"THE JHANAS IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM"
JHANAM — Meditation, Abstraction of the Mind

Trance-Samadhi

—P.G. Yogi

When told that it is unbefitting for one who has renounced the world to spend his life exhorting other men. The Buddha replied—

Whatever the apparent cause, Sakka, Whereby,
Man come to dwell together none doth fit,
The Wise Man’s case, compassion moves his mind,
And if, with spirit thus satisfied, he spends
His life instructing other men, yet be,
Thereby is nowise bound as by a Yoke.
Compassion moveth him and sympathy.

Samyutta-Nikaya— 1, 206.

Jana is a religious exercise productive of the highest spiritual advantage, leading after death to rebirth in one of the Brahma heavens, and forming the principal means of emergence into the four paths. The four Jhanas are four stages of mystic meditation, whereby the believer’s mind is purged from all earthly emotions, and detached as it were from the body, which remains plunged in a profound trance.

The priest desirous of practising Jhana retires to some secluded spot, seats himself cross-legged, and shutting out the world, concentrates his mind upon a simple thought. Gradually his soul becomes filled with a supernatural ecstasy and serenity, while his mind still remains upon and investigates the subject chosen for contemplation, this is the first Jhana, still fixing his thoughts upon the same subject, he then fixes his mind from reasoning and investigation, while the ecstasy and serenity remain, and this is the second Jhana. Next, his thoughts still fixed as before, he diverts himself of ecstasy, and attains the third Jhana, which is a state of tranquil serenity. Lastly, he passes to the fourth Jhana, in which the mind excited and purified, is indifferent to all emotions, alike of pleasure and of pain. The following is the full text of the four Jhanas: "|k' avaro bhikkhu vivoc eva kameke

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viveca akatsalahi dhammadhi savi sakkam savicaram vvekasam pisitsukham
pathamajjanam upasampajja viharati: vitakkavacanam upasama ajhatiam
samapadanim cetase ekodibhavan avicakam avicaram samudhijam pisitsukham
dutiyajjanam upasampajjam viharati;

They are summarised thus: vitakkavacara pisitsukhagargasahasitam pathama,
Pisitsukhagargasahasitam dutiyajjanam, sukhekaggatasahasitam tatiyajjanam, 
uphekhekkarga Sahitam catu tihaajjanam.

Each of the first three Jhanas is subdivided into three, the inferior, the
medial, and the perfect contemplation (Pathamajjanam Parittam, Pathama jhatam
mamgajhijanam, Pathama jhanam Pannam dutiyajjanam parittam, and so on).

Those who have exercised Jhana are reborn after death in one of the first
eleven Rupa Brahma heavens, the particular heaven being determined by the degree
of Jhana attained. Those who have only reached the initial contemplations of
the first Jhana are reborn in the Brahma partapajja heavens, the medial contemplations of
the same Jhana secures admission to the Brahmaupapajja heaven, while the per-
fected contemplation is an introduction to the Mahabrahma heaven. Thus the three
lowest rupabrahmalokas are peopled by those who have attained the first Jhanas.
The next three are peopled by those who have attained the second Jhana, the next
three by those who have attained the third Jhana, and the tenth and eleventh
(Vehapphala and Assamavaseta) by those who have attained the fourth Jhana. The
remaining five rupabrahmalokas are peopled by those who have entered the third
path—(Anagamin, see Dhani).

The attainments of the fourth Jhana gives the power of working miracles
(Siddhi) (Thag). Five Jhanas are frequently mentioned; they are thus summarised—
vitakkavacara pisitsukhagargasahastam pathamajjanam, vicarapitsukhagargasahastam
sahastam dutiyajjanam pisitsukhagargasahasitam tatiyajjanam, sukhekag-
gargasahastam catu tihaajjanam, uphekhekkargasahasitam panmamgajhanam.

It will be seen that they differ in an essential respect from the four Jhanas,
but are merely a more gradual attainment of the same mystic state, the original
second Jhana being separated into two stages— Parinibbajjane, one who has fallen
away from Jhana, that is who has been prematurely robbed from the state of
mental absorption while practising this rite (Dh 254)— Jhanabhinnam, supernatural power
or Siddhi obtained by the exercise of Jhana (Dh 116). Catuuparepana-kañjhanami,
the four and the fifth Jhanas (ALW 1.80) Jhanan nibbatthi to produce or enter
upon mystic meditation (Dh 254, Dh 67 Abhasthati's Wheel of the Law, 192-195,
and in Hardy's legends and theories of the Buddhàm 178-180, see Arammanam,
Brahmaloka, Kathān, Samapatti, Kammamabham) (SAMDHNA-Agreement, peace,
reconciliation, tranquility, self-concentration).
“Ab. 155, 858, Dh. 26, 44, 66, Dh. 311, Dh. 375, clamy”.

The word Samadhi, best rendered by concentration, is the most important term in the doctrine of meditation in Buddhism. It is one of the original terms used by the Buddha himself, for it occurs in his first Sermon. It is there used in the sense of “Samma Samadhi”,—Right concentration. Samadhi from the root “Sam-a-dha” “to put together”, “to concentrate”, refers to a certain state of mind. In a technical sense it signifies both the state of mind and the method designed to induce that state.

In the dialogue, (Majjhima Nikaya 30); between the sister Dhammadinna and the devota Visaka, Samadhi is discussed both as a state of mind and method of mental training. Visaka asked—“what is Samadhi?” the sister replied—“Samadhi is cittana ekaggata”

Literally one pointedness of mind. “What induce it?” The four applications of mindfulness (Satipathana), induce it. “What are its requisites?”, “What are the culture of it?" “Cultivation and development of these self-same principles—mindfulness and supreme efforts, are the culture of it”.

In this discussion Samadhi, as a mental state, is defined as “Cittana ekaggata”, and this appears to be the first definition of the term of the Sutta. In the Abhidhamma this definition is repeated and elaborated with a number of words that are very similar indeed almost synonymous. “Dhammacakkavatthu defines “Cittana ekaggata”, as follows—“Ya cittassa thim santhiti, avathiti, avishanho, avikkhepo, avisathata manassta, “Samatho, Samadhi-indriyam, Samadhibalam, Samma Samadhi”, (Dh. 10) which means “stability, steadiness and steadfastness of mind, absence of scattering and distraction, un-scattered mentality, tranquility, the faculty of and the power of concentration, Right concentration”. (Cf. p. 157). All these terms are united in the one general sense of Samadhi— that is “Cittana ekaggata”. Buddhaghoza there’s comment hereon says “Cittassu ekaggabhavo cittakkaggata, Samadissa etam nana”. “One pointedness of mind is cittakkaggata and it is the name of Samadhi”. (ASL. 118).

In this Visuddhimagga Buddhaghosa gives the same definition, but makes use of one more word. The special word which sheds more light upon the meaning is “Kusala-cittakkaggata, that is the say, one-pointedness of mind is the collected state of moral consciousness. In Arihali it is said “Kusala-samadhi”, concentration of moral consciousness.

In Buddhist teaching therefore, Samadhi is to be understood as a concentrated state of pure mind, a necessary preliminary to the spiritual progress towards Arhatship, or final deliverance. The outstanding characteristic of this state is the
absence of mental wandering and agitation and it is the dominant mental factor in
the process of the elimination of sensory impression of lower mind. The unifica-
tion of the state of mind that rises with it, is its essential function. Tranquility and
knowledge are its manifestation.

In its general characteristic it is described as twofold:— The concentration
or collectiveness of any kind of pure thoughts, and the concentration which is trans-
muted into the *Jhānic* or ecstatic state. The former implies collectiveness, in the
sense of concentration of mental process upon a single idea, which must always
be of a moral nature; the latter signifies the super-normal state of consciousness,
which has passed from the ordinary state to the state of *Jhāna* where there is no
discrimination between subject and object, and this is what is actually implied by
Samadhi in Buddhist meditation.

From the Buddhist psychological point of view Samadhi is regarded as the
positive and most active factor of the spiritually developed mind, for it must al-
ways include the virtues of morality, universal love, compassion, etc. and is asso-
ciated with the psychological principles of psychic powers and self-enlightenment.
Samadhi is therefore, opposed to all passive, inactive states of mind, which are
considered imical and capable of proving a hindrance to self-enlightenment. It
is only through the power of Samadhi that the mind becomes apt and ready to
work for higher knowledge and psychic powers; and cultivation of Samadhi is
therefore, an essential to the attainment of spiritual happiness and full knowledge.
Samadhi also implies the method, or system, of meditation which leads to a well
balanced, tranquil state of mind; and in this connection it is known as “Samadhi”
or Samatha-Bhavana which precedes *Vipassana*, the cultivation of insight.

The explanation given by the sister Dhammādāna, quoted above, refers to
the method of Samadhi as Bhavana of the cultivation of mindfulness and supreme
efforts, which are respectively the two principles of Right Effort and Right
Mindfulness in the eight fold path of which Right Samadhi-Concentration is the
culmination. When Right Effort, which means well directed mental and physical
energy, is cultivated with Right Mindfulness, well established Samadhi is the result:
For Right Effort supports Samadhi, in the exercise of meditation preventing it
from sinking into a state of mental passivity. Right Mindfulness fortifies the mind
with good qualities, and act as the guiding principle that keeps the mind alert and
steady in the Samadhi state, not permitting it to lapse into a subconscious condi-
tion. These two principles join forces to produce Right Concentration; and their
development embraces the whole field of meditation common to both systems,
Samadhi and Vipassana.

But when the term Samadhi is used with reference to the method, it must
be understood to mean the system of meditation that tends to Samadhi in the pre-
Atmanta stage, that is to say, the attainment of Vipassana. From what has been said it is clear that Samadhi means a state of mind which is to be developed by systematic training of mind. This training includes the habit of mental concentration, which results in spiritual progress experienced in and through the human organism, to a point at which self illumination supervenes.

Meditation has a very important place in Indian life. It is so because Moksha is the only ultimate objective of the lives of the Indian people. Moksha cannot be attained without meditation. Hence all the Indian philosophers have there distinct meditation systems. In the Buddhist stream mainly those are three meditation systems named as: “Theravada Naya”, “Puranmita Naya”, and “Maha Naya”. I would seek to explain here in the meditation system according to Sthavira Naya. In this Naya lots of comprehensive literature and various Acharya systems are available.

The subject of the aforementioned meditation is very serious, unique and comprehensive for knowing in its different minute aspects understanding them, and successful subjugation of the Caprice of self after realizing the constraints of its limitations, there is great need of meditation in each and every person’s life. I seriously feel a great need for this.

In my article, I have made an attempt to establish one aspect of “Sthavira Naya”. I just hope this article will create a spiritual air in the minds of those who have faith in this science. The AWAKENED ONE— THE BUDDHA SAID:

“Here, O Monks, a disciple has his mind pervade one quarter of the world with thoughts of unselfish joy, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole “With Metta”, wide world, above, below, around, everywhere and equally, he continues to pervade with a heart of unselfish joy, abundant, grown great, measureless, without hostility or ill-will.”