

19 PERFECT STILLNESS

29th June 2005

Today's talk is on the final factor of the Eightfold Path, which would be accurate to call the culmination of the Path, *sammā samādhi*. There is only one definition given by the Buddha of *sammā samādhi* and that is *jhāna*. The Perfect Teacher consistently and repeatedly explained the final factor of the Path as one or more of the four *jhānas*. Never, not even once, did the Buddha utter the words *khaṇika samādhi* (momentary concentration), *upacāra samādhi* (neighbourhood concentration) or *vipassanā jhānas*. These apocryphal terms were coined much later than the time of the Buddha. A disciple of the Buddha, one who faithfully follows his teachings, must of necessity repeat the Buddha's explanation that *sammā samādhi* means the four *jhānas*, only the four *jhānas*, and nothing but the four *jhānas*.

I maintain that the *jhānas* were rediscovered by Siddhattha Gotama for this age. They are crucial for the attainment of the Path. The only people who say that Enlightenment is possible without the *jhānas* are those who have never experienced a *jhāna*. If you have the experience of *jhānas* you know their power, importance, and value, which is why the eighth factor of the Eightfold Path is *sammā samādhi*. It's an important factor of the path.

However, because Buddhism has only recently come to Western countries, people are still struggling to understand the importance of the term *jhānas*. In past times they thought, 'Yeah, it sounds very good', but the names given to it, for example, 'absorptions', or 'right concentration', or 'trances' always missed the point. That is quite obvious when you achieve a state called an *uttarimanussadhamma*, a state beyond the normal human experience. It's the first real stage of transcendence. Scholars have a hard time understanding what that means, let alone understanding its importance to the Path. Giving it a good descriptive name may help people understand why they have misunderstood its meaning, let alone know the path to attain it as an experience.

The Way Out of *Samsāra*

These days I really shy away from calling *samādhi* ‘right concentration’. I’ve been calling it ‘right letting go’ for a long time now and this evening I’m going to give it another name, ‘perfect stillness’ or ‘right stillness’. The reason I say that is because it is the stillness of the mind that not only gives rise to *sammā samādhi*, the *jhānas*, but it’s also a beautiful description showing the way to get into these stages. It’s very important people experience these stages and discover how easy they are. If we give these stages the right name, a name that describes them at least with some of their important features, even if not perfectly, that will make it easier.

It becomes quite clear why some people, even some monks, do not attain those stages in their lifetimes, if they are trying to attain concentration. The very word concentration in the Western world means some ‘doing’, some force, or work. We are told at school to concentrate as if it is something that you do through an exercise of will. When we understand what *samādhi* is, what *jhāna* is, then we understand what a stupid idea that is. It goes in completely the opposite direction of what’s needed to gain *samādhi*.

The experience of *samādhi* shows you the way out of *saṃsāra*. It shows you what Enlightenment is. It shows you the doorway to the ‘deathless’. So it’s very apt to call the *jhānas* the doorway to the deathless. Yes, we practise all the factors of the Eightfold Path, but it is essential that they culminate in the *jhānas*. The *jhānas* are the doorway, and through them you get the insights and wisdom that carry you all the way to cessation. But first of all you have to attain those stages of stillness, the *jhānas* themselves.

When we investigate these states of stillness it becomes quite clear that every time we do something we are disturbing the mind. We’re disturbing the process and making it tremble; we’re making the mind wobble. We are doing exactly the thing that stops the attainment. That is why when we talk about these stages – the culmination of which is the stillness of the mind – it becomes quite evident and clear that the obstructions to the path and the obstacles to the *jhānas* arise because we are always getting involved, interfering, controlling, and managing, even by just having destinations or goals.

Have You Come Here to Die?

At one retreat that I gave recently I said, “Try and meditate without having a destination”. The people asked me what I meant by that. They said, “We can’t do that; we’ll fall asleep and the mind will just go all over the place.” I said, “Give it a go and see what happens, but be consistent throughout the whole meditation. For the whole nine days have no destination”.

If people have no destination they feel lost. Why do they feel lost? Because at last they have nothing to do and they can’t get into the ‘doing’ business. They can’t get a handle on something to aim for or to do, so it confounds the ‘doer’, it confounds the ‘controller’, and underneath all of that is the confounding of the sense of ‘self’. This is why the meditation seems so hard.

In the first year of my life at Wat Pah Pong, Ajahn Chah used to ask, “Have you come to Wat Pah Pong to die?” Obviously he didn’t mean physical death; he meant the death of the ‘self’. It was one of those constant refrains that you hear in any monastery. You’ll also notice that with me: I’ve got phases and fashions I go through, little teachings which are repeated over and over again for about three or four months, and then they change and I get into another fashion. I will go back to that teaching after a few years and repeat these old things – they are all still valid – but I put them into a different perspective.

“Have you come here to die?” That’s what it feels like when you start meditating properly. There is something inside you that dies or comes close to death. That’s the aspect of the ‘self’ called the ‘doer’, the ‘maker’, the active participant in life that always wants to manage, to work things out, so that you can describe it to yourself or tell your friends. Even the will to know, to understand, is part of this ‘doer’ business. That’s why it gives rise to doubt.

Each one of the hindrances keeps the mind active and stops it from being still enough to see that the five hindrances are all about doing something. Obviously the first hindrance of sensory desire, craving, wanting something, is all about going to some sort of destination, someplace you want to get to. Aversion, the second hindrance is

about not wanting to be here in the first place, and that creates ‘doing’. It’s being averse to this moment, to the wandering mind – being averse to anything. ‘I don’t want to be here, I want to be somewhere else.’ The third hindrance, sloth and torpor, is the result of doing too much. You’ve burnt out the mind. You’re just too tired, and the mind has no energy because it’s all been wasted in doing things. When people start ‘doing’, when they start struggling and striving to get out of sloth and torpor, it’s just more doing and it stirs up the mind. I’m sure you think you’ve got to stir the mind up to become alert again. But you don’t really stir up the mindfulness, instead you stir up more craving. Sure, that brightens up the mind and you don’t have sloth and torpor, but you have restlessness instead.

In a previous talk I said it was a great insight for me to see that I was always oscillating between sloth and torpor and restlessness. I’d be slothful in the morning because Thailand is such a hot country for a Western monk. The food was terrible and there was no nutrition in it. No wonder we had low energy levels; it was a physical problem. At three o’clock in the early morning when we had to get up we hadn’t had enough sleep and we didn’t get enough nutrition. We were hot and sticky, not used to that environment at all. Physically, of course we were tired. So, what did I do? I struggled to get through that tiredness: ‘Come on Brahm, get your act together! Be more mindful’. And because I was controlling and managing and forcing, yes, I would break through the sloth and torpor, but then I would be restless thinking about all sorts of things. I was oscillating between the two. When I got restless I’d calm down, stop the thoughts, and then I’d just go into dullness again. Some of you may recognize that oscillation between dullness and restlessness.

This oscillating between those two hindrances all comes from ‘doing’, from trying to control. That’s the reason I’ve had incredible success on meditation retreats when I tell people, “If you feel sleepy go and rest”. They say, “Oh, but I should fight my sloth and torpor. I can’t go and rest. That’s being lazy”. I say, “Listen, go and rest”, and because Malaysians and Singaporeans are quite faithful and have a lot of trust in me they do that, and they always get good meditations afterwards. They usually only rest in the first few days and afterwards they have all this energy.

At the last retreat I taught in Ipoh we had some incredible results. One lady, who was already sitting for four, five, or six hours at a time, sat for eight and a half hours on the last day. It was just so easy, she had so much stillness that she didn't want to move. That was because she had stopped 'doing things'. She had stopped making the mind move. Stillness was her goal, not, seeing *nimmittas* or holding on to the breath, not attaining *jhānas* or Enlightenment. She had a meditation that had no destination. The aim is not getting somewhere, it's being here. *Being here and being still.*

The last of the hindrances is doubt, always 'wanting to know'. That is just another 'doing'. Knowledge is almost like control: measuring is how we find out where we are in life. And that 'doing', measuring, and 'wanting to know', makes the mind move. Be quiet! You'll *know* later on. Don't interrupt the lecture; just wait and don't do anything. This is the path of *samādhi*.

Māra I Know You

When you don't do anything you're not feeding the hindrances. This is where mindfulness should be used in your meditation. It doesn't matter what you are experiencing – you may even be thinking of sex – the point is to make sure you don't do anything. Don't get upset. Don't encourage it. Don't get into aversion. In fact don't get into anything at all. If you put peace into this letting go by putting stillness between you and whatever you are experiencing, things start to slow down and stop. It's the hindrances that are the problem, not what they have created. It's the creating power of these hindrances that causes more suffering and a lack of stillness for you.

So, if you put your mind in the right spot and watch the play of the hindrances – the doing, craving, wanting, the trying to get rid of things, the talking to yourself the trying to understand things, and then getting sleepy and upset about it – you can see where the five hindrances live. You find their playground, their home. Once you see where they are playing around, you can knock them to bits very easily. You can kick their arse! When you do that to those five hindrances they hurt and they stop. You kick them by telling them, 'Shush, I'm not going to do anything. I'm just going to watch'. Do you remember how the Buddha and the great monks defeated Māra? They didn't get Māra and kick him. They just said, "Māra I know you"! They saw

where Māra was playing. They saw the area that is just between you and the object you're watching now, the area where the hindrances and the defilements live, and they said, "No". They were just still, without 'doing' anything.

Look at the metaphor of having a destination. Consider how long in your life you have been trying to get somewhere. We've all had these destinations, these goals. It's only a few weeks now until the Rains Retreat begins. How many of you are trying to get things out of the way so that you are ready for the Retreat, trying to get your projects finished and all of your letters written? How many of you have goals and are thinking, 'When I've got all of this done, then I can stop'. But what happens as soon as the Rains Retreat starts? You have another goal: 'Now I am going to get some *jhānas*', 'I've got to do this exercise', 'I've got to write this book', 'I'm going to read that book.' Always setting goals – when you've got goals you've got something to 'do'. Isn't it amazing?

If you put yourself into a hut and say, "I've got nothing to do, absolutely nothing. All those letters I am supposed to write, who cares? I'll put them in the bin and burn them all. I'm doing absolutely nothing, having no goals, no destinations. I'm not just saying this, I'm doing it. I'm not reading any books and I'm not going to write any letters so that I can 'do' *samādhi*". You're missing the point again!

This sense of self, this delusion, is so sneaky that most of the time we let go of one thing, only to do something else. We are always striving to go somewhere, always active, always doing something and because of that we are missing the path to *samādhi*.

Sometimes you sit in your hut and that's good enough. Whatever happens next who cares? You think, 'I'm just going to be aware of what's happening now and do absolutely nothing about it.' Even if your hut is a mess, sit there and do nothing about it. Even if your mind is a mess do nothing about it. Just do nothing. If you understand what I mean by this you're 'making' incredible peace. You're 'making' stillness, and after a while when you attain the *jhānas* you understand what the whole

process is about. You also understand why people don't get *jhānas*, why they don't even get into deep states of meditation, and why they don't even watch the breath.

You should know from the Anattalakkhana Sutta that if the five *khandhas* were 'me', if they belonged to me, if they were a self, I would be able to tell these five *khandhas*, 'Oh, may my body be so; oh, may my *vedanā* just be the *pīṭisukha* of deep meditation; oh, may my perception be of the light of *nimmittas*; oh, may my *saṅkhāras* be still; oh, may my consciousness of the five senses disappear and may I only have the consciousness of the mind; oh, may I get the *jhānas* and become Enlightened'. The Buddha said you can't do that, it's impossible. So can't we understand what the Buddha is saying and stop it?

That's actually what the Buddha said, "Stop it; stop it!" Monks, stop it. Lay people and visitors stop it. Stop doing things, stop going places, and trying to achieve things. If one really stops all this running around one sees the meaning of *saṃsāra*. *Saṃsāra* is the perpetual wandering, the perpetual moving, the perpetual journey. Always walking on and thinking that when you get to the next step or the next goal, you will be able to rest there and do nothing for evermore. But that journey is endless. You are always going somewhere, walking, travelling, and trying to get somewhere. That's not been just in this life, it's been going on for countless lifetimes, and you've never ever stopped. There is an old English phrase, 'In the journey of life, please remember to stop and smell the roses'. What I mean by that is in your lifetime please stop and smell the *jhānas*. That is what happens when you stop. You smell the four-petalled *jhānas*: the first, second, third and fourth *jhāna* because you have stopped trying.

Many meditators have told me that because they have taken this advice to stop – which goes against the grain – and have actually given up, let go, and abandoned everything, they get into the deep states of meditation. It works. It's true! This is how I meditate. I sit down and I don't do anything. All my mindfulness is directed to making sure I don't forget and start doing things. That's the nature of the delusory self. The thing we are trying to uncover and see is a fallacy. Whenever you think you exist, or assume you exist and perceive that 'self', that is the cause of doing things.

When the ‘me’ illusion is active we always interfere with things: that’s what the ‘self’ does, that’s a ‘me’ – its function is to interfere. That is why this sense of ‘non-doing’, of stillness, goes against the grain. It goes against the grain of what the ‘self’, what the illusion, really wants.

Give Up Hope

The ‘self’ is that which controls the whole purpose of being. To be is to do. You have got to do something otherwise you feel that you are dying. In the last retreat some people who experienced *samādhi* said they thought they were dying and they were afraid. So I said, “Well done, die some more”. It’s fun dying. You die to the body and the body disappears. Die to the five senses and you can’t hear or see anything. It’s as if you were a dead corpse. You die to the will, to everything. Imagine what we are saying here. When there is no will the body is not moving. It’s not reacting any more. You poke it and it doesn’t respond. If you were in a *jhāna* and someone opened your eye lids and shone a light into your eye it wouldn’t respond. You’re dying to the world. That’s what Ajahn Chah meant when he asked, “Have you come here to die?” When the ‘doer’ dies so does a large part of consciousness, temporarily. That’s what stillness means. That which moves the world has now temporarily gone. Lots of things have disappeared and you’ve died. If anyone remembers their past lives, that is what it is like to die. It is so similar to the dying process. After the pain and the trouble of the dying process the five senses disappear, just as the five senses disappear in deep meditation.

With the death experience you still have a little bit of will left; that’s the problem. If you can let that go you get into the *jhāna* realms. That ‘doing’ is what keeps you active and stops you from being reborn into the *jhāna* realms or even going to *Nibbāna*. There are a lot of similarities. So once one understands what stillness is, what the defilements are, and what the hindrances are, it should become obvious how to get into *jhānas*.

Don’t try and sit through pain. That’s doing something again. That’s just some sort of attainment, some sort of Brownie badge, or Scout badge that you can put on. “There, I’ve sat through pain!” We are not here to get attainments. We are here to let

go of everything. Letting go is what some people call attainments, but in truth, in reality, it's a non-attainment. You haven't done anything. You have stopped doing anything. You wonder why people praise you for these things. You haven't done anything. It's true! If you get into a *jhāna* you haven't done anything. That's what makes it so beautiful and wonderful. You are going in completely the opposite direction to what is supposed to be praised in the world, that is, getting attainments or getting medals.

You don't deserve any medals. You don't deserve any praise because you've attained these states due to 'selflessness'. So, if you want to attain those *jhānas*, do nothing. If you want to do 'nothing' give up your sense of 'self'. Give up your pride. Give up your ego. Die to your 'self' and completely abandon everything. Be someone who has no destination.

Christianity gets it wrong when it says that on the doors of Hell there is a big sign saying 'GIVE UP HOPE ALL WHO ENTER HERE'. In meditation 'GIVE UP HOPE', and you will have everything you ever wanted: joy, bliss, happiness, and so much stillness. It's in the stillness that you experience the power of *samādhi*. You may not have got into *jhānas* yet, but those who have experienced deep meditation states, notice the stillness in them. The more still you are the less the mind moves and the more happiness you have. The more peace you have, the more power the mind has. You can feel this is going in the correct direction.

Perhaps that was one of the reasons I was able to develop deep *samādhi*, because even the first time that I meditated I felt that something there was right. The peace was becoming still and things stopped moving; I felt that I was on the correct path. Fortunately I had good teachers who even in those early days encouraged me in that way to stillness. So, don't do anything. Just see how much you can not do. Catch any movement of the mind that might try to do something or get somewhere.

You are sitting down, and you are on a journey of life. You are not moving and you are not looking forward to any destination. You are not holding anything from the past. You are practising a 'no destination' meditation. 'This is absolutely good

enough, and so I don't want to move.' You build stillness upon stillness upon stillness, always seeing the cause of any vibration or trembling in the mind. Anything that stops the mind settling into this deep meditation is all coming from the illusion of 'self'. You want to get *jhānas* because you think that is going to make you a better monk. That's an ego trip again. 'You' want to get Enlightenment. Its ego again. 'I'm Enlightened!' 'I'm an *Ariyan!*' 'I've got the *jhāna* what have you got?' 'You've only got second *jhāna*, I got that years ago. I've attained third *jhāna!*' All that sort of stuff that sometimes comes up is ego. That is the reason we don't start shouting out our attainments in public, because it doesn't make sense. They have nothing to do with an ego or a 'self'. Ego is the complete opposite of these attainments. Who's attaining these things? No one is. It's just a disappearing from *samsāra*, a stillness, a vanishing. The whole Eightfold Path is a vanishing act. You are disappearing more and more and more.

How can you disappear by being still? Haven't you ever noticed that when things are still they disappear? When your body is still it soon vanishes from your consciousness. Consciousness is called *viññāṇa* in Pāli because it discriminates. The prefix *Vi* implies it's two, the same as the Latin word *bi*. It means 'two things': *an object has to move both backwards and forwards for consciousness to know it*. Consciousness needs something to compare with, and anything that is perfectly still eventually stops consciousness. That's why consciousness can only know movement and change. *Samsāra* is *anicca*, impermanent, but when *anicca* stops, *Nibbāna* or cessation is *nicca*, which is permanent. When things stop nothing moves; there is stability. So, the path into this meditation is to sit there and not do anything.

Many monks know that when they start to develop *jhānas* they tend to force the mind. First of all they try and sit for long periods of time. They strive and strive to watch their breath. But all monks know that at the very end they have to start letting go and stop 'doing'. In fact it's even better to stop earlier, from the very beginning, instead of wasting time. That's what experience has taught me. Years ago I'd meditate and really watch the breath, really force my mind onto the breath and then when I had the breath I would let go. I eventually realized that I was wasting too much time. Now I let go straight away when I first sit down, not doing anything, just making peace with

the moment. It doesn't matter what I am experiencing, what thought is in my mind, what sound is around me. As Ajahn Chah famously said, 'It's not the sound that disturbs you, you disturb the sound'. It's not the thoughts that disturb you, you disturb the thoughts. It's not the pain that disturbs you, you disturb the pain. It's not the five senses that disturb you, you disturb the five senses. It's not even the hindrances that disturb you – they're old *kamma*, once you see them – it's you who disturb the hindrances. You make the hindrances grow and give them power. If you say, "Five hindrances, I know you", you don't disturb them. Just say, "I know you. I see you. I'm not going to do anything. I'm not going to move because of you". Then the mind doesn't move and the mind starts to slow down and stop. It's a wonderful process just to sit there and watch.

You have all these thoughts because you have responsibilities and perhaps you have been talking too much, so just sit down and stop. First of all the past and the future disappears because you have stopped in time. That means there are no minutes, hours, days, or years. Is it morning or afternoon? Who cares! Stop the clock with 'present moment awareness'. All those thoughts in the mind, just leave them alone, and in a few minutes they stop. Understand where the thoughts come from: you are prodding the mind, poking it, making it move. And those thoughts are what a moving mind sounds like. It's as if you're wearing one of those plastic anoraks. When you move it sort of rustles. That's what you do with the mind: there is a sort of rustling in the mind. It's because you are moving it. If you shake a tree you hear all the leaves and twigs moving. All these thoughts are the result of shaking the mind. If you leave the tree alone it will be absolutely still. It doesn't make any noise at all. That's what happens with the mind. You just stop: don't do anything and the thoughts slow down completely. They finish and vanish. If you try to stop the thinking by 'doing' it just goes on and on forever.

The Stages of Stopping

So, those of you who have been trying to stop the mind thinking, please understand your fault. Stop trying to do anything. Stop 'doing'; just watch, make peace, let go, and practise contentment. That's good enough. Don't even think, 'I must stop', because that's more 'doing'. Just understand what stopping means and stop. When you stop, the thoughts go. Sometimes I don't even need the breath anymore. The

vehicle of the breath just stops. The five senses stop and I get straight to the *nimmittas*. Sometimes I go through the breath but the breath comes up anyway. I don't do anything; I don't make the breath happen. I don't look for the next stage of meditation, and I don't try and watch the breath or put it in one particular place or make it this way or that way. It comes up by itself. You watch but you are not doing anything.

In order to allow the five physical senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching to disappear in breath meditation, you take one of them, and then only a part of one of them, for example the sense of the physical touch of the breath, and you ignore all the others so that they can disappear. When the breath is the only part of the five senses that you have left, allow that to disappear too. The breath is like a halfway house between the five senses and no senses: we just have a little bit of one of the senses. It's only a method, a means of practise, and all other types of meditation are the same. It's just a way of turning off the five senses, a way of stopping them. The way you stop is by not looking, listening, feeling, or doing anything. After a while you stop scratching and you stop moving. The body disappears; it's finished. When it's gone the *nimmittas* come up. And what do some meditators do when *nimmittas* come? 'Ah, that's the *nimmitta*. Now I can really get it together. I can make them expand.' For goodness sake leave them alone! You've come so far; don't spoil it now. Stop completely. Don't say anything, just watch.

A *nimmitta* may seem like a big deal: it's so powerful; it's the biggest bliss in the world. So what! Big deal! It's not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self'. It's nothing to do with me. It's just a phenomenon in life that comes and goes. So don't get attached to it; don't get involved with it. When you don't get attached and involved with it, you don't interfere with it. Non-interference means stopping, not doing anything. So, when these *nimmittas* come up, please don't do anything. Please remember to look between you and the *nimmitta*. See what's going on there; make sure you don't spoil the whole process that's come up. Because things have disappeared and you've stopped, your mind is still. If the *nimmitta* is moving around, it means that you are moving around. The *nimmitta* is a reflection of your mind. If your mind is still

moving up and down, the *nimmitta* is also moving. So be still, don't do anything. Don't spoil the stillness.

Doing nothing works almost like friction. It's stopping all the movement by becoming slower and slower, more and more still. It's like Ajahn Chah's famous leaf on a tree simile. When the wind stops the leaf keeps on moving but less and less and less. So, don't go blowing on that *nimmitta* and, using that simile, don't do anything. Leave it alone for goodness sake! *Don't even make an effort to leave it alone, that's more 'doing'.*

Please understand what stillness is: it's a *complete* letting go. Understand that it's nothing to do with you: it's not a self and it's not under your control – it's non-self. Because you do nothing, the *nimmitta* stops moving. It stays there. You don't have to start thinking, 'ah, now I can go into *jhānas*'. Stop it! Stillness is like the simile of the magnifying glass and the sun. If the magnifying glass moves backwards and forwards the focus never becomes still enough to light a fire. If your *nimmitta* is still, it will grow by itself. If you do nothing, leaving things completely alone, if the mind doesn't interfere or go anywhere, if the mind is completely at peace – not looking for a destination and being as still as a statue – the *nimmitta* will come and it will grow by itself. It will get brighter and brighter and more and more powerful, because the energy is going into the mind. And then the *jhānas* happen, and wonderful states of happiness arise. The thing that has really been stilled is the 'doer', the sense of activity.

The full stilling of the 'doer' begins in first *jhāna*. But on one sense the first *jhāna* shouldn't be called a *jhāna*, because there is still a wobble there, *vitakka vicāra*, the movement of the mind onto the object and the holding onto the object. However, it is so close it deserves to be a *jhāna*.

The second *jhāna* is when it really all happens: full *samādhi*, the perfection of *samādhi*. When the 'doer' has completely gone there is no potential to move. That's a great way of describing it. Not just 'no doing', but no potential to do, no potential to move. Now you really are stuck in stillness. You've stopped! What does 'you've

stopped' mean? It means you can't move; you can't interfere any more. All your powers of interference and involvement are completely removed from you. You have been disempowered. Of course that very prospect is very scary because in that experience you've lost a lot of your sense of self. You are actually experiencing *anattā*. *Anattā* is the emptiness of the 'self', and you understand what that means, it means that 'will', *sañkhāra*, is nothing to do with a being, it's nothing to do with me. *Avijjā paccayā sañkhāra*: it's delusion that creates the *kamma* formations, the doing business. And that doing business in turn creates consciousness. Conscious activity keeps the five bodily senses and the sixth sense of the mind going. That is standard Dependent Origination. When delusion I being uprooted, the *kamma* formations are stopping and consciousness is disappearing. It's fading in front of your attention.

When things stop it's amazing how much disappears. The *jhānas* are like a machine stopping. Craving stops and the five hindrances all stop. These *jhānas* are stages of stopping – right stopping, right stillness. So instead of calling it letting go, because that's been a bit overused now, we can call it stopping, finishing, not moving anymore. If you do that you'll see the whole stupidity of the journey of *saṃsāra*, always going somewhere, trying to get somewhere, or achieve something, thinking, 'if I do this, I'll get that'. It's all craving and attachment business.

You can see that happening in people's lives. They are working so hard to pay off their mortgages, so that once they've payed off their mortgages, they can build a bigger house and have another mortgage. They call it investment. It's not investment, it's stupidity. It's all 'doing', and it just creates this world of *saṃsāra*, of constant wandering. Ajahn Chah used to say – I think it is also in the Saṃyutta Nikāya – that the dog with mange is always running, thinking, 'If I get into the forest then the mange will go'. It doesn't go and then it thinks, 'If I go into the city it will go'. It doesn't go. I thinks, 'If I go into the water it will go', but the mange is still there. You think, 'If I ordain as a novice then my itch will go'. It doesn't go. 'If I get into *jhānas* then it will go', but you never get into *jhānas* that way. The itch is what stops you. That itch is called craving and that craving is always wanting and desiring. It moves you, and that movement of the mind is what prevents the stopping of the mind.

So, look upon your life as a journey. When you sit down and meditate, stop going anywhere, have no destination, nothing to prove, no more Brownie badges, no more things you want to get, no wanting at all, complete letting go, making stillness your only goal. Say to your self, “I will be still. I am still!” You’ll be afraid because it is a complete letting go of control. Giving up and abandoning this ‘doer’, this ‘controller’ inside, is like dying. You become as still as death and things do die. Allow that to happen and don’t interfere, completely abandon everything. Allow stillness to grow and grow and grow.

Take away the wind of craving and the leaf gets more and more still. Keep on being still and that stillness grows so incredibly still, so motionless that the whole world seems to be trembling, seems to be like an anthill, or in chaos moving backwards and forwards like a chicken with it’s head cut off. Inside, you are absolutely still. The sense of ‘self’ is dying. The sense of ‘self’ is disappearing. The ‘doer’ has stopped, and after awhile all the stages of meditation that I’ve often described just happen. You don’t make it happen. You just sit and watch, and all the stages come up one after the other in their right sequence, until you stop completely. If that stopping continues for long enough you enter the *jhāna* realms.

Even from *jhāna* to *jhāna* things disappear. The difference between the first and second stage of *jhāna* is the stopping of the movement of the mind onto the bliss and the holding onto that bliss. That last little bit of ‘doing’ is almost like an echo of what was there before. You only notice that when you have been in the first *jhāna* many, many times and can compare it to the second *jhāna*. Once you are out of the *jhāna* it becomes obvious what those two different *jhānas* were. You can see everything stopping. Even the bliss and ecstasy stop as you move from the second *jhāna* through the third *jhāna*, to the fourth *jhāna*.

Things are stopping and just disappearing, flaking off you like the snake giving up its skin, only in this case within the skin there is nothing left, and you go to the immaterial attainments. These are just more states of stopping; the mind is stopping, ‘knowing’ is stopping. It’s an incredible experience to see consciousness just unravel

and completely stop and to see the incredible powerful emptiness inside. Nothing is left. This is what *samādhi* is, and this is how you get into those incredible states of stillness called *samādhi*.

When you understand what *jhānas* are you understand why *khaṇika samādhi* is just complete, absolute nonsense. *Khaṇika* means momentary or temporary. You can't have momentary stillness. If it only lasts for a moment it is not still. That's why when people say they go into *jhāna* for ten minutes, I say, "Come off it, that's not possible!" You are so still in these states of deep meditation that you can't move for hours sometimes. You are stuck there like the lady on the retreat in Ipoh, eight and a half hours in *samādhi*. I knew she was doing a lot of meditation. I checked up on her after I had my meal, and she was sitting in the hall completely relaxed, not moving. She hadn't changed for hours, couldn't change for hours. She was just like a statue. This is what happens in *jhāna*: the mind and the body become so still. This is called *samādhi*. The more still you are the deeper that *samādhi* is. So, if that is what *samādhi* is, can you understand now that any type of 'doing' whatsoever – any interfering, poking, or prodding is just shaking up what you should be leaving alone? You know now what the problem is. Don't shake your mind, don't rock it. Leave it alone. Allow stillness to build up powerfully, and you too will experience those huge long sits, hour after hour after hour. So what's the point of all this? The point of all this is that from all that stillness you understand and see through the 'sense of self'; you understand *anattā*.

The Flame of *Jhānas*

The most powerful insight of Buddhism is to see that there is no one in here. Sure, I say there are two halves to the sense of self, the 'doer' and the 'knower', but really it is the 'doer' that feeds the 'knower'. Because we are doing things consciousness keeps on going. It is *saṅkhāra* that creates the consciousness. So when you actually stop that part of the mind, the active/reactive, craving part of the mind, the other one is fatally flawed as well: consciousness can't survive long. This is why consciousness starts to die in the *jhānas* and also why you go through those *jhānas* and immaterial attainments naturally. It's just consciousness stopping. It is practically imperceptible in 'neither perception nor non-perception', and then finally goes into

Nirodha. *Nirodha* means cessation, the stopping of things: the complete stopping of time, consciousness, and all that is perceived and felt. *Saññāvedayitanirodha*: all that is perceived and felt has completely ceased, there is nothing left. That is actually experienced. So when you come out of that state, there is no argument anymore. There is no misunderstanding about what the Buddha was talking about. Nor is there any doubt anymore about the path into *samādhi*, its importance, and its necessity.

It's essential to at least experience a first *jhāna* and to actually see things stopping; because if you can't stop that much, how on earth do you think you can understand what this 'doer' business is and what the 'self' is? If you haven't uncovered it yet, it means you haven't got close enough, and you haven't actually seen the process yet. You are still a 'doer'. Anyone who hasn't got into a *jhāna* is still a 'doer', just a controller, still on the journey. They haven't stopped, nor have they reached any destination. They are just into *samsāra*, wandering around – if not in the world then from monastery to monastery – wandering around in their minds from thought to thought, idea to idea, concept to concept, goal to goal, destination to destination.

There is never an end to destinations, never an end to goals, so just stop the whole lot in one go. Stop, give up, and abandon, and then you'll understand what *jhāna* is. You'll understand why it's called *sammā samādhi* – right, correct, perfect stopping. You'll understand why we practise renunciation, why we have all these precepts, why we let go of possessions, and why we stop doing things. You understand why we have huts in this monastery and why we try and make this monastery so that there are very few jobs and duties. If the whole thing falls apart you do nothing: be a person who completely stops. If you can be a 'stopper' in this meditation then you can get into *jhānas*. I far prefer that to having the most beautiful huts and beds and sewing rooms and all that sort of stuff. We need more *Ariyas* in this world, not more *kuṭīs* (monks huts). We need more Stream Winners, Once Returners, Non Returners, and *Arahants*. We need more *jhāna* attainers, not more brooms.

Get the priorities right. We have all this time in the monastery, so just sit down and stop. Once you get the hang of it, it is the easiest thing in the world to do – sit down and stop. Don't try to get all those other things out of the way first of all, stop first.

There is no end of things to get out of the way. You will die before you get all your jobs and projects out of the way. Look at this monastery. This monastery has been going for twenty-one years and it's still not finished. It never will be. There will always be something to do here, so don't think, 'oh, once I get this monastery correct, once I learn this chant, once I understand the Vinaya, or once I've learned the Pātimokkha, then I'll meditate'. Don't waste time; just stop now! When you sit here, stop. Just sit here and watch and all these amazing things happen. That's the way to get into *jhānas* – not by trying to get there, not by doing things. Understand that 'doing' prevents stillness building up. By stopping, stillness arrives and grows like a fire, like a flame.

When stillness really takes off it's the flame of *jhānas*. The mind is so still it generates incredible states of mind and gives you all the necessary data you need. You understand you got there by stopping the 'doing' – no craving, no *saṅkhāras*. Things have disappeared and consciousness is peaceful. This is bliss. All this rushing around that I have been doing, all this wanting and craving, that was the wrong way. You get the message at last about what renunciation truly is and why people are monks and nuns. When you get that message, then you are sweet for the rest of this life.

You know what *jhānas* are. You know how to give up craving and how to stop the cycle of *saṃsāra* with right stillness. When you get that still, the whole universe stops. You are on the way out of *saṃsāra*. This is why we call it *sammā samādhi*, perfect stillness.