

# The Jhanas – The Original Practice of Mindfulness and Insight

Supplementary Notes for a Non-residential retreat with Upasaka Culadasa

January 21 - 23, 2011

## Part I: What is *Jhāna*?

*Jhāna* in Pāli is used to refer either to meditation in general, or to certain specific meditative states in particular. The etymologically correct derivation of the Pali word “*jhāna*” is from the verb *jhāyati*, meaning to meditate. The word for meditator is *jhāyim*. There is also a more playful but inaccurate derivation from the verb *jhāpeti*, meaning to burn up. The latter is sometimes used in reference to its function in “burning up” mental defilements rather than to its linguistic origins.

Even when used to mean meditation in general, *jhāna* still refers to a *focused, very stable* state of *concentration* during meditation. Properly used, therefore, even in this general sense *jhāna* means meditation at a skill level where attention has become focused and stable, and not the “novice” meditation characterized by forgetting, mind wandering, gross distraction, or dullness. With reference to the Ten Stages of *Samatha-Vipassana*, all meditations at the 6<sup>th</sup> Stage and beyond can be called *jhāna* in the general sense of the term.<sup>1</sup>

*Jhāna* is most frequently used in Buddhism in a more precise sense of referring to “absorptions” that occur in a stable, focused state of concentration. There are many types and degrees of such states, and so there are correspondingly many different methods for achieving them in different Buddhist traditions. Equivalent terms are:

“*Dhyāna*” in Sanskrit,  
“*Chán*” in modern Chinese,  
“*Zen*” in Japanese,  
“*Seon*” in Korean,  
“*Thien*” in Vietnamese, and  
“*Samten*” in Tibetan.

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, with reference to the sixteen stages in the Progressive Stages of Insight, all meditations from the 4<sup>th</sup> stage (Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away) and beyond also correspond to *jhāna* in the general sense of the term. All of these are meditations involving a stable, focused state of concentration.

### **Some further clarifications of terminology -- *samadhi*, *ekaggata* and *samatha*.**

The word *jhāna* is used in close association with the word “*samadhi*”. *Samadhi* derives from *sam-a-dha*, meaning *to collect or bring together*. Often translated into English as concentration, the word *samadhi* is specifically meant to suggest the process of *unification of the mind* that is brought about through the practice of focusing the attention, or concentration. However, it is important to recognize that *samadhi* has a broader scope of meaning than does *jhāna*. In addition to the *jhānas*, *samadhi* also includes all of the levels of concentration (“bringing together”) that lead up to them.

Another very closely related word is “*samatha*”, which means serenity. It is often used almost interchangeably with *samadhi*, but refers more specifically to the state of joyful serenity that follows upon *complete unification of the mind through the practice of samadhi*. In other words, *samatha* is the culmination, the final result of the practice of *samadhi*.

The unified mind is *cittas’ekaggata*, meaning the mind (*cittas*) that has gone (*gata*) to oneness or unity (*eka*). Unfortunately, “*ekaggata*” has often been assumed to refer to the single-pointed attention that is used as the primary *means* to achieve unification of mind, and so is commonly mistranslated into English as “single-pointed” mind, rather than more properly as “unified” mind. The significance of this distinction is that once the mind is unified (*ekaggata*), *single-pointed attention and concentration practice are no longer required*. Unification of mind is the truly essential feature of absorption in the *jhāna*, not single-pointed attention. In the case of the deep *jhānas*, single-pointed attention to a meditation object by a mind that is fully unified is only used as a means to enter the first *jhāna*, and is subsequently abandoned in all of the higher *jhānas*. With the lighter *jhānas* however, which are practiced before the mind has achieved full unification, single-pointed attention focused on a specific object may be required at every level of *jhāna* in order that there be sufficient *ekaggata* present to sustain the *jhāna*.

### **What do we mean by “absorption”?**

If we begin with a general definition of absorption, we find it means “the assimilation of one thing into another, the state of being absorbed”. What we are discussing here, of course, is *mental absorption*, which is “the mental

state of being preoccupied with something”. Synonyms for mental absorption are: complete attention; concentration; engrossment; enthrallment; and immersion.

### **What makes the Buddhist *jhānas* special compared to any other mental absorptions?**

All of us are familiar with mental absorptions of various sorts and recognize that they can take many forms. Mental absorptions differ from one another in at least four ways:

1. The wholesome or unwholesome quality of the underlying mental state and the object of the absorption.
2. The presence or absence of the so-called “*jhāna* factors” of unification of mind (*cittas’ekaggata*); joy (*pīti*); pleasure or happiness (*sukha*); and equanimity (*upekkha*).
3. The particular circumstances in which the absorption occurs, i.e. ordinary worldly pursuits vs. meditation.
4. The completeness of the absorption itself and the extent of unification of mind that accompanies it.

With regard to the first difference, not all absorptions are “wholesome” absorptions, but those that the Buddha called *jhāna* were distinctly wholesome in nature. So first we must see how wholesome absorptions are distinguished from unwholesome absorptions. Unwholesome absorptions are those based in greed, lust, anger, hatred, dullness, addiction, escape, fear, worry, guilt, cynicism, self-doubt, self-pity or self-loathing. In the jargon of the *Suttas* (the recorded discourses of the Buddha), these unwholesome absorptions are based in the five hindrances. For an absorption to be of the wholesome type that is called *jhāna*, these five hindrances must be completely absent, even if that absence is only temporary:

"It wasn't the case, brahman, that the Blessed One praised mental absorption of every sort, nor did he criticize mental absorption of every sort. And what sort of mental absorption did he not praise? There is the case where a certain person dwells with his awareness overcome by sensual passion, seized with sensual passion. He does not discern the escape, as it actually is present, from sensual passion once it has arisen. Making that sensual passion the focal point, he absorbs himself with it...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by ill will...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by sloth & drowsiness...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by restlessness & anxiety...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by uncertainty, seized with uncertainty. He does not discern the escape, as it actually is present, from uncertainty once it

has arisen. Making that uncertainty the focal point, he absorbs himself with it... This is the sort of mental absorption that the Blessed One did not praise.

"And what sort of mental absorption did he praise? There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful (mental) qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana..."

MN 108: Gopaka Moggallana Sutta - Moggallana the Guardsman  
*translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu*

With regard to the second difference, for an absorption to qualify as *jhāna* it must occur within or be accessed from a state in which the mind is not only focused and stable, but is also characterized by the presence of joy, happiness and pleasure<sup>2</sup>. We can recognize absorptions such as these as being very similar to what positive psychologist Csikszentmihalyi defines as “flow”, the state that creates optimal experience:

“These investigations have revealed that what makes experience genuinely satisfying is a state of consciousness called *flow* -- a state of concentration so focused that it amounts to complete absorption in an activity. Everyone experiences flow from time to time and will recognize its characteristics: People typically feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and at the peak of their abilities. Both the sense of time and emotional problems seem to disappear, and there is an exhilarating feeling of transcendence.”

*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*,  
by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi.

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<sup>2</sup> Those who are familiar with the Progress of Insight will recognize that most of those meditative states do not actually meet this particular criterion due to the absence of joy, pleasure and happiness. Thus the so-called *Vipassana Jhānas* described by Sayadaw U Pandita (*In This Very Life*) actually differ significantly from the *jhānas* in the more specific sense as defined by the Buddha. Meditative states in the dry *vipassana* practice that do correspond to *jhānas* are: 1) the meditative state referred to as “Ten Corruptions of Insight” that gives rise to the Knowledge of Path and Not Path (4<sup>th</sup> stage), which includes directed and sustained attention, joy, pleasure and happiness, and therefore corresponds to Buddha’s First *Jhāna*; 2) the Knowledge of Equanimity Towards Formations (11<sup>th</sup> stage) includes tranquility and equanimity, and therefore corresponds to Buddha’s Fourth *jhāna*, and; the Knowledge of Fruition in the 16<sup>th</sup> stage, which includes pleasure, happiness and equanimity corresponds to Buddha’s Third *jhāna*.

Csikszentmihalyi describes the following characteristics of flow and the activities that give rise to it:

- The activities that give rise to the flow experience are performed as an end in themselves, not for any other purpose.
- The goals of the activity are clear, and the feedback is immediate. What is most important about the feedback is the symbolic message it contains: I have succeeded in my goal. This creates order in the “flow” of consciousness.
- Flow appears at the boundary when the challenge of the task is perfectly balanced with the person’s ability to perform the task.
- What makes the flow experience enjoyable is the sense of successfully exercising control, which is not the same as “being in control”.
- During the flow experience, a person becomes so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic, and they cease to be aware of themselves as separate from what they are doing.
- A complete focus of attention is required, allowing only a very select range of information into awareness and leaving no room in the mind for anything else. All troubling or irrelevant thoughts are kept in entirely in abeyance.
- The flow experience appears to be effortless, yet requires the application of skilled performance. While concentration lasts, everything happens seamlessly, as if by magic.

Most of us have experienced absorptions outside of meditation that fulfill these criteria, and we have discussed in the last course (Joy & Meditation – More Than Just a Happy Feeling) how meditation can be practiced in such a way that it becomes a flow experience.

The third important distinction is that, whenever *jhāna* is referred to in the *Suttas*, it always occurs as a part of meditation. By comparison, the flow experiences described by Csikszentmihalyi occur in a wide variety of circumstances involving worldly pursuits and ordinary activities of daily life.

***So we can summarize the foregoing by saying that *jhāna* refers specifically to 1) wholesome absorptions, 2) of the type that constitute “flow” experiences, and 3) that occur in meditation.***

So the next question is, are all such meditation experiences properly spoken of as *jhāna*?

**Is there a further refinement of the definition of *jhāna* that excludes all but a special subset meditative absorptions?**

As for the fourth and final distinction listed above, both common sense and personal experience tell us that many different degrees mental absorption are possible. Preoccupation with something can be only partial; or else it can be to the complete exclusion of all else, so great that the ordinary demands on attention are completely ignored as a consequence.

The question of whether or not only meditative absorptions of a certain degree of depth or completeness qualify as *jhāna* has provoked considerable confusion and disagreement as Buddhist meditation has come to the West. On the one hand, in many Buddhist cultures and in many of the early Buddhist texts, *jhāna*, or its Sanskrit (*dhyāna*), Chinese (*chan*), and Japanese (*zen*) equivalents, are treated as being synonymous with meditation itself. Although we have distinguished above between this and more specific usages of the term, this does suggest a broader and more inclusive definition of any absorption fulfilling the three criteria above as *jhāna*.

On the other hand, the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification, a compendium of Buddhist doctrines compiled in Sri Lanka by Buddhaghosa in approximately 430 CE) seems to define *jhāna* as a very specific, highly refined, and difficult to attain meditative state involving the most complete absorption possible. As such, it is accessible only through intensive and prolonged practice and is rarely attained. Because this text is the most important text other than the Pali canon for the Theravada, this has been the predominant view in Theravada countries for many centuries. A similar, more restricted and exclusivist definition of *dhyāna* is to be found in the Mahayana Buddhism of Tibet. Here the absorption is so complete as to involve a complete withdrawal of the mind from the senses. As a result of these extreme views of what constitutes *jhāna*, the actual practice of the classic *jhānas* of the *Suttas* has become very rare in both the Theravadin and Tibetan traditions. This is in spite of the fact that *jhāna/dhyāna* is discussed extensively throughout both the Pali Tipitika and the Sanskrit Tripitika, much more so than any other form of meditation!

As westerners have taken an increasing interest in Buddhist meditation, some have noted this peculiar inconsistency. A careful comparison of sources reveals that the general tone of the discussion of the *jhānas* found in the *Suttas* suggests that they are not only readily attainable, but should

indeed be practiced by all serious followers of the Eightfold Path. Indeed, when asked what constituted “right concentration” (*sammāsamādhi*), the Buddha consistently answered by describing the *jhānas*. Furthermore, the detailed descriptions provided in many of the *Suttas* do not require the stringent interpretations that make the *jhānas* of the *Visuddhimagga* and other Theravada and Mahayana commentaries appear to be so lofty, remote and unobtainable. A few years ago this led some Western scholars and practitioners of Buddhist meditation to distinguish two kinds of *jhāna* – the so-called *Sutta jhānas*, and the *Visuddhimagga* or Commentarial *jhānas*.

Although the designations as *Sutta jhāna* and Commentarial *jhāna* have been useful for comparing different descriptions of *jhāna*, and discussions based on these distinctions have brought some clarification to the issues, they are not particularly valid. As a result they have tended to create another source of confusion and an unfortunate debate about “Which *jhānas* are the ‘real’ *jhānas*?”. A closer examination of the *Suttas* reveals that they do in fact include descriptions of *jhāna* that are consistent with those described in the Theravada and Mahayana commentaries, so both kinds of *jhāna* are in fact “*Sutta jhānas*”, and both kinds are therefore also “real” *jhānas*. This recognition in turn has led to a far more useful distinction between *jhānas* as being either “lighter” or “deeper”, rather than as being of the “*Sutta*” or “Commentarial” type. This has also helped somewhat to calm the “truthiness” debate. Unfortunately, by the time this realization and redefinition happened, the designations of *Sutta jhāna* and *Visuddhimagga jhāna* had already made their way into print, and are still being used by some meditation teachers, especially those who have developed a strong preference for one kind of *jhāna* over the other. And so the truthiness debate is bound to continue for some time to come.

Nevertheless, we are now in a position to say with complete confidence that:

**All states of meditative concentration involving absorption, of any degree, that are wholesome, stable, and occur within or else are accessed from a state characterized by the presence of joy, happiness and pleasure are true jhānas.**

### **Eight Types of *Jhāna* – The Four Form *Jhānas* and the Four Formless Variants of the Fourth *Jhāna*.**

You will often hear about there being eight *jhānas*, but technically there are only four *jhānas*, plus four variants of the 4<sup>th</sup> *jhāna*. The Four *Jhānas* are

said to be “with form” because they retain connections to the qualities of the material sense realm, such as body awareness and a sense of specific location in space. The variants of the 4<sup>th</sup> *Jhāna* are said to be “formless”, because they retain no such connection to the material sense realm.

**The Four Form *Jhānas* are characterized as follows.**

**First *Jhāna*:**

- 1) The meditator is withdrawn from desire for sensual pleasures and from all unwholesome states of mind.
- 2) The following four “*jhāna* factors” are present - Directed attention (*vitakka*); Sustained attention (*vicara*); Meditative joy (*pīti*); Bodily pleasure and/or happiness (*sukha*).
- 3) The meditative joy and pleasure/happiness are said to be “born of withdrawal” in the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna*.

**Second *Jhāna*:**

- 1) The meditator has confidence and unification of mind (*ekaggata*).
- 2) The following two *jhāna* factors are present - Meditative joy (*pīti*); Bodily pleasure and/or happiness (*sukha*).
- 3) The meditative joy and pleasure/happiness are said to be “born of concentration” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> *jhāna*, rather than withdrawal as in the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna*.

**Third *Jhāna*:**

- 1) The meditator has mindfulness (*sati*) and clear comprehension (*sampajañña*).
- 2) The following two *jhāna* factors are present - Bodily pleasure and/or happiness (*sukha*); Equanimity (*upekkha*).
- 3) It is said of the meditator that, “He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.”

**Fourth *Jhāna*:**

- 1) The meditator has purity of mindfulness (*sati-sampajañña*) due to equanimity (*upekkha*).
- 2) The only *jhāna* factor present is Equanimity (*upekkha*).
- 3) The mind of the meditator is said to be “thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, pliant, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability”.



## **Detailed descriptions of each of the Four Form *Jhānas* from the *Suttas*.**

### **First *Jhāna*:**

"Quite withdrawn from sensual pleasures, withdrawn from unwholesome states, one enters and remains in the first jhana, which is accompanied by directed and sustained attention, and is filled with joy and pleasure born from withdrawal. Whatever sense desires he previously had disappear. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of joy and happiness born of withdrawal, and he becomes one who is aware of this joy and happiness."

"He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the joy and pleasure born from withdrawal. Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder — saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without — would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body not pervaded by joy and pleasure born from withdrawal."

"And as he remains thus mindful, ardent, and resolute, any memories and resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers, settles inwardly, grows unified and focused. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body."

### **Second *Jhāna*:**

"With the stilling of directed and sustained attention, one enters and remains in the second jhana, which is accompanied by inner confidence and unification of mind not dependent upon directed and sustained attention, and is filled with joy and pleasure born of concentration. There is a true but subtle perception of the joy and happiness born of concentration, and he becomes one who is aware of that joy and happiness."

"He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the joy and pleasure born of concentration. Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time and again, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake not pervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the joy and pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body not pervaded by joy and pleasure born of concentration."

"And as he remains thus mindful, ardent, and resolute, any memories and resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers, settles inwardly, grows unified and focused. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body."

### **Third *Jhāna*:**

“With the fading of joy, and with equanimity, mindfulness and clear comprehension, still feeling happiness and pleasure with the body, one enters and remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, ‘One has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’ The former true but subtle perception of joy and happiness born of concentration disappears. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of equanimity and happiness, and he becomes one who is aware of that equanimity and happiness.”

“He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of joy. Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would not be pervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the pleasure divested of joy. There is nothing of his entire body not pervaded with pleasure divested of joy.”

“And as he remains thus mindful, ardent, and resolute, any memories and resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers, settles inwardly, grows unified and focused. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.”

### **Fourth *Jhāna*:**

“With the abandoning of feelings like pleasure and pain, as with the previous disappearance of mental states like joy and grief, one enters and remains in the fourth jhana, which has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity and is beyond feelings of pleasure and pain. His former true but subtle perception of equanimity and happiness disappears. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of neither happiness nor unhappiness, and he becomes one who is aware of that perception of neither happiness nor unhappiness.”

“He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body not pervaded by pure, bright awareness.”

“And as he remains thus mindful, ardent, and resolute, any memories and resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers, settles inwardly, grows unified and focused. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.”

### **The Formless *Jhānas***

The formless *jhānas* are complete absorptions into the direct experience of the particular condition that serves as the base for each formless *jhāna*. They are described in the Suttas as follows:

#### **The Formless *Jhāna* of Infinite Space**

“By passing beyond bodily sensations, by the ending of all sense of resistance, by paying no attention to perceptions of diversity, thinking: 'Space is infinite,' he reaches and remains in the Sphere Infinite Space. His former true but subtle perception of neither happiness nor unhappiness disappears. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of Infinite Space, and he becomes one who is aware of Infinite Space.”

#### **The Formless *Jhāna* of Infinite Consciousness**

“By passing beyond Infinite Space, thinking: 'Consciousness is infinite,' he reaches and remains in the Sphere Infinite Consciousness. His former true but subtle perception of Infinite Space disappears. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of Infinite Consciousness, and he becomes one who is aware of Infinite Consciousness.”

#### **The Formless *Jhāna* of No-Thingness**

“By passing beyond Infinite Consciousness, thinking: 'There is nothing that really is,' he reaches and remains in the Sphere of No-thingness. His former true but subtle perception of Infinite Consciousness disappears. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of No-thingness, and he becomes one who is aware of No-thingness.”

#### **The Formless *Jhāna* of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception**

Perception is the process by which we interpret sensory data as corresponding to recognizable events or phenomena. The mind fabricates a perception to explain the sensory input of the moment, and then the mind takes that mental fabrication as its object of consciousness. “Non-perception” describes what occurs in deep sleep and states of unconsciousness. In the immediately preceding formless *jhāna*, even No-thingness is a mental fabrication based upon the absence of identifiable sensory input, and that no-thingness is *perceived* as an object of consciousness. In this next refinement, the perception of the mental fabrication corresponding to No-thingness is abandoned, yet the mind does not lose consciousness (i.e. it is not a state of non-perception), therefore “passing beyond No-thingness, he reaches and remains in the Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception.”

### **What are the differences between the “light” and “deep” *Jhānas*?**

*Jhānas* are entered from a meditative state known as Access Concentration (*upacara samadhi*). The depth of concentration and the corresponding degree of unification of mind in Access Concentration is what determines how “deep” the *jhānas* themselves are that one subsequently enters into.

To serve as a state of Access, the concentration must be strong enough to permit a *relatively* single-pointed focus on a suitable meditation object so that absorption is possible. If the meditation object is appropriately wholesome, then there must also be sufficient unification of mind to strongly suppress the Five Hindrances. When the basic requirements are met, all that is needed is for the meditator to enter into a stable state of flow accompanied by joy and pleasure. Thus absorption is achieved and sustained.

In the ‘lightest’ forms of *jhāna* practice, *vitakka* and *vicara* (directed and sustained attention) consists not only in the attention that is directed and sustained upon the meditation object, but also in some degree of thinking and/or intentional investigation and evaluation as well. In these lighter *jhānas*, attention to the meditation object is usually continued in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4th *jhānas*, while thinking and investigation are abandoned after the 1st. In the practice of the deepest *jhānas*, on the other hand, there is no thought or investigation even in the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna*, and even attention to the meditation object is completely abandoned after the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna*.

In the practice of the lighter *jhānas*, the *jhāna* factor of meditative joy includes physical sensations and other phenomena associated with *pīti*. In deep *jhāna*, physical and other sensations have typically subsided prior to entering even the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna*. Also, in the lighter *jhānas* bodily pleasure is experienced as well as mental happiness, so *sukha* takes the form of both of these together. In all but the deepest forms of *jhāna* practice, some degree of pleasurable sensation related to the physical body persists until the 3<sup>rd</sup> *jhāna*, and disappears only in the 4<sup>th</sup>. In the deepest *jhāna* practice, pleasure associated with the body is absent even in first *jhāna*, and mental happiness is the only form that *sukha* takes.

A brief word needs to be added regarding the meditation object used for entering the *jhānas*. The Pali word meaning “appearance” is “*nimitta*”, and so we must speak of the “appearance” of the meditation object. No ordinary sensation, even the sensation of the breath, is suitable for sustaining a meditative absorption. The ordinary appearance (*parikamma-nimitta*) of the

breath is in reality a complex conceptual construct positing hypothetical entities such as air, nose, skin, in and out as an explanation for the sensations experienced. It is too conceptual and involves too much mental processing to serve as a suitable object for *jhāna*. But as we progress in the quality of our mindfulness and concentration, the appearance of the meditation object changes as well. The so-called “acquired appearance” of the breath (*uggaha-nimitta*), typically occurs in the 6<sup>th</sup> Stage. This acquired appearance involves a more immediate, less conceptual, and less intricately fabricated perception than the appearance in ordinary perception. In other words, it is a more direct experience of the actual sensations themselves, rather than a conceptual overlay. Later, in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Stages, a further change in the appearance of the meditation object occurs as well. The mind can be so completely withdrawn from the actual sensory experience of the breath that what is perceived in conscious awareness are neither the sensations of the breath themselves, nor the conceptual fabrications of the mind that interpret those sensations. Instead what is perceived is the “mental counterpart” appearance (*patibhāga-nimitta*) of the breath which is “pre-conceptual”, being the stored imprint of the sensations on mind prior to an act of conceptualization.

I will describe below four depths of *jhāna* practice that will illustrate clearly both the nature of *jhāna* and the distinctions between the lighter and the deeper *jhāna* states. I have rather whimsically designated these as the “Ultralite”, “Lite”, “Light” and “Deep” *jhānas*. I borrowed the term ‘lite’ from the food and beverage industry where it implies that all the same ingredients are present, just not in so large a quantity. ‘Ultra’ means even more so, or in the case of ‘ultra-lite’, even more of less. So all the same stuff is there but even less of it than with ‘lite’. And I think that ‘ultra-lite’ just sounds better than ‘very-lite’ or ‘lite-er’.

‘Light’ is a pun on ‘lite’, and the difference in spelling refers specifically to the utilization of a luminous visual “*nimitta*”. It also fills the gap between the ‘lite’ and ‘deep’ *jhānas*, where all the same stuff is there, more than just ‘lite’ but maybe not quite as much as ‘deep’. ‘Medium-lite’ and ‘not-quite-so-deep’ just don't have the right ring to them, and the employment of the luminous *nimitta* as meditation object invites the pun. To avoid confusion it is important to note that the deeper type of *jhāna* includes those I have called “Light” *jhānas*. In both the Light and Deep *jhānas*, there is a complete withdrawal of the mind from normal sensory awareness. In this way, and in this way alone, they are somewhat “trance-like”. By contrast, in the Lite and

Ultralite *jhānas* there continues to be an awareness of ordinary sensations, although notably more muted than normal.

The 'Ultra-lite', 'Lite', 'Light', and 'Deep' *jhānas* can be arranged along a spectrum of states corresponding to different stages belonging to the 10 Stages of *Samatha-Vipassana*.

### **The Ultralite *Jhānas***

Ultralite *jhānas* are accessed from a state corresponding to Stage 6 of the 10 *Samatha-Vipassana* Stages. Sixth Stage is the earliest point in the progressive development of *Samatha-Vipassana* from which *jhāna* can be entered and sustained without the meditator quickly becoming lost in distraction or sinking into dullness. Continuous introspective awareness (*sati-sampajañña*) must be present to prevent distraction or dullness from occurring.

The meditation object is the sensation of the breath as experienced in the whole body simultaneously, arrived at through the practice of “Experiencing the Whole Body with the Breath”. There is reasonable stability of attention, but a lot of background noise still gets through, and discursive thought is definitely present. Thinking and investigation are present in the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna* becoming more attenuated and eventually ceasing in 2<sup>nd</sup> *jhāna*. The attention remains focused on whole-body sensations throughout all four of the *jhānas*, because the mind has not yet achieved sufficient unification and stability to abandon a specific object of attention. The mental state of joy corresponding to *pīti* is present, but is very incompletely developed, and so the *jhānas* tends to be dominated by strong physical sensations.

Although very ‘light’, these meditative absorptions satisfy all of the criteria for true *jhānas*, and can be useful both in producing Insight (*vipassana*) and for further deepening concentration and bringing about an even greater unification of mind. The progression through the four Ultralite *jhānas* corresponds to a series of meditative states approximating Stages 7 through 10 of *Samatha-Vipassana*.

### **Lite *Jhānas***

Lite *jhānas* are accessed from a state corresponding to Stage 7. This state is single-pointed, with very little noise and almost no discursive thought. Whatever thinking occurs is mostly non-verbal. *Pīti* is still incompletely

developed and mostly physical, and the illumination phenomena are either absent or ignored.

The meditation object for entering 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna* is the combination of pleasure and other strong physical sensations associated with the arising of Meditative Joy (*pīti*). They resemble the Deep *jhānas* more than the Ultralite and Light *jhānas* in that *vitakka* and *vicara* in the form of directed and sustained attention focused upon a specific meditation object does not occur in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> *jhānas*. Rather than focused attention, there is an “introspective awareness” of joy, serene happiness, and equanimity.

Once sufficient stability of attention can be achieved and sustained for periods of 10 to 15 minutes at a time, these *jhānas* are relatively easily accessed. Progression through the four Lite *jhānas* corresponds to a series of meditative states approximating Stages 8 through 10 of *Samatha-Vipassana*. They can be very productive of Insight (*vipassana*), and can greatly assist the meditator in achieving the adept levels of concentration of Stages 8 through 10.

### **Light *Jhānas***

Access to the Light *jhānas* is from a state corresponding to Stages 8 or 9. There is unification of mind, well developed *pīti* and *sukkha*, and a distinctive presence of the illumination phenomenon.

Although relatively much deeper in terms of concentration level and degree of unification of mind, I call them “light” *jhānas* simply because the object of meditation used for entering these *jhānas* is the illumination phenomenon, or “light” associated with the arising of *pīti* (meditative joy). They are, in fact, a ‘deep’ *jhāna* in the sense that the mind is profoundly unified. The breath or other meditation object is abandoned in favor of a luminous “*nimitta*”. The mental rather than sensory nature of the light *nimitta* is conducive to withdrawal of the mind from the senses. Attention focused on the light *nimitta* continues to be present in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> *jhānas*, together with introspective awareness of joy (*pīti*), happiness (*sukkha*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).

The Light *jhānas* presume an adept level of concentration, and so are not as readily achieved. They can be used quite effectively for cultivation of Insight. Progression through the 1<sup>st</sup> three Light *jhānas* corresponds to a series of meditative states similar in many ways to Stages 9 and 10 of

*Samatha-Vipassana*, and to the Deep *jhānas*, except for the focused attention upon the *nimitta* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> *jhānas*.

### **Deep *Jhānas***

The Deep *jhānas* take the *Samatha-Vipassana* state corresponding to Stage 10 as Access. Unification of mind (*ekaggata*), mindful awareness (*sati*), meditative joy and happiness (*pīti-sukkhā*), tranquility (*passadhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are all present. The illumination phenomenon is ignored and the mental counterpart image (*patibhāga-nimitta*) of the original meditation object is used as the meditation object. Once the mental counterpart *nimitta* has been acquired, the mind has already fully withdrawn from the senses and entry into 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna* using this object follows easily.

Focused attention is completely abandoned upon entry into 2<sup>nd</sup> *jhāna*, and the full power of conscious perception is devoted to introspective mindful awareness. The mental state of joy is allowed to subside into subconscious awareness in 3<sup>rd</sup> *jhāna*, as is the feeling of happiness in 4<sup>th</sup> *jhāna*, leaving the mind permeated by the experience of conscious awareness itself.

Although the Deep *jhānas* require the greatest amount of time and dedication to achieve, and are not necessarily attainable by all prior to Stream Entry, as a basis for Insight they constitute the most powerful of all meditation practices.

### **Part II: *Jhānas*, Mindfulness, and Insight**

Numerous erroneous notions have arisen regarding the *jhānas*, and amongst them is the idea that the *jhānas* are somehow not compatible with the practice of mindfulness (*sati-sampajañña*), and that *jhāna* practice does not lead to Insight (*vipassana*). Nothing could be further from the truth!

### **Some historical background on the origins of Buddhist meditation.**

The Buddha learned to practice the *jhānas* from his first two teachers, Alara Kalama and Udakka Ramaputta. They believed that while practicing the *jhānas*, the formless *jhānas* of No-thingness and Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception in particular, the yogi experienced a ‘taste’ of Ultimate Liberation. They further believed that, as a result of residing in those *jhānas* for extended periods of time during life, at the time of death the yogi would achieve permanent Liberation. *Jhāna* practice became in effect a ritual, and liberation at death was the (semi-magical?) result of consistently performing



that ritual. The Boddhisatta found those teachings to be unsatisfactory and left those teachers, going on to explore other practices and philosophies for the next six years.

But at the end of that period, not having found what he sought, he reconsidered the method of practicing *jhāna* meditation once again, and renewed his quest for true Awakening. He recalled a meditative state he entered by chance as a child:

"I thought: 'I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities — I entered and remained in the first jhana: joy and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed and sustained attention. Could that be the path to Awakening?' Then following on that memory came the realization: 'That is the path to Awakening.'  
(MN 36: Maha-Saccaka Sutta - The Longer Discourse to Saccaka)

The *Suttas* then describe how the Buddha-to-be subsequently sat down, entered *jhāna*, and achieved his own Awakening. Thereafter, as described throughout the *Suttas*, he constantly encouraged his disciples to develop *jhāna* as a way of achieving Awakening and Liberation.

The Buddha did not invent the *jhānas*, but he introduced one key innovation -- that meditative absorption must be combined with mindfulness (*sati*) even in the deepest *jhānas*. Alara Kalama, Udakka Ramaputta, and other early Brahminical teachers believed that the *state* of absorption was what was most important, and the more completely trance-like that state was, the better. That was a mistake! The truly novel discovery of Siddhatta Gotama, the historical Buddha, was that meditation combined with mindfulness, and practicing the *jhānas* in particular with mindfulness, gives rise to *liberating cognition* (*vipassana*). The early brahmins also believed that true Liberation only occurred after death, and that a life of *jhānic* entrancement was the means to achieve that end. The Buddha discovered that full Awakening and complete Liberation are achievable *in this very life*, and not through ritual and magic, but *through the attainment of Insight wisdom*.

It is ignorance that leads to craving that leads to the endless cycle of suffering (*samsara*). It is the dispelling of ignorance through the attainment of wisdom and understanding (*panna*) that leads to the cessation of craving and the permanent release from suffering.

The Buddha also went to great effort to make it known that the Wisdom that leads to Awakening cannot be attained by means of intellect alone. Once it is

understood that Enlightenment results from liberating cognition, there is a strong tendency to pursue truth through analysis and philosophy. This will not work. True wisdom, of the sort that can overcome the delusion in which we are immersed, must arise in the form of Insight (*vipassana*) resulting from mindful awareness (*sati-sampajañña*) applied in the course of direct experience. *Jhāna* practice creates the perfect opportunity for that kind of direct experience.

Another potential for misunderstanding is that the emphasis on meditation and direct experience can cause the yogi to discount the importance of *cognitive transformation* in favor of the *meditative experiences* themselves. This is also futile. Knowing and feeling are two very different things. An experience of no-self for example, of feeling at one with the universe, of being deeply aware that everything is perfect as it is, *is just another experience fabricated by the mind* – unless it is based on profound Insight. Without wisdom and understanding, a “peak” experience such as this soon becomes only a cherished memory while one continues on as before, immersed in a world of ignorance and inevitable suffering. To pursue *jhāna* or any other form of meditation as a source of such experiences is to fall into the same error as the Buddha’s predecessors, that of expecting a magical result from dwelling in particular mental states, or from having ‘special’ feelings and experiences. All of human existence is an endless tapestry of states, feelings, and experiences woven together to form the trap of *samsara*. But through the proper application of mindfulness, wisdom can arise that permanently destroys that trap. Salvation lies not in the experiences themselves, no matter how rewarding, satisfying and ecstatic, but in the power of conscious awareness properly applied to the observation of those experiences.

### **What is Mindfulness?**

To understand what mindfulness (*sati*) is, we first need to recognize that we normally experience two different modes of “knowing”. I like to use the words “awareness” and “attention” to distinguish between these two. In *attention*, consciousness is *focused*. In *awareness*, on the other hand, consciousness is more *distributed*. Both of these modes of knowing are often simultaneously present to some greater or lesser degree. Even while our *attention* is focused on one thing, we are aware of many other things – our bodies, thoughts and feelings, the environment, the processes that led us to be where we are, doing what we are doing, and events ongoing around us.

Consciousness that is more broadly distributed in the form of *awareness* provides the background and the context for whatever consciousness in the form of *attention* happens to be focused on.

*Attention* isolates some small part of our subjective reality from the rest. That part is instantly identified, labeled, categorized, and evaluated. The object(s) of attention are processed by the mind, conceptualized and interpreted on the basis of past knowledge and experience. In the experience of *attention*, there is always a very definite subject-object duality. Sometimes the interpretation of the objects of attention is highly *subjective* in that it mostly emphasizes their relevance to the ‘self’, and the object is perceived very egocentrically. Although a common feature of *attention*, subjectivity is not an essential feature of it. There are times when attention is more *objective*, and subject-object duality takes the form of a distinct separation and independence of the knower from the known.

*Awareness*, on the other hand, provides a more global and holistic perspective. Rather than isolating and identifying individual objects, awareness has more to do with the relationships of objects to each other and to the whole. There is very minimal processing of the contents of awareness, and they tend to be perceived more ‘as they are in themselves’. Specific objects often ‘pop out’ of awareness to become objects of attention, and attention often browses the contents of awareness in search of something relevant or important to focus on.

“Mindfulness” is a rather unfortunate translation into English of the Pali word *sati*. What *sati* refers to is an optimal interaction between, and even a merging together of attention and awareness. As used in the *Suttas*, *sati* implies a condition of being more fully conscious, alert, and aware than is normally the case. “Mindfulness” has more the connotation of attentiveness or of remembering to pay attention, which fails to capture the full meaning and importance of *sati*. A more appropriate translation would be “powerfully conscious awareness” or “fully conscious awareness”, both of which are rather cumbersome phrases, or perhaps “mindful awareness”, if one keeps in mind the distinction I have made between awareness and attention.

As a result of the optimal interaction between attention and awareness that *sati* is really describing:

- the *distributed consciousness* of **awareness** has more of the power usually found only in the *focused consciousness* of **attention**;
- **awareness** is not so completely robbed of its conscious power whenever attention is focused on something;
- there is a more appropriate selection of objects for the focused consciousness of **attention** due to the *greater power of consciousness* of **awareness**, and so **attention** is *more effectively utilized*;
- **attention** exhibits more objectivity, more of the ‘seeing things as they are’ quality of **awareness**, and so there is greater clarity, less projection, and less subjective interpretation of whatever attention investigates.

When we “lose mindfulness”, *sati* has failed because consciousness is excessively focused on the current object of **attention**, and the conscious power of **awareness** consequently fades. Even worse, when the **attention** is constantly shifting its focus from one object to another, genuine **awareness** disappears to be replaced by a stream of highly subjective impressions and projections left behind by fleeting moments of **attention**. When this happens to a samurai swordsman, he loses his head. When this happens to any of the rest of us, we lose our way in life, doing and saying the wrong things and getting caught up in suffering and delusion. Likewise, when the conscious power of **awareness** (*sati*) is inadequate or absent, attention tends to be focused on inappropriate objects. Those things that it would be to our greatest benefit to observe and investigate are instead disregarded.

When mindfulness is well developed, experience is richer, fuller, more satisfying and less personal. This is because **attention** now plays an appropriate role within the larger context of a broad and powerful **awareness**. We are more fully present, happier and more at ease, not so easily caught up in the mind’s stories and melodramas. More importantly, because of an enhanced conscious awareness of the whole, and of relationships within the whole, Insight arises. Due to greater objectivity, clarity, and ‘seeing things as they are’, Insight arises. And because the investigative powers of attention are more appropriately and effectively utilized, Insight arises.

*Sati* is quite commonly spoken of in combination with *sampajañña*, often translated as “clear comprehension” or “clear knowing”. The *Suttas* make it clear that *sati* has to be integrated with *sampajañña*, and it is only when these two work together as *sati-sampajañña* that “right mindfulness” can fulfill its purpose in bringing about Insight and Awakening. The easiest way to understand *sati-sampajañña* is as “introspective awareness. When one has *sati-sampajañña*, one has direct and immediate knowledge of what one is doing, the cause or purpose behind what one is doing, and the appropriateness of what one is doing. With introspective awareness, one comes to have a direct and immediate knowledge of what is occurring in the mind, the causes and potential purposes behind what is occurring in the mind, and the appropriateness of what is occurring in terms of one's own values, intentions, and objectives.

### **How is Mindfulness combined with *jhāna***

The practice of *Samatha-Vipassana* relies upon the cultivation of introspective awareness to achieve the concentration that gives rise to unification of mind. Until the meditator has learned to sustain introspective awareness while focusing attention on the meditation object, becoming too focused results in distraction, forgetting and mind-wandering, or else it results in slipping into dullness. A meditator who has sufficient concentration and unification of mind to enter into a stable *jhāna* also has introspective awareness. Entering the first *jhāna*, **attention** is focused on the meditation object, while there is introspective **awareness** (*sati-sampajañña*) of *pīti* and *sukha*. In other words, mindfulness is already present before entering the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhāna*. At least in the ‘Lite’ and ‘Deep’ forms of *jhāna* practice, **attention** is abandoned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> *jhāna* while mindful **awareness** is sustained throughout the remaining *jhānas*. No matter how “lite” or “deep” the *jhāna*, the meditator is conscious, and that consciousness takes the form of introspective mindful awareness of the *jhāna* factors present in every *jhāna*. Only those who don't understand either mindfulness or *jhāna* would suggest that there can be no mindfulness in *jhāna*!

There are two important ways that *jhāna* as a mindfulness practice is used to achieve Insight and Awakening. First, one resolves to be aware upon entering *jhāna* of what was present but is now absent, and of what was absent that is now present. In the lighter forms of *jhāna* there is also some capacity for discursive thought and investigation that can be applied within the *jhāna* itself. Second, after emerging from *jhāna*, one recollects and reviews the state of the mind in Access prior to entering the *jhāna*, the state

of the mind in the *jhāna* itself, and the state of the mind upon emerging from the *jhāna*. The same method can be used to investigate the differences between the four Form *jhānas*, and likewise the four Formless variations.

The practice of the *jhānas* done with mindful awareness is much like a serial dissection of the mind. Just as scientists have come to understand the workings of the body by carefully observing the body while dissecting it, so did the Buddha teach yogis of 2500 years to carefully observe the mind while dissecting it. Here is a beautiful description of how Sariputta became an *Arahant* using exactly this method:

MN 111

PTS: [M iii 25](#)

Anupada Sutta: One After Another  
translated from the Pali by  
Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
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I have heard that at one time the Blessed One was staying in Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. There he addressed the monks, saying, "Monks."

"Yes, lord," the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, "Monks, Sariputta is wise, of great discernment, deep discernment, wide... joyous... rapid... quick... penetrating discernment. For half a month<sup>3</sup>, Sariputta clearly saw insight into mental qualities one after another. This is what occurred to Sariputta through insight into mental qualities one after another:

"There was the case where Sariputta — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities — entered & remained in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Whatever qualities there are in the first jhana — directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities,

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<sup>3</sup> The Commentary states that the half month mentioned here refers to the half month between Ven. Sariputta's ordination and his attainment of arahantship, described in MN 74.

independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, Sariputta entered & remained in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. Whatever qualities there are in the second jhana — internal assurance, rapture, pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the fading of rapture, Sariputta — remaining in equanimity, mindful & alert, and physically sensitive to pleasure — entered & remained in the third jhana, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' Whatever qualities there are in the third jhana — equanimity-pleasure, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He understood, He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure & stress — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — Sariputta entered & remained in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Whatever qualities there are in the fourth jhana — a feeling of equanimity, neither pleasure nor pain; an unconcern due to serenity of awareness; singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, [perceiving,] 'Infinite space,' Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of the infinitude of space. Whatever qualities there are in the dimension of the infinitude of space — the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space, singleness of mind,

contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, [perceiving,] 'Infinite consciousness,' Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. Whatever qualities there are in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness — the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, [perceiving,] 'There is nothing,' Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of nothingness. Whatever qualities there are in the dimension of nothingness — the perception of the dimension of nothingness, singleness of mind, contact, feeling, perception, intention, consciousness, desire, decision, persistence, mindfulness, equanimity, & attention — he ferreted them out one after another. Known to him they arose, known to him they remained, known to him they subsided. He discerned, 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.

"Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, Sariputta entered & remained in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. He emerged mindfully from that attainment. On emerging mindfully from that attainment, he regarded the past qualities that had ceased & changed: 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is a further escape,' and pursuing it there really *was* for him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Notice that, with each of the previous levels of attainment, Sariputta was able to ferret out the various mental qualities arising there while he was still in the attainment. With this attainment and the following one, however, he was not able



"Furthermore, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, Sariputta entered & remained in the cessation of feeling & perception. Seeing with discernment, his fermentations were totally ended. He emerged mindfully from that attainment. On emerging mindfully from that attainment, he regarded the past qualities that had ceased & changed: 'So this is how these qualities, not having been, come into play. Having been, they vanish.' He remained unattracted & unrepelled with regard to those qualities, independent, detached, released, dissociated, with an awareness rid of barriers. He discerned that 'There is no further escape,' and pursuing it there really *wasn't* for him.

"If a person, rightly saying it of anyone, were to say, 'He has attained mastery & perfection in noble virtue... noble concentration... noble discernment... noble release,' he would be rightly saying it of Sariputta if he were to say: 'He has attained mastery & perfection in noble virtue... noble concentration... noble discernment... noble release.'

"If a person, rightly saying it of anyone, were to say, 'He is the Blessed One's son, his offspring — born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma, created by the Dhamma, his heir in the Dhamma, not his heir in material things,' he would be rightly saying it of Sariputta if he were to say: 'He is the Blessed One's son, his offspring — born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma, created by the Dhamma, his heir in the Dhamma, not his heir in material things.' Sariputta, monks, takes the unexcelled wheel of Dhamma set rolling by the Tathagata, and keeps it rolling rightly."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

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to analyze the mental qualities present and absent there until after he had left the attainment. The difference here is related to the point made in AN IX.36 that all the attainments up through the dimension of nothingness are “perception-attainments.” And that, “As far as the perception-attainments go, that is as far as gnosis-penetration goes. As for these two dimensions — the attainment of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception & the attainment of the cessation of feeling & perception — I tell you that they are to be rightly explained by those monks who are meditators, skilled in attaining, skilled in attaining & emerging, who have attained & emerged in dependence on them.”