self. Then the Buddha attains the knowledge of death and rebirth (*cutūpapāta, ñāṇa*) or the “divine eye,” with which he is able to see how beings fare through numerous lives according to their karma.

¹³³ See eg (**Nāna, karaṇā**) **Puggala S 1** (A 4.123/2:126-128), SD 23.8a cf (**Nānā, karaṇa**) **Mettā S 1** (A 4.125/2:128 f), SD 33.9.

¹³⁴ S 56.11, 3/5:420 (SD 1.1).

¹³⁵ M 36, 21-32/1:236 f (SD 1.12). On the 4 dhyanas as *sukh'allikānuyoga*, “devotion of pleasure,” see **Pāsādika S** (D 29, 23/3:130), SD 40a.6.

¹³⁶ For a description of the Buddha's awakening, see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26, 18/1:167), SD 1.11, **Mahā Sīha, -nāda S** (M 12, 56-63/1:81-83), SD 1.13, & **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36, 31-44/1:246-249), SD 1.12.

¹³⁷ M 81, 6/2:46 & 81, 23/2:54 (SD 49.3). The **Buddha, varṃsa** records our Buddha as recalling as the monk Jotipāla under the Buddha Kassapa, he “illuminated the Conqueror's teaching” (*sobhayim Jina, sāsanam*, B 25.15).

5.2.5 Through *recalling his own past lives and those of other beings*, he sees a common pattern of how the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion, condition our sufferings, and how through understanding and accepting the universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self, suffering is overcome and liberation won. All this is confirmed by his recalling the teachings he has received from Kassapa Buddha.

5.2.6 As right view arises in our Buddha, he is finally able to directly see into true reality, and so gains the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes (*āsava-k,khaya ñāṇa*), that is, the drying up the floods of sense-desires, views, existence and ignorance. With this, he attains self-awakening and spiritual liberation.¹³⁸ In other words, it is not dhyana alone that liberates the Bodhisattva, but it is the true Dharma (*saddhamma*) that makes him Buddha.¹³⁹ The vital point here is that the dhyana must be right concentration or right samadhi (*sammā samādhi*), not wrong concentration (*micchā samādhi*).¹⁴⁰ **Right-samadhi dhyana**, in other words, must be developed along with the other limbs of the noble eightfold path, especially right view.

5.2.7 In short, the practitioner must realize for himself the nature of non-self (*anattā*), and the calm and clear mind arising out of dhyana will facilitate this realization.¹⁴¹ In other words, the Buddha is the first person to experience dhyana *with right view*, and so fully self-awaken. In this sense, the Buddha is the first to discover dhyana—just as other Buddhas before him have done, too.

6 Scholarship, practice and dhyana

6.1 TWO VIEWS ON DHYANA

More has been written and read about meditation, I think, than there are those who regularly meditate and experience its wholesome benefits. Most books on meditation available today have been written by non-practitioners, many of whom are not Buddhist, or by those who claim to have meditative experience or have some sort of affinity with Buddhism. Conversely, the writings of avowed practitioners of meditation leading Dharma-centred lives, especially monastics, are assuredly worthwhile reading.

It is interesting to see how the theoretical knowledge and understanding of meditation and dhyana are presented to us in clearer ways, especially those based on personal experience and confirmed by the Buddha's teachings. For the rest of this paper, I would like to compare the key ideas and teachings, regarding meditation and dhyana, of two well known meditation teachers of our time, that is, **Ven Dr Heneola Gunaratana Mahathera** (a senior Sinhala monk, resident in the USA) and **Ajahn Brahmavamso** (an English monk of a modern forest tradition, resident in Australia).¹⁴²

For our present purposes, I will confine our discussion mainly to views on dhyana found in **Gunaratana's** paper, "Should we come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā?" (2007) and **Brahmavamso's** teach-

¹³⁸ The 3 knowledges (*te,vijjā*) are listed at **M** 2,10/1:8, 9,70/1:55; **D** 33,1.10.58/3:220, 34,1.4.10/3:275; **A** 3.59/-1:166 f, 3.67/1:197-199, 6.63/3:414, 10.102/5:211.; see also **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8 (2.2). For a list of 6 super-knowledges & defs, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,89-100/1:77-100), SD 8.10.

¹³⁹ On the Buddha's respect for the Dharma, see **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3.

¹⁴⁰ There are numerous refs to *micchā,samādhi*, eg D 3:254; M 1:42, 3:77; S 5:1; A 2:221, 5:212; Nm 1:78; Pm 2:88; Dhs 76; Vbh 373; Kvu 619.

¹⁴¹ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (3.1) & **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 30.1), SD 24.11 (1), esp (1.3). See also Analayo 2003: 75 f.

¹⁴² These two teachers are well known to me, as in late 1967 I spent a stint as novice (*sāmaṇera*) of the Siyam Nikaya under the tutelage of **Bhante H Gunaratana**; and I have known **Ajahn Brahmavamso**, since 1974, when we met in Wat Srales, Bangkok, where I acted as his interpreter just before his ordination there, and from whom I learned the forest meditation of Ajahn Chah's lineage.

ings.¹⁴³ What is of special interest here is that their teachings on dhyana seem to *contradict* each other, and we will here investigate this interesting problem. We will also look at the views of a few other teachers and scholars who have shown a special interest in meditation and dhyana. We shall examine Gunaratana's main views, expressed in his paper entitled, "Should we come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā?" (2007), namely:

- (1) that in a dhyana state, the meditator "sees and knows what is going on in his mind" (page 1) [6.2];
- (2) that "the meditator does not become one with the object" (page 8) [6.3];
- (3) that the mental hindrances return immediately when we are out of dhyana (page 4) [6.4];
- (4) that reflecting on the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of these factors (that is, the dhyana-factors) should be done while they are present" (page 10) [6.5].

6.2 DO THINKING AND SPEECH OCCUR DURING DHYANA?

6.2.1 The nature of dhyana

6.2.1.1 CAN WE "CONTEMPLATE" WHILE IN DHYANA? Renowned scholar monk, **Bhikkhu Bodhi**,¹⁴⁴ in his note on "samatha and vipassana as a twin practice" (*samatha, vipassanā, yuganaddha*) in his (**Yuganaddha**) **Paṭipadā Sutta** (A 4.170) translation, makes this interesting note:

[The Aṅguttara commentary] says that each time he [the meditator] attains a meditative attainment (*samāpatti*), he explores it by way of its conditioned phenomena. And having explored the conditioned phenomena, he enters the next attainment. Thus, having attained the first jhāna, he emerges and explores the conditioned phenomena as impermanent, etc. Then he enters the second jhāna, emerges and explores its conditioned phenomena, and so on up to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

Since, however, *yuganaddha* means literally "yoked together," some interpret the term to mean that in this mode of practice serenity and insight occur simultaneously. The commentarial system does not acknowledge this possibility but several suttas might be read as suggesting that insight can occur within the jhāna and does not require the meditator to emerge before beginning contemplation. [The suttas are then listed as A 9.36, M 52 and M 64.] (A:B 1707 n861)¹⁴⁵

The suttas mentioned by Bodhi are as follows:

Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta	M 52,4-14/1:350-352	SD 41.2
Mahā Mālunḅyā,putta S	M 64,9-15/1:435-437	SD 21.10
(Āsava-k, khaya) Jhāna Sutta	A 9.36/4:422-426	SD 33.8

¹⁴³ See SD 33.1a biblio for their respective works relevant to our discussion here.

¹⁴⁴ It should be noted that Bh Bodhi, by his own admission, is unable to meditate, esp on account of his "karmic" headache," which troubled him for many years of his life. In answer to question 3 of his *Inquiring Mind* interview, he candidly says, "I have to admit that my own meditation practice has fallen far short of my ideal, but I ascribe this largely to a chronic health condition (a personal karmic obstacle with which I must deal)." He is certainly a renowned scholar and, perhaps, the leading published translator of the early Buddhist texts today. See his interview, *Inquiring Mind*, spring 2006: <http://www.inquiringmind.com/Articles/Translator.html>.

¹⁴⁵ See SD 41.6 (4.2).

In all these key suttas, the meditation passages each describe of the relevant attainment, and then immediately follows the contemplation by the meditator. This passage, from **the Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta**, on the first dhyana, with the proper changes (*mutatis mutandis*), applies to other attainments, thus:

Here, houselord, quite secluded from sense-desires, secluded from unwholesome mental states, a monk enters and dwells in **the first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of seclusion.

He considers thus:

“Even this first dhyana is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.” (M 52,4/1:350), SD 41.2

Such passages have also been construed by **Gunaratana** that the meditator need not emerge from the dhyana to contemplate on the mental state [6.2.2], where we discuss in greater detail why the meditator *does* emerge from such a state before he is able to contemplate on anything at all. Suffice it here to state a few key ideas and textual references, which will be elaborated below [6.2.2].

Firstly, such passages from the suttas (M 52, M 64 and A 9.36) quoted above are those whose import (*attha*) needs to be drawn out (*neyy’attha*). In other words, not everything (especially the obvious) is stated:¹⁴⁶ the suttas quoted do not mention the need to emerge from such attainments because it is such an obvious fact from personal experience: we do really *feel* that we are enjoying profound bliss or in a rapturous state, what more in dhyana and the attainments.

Secondly, experienced meditation teachers, as a rule, teach their students to “review” their meditation practice, as soon as they have emerged from their meditation. Only during such a reviewing do we really know (in conceptual and language terms) the kind of samadhi or dhyana we have experienced. Such a reviewing also helps us to gauge, discipline and improve our practice.¹⁴⁷

Thirdly, we have suttas that *do*, in fact, mention that we need to emerge from such attainments before we can contemplate on them. Such suttas include the following:

		<u>Method of cultivating</u>	
• Mahā Vaccha, gotta Sutta	M 73.18-19/1:494	calm and insight	SD 27.4
• Kāya, gata, sati Sutta	M 119.29 f/3:96 f	mindfulness regarding the body	SD 12.21
• Paṃsu, dhovaka Sutta	A 3.100a.4/1:254	“peaceful and sublime” concentration	SD 19.11
• (Nīvaraṇa) Upakkilesa S	A 5.23/3:16-19	the mind of free from the hindrances	SD 74.3
• Iddhi, pāda Sutta 2	A 5.68/3:82 f	the 5 bases of spiritual power	SD 51.11

In such suttas, it is stated that after the mind is properly calmed and clarified (usually dhyana), we direct (*abhininnāmeti*)¹⁴⁸ our mind to spiritual or higher knowledge (such as psychic power or awakening

¹⁴⁶ See **Neyy’attha Nīt’attha S** (A 2.3.5-6), SD 2.6n.

¹⁴⁷ On meditative review: **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118,21/3:83) n, SD 7.13 + SD 33.13 (3) Dhyana and the review sign.

¹⁴⁸ **Abhininnāmeti** (BHS *abhi-nir-ñāmayati*) “to bend or stretch out (acc), to direct (towards: dat/gen),” caus of *abhi + nir + √NAM*, “to bend, bow.” See D 1:76,15-32, 79,9 ≈ Pm 1:112,28; D 1:79,28 = 80,22 ≈ Pm 1:113,15; D 1:77,-9-24, 78,24 ≈ Pm 1:111,22; D 1:81,12 = 82,5 = M 1:182,21 = 278,8 = 347,26 = 412,33 = 441,33 = 522,9 = II 38,18 ≈ Pug 60,3 ≈ Pm 1:114,14; D 1:82,25 = 83,13 = M 1:183,3 = 278,34 = 348,5 = 413,3 = 442,4 = 522,16-2:38,25 ≈ Pug 60,18 ≈ Pm 1:115,8, cf Vism 423,11 f; D 1:83,36 = 84,23 = M 1:183,25-279,21 = 348,29 = 413,9 = 444,12-522,23 = 2:38,34 ≈ Pug 60,36 (PugA); V 1:254,33 = M III 96,18 f; **pot** 3 sg *~eyya*, S 1:123,25 = M 1:234,13; **aor** 3 sg *~esi*, S 4:178,11; 1 sg *~esim*, 3:4,20 = M 1:22,11 (MA = VA) = 248,1; V 3:4,38 = M 1:22,29 = 248,21 (cf Vism 423,11 f); V 3:5,22 = M 1:23,13 (MA = VA) = 249,6 = V 3:93,1; **fut** 3 sg *~essati*, S 4:178,1. For details, see CPD & DPL sv.

itself). This is **directed meditation**, which is done when we start to cultivate insight, or to develop certain mental abilities or powers. [6.4.2]

Furthermore, in **the Anupada Sutta** (M 111), Sāriputta recounts his formless attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and of the cessation of perception and feeling, for example, stating that the meditator “emerges mindful (*sato*) from that attainment” (*so tāya samāpattiyā sato vuṭṭhahati*), and then reflects on its impermanence¹⁴⁹ [6.2.3.6].

Fourthly, there are numerous stories of meditators deep in dhyana or attainment meeting with external incidents or exigencies of which they are totally unaffected. Such accounts include the following:

- **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** D 16.4 Ājāra’s meditation unaffected by 500 passing carts SD 9
- **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** D 16.4 The Buddha’s meditation undisturbed by thunders SD 9
- **Juṇhā Sutta** U 4.4 An airborne yaksha strikes Sāriputta on his head SD 24.9
- **Sāmāvatī Vatthu** DhA 1:224 f A pratyeka-buddha in dhyana does not burn SD 39.1 (2.1)

Fifthly, Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi,magga**, too, makes the same note that we need to emerge from dhyana before we can reflect on it:

After emerging from the dhyana, he would also feel joy, since his physical body (*rūpa,kāya*) would have been touched [affected] by the profoundly subtle matter arising from that joy associated with the mental body.¹⁵⁰ As such, it is to point this out that the words “he feels joy with the body” are said. (Vism 4.175/163)

Dhyana is *full* mental joy, transcorporeal bliss, truly out-of-body experience, in the sense that all the physical sense-faculties are completely suspended. It is a sense-deprived mind in the full sense of the word. Yet the mind is functional in the sense that it is fully experiencing itself, like two mirrors fully facing each other. Such a mind only knows pure bliss.¹⁵¹

6.2.1.2 THE MIND KNOWING ITSELF. Before we go on, we should have some idea of the nature of the dhyanas. The numerous passages in the early Buddhist texts describe that dhyana arises with the abandoning of all mental hindrances,¹⁵² that is, when the 5 physical sense-doors have been closed, revealing only the mind. In this way, we are experiencing the mind directly: we *are* the mind.

THE 1ST DHYANA. Free from the mental hindrances, the practitioner goes on to attain **the 1st dhyana**. A rudimentary thought-process still lingers in the first dhyana, but this is directed to the meditation object and anchored there—this is known respectively as “initial application” (*vitakka*) and “sustained application” (*vicāra*). With this mental focus, there arise zest (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) “born of solitude” (*viveka,-ja*).¹⁵³

The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta (D 9) describes this experience thus:

Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states,
the monk enters and dwells in the **1st dhyana**,
accompanied by initial application and sustained application,

¹⁴⁹ M 111,18-20/3:28 @ SD 56.4.

¹⁵⁰ On consciousness-born materiality, see Vism 20.30-34/615 f.

¹⁵¹ See SD 41.5 (4.2).

¹⁵² The 5 hindrances (*pañca,nīvaraṇa*) are: (1) sensual lust (*kāma-c,chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) restlessness and worry (*uddhacca,kukkucca*), (4) sloth and torpor (*thīna,middha*), and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*): see above (3.3.2) n.

¹⁵³ Ie mental solitude, a mind free from the 5 hindrances. On the 3 kinds of solitude, see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (1.5). On def of the 4 dhyanas (with images), see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.77-84/1:73-76), SD 8.10.

accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.¹⁵⁴
 And if he has any previous sense-desires, it disappears.¹⁵⁵
 At that time, there arises a subtle but real perception¹⁵⁶ of zest and joy born of seclusion,¹⁵⁷
 and he becomes conscious of this zest and joy at that very moment.¹⁵⁸ (D 9,10.3/1:182), SD 7.14

6.2.1.3 HOW DHYANA IS KNOWN. The language of the last can easily be misinterpreted by a scholar, especially a non-meditator. The meditator “knows” the state, but not as “external” object: we do not *cognize* it as we do in our “normal” waking lives. It is not possible for us to be aware of such a state *cognitively*, as all the physical senses have shut down and there is not perceiving of any “external” sense-objects (including mind-objects).

This is purely a *mental* experience. In a sense, it is like a dream (since all physical senses have shut down and there are no external sense-objects). This is only fully known (cognized as a mind-object) by way of review-knowledge, that is, after the fact.

The Sutta uses similar language to describe the arising of the other 3 dhyanas, so that we “become conscious” (*saññī ... hoti*) of the deepening bliss. These dhyanic experiences are “known” or enjoyed as they arise, but cognized only after the fact, especially during reviewing. There might be “chance cases” where a person might experience dhyana and not even know it. However, with proper instructions from an experienced meditation teacher or with a proper understanding the the suttas, such an experience may be identified in due course. Such occurrences however are not so common.¹⁵⁹ [6.4.1.2]

THE 2ND DHYANA. When the mind is aware of itself, there is no more need of even the subtlest thought (which would be like a speck of dust on the lens of a giant telescope). At this stage, the mind continues to enjoy zest and bliss, free from all thinking (which also means free from all knowing). This is the experience of a full concentrated mind that is “born of concentration” (*samādhi,ja*), that is, **the 2nd dhyana**. This is where the meditator is simply blissed out with the sweet duo of zest and joy (*pīti,sukha*). Their combined effect is that of euphoria, more blissful than anything we can physically know.

THE 3RD DHYANA. In due course, the dhyana attainer feels that there is a coarse or gross (*oḷārika*) aspect of this bliss, and that is zest.¹⁶⁰ When the coarseness of zest is felt, it simply fades away, leaving only joy (*sukha*), which is much more refined and serene. This is **the 3rd dhyana**. It is clear from such experiences that dhyanic bliss arises from letting go any any attachment to it: it is truly the bliss of renunciation.

THE 4TH DHYANA. In **the 4th dhyana**, feeling that joy (*sukha*) is coarse, the meditator simply lets it go. The mind is now enjoying a rock-like stillness. There is a complete lack of access to the world of the physical senses and the body itself. The physical body has totally shut down, as it were. The meditator in

¹⁵⁴ On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5.1.2).

¹⁵⁵ *Tassa yā purimā kāma,saññā sā nirujjhati*, lit “And any previous sense desire of his disappears.”

¹⁵⁶ Comy explains “a subtle but real perception,” *sukhuma,sacca,saññā*, as *vivekajehi pīti,sukhehi sampayutta*, “conjoined with zest and joy born of seclusion” (DA 2:372). This is a stock description of the 1st dhyana with the additional phrase, *sukhuma,sacca,saññā*. *Sukhuma*, meaning “subtle,” here refers to the form dhyana, while its opp *oḷārika*, “gross” refers to the consciousness of the sense-world. On the usage of *sacca* here, see Harvey 1995: 24 f. On *viveka*, see Gethin 2001:166-168.

¹⁵⁷ *Samādhi,pīti,sukha,sukhuma,sacca,saññā tasmim samaye hoti*.

¹⁵⁸ *Samādhi,ja,pīti,sukha,sukhuma,sacca,saññī yeva tasmim samaye hoti*.

¹⁵⁹ Further see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9) which speaks of the dangers of mental activity, esp thinking and planning, which makes us lose our dhyana and attainments (D 9,17/1:184), SD 7.14.

¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, the idea that thinking *must* go on even during dhyana is an ancient view (a wrong view, that is), one held by the Jain teacher, Nirgrantha Nāta,putta: see **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta S** (S 41.8/4:298-300), SD 40a.7.

the 4th dhyana is effectively only a “mental being” so that “there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by pure, bright mind.”¹⁶¹ The “entire body” clearly refers to *his mental body* because his physical body has completely shut down.¹⁶²

6.2.1.4 Even though there is during dhyana no cognitive process as we know it in daily life, we are certainly not in a trance. Our mindfulness is intensified to such profound level of sharpness: we are fully aware. The mindfulness, however, does not move because it does not process any cognitive event or state. It can be said to be “frozen,” in the sense of the stillness of a superpower mindfulness. This perfect one-pointed awareness cannot be compared to anything we have known before. It is definitely not unconsciousness: it is non-dual consciousness. It knows only one thing: the bliss that neither changes nor moves, a bliss free from time and space.¹⁶³ [6.4.4]

In short, we do know, or more correctly, **feel**, the bliss, still and clarity of the mind in dhyana. It is well beyond our everyday knowing or feeling. It might be said to be a kind of transcendental awareness in the true sense of the word: it transcends the world, while it lasts (for the unawakened).¹⁶⁴

6.2.2 Dhyana is beyond words and thoughts

6.2.2.1 THE PRESENT TENSE IN PALI. **Gunaratana** holds the view that a meditator in a dhyana state “sees and knows what is going on in his mind” (2007:1). He quotes **the Mahā Sākul’udāyi Sutta** (M 77), saying,

The Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta clearly expresses that the meditator, even in very refined states of *Jhāna*, sees and knows what is going on in his mind. The verbs are used in the present tense not in the past tense ... If he were to see and know these things after emerging from meditation the Sutta would have used the past tense. (Gunaratana 2007:1)

Firstly, let me address the issue of the present tense, as used in the Pali suttas, which is entirely different from the way we use it in English (as in many other languages, too). **A K Warder**, in his *Introduction to Pali*, is instructive:

The present (*vattamāna*) tense (*lakāra*) is used to express present (*paccuppanna*) time (*kāla*), the limits of which are somewhat vague, or indefinite time (timeless statements such as “eternal truths”), sometimes the immediate future (which may include a shade of “imperative” sense; cf English “I’m going”) and sometimes the past (“historic present”). It is used to express the duration of an action “until,” a fixed future time (a vivid future visualized at present) “when,” and in certain other constructions. (1963; 2nd ed 1974:12 f)

Now, in the light of what Warder has clarified regarding the present tense in the Pali suttas, let us examine the passage that Gunaratana refers to. It is actually a 4-dhyana stock passage, and is identical with the four passages quoted above [4.4.3]. We shall look only at the passage on the first dhyana, as it is sufficient for our present purposes:

¹⁶¹ See eg **Sāmañña, phala S** (D2.84/1:75), SD 8.10.

¹⁶² See SD 51.13 (2.2.1.4); also Brahmvamso 2006:153-168.

¹⁶³ See Brahmvamso 2006:153.

¹⁶⁴ On how mindfulness and awareness work during dhyana, see SD 60.1e (1.3.8). Further see SD 56.13a (4.2): meditation language.

STOCK PASSAGE ON THE 1ST DHYANA (From the Mahā Sakuludāyi Sutta, M 77)

Again, Udāyi, I have pointed out to my disciples the way that disciples should cultivate the 4 dhyanas.¹⁶⁵

Here, Udāyi, quite secluded from sensual-objects,¹⁶⁶ secluded from unwholesome mental states, he attains and dwells in the **1st dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and with zest and joy born of solitude. He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the zest and joy born of solitude.

Puna ca'param, udāyi, akkhātā mayā sāvakānaṃ paṭipadā, yathā, paṭipannā me sāvakā cattāri jhānāni bhāventi.

Idh'udāyi, bhikkhu vivicc'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi sa, vitakkaṃ sa, vicāraṃ viveka, jaṃ pīti, sukhaṃ paṭhamam jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. So imam eva kāyaṃ viveka, - jena pīti, sukkena abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa viveka, jena pīti, sukkena apphuṭaṃ hoti. (M 77,25/2:15), SD 49.5

The present-tense verbs found in the above passage (other than the inherent verb, such as *hoti*," it is"), are as follows: "(they) cultivate" (*bhāventi*), "he attains and dwells" (*upasampajja viharati*), and "(it) permeates and pervades, floods and fills" (*abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati*). All we can rightly say here is that the Buddha is reporting how his earlier disciples have practised meditation to attain dhyana, and as such what his audience, the present disciples, should do, too. The present tense is simply to evoke *the historical or narrative present* to reflect the timeless efficacy and truth of these teachings.¹⁶⁷

6.2.2.2 The terms "**initial application**" (*vitakka*) and "**sustained application**" (*vicāra*) here specifically refer to our totally speech-free and will-free awareness of the meditation-object. We are simply aware of it, and keep our attention there. This is as far as language can go in describing the highly refined attention and directing the attention in the first dhyana. In the later dhyanas, even this form of attention is superseded.

Dhyana, then, arises when we have "let go" of the meditation-object. It is like getting off a vehicle once it has arrived at its destination, and we are getting off and stepping on the firm ground of our destination. The journey of inner stillness has begun. This is like the 1st dhyana. To continue, we must leave behind initial application and sustained application, too. This is like showing or returning our ticket butt at the exit in the space of our destination.

By stilling initial application and sustained application, we dwell in the joy and happiness of the 2nd dhyana, a state of inner clarity and mental oneness without any initial application and sustained application, in a stillness born of concentration. (D 2,75/1:74).¹⁶⁸ Gethin insightfully notes:

Such a process is perhaps analogous to the way in which ordinary skills are accomplished: the initial stages of learning a language, or how to play a musical instrument, or drive a car, involve a considerable amount of deliberate and careful thinking about what we are doing. Once we have acquired the skill we do it "without thinking." Technically, though, it would seem that according to the system of Theravāda Abhidhamma, we still require the kind of thinking designated as

¹⁶⁵ *Puna ca param udāyī akkhātā mayā sāvakānaṃ paṭipadā yathā paṭipannā me sāvakā cattāro jhāne bhāventi.*

¹⁶⁶ On the significance the plural *kāmehi* here, see SD 8.4 (

¹⁶⁷ See SD 46.19 (3.2.1.4).

¹⁶⁸ **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,771:74), SD 8.10.

vitakka and *vicāra* when speaking a language, playing a musical instrument or driving car, however proficient we are.¹⁶⁹

Such thinking is only absent when the mind reaches the levels of stillness characterized by the second *jhāna* and beyond, and it is not possible, it seems, to speak, play the piano or drive a car in such state of mind. And this provides a clue as to why a meditation practice such as recollecting the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma or Sangha is understood as unable to support the attainment of the *jhānas* proper. The qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma or Sangha are relative to, say, the *kaṣiṇas* or the breath or friendliness [*mettā*], conceptually complex objects of meditation. In order to continue to be aware of them, the mind requires a degree of conceptual and discursive activity—*vitakka* and *vicāra*—that is simply not compatible with the stillness of *jhāna* proper. (Gethin, 2004:214)

Let us now examine a few more related passages in this connection.

6.2.2.3 THE 4TH DHYANA AND THE 3 KNOWLEDGES. Gunaratana further holds that “we have no reason to believe that he came out of Jhāna to develop the three kinds of knowledge—knowledge of seeing the past, knowledge of seeing beings dying and taking rebirth, and knowledge of the destruction of defilements. The Buddha used the fourth Jhāna for Vipassanā” (2007:1). And he adds:

It is virtually impossible to find evidence in the Suttas that one should come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā. There are a number of passages repeated in many Suttas dealing with the four fine material Jhānas [*rūpa jhāna*]. Nowhere in any of these passages is it said that one should come out of Jhāna to gain the three kinds of knowledge—knowledge of seeing previous lives, knowledge of beings dying and taking rebirth according to their karmas, and knowledge of the destruction of defilements. (Gunaratana 2007:1 f; emphasis added)

Gunaratana refers to **the Mahā Sākul’udāyi Sutta** (M 77) but there is no such allusion in those passages relating to dhyana and the 3 knowledges, as in all such passages the Buddha begins by reporting, “Again, Udāyi, I have proclaimed to my disciples ...” [6.2.2.1] followed by the 8 kinds of superknowledges that, in the Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2) are designated as the higher fruits of recluseship.¹⁷⁰

However, the following stock passage from **the Bhaya Bherava Sutta** (M 4) and **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36) apparently reflects Gunaratana’s view that “we have no reason to believe that he came out of Jhāna to develop the 3 kinds of knowledge.”

STOCK PASSAGE ON THE 1ST SUPERKNOWLEDGE

38 (1) When his [my] concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to unshakable steadiness, he [I] directed it to **the knowledge of the recollection of past lives**.¹⁷¹ He recollects his [I recollect my] manifold past lives, ...

So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatēpakkilese mudu, bhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneṅja-p, patte pubbe, nivāsānussati, ñāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesim̐. So aneka, -vihitaṃ pubbe, nivāsāṃ anussarāmi . (M 4,27/1:22), SD 44.3, = (M 36,38/1:248 f), SD 49.4

¹⁶⁹ According to the system set out in such texts as Abhidhammāvatāra, Visuddhi, magga (ch 14) and Abhidhammattha, saṅgaha, the sense-sphere processes of impulsion (*javana*) which occur during ordinary waking states always involve *vitakka* and *vicāra*. (Gethin, 2004:214)

¹⁷⁰ See, respectively, **M 77**.29-36/2:17-22 (SD 49.5) & **D 2**.87-100/1:76-85 (SD 8.10).

¹⁷¹ This knowledge is detailed at Vism 13.13-71/411-423.

6.2.2.4 Firstly, note that although the key verb *anussarāmi* (“I recollect”) is in the present tense, it would have just the same sense if it were rendered into the past tense as “I recollected”—as in all the major English translations we have.¹⁷² In fact, it makes better sense to use *the past sense* for at least two important reasons: (1) the Buddha was *reporting* this past event but as an instruction; and (2) the verb *abhininnāmesim* (“he directed (it)”) is in the past tense.¹⁷³ The point here is that in the case of Dharma-teaching (especially instructions regarding meditation and practice), no matter what the tenses are, it should be generally understood in the historical or narrative present to reflect the timelessness of the Dharma.¹⁷⁴

6.2.3 The Anupada Sutta (M 111)

6.2.3.1 One of the major discourses that **Gunaratana** uses to support his notion that “there is no suggestion at all that the meditator should leave the fourth Jhāna [or any dhyana] to attain these understandings,” is **the Anupada Sutta (M 111)**.¹⁷⁵ He quotes that

This is the state of mind the Buddha ascribes to Venerable Sāriputta in Anupada Sutta.

“And the states in the fourth Jhāna—the equanimity, the neither-painful-nor pleasant feeling, the mental unconcern due to tranquillity, the purity of mindfulness, and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and the mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention—known to him those state arose, known they were present, known they disappeared.” [M 111,10/2:26] (2007:12)¹⁷⁶

Elsewhere, Gunaratana notes, regarding the above passage, that “significantly, the name of this Sutta, **Anupada**, means *uninterrupted*. Ven Sāriputta not only saw the mental factors in each Jhāna by turn, he did it *without* leaving the Jhānic state. His Jhāna was *uninterrupted*.” (2007:17; highlights added). By “uninterrupted” here, Gunaratana clearly refers to *anupada*, following the Pali-English Dictionary (PED), where we find the explanation of the phrase, *anupada,dhamma,vipassanā* (Anupada Sutta, M 3:25,11) as “uninterrupted contemplation.”

6.2.3.2 The Anupada Sutta Commentary explains the phrase, *anupada,dhamma,vipassanā*, as “he has insight into these states *in succession* [“immediately after,” *anupaṭipāṭiyā*] by virtue of an attainment

¹⁷² | B Horner (1954) (M:H 28); Nyanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, 2001 (M:ÑB 105); Thanissaro (2009), online ed: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.004.than.html>. Of the modern translations, apparently only Piya Tan has rendered *anussarāmi* (which follows) in the present tense, “I recollect,” following the Pali, to reflect the historical or narrative present or timelessness of a Dharma teaching: see SD 49.4 and elsewhere. We have no good reason to say that, on account of the present tense used in *some* of the dhyana and *abhiññā* pericopes, that the Buddha or meditator does not come out of dhyana to cultivate insight. See further below.

¹⁷³ Pres 3 sg *abhi-ninnāmeti*, caus of *abhi + nir* V_{AM} (to bend, bow), to bend or stretch out (acc), to direct (towards, dat, gen): CPD sv. Interestingly, the same passage in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2) uses *abhininnāmeti* (“he directs (his mind)”) (D 2,95/1:81), SD 8.10.

¹⁷⁴ In historical cases, such as the narrative of the two teachers, as given in **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26), the past tense used in reference to the late teacher Rāma (father of Uddaka) is very significant, as it states the fact he was already dead, while Āḷāra was still living: see M 26,15-17/1:163-167 + SD 1.11 (4.2).

¹⁷⁵ M 111/3:25-29 (SD 56.4).

¹⁷⁶ Although Gunaratana rightly mentions **Anupada S** (M 111) in his text, he miscites this as “M #52, Aṭṭhaka-nāgara Sutta” in his endnote.

or by virtue of a dhyana-factor; thus he [Sāriputta] attained arhathood in a fortnight.”¹⁷⁷ The translation “uninterruptedly” hardly fits the context here.

Furthermore, the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) defines *anupaṭipāṭi* as “regular order, succession.” So we can take *anupaṭipāṭiyā* as meaning, “in a regular order, successively, immediately after.” In fact, such an interpretation harmonizes with how the contemplative forest monks describe their own experiences of dhyana.¹⁷⁸

6.2.3.3 Gunaratana, basing his arguments on the Pali texts and his PhD research, goes on to say of Sāriputta’s insight into the various successive abodes (the dhyana and attainments), as follows:

Venerable Sāriputta knew them when they were present, when they arose and when they disappeared. He was fully mindful of it when any mental state was present. He was completely aware while he was going through these Jhānic states, even though he had not yet attained enlightenment. (Gunaratana 2007:12)

This is Gunaratana’s paraphrase of the Anupada Sutta passage which reads: *Tyāssa dhammā anupada, vavatthitā honti. Tyāssa dhammā viditā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abhatham gacchanti*, which Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi translate as: “These states [the dhyana and attainment factors]¹⁷⁹ were defined by him one by one (*anupada, vavatthitā*) as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared.” (M:ÑB 899; highlights added).

This translation seems to support Gunaratana’s view, but it is problematic, to say the least, due to the difficulty with the key phrase *anupada, vavatthitā*. CPD defines it as “individually set up or fixed” (alluding to the Commentary). We already have an idea of the meaning of *anupada* [above]. The word *vavatthita* means “fixed, arranged, appointed” (Childers’ DPL), or “entered on, arranged, fixed, determined, settled (M 3:25; DhsA 36)” (PED). From this, we can also safely accept the translation “defined,” as Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi have done. So far, so good.

6.2.3.4 There is a problem, however, with the phrase “as they occurred,” which is Bodhi’s rendition of *anupada* in *anupada, vavatthitā honti* [6.2.3.3]. This is reading too much into the Pali word or phrase, and is not attested in any Commentarial gloss or any Pali dictionary. More significantly, it can be safely said that this translation would not be accepted by the dhyana-attainers themselves (or, even serious sutta students). Let me propose a different translation for this key passage, from a more experiential angle, thus:

These states [the factors or nature of each dhyana and attainment] were discerned progressively by him (one by one) (*anupada, vavatthitā*). Known to him, those states arose; known to him, those states were present; known to him, they disappeared. (M 111,4/3:25), SD 56.4

Notice what is not said here: it is *not* said that “he *knows* that those states as they arise; he *knows* that these states are present; he *knows* that these states disappear.” But it is in the present perfect or

¹⁷⁷ *Anupada, dhamma, vipassanan ti samāpatti, vasena vā jhān’āṅga, vasena vā anupaṭipāṭiyā dhamma, vipassanaṃ vipassati, evaṃ vipassanto addha, māsenā arahattam patto* (MA 4:86).

¹⁷⁸ See eg Brahmavamsa 2006:99, 154.

¹⁷⁹ That is, “the initial application, sustained application, zest, joy, and oneness of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and the mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention” (*vitakko ca vicāro ca pīti ca sukhañ ca citt’ekaggatā ca, phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkha vīriyaṃ sati upekkhā manasikāro*). These factors lessen progressively through the dhyanas up to the 3rd formless sphere.

past participle, reflecting after the fact, outside of dhyana, “*known* to him ... ” or “having known ... ”. There is a hint of a mystical experience here: the dhyana-attainer knows only **through reviewing** (*pacca-vekkhaṇa*)¹⁸⁰ that these states have arisen, were present, and passed away—all this he knows. Knowing is always *after* the fact!

They are profoundly blissful, but they all change, too. This is what is carefully noted in **the Anupada Sutta** [6.2.3.5].¹⁸¹

6.2.3.5 We need to have a proper understanding about how **the Anupada Sutta** (M 111) describes our “knowing” or “reviewing” of each of the “9 progressive abodes,”¹⁸² that is, the 4 dhyanas, the 4 attainments and the cessation. Except for the last two stages—that is, the 4 dhyanas and the first 3 attainments—Sāriputta says that, having experienced each of them, “these states were analysed by him one after another: those states arose, known to him; they were present, known to him; they disappeared, known to him” (*tyāssa dhammā anupada,vavatthitā honti; tyāssa dhammā veditā uppajjanti, veditā upaṭṭhahanti, veditā abbattham gacchanti*).¹⁸³

Note that **vidita**, “he has/had known, having known,” is the present/past participle of *vindati*, “he knows.” The meditator only “knows” (*vindati*)—not “understands” (*pajānāti*)¹⁸⁴—here he only knows *after* the fact. That is to say, there is *first* the arising, the presence (duration), passing away of each of the meditative states; *then* the meditator “knows,” not intellectually but directly (like watching a sunset).

Furthermore, the meditator has *no* choice but to “know” the truth and beauty¹⁸⁵ of the rise, stay and fall of such blissful mental events. There is no willful act of emerging for the dhyana meditator: if we are determined and skilled enough, we can determine at the start of his meditation how long we are going to stay within dhyana (sort of setting our body-mind clock).¹⁸⁶ On such an emerging from the dhyana, we are still deeply engrossed in profound dhyanic bliss, except that we are conscious of the immediate mental state. With training, we would then be able to review such states as being impermanent and so on.¹⁸⁷

6.2.3.6 On the other hand, in the Anupada Sutta account of the formless attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and of the cessation of perception and feeling, it clearly states that the meditator “emerges mindful (*sato*) from that attainment” (*so tāya samāpattiyā sato vuṭṭhahati*), and then reflects on its impermanence.¹⁸⁸ These two states are so profoundly subtle that only those with great

¹⁸⁰ See SD 10.16 (1.2.1.6).

¹⁸¹ See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (6.0); **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (8.5). This special ability is known as “mastering review” (*pacca-vekkhaṇa,vasī*): discerning the dhyana factors after emerging from it: see (**Samādhy-aṅga**) **Pañc’āṅgika S** (A 5.28,-10/3:27) + SD 33.13 (3) & **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (8.6.2).

¹⁸² See (**Āsava-k,khaya**) **Jhāna S** (A 9.36/4:422-426), SD 33.8.

¹⁸³ See **Anupada S** (M 111.4+6+8+10+12+14+10/3:25-28), SD 56.4.

¹⁸⁴ On the different words for “knowing,” see SD 17.1b (1.3) & SID: jānāti.

¹⁸⁵ On Buddhism as truth and beauty, see SD 40.1 (8.1.2); SD 46.5 (2.4.2) as aesthetics; SD 37.8 (2.3) in right livelihood. See also Piya Tan, Reflection, “No views frees,” R255, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Normally, we will emerge from a dhyana only when all the “fuel” of contentment is used up. From the suttas, evidently, the longest period for each dhyanic sitting is a week. See eg the account of the 7 weeks after the awakening: SD 26.1(5).

¹⁸⁷ See eg **Aṭṭhaka,nāgara S** (M 52,4/1:351), SD 41.2. More detailed version at **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 64.-9/1:435 f. On the importance of reviewing our dhyana experience, see **Bhāvanā** @ SD 15.1 (8.6.3).

¹⁸⁸ M 111,18-20/3:28 @ SD 56.4.

meditative powers and skill can attain them. In the case of cessation, only the Buddha and arhats can attain it.¹⁸⁹

The minds of such great meditators are clear and alert, so that they are said to emerge “mindful” (*sato*). In the previous meditation states, the meditator, especially if they are still unawakened, would need a bit of time to adjust back to the returning sense-processes. Even then, the mind at this stage is so clear that it is inclined to remain so, so that to have any thought at all would be like thundering in a clear blue calm sky. In due course, with proper training in mindfulness and wisdom, the meditator is able to direct his mind to the reflection on impermanence and so on. Once this begins, it only gets easier and more profound with sustained effort, in due course breaking through into some level of awakening.¹⁹⁰ [6.2.5.4]

6.2.3.7 Experiencing dhyana is like being in the thick of an existential love affair: we are lost in its bliss. It is like listening to a beautiful piece of symphony or music: we neither think nor speak; we only listen and *feel*, we simply enjoy. Indeed, we can only really and fully enjoy something when it is uninterrupted or adulterated by words or thoughts. Dhyana, in other words, is a deepening silent stillness that is blissful beyond words and ideas. Only after the fact, do we take stock of what really has happened. We neither count nor define the blissful moments: we simply enjoy them, and celebrate them thereafter.

Even on a mundane level of deep inspiration, such as immediately after a profoundly blissfully focused moment, we feel infused with a great desire and power to express ourselves in music, art, poetry or writing, or simply solve some problem. However, we try to paint or pen this inspiration, to express it, there is quite a lot to do, but it seemed only a mere moment in our inspiration. Dhyana is deeper than this.

6.2.4 The Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta

6.2.4.1 One last word on **thought-free dhyana**, and let’s hear this from the Buddha word itself. There is actually an important text that clearly rejects the idea of any thought occurring during dhyana, and this is found in **the Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta** (S 41.8). The Sutta records Nirgrantha Nātaputta, the Jain leader, as declaring as follows:

One who thinks that initial application [thinking] can be stopped would imagine that he could catch the wind in a net,

one who thinks that sustained application [pondering] can be stopped would imagine that he could stop the flow of the river Ganges with his own fist. (S 41.8,6), SD 40a.7

In the context of Nāta,putta’s view of dhyana (and his lack of experience in it) here, we need to translate *vitakka, vicāra* as “thinking and pondering,” or simply “thinking.” Clearly, Nāta,putta holds the notion that it is impossible to stop thinking, even in deep meditation.

6.2.4.2 Citta the houselord, an experienced dhyana-attainer, however, rejects this wrong view, and declares that he has himself attained dhyana—which he can at any time easily attain—that “there is a samadhi without initial application and sustained application, a cessation of initial application and sustained application.” He is able to know this through his own meditation, even “without having faith”

¹⁸⁹ On the cessation of feeling and perception (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*), see See **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,25/1:-296), SD 30.2 (4) & **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,16-21/1:301 f), SD 40a.9 (2.5); also **Animitta Ceto,samādhi Pañha S** (S 40.8/4:268 f), SD 24.19..

¹⁹⁰ On the practice of review, see **Anāpāna,sati S** (M 118,21/3:83) n, SD 7.13.

in the Buddha (or, in our context today, relying on the texts alone). He is referring to the wisdom of personal realization, which, however, eludes Nāta,putta.¹⁹¹

Serious meditators who have, at one time or another, tasted at least momentary flashes of meditative rapture or transcendental ecstasy, know that “we have no words” for such experiences. Those who have been able to sit for many hours, deep in inner stillness, do not feel any bodily sensation, and invariably emerge with a sense of profound bliss. All such experiences are beyond thought and language—that is, until we have returned to the “real” samsaric world.¹⁹²

6.2.5 The Pañca-t,taya Sutta

6.2.5.1 Another important discourse that gives us deep insights into dhyana meditation is **the Pañca-t,taya Sutta** (M 102), which is not an easy one to fathom. However, a careful and patient study of it will reward us with some helpful understanding of the true nature of dhyana as experienced by the early Buddhists. The Sutta discusses various sectarian views about **survival**, that is, the fate of a hypothetical “self” or “soul,” whether it continues intact after death or not, or that “nirvana” (as envisaged by the sectarians) is here and now.

In the Pañca-t,taya Sutta, the Buddha explains how some sectarian meditators think that they have attained some “consciousness-kasina”¹⁹³ (their version of dhyana) or even the sphere of nothingness¹⁹⁴ that is “boundless and imperturbable.”¹⁹⁵ But “(all) this is something conditioned and gross.”¹⁹⁶ Simply, this means that they are mind-made, unsatisfactory, and body-based experiences, not fully or truly mind-based experiences.¹⁹⁷

6.2.5.2 What is most interesting is the Sutta’s statement on the “**sphere of the neither-conscious-nor-not-conscious,**” which is identical with the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, the highest of the formless spheres, indeed the highest of all meditative state that anyone was capable of attaining up to the Buddha’s time. The Buddha’s statement of this is crucial to our understanding of dhyana, and is here fully quoted:

Some recluses or brahmins declare that this mental sphere [meditative state] occurs with a measure of formations by way of what is seen, heard, sense or cognized.¹⁹⁸

Bhikkhus, the attaining of this mental sphere is a disaster indeed—[232] for, bhikkhus, it is said that this mental sphere¹⁹⁹ is to be attained as *an attainment with formations*.²⁰⁰

This mental sphere, it is said, bhikkhus, should be attained as an attainment with a residue of formations.²⁰¹

¹⁹¹ S 41.8,5-8 (SD 40a.7), but the Sutta is best read in full.

¹⁹² On mental silence during the 1st dhyana, and the noble silence of the 2nd dhyana, see SD 48.7 (5.1.3; 5.2.3).

¹⁹³ On *viññāṇa,kasīṇa*, see SD 40a.12 (3.2.3).

¹⁹⁴ *Ākiñcaññ’āyatana*. See **Ākiñcaññ’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7), SD 24.17. On Ājāra Kālāma’s experience, see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 16,15.2), SD 1.11.

¹⁹⁵ See SD 40a.12 (3.4.3.3).

¹⁹⁶ M 102,4/2:239 f (SD 40a.12).

¹⁹⁷ SD 40a.12 (3.4.3.4).

¹⁹⁸ *Ye hi keci bhikkhave, samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññātabbassa saṅkhāra,mattena* etassa āyatanassa upasampadam paññāpentī. *Ce Diṭṭha,suta,muta viññātabba,saṅkhāra,mattena, See **Diṭṭha muta suta viññāta**, SD 53.5.*

¹⁹⁹ *Āyatana*, see SD 40a.12 (3.12).

²⁰⁰ *Vyasanam h’etaṃ bhikkhave, akkhāyati etassa āyatanassa upasampadāya, na h’etaṃ bhikkhave, āyatanam sa,saṅkhāra,samāpatti* pattabam akkhāyati. *Be saṅkhāra,samāpatti. See SD 40a.12 (3.8).*

This is something conditioned and gross.

But there is **the ending of formations**. Having known thus, that this is the goal, the Tathagata is thus one who sees his salvation—he is one who has gone beyond that.

6.2.5.3 For our purposes here, it is sufficient to point out that the Sutta clearly states that the sectarians, that is, non-Buddhists, and those unfamiliar with dhyana, might view that the senses (what is “seen, heard, sense or cognized”) still operate in dhyana, even in the formless states. Such a view, says the Buddha in the Sutta, is “a disaster indeed” (*vyāsanam hi!*)²⁰² In other words, such “meditators” either have simply misunderstood the nature of meditation, especially dhyana, or have not really attained any such stage of dhyana.²⁰³

6.2.5.4 The Buddha’s “Ātumā experience,” recounted by the Buddha himself in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), is instructive. Once, when the Buddha is staying in a threshing-house near Ātumā, there is a great thunderstorm with bright bursts of lightning, when 2 brothers and 4 oxen were struck down. The Buddha, deep in dhyana, “being both conscious and awake,” neither saw anything nor heard a sound!²⁰⁴

Note the phrase, “being both conscious and awake” (*saññī samāno jāgaro*): this refers to the nature of the Buddha’s consciousness in the context of dhyana. This is clearly not being “conscious and awake” in the ordinary sense. Such a state can be said to be one of **“suspended cognition,”** where the mind is only affectively alert, but has *cognitively* shut down. The physical senses are fully at rest so that the mind is free from any data input: the mind is only aware of itself in the dhyanic state.²⁰⁵

Scholars and meditation teachers who fail to notice or understand this distinction may claim that thinking and external awareness continue during dhyana. The point is that we are not able to examine our mind in dhyana since it is cognitively at rest or, simply, thought-free. We can only evaluate our meditation after we emerge from it, when reviewing our practice.²⁰⁶ [6.2.3.6]

6.2.5.5 This vital point needs to be stressed: **sense-based (sensory) thinking and knowing are transcended in dhyana**. Yet, the suttas often speak of a meditator experiencing dhyana **“with the body”** (*kāyena*). This is *not* the physical sense-based body, but rather, what remains of our “body,” that is, perception (*saññā*) and feeling (*vedanā*) on a *mental* level (*saññā ca vedanā ca citta, saṅkhāro*), as stated in **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44).²⁰⁷

Far from being incapacitated by being “sense-deprived,” the mind in dhyana, on the contrary, is fully and clearly focused, free from the distractions of the sensory processes. On the bodily sensory level, all that are perceived and felt are karmically projected by formations (*saṅkhārā*) as **mental proliferations** (*papañca*, “multiples of fives,” as it were!). Hence, *saṅkhārā* are always plural: they work in crowds.

On the purely mental level of **dhyana** (*jhāna*), there is only the mental formation (*citta, saṅkhāro*, singular) of perception and feeling—*saññā ca vedanā ca citta, saṅkhāro*—since all *saññā*, all *vedanā*, of the physical body (the physical faculties) have been transcended. This, then, is the “mind-body” (*nāma, kāya*) [SD 11.1 (5.2.1.4)]. How subtle perception still occurs in dhyana is described in **(Navaka) Ānanda S**

²⁰¹ *Saṅkhār’āvasesa* [Be *saṅkhāra, samāpatti*] *samāpatti, pattabbam etaṃ bhikkhave āyatanaṃ akkhāyati*. On “a residue of formations,” see SD 40a.12 (3.10.3).

²⁰² M 102,10.2 + SD 40a.12 (3.8.2).

²⁰³ On how we “know” in dhyana, see SD 49.5b (0.4).

²⁰⁴ D 16,4.32/2:132 (SD 9).

²⁰⁵ See Pa-Auk, *Knowing And Seeing*, 2019:98 f; SD 60.1b (8.3.3.1).

²⁰⁶ This whole subsection recurs at SD 49.5b (0.4.5). See also SD 54.2b (2.2.3.2).

²⁰⁷ M 44,15/1:301,21 f (SD 40a.9).

(A 9.37)—this always bright and blissful; far from being anything like thinking and knowing on the sensory level.²⁰⁸

6.3 ON A MEDITATOR’S “BECOMING ONE WITH THE OBJECT”

6.3.1 Gunaratana, following the commentarial tradition, especially the *Visuddhi, magga*, gives some very helpful advice on how to focus on our meditation object.²⁰⁹ He reminds us that “the meditator does not become one with the object,” adding that

When we attain any Jhāna, we don’t become one with the meditation object. Meditation objects are like launching pads. We use them to train the mind to gain right concentration, which, as we have seen already, is one-pointedness of mind, not one-pointedness of the meditation object. We use an object to start the meditation practice. Then, as the mind gets subtler and the mind becomes sharper, it leaves the meditation object behind and remembers the image of the object. We then focus the mind on the memorized image. As the hindrances are suppressed, the memorized image is replaced with a bright light. The mind shifts its focus to the bright light. From that point onward the object of the mind is this bright light.

(Gunaratana 2007:8)

6.3.2 This is, in fact, a summary of excerpts from Buddhaghosa’s chapter 4 of his *Visuddhi, magga* (*Vism* 119-169). In other words, it is a scholastic note, which is understandable, as Gunaratana is an accomplished scholar of meditation, as attested by his PhD dissertation, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation* (Washington, DC: American University, 1980). His approach is theoretical, based mostly on the *Visuddhi, magga*.

On a scholarly level, Gunaratana’s theories are perfectly acceptable, as they are his own interpretations of the texts. However, on an experiential level of meditation, the spiritual texts often take on a new dimension of meaning. It is like reading great poetry: we know *syntactically* (from the words and grammar) what the text says, but *semantically* and *spiritually*, we must free ourselves from the words and feel the poem or “lose” ourselves in the sunset. We need some level of meditative stillness and clarity, as it were, to add the living flesh and blood to the dry bones of theory and textuality.

Meditation is ultimately *not* thinking about the body or the mind; it is feeling, directly experiencing, our body and mind. Then, we free ourselves from both of them—we are pure “mind,” so to speak. Or, better, we can say: our mind is free of itself or even of its self. What place has thought here?

6.3.3 Let us return to our examination of the above passage. The expression “to become one with the object” is often used by meditation teachers as a figure for fully focusing on the meditation object, usually the breath. When I teach breath meditation to beginners, I would usually instruct them to first count their breaths, if it helps.²¹⁰ Generally, beginners are taught to start off with some sort of mental verbalization or “subverbalization” (like watching the breath as “in” and “out”).

As we progress, we would naturally find the verbalization becoming a “distraction,” that is, it seems to become “gross” (*olārika*) [6.2.1]. This is when we simply watch the breath directly, *knowing* that it is

²⁰⁸ A 9.37 + SD 55.19 (1.2.2).

²⁰⁹ See eg *Vism* ch 4/119-169, which elaborates on what is quoted here.

²¹⁰ Counting itself is not a meditation, but help to clear away initial distractions. Even then, it might not work for some people. See *Vism* 8.145-243/266-293. For a comprehensive contemporary exposition by Ven Nauyane Ariyadhamma Mahathera, see http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/anapanasati_meditation_on_breathing.php.

coming in, *knowing* that it is going out, and so on. Often, it is this stage that is meant by the expression, “becoming one with the breath.”²¹¹

6.3.4 A rule of thumb in meditation is that we should never to quarrel with our meditation teacher, but to be diligent in our practice as a student. He is like a chef who has his own way of cooking and specializes in certain types of dish. At first, depending on our taste, we should faithfully follow the teacher’s meditation instructions, and questioning him as appropriate. If we feel a good sense of inner stillness in our practice, it means that we are making some progress.²¹² Then, we should keep up our practice with this nascent joy.

If we stay long enough with a meditation teacher, and have sufficient wisdom ourselves, we will learn to know him or her better.²¹³ However helpful as this may be, it is not our real or vital purpose in meditation. Our true task in mental cultivation is to know ourselves better, so that our meditation transforms us into a better individual, even an awakened one. One clear sign that we are going on right path is that our meditation helps us to understand the sutta teachings better, and these teachings clarify, correct or confirm our own meditation experiences and life. Above all, we continue to grow in inner happiness and clearer insight into true reality.

6.4 DO THE HINDRANCES RETURN IMMEDIATELY AFTER DHYANA?

6.4.1 Coming out of dhyana

6.4.1.1 Gunaratana often quotes the suttas to support his views and arguments regarding dhyana. These suttas make useful study for anyone interested in teachings related to meditation. However, it is possible that some of his views about dhyana are based on his personal meditation experiences rather than sutta teachings. For example, this is how he describes when we emerge from dhyana:

Coming out of Jhāna means that we are no longer in Jhāna. All the hindrances that we have overcome with great difficulty will rush back to the mind and the mind will once again be cluttered with hindrances. We will lose clarity, purity, concentration, light, and mindfulness. If you want to come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā, then you should not waste your valuable time to attain it at all. You should use that time to practice Vipassanā from the beginning.

(Gunaratana 2007:4; emphasis added)

6.4.1.2 Gunaratana then quotes **the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9) passages on the “9 progressive abodes or abidings” (*nava anupubba, vihāra*),²¹⁴ of which I have quoted only the passage on the 1st dhyana, as it is representative of the rest:

Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states,
the monk enters and dwells in the **1st dhyana**,
accompanied by initial application and sustained application,

²¹¹ See **Samadhi** (SD 33.1a) on “directed meditation,” SD 33.1a(2.1.2), and “undirected meditation,” SD 33.1a-(2.1.3). See also §6.4.2-3.

²¹² A good meditation teacher is our “spiritual friend” (*kalyāṇa mitta*). On the qualities desirable in a spiritual friend, see **Spiritual friendship**, SD 8.1. On the parable of the cook, see **Sūda S** (S47.8/5:149-152), SD 28.15.

²¹³ On how to properly know another, see, eg, **Satta Jaṭila S** (S 3.11) = **Ossajjana S** (U 6.2), SD 14.11.

²¹⁴ Sometimes loosely called “the 9 dhyanas,” ie the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*), the 4 formless dhyanas (*arūpa jhāna*), and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha* or *nirodha, samāpatti*) (D 3:265, 290; A 9.33/4:410-414). See **Tevijja S** (D 13) @ SD 1.8 (2.2) (3) n; also **Rahogata S** (S 36.11/4:216-218), SD 33.6.

accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.

And if he has any previous sense-desires, it disappears.

At that time, there arises a subtle but real perception of zest and joy born of seclusion, and he becomes conscious of this zest and joy at that very moment.

(D 9,10.3/1:182), SD 7.14 [6.2.1.2]

What does this passage really say? It defines the 1st dhyana, adding that all sense-desires have disappeared. We are conscious of the attending joy (a merely passive but profoundly blissful awareness). It also says that our states of consciousness arise and fall dependent on conditions. Implicitly, it is saying that the dhyanas is a great way to purify our consciousness. There is *no* mention of cultivating insight while we are *in* dhyana. There is also *no* mention that the hindrances “flooding” the mind immediately after emerging from dhyana—this is surely *not* dhyana. [6.2.1.2]

In the **Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), the arhat nun Dhamma, dinnā, in answer to the non-returner Visākha’s question, replies that “For a monk emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, avuso Visākha, thought formation arises first, then bodily formation, and then verbal formation.”²¹⁵ In other words, during cessation (as in dhyana), thinking and knowing completely cease to function. On emerging, like waking up from a good sleep, we become mentally conscious first; then we are conscious of our body, and then we are able to speak. In dhyana, however, feeling is still present as “a residue of formations” (a rudimentary cognitive process) that only allows us to feel profound bliss.²¹⁶

6.4.1.3 The suttas, in fact, speak of **dhyana** as a profoundly blissful state of calm and clarity, both during and after the state, that is, the mental focus does *not* disappear so quickly, that the hindrances do not come “flooding” back once we emerge from dhyana. Indeed, **the Pabbateyya Gavī Sutta** (A 9.35) clearly states this: “Whenever a monk attains to such an attainment [a form dhyana or a formless attainment], or emerges (*vuṭṭhāti*) from it, his mind is pliable and malleable.”²¹⁷ So, we can safely say that the mind that has just emerged from dhyana is still very calm and blissfully focused with a potential for great good.

6.4.1.4 Furthermore, Buddhaghosa, explaining the 3rd **dhyana** in his **Visuddhi, magga**, sums it up, thus:

Now, regarding (the phrase), “he feels joy with the body”: here, although in one who is engrossed in the third dhyana, there is no concern for feeling joy (*sukha*), nevertheless he would feel the joy associated with his mental body (*nāma, kāya*).

After emerging from the dhyana, he would also feel joy, since his physical body (*rūpa, kāya*) would have been touched [affected] by the profoundly subtle matter arising from that joy associated with the mental body.²¹⁸ As such, it is to point this out that the words “he feels joy with the body” are said. (Vism 4.175/163)

6.4.1.5 Here is an interesting report of the first-hand experience of dhyana (here called *samādhi*) by a renowned contemporary Thai forest meditation teacher, **Ajahn Thate Desaraṃsī**,

When you first enter concentration [samadhi], this is what it’s like: You’ll have no idea at all of what concentration or one-pointedness of mind is going to feel like. You’re simply intent on

²¹⁵ M 44,19.2 (SD 40a.9).

²¹⁶ On “a residue of formations” (*saṅkhārāvesa*), see **Pañca-t, taya S** (M 102,10.3), SD 40a.12 (3.8.3).

²¹⁷ *Yato kho bhikkhave bhikkhu taṃ tad eva samāpattiṃ samāpajjati’pi vuṭṭhāti pi.*

²¹⁸ On consciousness-born materiality, see Vism 20.30-34/615 f.

keeping mindfulness firmly focused on one object—and the power of a mind focused firmly on one object is what will bring you to a state of concentration. You won't be thinking at all that concentration will be like this or like that, or that you want it to be like this or like that. It will simply take its own way, automatically. No one can force it.

At that moment you'll feel as if you are in another world (the world of the mind), with a sense of ease and solitude to which nothing else in the world can compare. When the mind withdraws from concentration, you'll regret that that mood has passed, and you'll remember it clearly. All that we say about concentration comes from the mind that has withdrawn from that state. As long as it's still gathered in that state, we aren't interested in what anyone else says or does.

No matter what method you use—*buddho*, rising & falling, or *sammā araham*—when the mind is about to settle down in concentration, you won't be thinking that the mind is about to settle down, or is settling down, or anything at all. It'll settle down automatically on its own. You won't even know when you let go of your meditation word. The mind will simply have a separate calm and peace that isn't in this world or another world or anything of the sort. There's no one and nothing at all, just the mind's own separate state, which is called the world of the mind. In that state there won't be the word 'world' or anything else. The conventional realities of the world won't appear there, and so no insight of any sort will arise in there at all. The point is simply that you train the mind to be centered and then compare it to the state of mind that isn't centered, so that you can see how they differ, how the mind that has attained concentration and then withdraws to contemplate matters of the world and the Dhamma differs from the mind that hasn't attained concentration.

(Thate Desaraṃsī, *Buddho*, 1994)

6.4.2 Directing the mind to cultivate insight

6.4.2.1 The Pabbateyya Gavī Sutta (A 9.35) speaks of 2 kinds of meditation: a “directed” meditation (*paṇidhāya bhāvanā*) and an “undirected” meditation (*apaṇidhāya bhāvanā*),²¹⁹ that is, knowing when to direct the mind to a suitable object, or to simply leave it to uninterruptedly build itself up into focus.²²⁰ When the mind is badly distracted, we should **direct** it to some “inspiring sign,” usually one of the 6 recollections²²¹ or loving kindness meditation.²²²

6.4.2.2 When the mind is quite stable, we should leave it as it is to build uninterruptedly into samadhi and dhyana—and it is useful to know when and how to do this.²²³ The Pabbateyya Gavī Sutta (A 9.35) describes **an undirected cultivation** of dhyana in these words: “He enjoys²²⁴ the sign, cultivates it, continuously works on it, focuses on it, so that it is well focused.”²²⁵ This is a subtle mental effort of non-effort.

²¹⁹ A 9.35/4:418-422 (SD 24.3). See also **Samadhi**, SD 33.1a (2.1).

²²⁰ On directed cultivation, see further **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10/5:154-157), SD 24.2 (1.2). On satipatthana with dhyana, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), SD 13.1 (4.3b).

²²¹ **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka Sutta** (S 47.10), advises that when “there arises in him, based on the body, either a fever in the body or sluggishness in the mind, or the mind is distracted outwardly,” is instructed on how to *direct the mind* to an inspiring meditation, such as one of the 6 recollections (S 47.10/5:154-156), SD 24.2, also called 6 bases of recollection (*cha anussati-ṭ, ṭhāna*), ie, on (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) moral virtue, (5) charity, and (6) the devas. See **Sambādh'okāsa S** (A 6.26/3:314 f), SD 15.6.

²²² On the cultivation of lovingkindness (*mettā bhāvanā*), see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khṇ 9 = S 1.8), SD 38.3.

²²³ See **Pabbateyya Gavī S** (A 9.35/4:418-422), SD 24.3.

²²⁴ **Āsevati**, which has a broad sense of “associating,” thus “to visit, frequent; practise; follow (eg *maggam*); repeat, develop; cultivate; enjoy; often used with *bhaveti* and *bahulī, karoti* (CPD). I render *asevati* here as “he enjoys” as it vitally involves *joy* for the meditation to succeed.

6.4.2.3 There are suttas that show how dhyana can lead to liberating insight. The method comprises two stages: first, one gets into dhyana; then, one emerges from it and reflects on the 3 characteristics—that the state is impermanent, suffering and non-self—or something similar. Of these two stages, **the Aṭṭhaka,-nāgara Sutta** (M 52) says:

Here, householder, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in **the 1st dhyana** that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of solitude.

He considers and understands thus: “This first dhyana is conditioned and volitionally formed.²²⁶ *Whatever is conditioned and volitionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.*”

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes.²²⁷ If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire in dharmas [states], the delight in dharmas,²²⁸ then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters,²²⁹ he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the pure abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

(M 52,4/1:351), SD 41.2²³⁰

The phrase, “He considers this and understands it” (*so iti paṭisañcikkhati ... pajānāti*) is crucial and should be properly understood in its context here. These are *discursive thoughts* (thinking and reasoning), and certainly uncharacteristic of a dhyana. As such, *it goes without saying* that this is an extra-dhyana process. Such mentation is done outside of dhyana.

6.4.2.4 The Mahā Māluṅkya Sutta (M 64), using almost the same words as the Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta, shows a slightly different manner of self-liberation (in this case, leading directly to non-return, even arhat-hood):

²²⁵ *So taṃ nimittam āsevati bhāveti bahulī, karoti svādhiṭṭhitam adhiṭṭhāti.*

²²⁶ *Abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcayitam.* These two terms are stock indicating a conditioned state in which volition (*cetanā*) is the most important conditioning factor.

²²⁷ The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (i.e. either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as “taints” (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhat-hood. See BDict: *āsava*.

²²⁸ “Desire ... delight in dharmas” (*dhamma,rāga dhamma,nandī*), as at **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** (M 52.4/1:350), where Comy explains that these 2 terms refer to desire and lust (*chanda-rāga*), meaning simply “attachment,” with respect to calm and insight. If one is able to let go of all attachment to calm and insight, one becomes an arhat. If one cannot discard them then one becomes a non-returner and is reborn in the Pure Abodes (MA 3:14). *Dhamma* here clearly does not mean “teaching” or “Teaching,” but meditative states; as such, it is best rendered as “dharma.”

²²⁹ **The 10 fetters** are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyā-pāda*). The first 5 are **the lower fetters** (*orāma,bhāgiya*), and the rest, **the higher fetters** (*uddham,bhāgiya*). They are called “fetters” (*samyojana*) because they shackle one to the samsaric world of negative habits and suffering.

²³⁰ See **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (10.3), “Applying insight to dhyana.”

Whatever exists by way of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, he sees those states as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void, as not self.²³¹ He turns his mind away from those states²³² and directs it to the deathless element [nirvana], thus:

“This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions [attachments], the destruction of craving, dispassion [letting go of craving], cessation (of suffering), nirvana.”²³³ (M 64,9/1:435 f)

6.4.2.5 The Dīgha,jānu Sutta (A 8.54) even encourages the laity to practise direct cultivation for the arising of wisdom, thus:

What is the accomplishment of wisdom (*paññā,sampadā*)?

Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family is wise, possesses wisdom directed to [noting] the rising and falling away (of phenomena) that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering.

This, Vyagghapajja, is called the accomplishment of wisdom. (A 8.54,15/4:285), SD 5.10

6.4.3 Directing the mind to cultivate superknowledge

Now, the suttas do have passages on how we should direct our minds so that we can cultivate the various superpowers. This passage on the superknowledges taken from **the Pabbateyya Gavī Sutta** (A 9.35), a key discourse on dhyana training, is instructive:

Whenever a monk attains to such an attainment [a form dhyana or formless attainment], or emerges from it, his mind is pliable and malleable.

With a mind that is pliable and malleable, boundless samadhi is well developed.

With a well-developed boundless samadhi, whatever higher knowledge that should be realized that he directs his mind to, he realizes it.²³⁴

—He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, *whenever the conditions are right* [whenever the occasion arises].²³⁵ (A 9.35,3/4:421), SD 24.3

²³¹ Like the prec **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** passage, this passage shows the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) on the basis of calm (*samatha*), using dhyana on which the insight-practice is based as the object of insight. The terms “impermanent” (*aniccato*) and “disintegrating” (*palokato*) here show the characteristic of impermanence; three terms—“alien” (*parato*), “void” (*suññato*), and “not self” (*anattato*)—show the characteristic of non-self; the remaining 6 terms—*dukkhato*, *rogato*, *gaṇḍato*, *sallato*, *aghato*, *ābādhato*—show the characteristic of suffering (MA 3:146).

²³² Comy: “He turns his mind away from those states” (*so tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpeti*) from the 5 aggregates included in the dhyana, which he has seen to be marked with the 3 characteristics” (MA 3:146).

²³³ The “deathless element” (*nibbāna,dhātu*) is nirvana. First, “he directs his mind to” it with the insight consciousness, having heard it praised and described as being “peaceful, sublime,” etc. Then, with the supramundane path, “he directs his mind to it” by making it an object and penetrating it as the peaceful, the sublime, etc. (MA 3:146)

²³⁴ A 9.35,2bc/4:419-421, SD 24.3. *So appamāṇena samādhinā subhāvitena, yassa yassa abhiññā,sacchikaraṇīyassa, dhammassa cittaṃ abhininnāmeti, abhiññā,sacchikiriyāya.*

²³⁵ *Tatra tatr’eva sakkhi,bhabbataṃ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane.* This is a common stock phrase that introduces the attainment of the superknowledges (*abhiññā*): **Mahā Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73,9/1:494 @ SD 27.4); **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119,29 f/3:96 f @ SD 12.21); **Paṃsu,dhovaka S** (A 3.100a,4/1:255 @ SD 19.11a); **Upakkilesa S** (A 5.23/3:16-19); **Dutiya Iddhi,pāda S** (A 5.68/3:82 f); **Sakkhi,bhabba S** (A 6.71/3:426 f); **Gāvī Upamā S** (A 9.35/4:421 f). It refers to the preliminary conditions (*āyatana*) for the 6 superknowledges (*abhiññā*) which follow later. The preliminary con-

Note that the sutta says that it is “with a well-developed boundless samadhi” (*appamāṇo samādhī hoti subhāvīto*) that we “direct the mind to, realizes” a superknowledge. The phrase, “whenever the conditions are right” (*tatra tatr’eva ... sati sati āyatane*) is significant in telling us that we have to be very mindful. Obviously, this refers to our mental state *after* dhyana rather than within dhyana (when the mind is fully focused). This whole stock phrase often introduces the attainment of the superknowledges (*abhiññā*). The above passage (and similar passages elsewhere) clearly show that we emerge from dhyana to cultivate the superknowledges.

6.4.4 Our mind is supremely clear on emerging from dhyana

6.4.4.1 Unlike Gunaratana, who says that we can and must work on insight while *in* dhyana, **Brahmavamso** explains how we *emerge* from dhyana in a very different way:

Even though there is no comprehension within any jhāna, one is certainly not in a trance. One’s mindfulness is greatly increased to a level of sharpness that is truly incredible. One is immensely aware. Only mindfulness doesn’t move. It is frozen. And the stillness of the superpower mindfulness, the perfect one-pointedness of awareness, makes the jhāna experience completely different from anything one has known before. This is not unconsciousness. It is non-dual consciousness. All it can know is one thing, and that is timeless bliss that doesn’t move.

Afterward, when one has emerged from the jhāna, such consummate one-pointedness of consciousness falls apart. With the weakening of one-pointedness, perspective reemerges, and the mind has the ability to move again. The mind has regained the space needed to compare and comprehend. Ordinary consciousness has returned.

Having just emerged from a jhāna, it is the usual practice to look back at what has happened and review the jhāna experience. The jhānas are such powerful events that they leave an indelible record in one’s memory store. In fact, one will never forget them as long as one lives. They are easy to recall with perfect retention. One comprehends the details of what happened in the jhāna, and one knows which of the jhānas it was. Moreover, *data obtained from reviewing a jhāna form the basis of the insight that leads to enlightenment.* (2006:153 f)²³⁶

6.4.4.2 It’s hard to imagine how when a dhyana experience ends, as Gunaratana says, we find ourselves falling off a precipice right into the maws of mental fetters. It is difficult to envision how a profoundly focused mind could immediately, as it were, become unfocused. Imagine we have just spent some blissful time in samadhi in a beautiful remote mountain retreat. We emerge from it into the natural peace of the cool grass, swaying trees, bubbling stream, calm rocks, living mosses, and nipping breeze. We are still in a profoundly still and blissful state of mind, capable of clear focus. This is the time when we effectively cultivate insight: to know that even the solid rock will crumble, even the lively flower will fade away, the skies will be no more, and our consciousness recycles itself closer to liberation.

6.4.4.3 All this is of course utterly experiential, and discussing an experiential issue such as this is like a leisurely chat amongst regular tea-drinkers. Each of them likes a certain blend of tea, brewed in a certain way. It is difficult to say whose tea tastes better. It is not helpful at all to argue or debate over

dition for the first 5 knowledges (the mundane ones) is the 4th dhyana; for the 5th (the only supramundane one), it is insight. See SD 12.21 (6).

²³⁶ See also Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi: an in-depth exploration of Buddhist meditation*, Shambhala, 2008.

such preferences. Instead, we should taste the tea for ourselves. When we have taken enough tea over time, we would have a good idea which tea we love best.

6.5 WHAT HAPPENS DURING DHYANA?

6.5.1 The natural progress of the spiritual life

6.5.1.1 Gunaratana, having stated and reiterated that, in a dhyana state, the meditator “sees and knows what is going on in his mind,” and “it is virtually impossible to find evidence in the Suttas that one should come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā” (2007:1), then quotes the first part of **the Cetanākaraṇīya Sutta** (A 11.2) (2007:6 f). The Sutta quoted is abridged here:

For the morally virtuous, there is no need of the intention [an act of will],
“May *freedom from guilt-feeling* arise in me!” (*avippaṭisāro me uppajjatû ti*).

It is the nature of things that this will happen.

For the one free of guilt-feeling, there is no need of the intention,
“May *gladness* arise in me!” (*pāmojjaṃ me uppajjatû ti*) ...

For the one with gladness, there is no need of the intention,
“May *zest* arise in me!” (*pīti me uppajjatû ti*) ...

For the zestful, there is no need of the intention,
“May my body be *tranquil*!” (*kāyo me passambhatû ti*) ...

For the one tranquil in body, there is no need of the intention,
“May I feel *joy*!” (*sukhaṃ vediyāmi ti*)

For the happy, there is no need of the intention,
“May my mind *concentrate*!” (*cittaṃ me samādhīyatû ti*)

For the concentrated, there is no need of the intention,
“May I *know and see according to reality*!” (*yathā, bhūtaṃ jānāmi passāmi ti*)

For the one who knows and sees according to reality, there is no need of the intention,
“May I feel *revulsion*!” (*nibbindāmi ti*)

For the revulsed, there is no need of the intention,
“May I *let go (of defilements)* [be free from passions]!” (*virajjāmi ti*)

For the one who has let go (of defilements) [the dispassionate], there is no need of the intention,

“May I realize *the knowledge and vision of freedom*!”

It is the nature of things that this will happen. (A 11.2/5:312 f), SD 33.3b (abridged)

6.5.1.2 This teaching is what might be called **the “full *nibbidā* (revulsion) formula,”** so called because “revulsion” (*nibbidā*) is the high-point reached by the cultivation of moral virtue, and also the turning-point towards sainthood and awakening. *Nibbidā* is the first term in the better-known shorter “*nibbidā* formula,” which describes the spiritual turning-point to sainthood: *nibbidā* (revulsion), *virāga* (dispassion), *vimutti* (freedom) and *nibbāna* (nirvana), as in this stock passage:

... it leads to utter revulsion, to dispassion, to ending (of suffering), to peace [stilling], to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana.

etaṃ ekanta, nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhismāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattanti. (D 1:189; S 5:82, 179, 255, 361; A 3:83, 4:143, 5:216)²³⁷

²³⁷ This is also known as the 7 criteria of the true Dharma-Vinaya. See ***Nibbidā***, SD 20.1. For other connections, see PED: *nibbidā*.

6.5.1.3 Teachings like this remind us that meditation progress cannot be planned or forced. We can only create the right conditions for our practice, such as living a morally virtuous life, and letting the mind naturally focus. It is like archery: we must properly hold the bow and carefully aim the arrow at the target, judging its distance, wind direction and strength, etc, and then let the arrow go. The arrow then finds its own way to the target or bull's eye.²³⁸

6.5.2 The ineffability of dhyana

6.5.2.1 From a close study of sutta passages on dhyana and the teachings of those familiar with dhyana, we know that dhyana is a state free of any thought-process or word-based activity, a state so profoundly blissful that it would naturally preclude even knowing. In other words, it is not an intellectual process, but an utterly *affective* state. We cannot *know* dhyana; we can only *feel* it.

This vital point is highlighted in **the Cetanā'karaṇīya Sutta** (A 11.2) [6.5.1]. After quoting this Sutta, Gunaratana makes this important note:

It is stated here in unambiguous terms that the concentrated mind sees things as they really are without any thinking. It says specifically, "For one who knows and sees things as they really are there is no need for thought."

Thinking is the work of logic, reason, and philosophy with words, ideas and concepts. Long before he attains samādhi the meditator has already left behind all discursive thought with its logic, reasoning, investigation and philosophizing with words concepts and ideas.²³⁹ (2007:7)

6.5.1.2 The characteristics or landmarks of all dhyanas can be summarized as follows:²⁴⁰

- (1) The 5 senses have fully shut down; only the 6th sense, the mind, operates.
- (2) The consciousness is non-dual (objectless), freeing us from cognition.
- (3) There is neither thinking nor deciding.
- (4) There is no perception of time.
- (5) Yet, we are profoundly aware of only the still bliss.

6.5.1.3 From all these characteristics, it is clear that a dhyana is utterly *affective* in nature: we only *feel* it, without knowing it, that is, without thought or words, but as a direct experience. This is not difficult to imagine even if we have never tasted dhyana before. Imagine how we fully enjoy watching a sunset, or fully absorbed in a beautiful piece of music. Recall a time when we were truly happy, such as winning a special prize, or an extraordinarily joyful event. If we were asked, "How do you feel?" we may perhaps only concede, "I don't know ... it's just wonderful!"²⁴¹

²³⁸ See the archer simile which recurs 8 times in **(Āsava-k,khaya) Jhāna S** (A 9.36.2/4:423), SD 33.8.

²³⁹ Compare, however, what Gunaratana says above about experiencing "insight" [6.2].

²⁴⁰ Cf Brahmavamso 2006:155.

²⁴¹ On how thinking is not involved in meditation and dhyana, see **(Dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya S** (A 10.2), SD 41,6, and **(Ekā,dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya S** (A 11.2), SD 33.3b. Thinking is also not involved in the attainment of cessation: see **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.16-21), SD 40a.9.

7 Significance of dhyana

7.1 THE ROLE OF DHYANA²⁴²

7.1.1 Not all scholars agree on the connection between dhyana and early Buddhism. Some scholars have argued that dhyanas are a brahminical or yogic technique which was adopted by the Buddhists, and therefore, cannot be considered as a practice leading to liberation. Others have argued that even though the Buddha’s own awakening story includes dhyanas—and, as such, they are Buddhist—still, it is possible to reach liberation without attaining them.

Either way—whether scholars agree that dhyana is Buddhist or not—they tend to agree that dhyana is not liberative in itself, but is merely a concentration exercise (*samādhi*) or a mental absorption in a specific object (*samatha*), a meditation practice which is diametrically opposed to the practice of *vipassanā*, which is uniquely “Buddhist.”

7.1.2 Keren Arbel, in her paper, “Buddhist or Not? Thinking anew the role of the jhānas in the path of awakening” (2008) [4], argues against these assumptions, asserting that dhyana was only a borrowed *term*, not a borrowed meditation technique that was integrated into Buddhism. She further suggests that dhyana is “a description of a mind in the process of awakening; the fruit and a further foundation for the practice, and not a meditative technique” (2008:1).

According to Arbel, dhyanas are uniquely Buddhist, “since they embody a distinct Buddhist view on the path of awakening; a view that opposed and rejected a common perception in the various śramaṇa traditions that liberation is gained through pain, not pleasure” (id). She points to important passages in the Nikāyas that, firstly, emphasize the pivotal role of the first dhyana in the Buddha’s own awakening story, and secondly, debunking the notion that the dhyanas are mere concentration exercises. In fact, **Arbel** hypothesizes that

only by entering the first *jhāna*, one actualizes internally the “middle path.” The first *jhāna* is a mental actualization of a midpoint between asceticism and indulgence, between sensual pleasure and bodily pain. It seems that only when experiencing pleasure and rapture apart from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states, one can abandon internally, the desire for this coarse pleasure. ... However, this is only an initial state; a state where a very coarse attachment is abandoned. For attaining awakening, one has to abandon any attachment, even to these refined and wholesome states. (2008:13)

7.1.3 Even though the term *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*) has been adopted from a common religious vocabulary, it was, nevertheless, redefined by the Buddha to refer to the Buddhist understanding of the spiritual path and the awakening process. In other words, the Buddha is the first person to experience dhyana with right view, and so to awaken himself [5]. In this sense, the Buddha is the first to discover dhyana. Out of the dhyanic calm and clarity, the Buddha is able to directly see the true nature of reality, and confirm this as the same wisdom of past Buddhas. As such, our Buddha is the first to discover dhyana in his own dispensation, in which we are very fortunate to live and is still able to learn from and practice to gain the same liberation as the Buddha himself has done.

²⁴² This section is mainly inspired by Keren Arbel’s conference paper, “Buddhist or Not? Thinking Anew the Role of the Jhānas in the Path of Awakening” (2008).

7.1.4 Considering the facts thus far, to hold the view that the Buddha discovered dhyana, and that there was no dhyana before him is historically and factually problematic. This is like saying Newton discovered gravity (which is true), and that there was no gravity before Newton (which is clearly false)!

Other ancient thinkers—such as the Greek philosopher, Archimedes (c 287-c 212 BCE), the Roman engineer, Vitruvius (1st cent BCE), the Indian mathematician-astronomers Āryabhaṭa (475-550 CE) and Brahmagupta (c 598-c 668 CE) knew something about gravity, and even described it.

As we have noted, the most significant point is that the Buddha discovered dhyana with right view, and awakened to true reality and nirvana as a result. [5]

7.2 WRITING ABOUT A SUNSET

7.2.1 The subject of meditation can have strange effects on people who do not meditate, or do not meditate enough, or are not Buddhist, but write about it. The more academically qualified they are, especially when they are published, the more people are likely to read and believe them, rightly or wrongly, or at least are inclined to discuss such views. Of course, anyone can write about meditation or Buddhism, but the Buddhists (both as academics and as practitioners) have to industriously and intuitively respond to any wrong notion or misrepresentation about them.

7.2.2 Paul Griffiths,²⁴³ the Warren professor of Catholic Thought at Duke University, USA, for example, is one of those who worked with the notion that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are actually forms of meditation, rather than regarding them as integral aspects of the same practice. He claims that “*samatha* meditation” has a different aim from that of “*vipassanā* meditation.”²⁴⁴ He thinks that the attempt to reconcile the two “methods” of meditation and to integrate them into a single process of liberation is especially difficult.²⁴⁵ **Edward Crangle**, too, mentions that *vipassanā* is “the Buddha’s exclusive and original discovery.” He further asserts that it is what distinguishes the Buddha’s course of practice from those of other meditative schools.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ **Paul J Griffiths** (b 1955) received a doctoral degree in Buddhist Studies in 1983 from the Univ of Wisconsin-Madison, and his early works established him as one of the most incisive interpreters of Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy. His works on Buddhism incl *On Being Mindless* (Lasalle, IL: Open Court, 1991) and *On Being Buddha* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994). After converting from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism, and accepting the Schmitt Chair of Catholic Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, he largely gave up his work in Buddhist Studies. Another conversion was that of well known scholar of Mahāyāna Buddhism, **Paul Williams** (b 1950), Professor in Indian Religions at the University of Bristol, England, and director for the University’s Centre for Buddhist Studies. He received his DPhil in Buddhist Philosophy at Wadham College, Univ of Oxford, 1978. His main research interests were Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy, Prasāngika Madhyamaka and virtue ethics. Williams was a Buddhist himself for many years but had since converted to Roman Catholicism. In his book, *The Unexpected Way: On converting from Buddhism to Catholicism* (London: T & T Clark), Williams challenges Mahāyāna Buddhism with the question, “Why there is something rather than nothing?” (2002:28). Apparently, being a professional scholar of Mahāyāna could be a factor, even a bridge, in his conversion to Catholicism (unlike if say he were a serious Buddhist meditator, and all this worth investigating. Of course, we cannot rule out one’s apprehension with a not-so-lucrative specialist field (like Buddhist studies) and the pecuniary and social advantages of turning to an affluent and dominant religion with its well-established educational institutions. Then, there is the spectre of family pressure should not be left out, too. All said, one might add that learning Christianity or Catholicism from a Buddhist specialist on the Bible is much rarer than learning Buddhism from a non-Buddhist. Could a Bodhi tree grow on barren ground?

²⁴⁴ Quoted by Keren Arbel 2008:2.

²⁴⁵ Paul Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, Albany, NY: State Univ of New York Press, 1994:19.

²⁴⁶ **Edward Fitzpatrick Crangle**, *The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices*, Wiesbaden, 1994:272; however, he also notes that “[r]ather than two distinct styles of meditation, the *suttas* suggest two aspects of a single contemplative practice” (260) & “Nonetheless, the distinction between the practice of calm (*sam-*

7.2.3 All this becomes more complicated when the Buddhists themselves try to keep up with the academics.²⁴⁷ Two good examples of this are found in the writings of such Sinhalese scholar-monks, representative of the modern and modernist Sinhala Theravāda tradition, that is, Ven Dr Walpola Rāhula and Ven Dr Henepola Gunaratna.²⁴⁸

Rāhula, for example, clearly states that “all these mystic states, according to the Buddha have nothing to do with Reality, Truth, Nirvana. This form of meditation existed before the Buddha. Hence, it is not purely Buddhist ... ”!²⁴⁹ This is Buddhist revisionism. Most modern scholars and informed Buddhists would beg to differ as Buddhism did not arise in a social vacuum, uninfluenced by the meditative traditions and philosophies of mind of the times. [4.1; 4.4.1]

7.2.4 One of the real and inherent problems of writing about meditation from an academic viewpoint is that we are trying to describe what is **experiential** in *discursive* terms. However, this can be safely done by writing about meditation *descriptively* with generous imageries.

Even then, if we have not tasted the bliss and calm of dhyana, but do have some sense of inner stillness or even an emic²⁵⁰ understanding of Buddhism and meditation, how can its truth and beauty not flow from our finger-tips? Otherwise, as Griffiths (as a PhD candidate in Buddhist studies) points out, even a famous Buddhist scholar-monk could contradict himself when writing on meditation.²⁵¹

atha) and the practice of insight (*vipassanā*) is not explicit in the *Pāli Suttas*” (264). Crangle, in his email dated 10 June 2010, explains: “ ... I believe that a rational understanding of the Buddhist metaphysic provides essential programming of one’s dhyana to produce a degree of intuitive insight. Having gained a measure of intuitive insight, the meditator is able to revise his/her rational understanding, to some degree. This revision, in turn, reprograms one’s subsequent dhyana to produce deeper degrees of intuitive insight ... until understanding, intuitive insight and release are all perfected. | In this ‘indirect’ way, insight is applied in dhyana due to earlier programming of the mind. At the same time, discursion is absent in dhyana itself.” See also L Schmithausen, “On some aspects of descriptions or theories of ‘Liberating insight’ and enlightenment in early Buddhism,” Wiesbaden, 1981.

²⁴⁷ Eg Winston L King, *Theravāda Meditation: the Buddhist transformation of yoga*, University Park, 1980:viii.

²⁴⁸ See H Gunaratana, *The Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation*, Kandy, 1988:25.

²⁴⁹ W Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Chester Springs, PA, 1967:68 f. See further **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22) @ SD 3.13 (1.3).

²⁵⁰ The terms **etic** and **emic** were originally coined by linguist Kenneth Pike (*Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Nature*, The Hague, 1967), and derived from the terms “phonetic” and “phonemic.” *Phonetic* accounts of language are based on the observer’s measurement of physical sound differences, while *phonemic* accounts are those based on speakers’ conscious or unconscious models of sound difference (*Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, 1986:92). In short, in translation work and academic studies, there should be a good balance between ‘**emic**’ meaning and ‘**etic**’ interpretation. **Niels Nielsen** makes this useful distinction: “The *emic* (inside) *meaning* of a religious tradition is a description of that tradition by its adherents using their own language and their own categories and systems of organization In practice, most investigators use *etic* (outside) *interpretive categories* devised within their scholarly disciplines in addition to emic categories Emic and etic approaches can be complementary and mutually corrective.” (With John Y Fenton, in N Nielsen et al (eds), *Religions of the World*, NY, 1983:6; qu at Hoffman 1987:2)

²⁵¹ Griffiths, in his article “Concentration or insight: The problematic of Theravāda Buddhist meditation-theory,” notes: “Paravahera Vajirañāna Mahathera, in his exposition of the Visuddhimagga, reflects the confusion of his sources when he implicitly contradicts himself, saying at one point that samādhi-bhavanā is a necessary condition for attaining nibbāna, and denying this in another place (1962)” (1981:617): see P Vajirañāna, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, Colombo, 1962:8, 343. Cf (**Ahita**) **Thera S** (A 5.88), SD 40a.16.

8 Conclusion

8.1 PURPOSE OF MEDITATION. Dhyana entails a profound state of mental concentration. When properly developed, it forms the basis for wisdom. Even if we are not able to attain dhyana, our meditation can still help us with some level of calm and clarity. Such a mind facilitates a better understanding of the suttas, which enhances our mastery of meditation and promotes self-understanding, supported by the constant perception of impermanence.

As such, the Buddha, as recorded in **the Samādhi Sutta**, declares:²⁵²

Cultivate samadhi [mental concentration], bhikkhus. A monk who has samadhi understands things as they really are.²⁵³ (S 22.5/3:13 f; 35.99/4:80; 56.1/5:414; cf A 5.27/3:24)

The same Sutta explains the expression “understands things as they really are” (*yathā, bhūtaṃ pajānāti*) as referring to the 5 aggregates, thus: “Such is form ... feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness; such is its arising ... , such is its passing away.”²⁵⁴ The most basic meditation practice for all Buddhists, then, is **the perception of impermanence**.²⁵⁵

8.2 TEACHER-STUDENT BIASES

8.2.1 Most meditation teachers are aware of the different teachings and practices, and their finer variations. Out of professional courtesy, no meditation teacher would openly criticize another over such points, unless they clearly contravene the Dharma-Vinaya. Even then, such criticisms are rarely made publicly, but only intimated to their monastic students or to sincere seekers who closely question them.

8.2.2 Teachers who are too busy to read writings related to meditation, or are selective or elitist in doing so, are likely to lose touch with related issues. If they are dogmatic in their views (as is common with ethnic Buddhist teachers), then their students, too, would be misinformed and probably be narrow-minded. Such students are likely to fall away as they emotionally mature, or when their meditation do not really work for them.

8.2.3 Devoted students and fans of meditation teachers are more likely to accept wholesale the teachings and practices of their teachers. There should not be any significant problems where they practise diligently. However, it is not uncommon that the wiser practitioners would freely or tacitly incorporate the methods of other teachers in their own practice. Most teachers are compassionate enough to even openly allow their students to use any methods they find beneficially efficacious for them.

²⁵² S 22.5, 35.99, 56.1.

²⁵³ *Samādhiṃ bhikkhave bhāvētha. Samāhito bhikkhave bhikkhu yathā, bhūtaṃ pajānāti.* See DhsA 162.

²⁵⁴ Abridged. See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,14/2:301 f), **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,38/1:61), (**Pañca-k, khandha**) **Samādhi S** (S 22.5/3:13f), (**Salāyatana**) **Samādhi S** (S 35.99/4:80). See also **Dasa, bala S 1** (S 12.21/2:27 f), **Dasa, bala S 2** (S 12.23/2:29-32), **Sīha S** (S 22.78/3:84-86), **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/ 3:126-132) and **Nāva S** (S 22.101/3:152-155). The origin and passing away of the aggregates are explained in **Paṭisallāna S** (S 22.6/3:15) by way of diachronic conditionality, and in **Upādāna Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56/3:58-61 @ SD 3.7) & **Satta-ṭ, ṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65) by way of synchronic conditionality. See S:B 743 n58. [“Diachronic” here “across time,” ie, over many, usu 3, lives; “synchronic means within one life-time itself.]

²⁵⁵ See (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

8.3 BEING OPEN TO TEACHERS

It is vital to understand that even where a teacher may seem controversial or even wrong in certain teachings or practices, it does not mean that they are to be rejected or condemned wholesale. Some teachers are good meditators but lack depth in sutta learning or respect for the Vinaya. Some teachers are learned in suttas and scholarship but not skilled in meditation, or even handicapped in it. The point is that there are no wrong teachers, only wrong teachings. Correct or remove the wrong teachings, we have a good teacher!

8.4 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A clear mind can see forever, as it were. This eternal truth is the essence of our being, and reflects our spiritual potential for self-awakening. We may *talk or hear, write or read* about a sunset or a clear moonless starry night sky, but it is more inspiring for us to immerse ourselves in their profoundly blissful presence. Meditation has to be experienced for ourselves—like a toddler learning to walk—and we can only get better if we keep on trying until we get it right.

Even the best book or encyclopaedia on meditation is merely *about* meditation or *about* dhyana; but it is never *the experience* itself. Meditation is a wholesome activity; it is about how we breathe, how we feel, how we are truly free. It is the most spiritual of human activities. It is to be done in the true spirit of being human, where our willingness to learn from suffering spurs us on to seek and see our own minds.

Meditation may be read, but never raved about. Above all, it is to be done, and to be felt as the most intimate, revealing and liberating experience we can ever have. For, it is about what we really are, and what we can truly be—truly awakened beings.

8.5 THE TEACHING IS ABOVE THE TEACHER

8.5.1 It was with much apprehension that I have written this paper, as I knew both Bhante Gunaratana and Ajahn Brahmavamso very well, and also learned from them at different times in my Buddhist life. At the same time, the sutta teachings are also very clear on dhyana. This is where I am inspired by the Buddha's advice, "Do not go by the thought, 'This monk is our teacher' ['This recluse is respected by us']" (*mā samaṇo no garu*).²⁵⁶

When we see teachers as idol, it is a matter of time when we will see their clay feet, or imagine them so. We honor our teacher best when we diligently practise the teaching, not even his teaching, but the teaching he himself practices, that of his teacher before him, and his teacher before that, and so on—the "resort of our fathers" (*pettika visaya*)²⁵⁷—going back to the Buddha himself.

8.5.2 A good teacher always welcomes criticism. Only when we lack faith or wisdom, we fear other may find us out. Hence, a true teacher, would not dismiss even a research like this and say, "I don't read such things!" He would—like the Buddha in **the Vimamsaka Sutta** (M 47), SD 35.6—welcome criticisms, since these would reveal more of the questioner, and to compassionately raise him from his doubts into faith and wisdom. Surely then, that teacher reflects buddha-like qualities.

²⁵⁶ **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65,3.1 (10)), SD 35.4a.

²⁵⁷ *Pettikā visayā*, referring to **the 4 satipatthāna** (M 10, SD 13), is mentioned in **Cakka,vatti dīha,nāda S** (D 26,1/-3:58, 77), SD 36.10; also Nm 2:475

On a more serious note, the Buddha reminds us that it's all right to doubt a teacher's teachings where they are doubtful.²⁵⁸ It is beneficial, too, to properly speak out, and, if necessary, to reject, teachings and practices which are against the Dharma-Vinaya, even when—especially when—they are taught by famous teachers.

The (Pañcaka) Thera Sutta (A 5.88) soberly warns us not to blindly accept teachings of a teacher even if he is “of long standing,” famous, wealthy, or deeply learned, but where they are “of wrong view and deviant vision.” In other words, even famous teachers can be wrong.²⁵⁹

If you, the reader, have sacrificed your valuable time to read this student's exercise in sutta research, perhaps you may have sensed that some teachings by some teachers sometimes do not sound right. So, you are rightly troubled by this, but feel at a loss, even samvega. We feel not wise enough to question such busy illustrious teachers.

As the Buddha—in **the Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2)²⁶⁰—places the Dharma above even himself, it would surely be beneficial for us to turn to the ever-present Teacher, the Dharma, for guidance. If this writing brings you a sense of confident relief and inspire you to joyfully continue with your practice, this effort is more than rewarded.

8.5.3 Even an *impression* that a teacher (or anyone) is able to meditate, what more to attain dhyana, is a great source of charisma and benefits that comes with charisma. The wrong and unskillfulness here is to falsely project this impression, or even to use such ability (especially in a monastic) for worldly benefits and exploitation. This is abusing the Dharma and misleading others, actions that are rooted in wrong view.

Even if a teacher is a dhyana-attainer, it does not necessarily mean that he is awakened, or has attained any level of the path. No one else can know this, except another saint, or one who attained a higher level. On the other hand, even if our teacher is a dhyana-attainer or a great meditator, but we only bush the wine, and simply getting intoxicated with his perceived status, but we do not ourselves follow the teacher's good example, then, surely, we have failed both our teacher and ourselves.

The point is that it does not really matter if a teacher is unable to attain dhyana, but is of good moral character, wise in the teachings, compassionate in his actions and accessible to all. With good moral grounding, it is only a matter of time that we are able to meditate better, even attain dhyana. But more importantly, we go beyond dhyana to attain spiritual excellence, that is, streamwinning or even beyond.

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Bibliography

Please see under **Samadhi**, SD 33.1a & SD Guide (SD 01)

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²⁵⁸ “It is fitting that you are uncertain, that you doubt, Kālāmas. Doubt has arisen in you over what is doubtful.”
(**Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65,3.1), SD 35.4a.

²⁵⁹ A 5.88 (SD 40a.16).

²⁶⁰ S 6.2/1:138-140 (SD 12.3).