

Should we come out of *Jhāna* to practice *Vipassanā*?

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Coming out of *Jhāna* to practice *Vipassanā*:

Can *Jhānic* concentration penetrate things as they really are? Do we have to come out of *Jhāna* in order to practice *Vipassanā*? Is concentration the same as absorption? If *Jhānic* concentration is the same as being absorbed by our object of focus then yes, we must leave *Jhāna* to practice *Vipassanā*. But, when we become absorbed into our object of focus, what we are practicing is “wrong” *Jhāna*. When we practice “right” *Jhāna* we will be able to see things as they really are.

When we read how the Buddha used his own fourth *Jhānic* concentration, as described in many Suttas, we have no reason to believe that he came out of *Jhāna* to develop the three kinds of knowledge—knowledge of seeing the past, knowledge of seeing beings dying and taking rebirth, and knowledge of the destruction of defilements. The Buddha used the fourth *Jhāna* for *Vipassanā*.

Using the English word “absorption” to denote the deep concentration in the *Jhāna* is very misleading. There are many mental factors in any *Jhāna* and the meditator is quite aware of them. When you are aware of these mental factors you are not absorbed into them, but conscious of them or mindful of them. If you are absorbed in the subject you will not understand, nor remember anything.

In this paper we will also consider the question of whether it is best to come out of *Jhāna* to reflect upon the impermanence, suffering, and selflessness of *Jhānic* factors or to continue into higher *Jhānas*.

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

It is virtually impossible to find evidence in the Suttas that one should come out of *Jhāna* to practice *Vipassanā*. There are a number of passages repeated in many Suttas

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dealing with the four fine material *Jhānas*. Nowhere in any of these passages is it said that one should come out of *Jhāna* to gain the three kinds of knowledge—knowledge of seeing previous lives, knowledge of beings dying and taking rebirth according to their karmas, and knowledge of the destruction of defilements.

Consolidation of factors:

Right concentration is the unification and consolidation of all the wholesome mental factors into one harmonious balance. In fact all the thirty-seven mental factors of enlightenment (the four foundations of mindfulness, the fourfold right efforts, the four roads to power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, the noble eightfold path) are consolidated in right concentration. The factors that work together as a team are: confidence, effort, mindfulness, wisdom, friendliness, compassion, joy, happiness, concentration, contact, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness, desire, decision, equanimity, attention, letting go of greed, the seven factors of enlightenment and the factors of the noble eightfold path. Each of them supports one another thus maintaining the delicate balance of all.

When the aforementioned factors are working together in perfect balance the mind has full control of them for as long as the mind is in that state. While the conscious mind maintains the delicate balance of these factors the opposite factors are also working to get in and disturb the balance. They are working in the background. If they invade the mind you lose the *Jhāna*.

Concentration and Light

The Buddha said that the range of his vision of light and form depended on concentration.

“On the occasion when concentration is limited, my vision is limited, and with limited vision I perceive limited light and limited forms. But on the occasion when concentration is immeasurable, my vision is immeasurable, and with immeasurable vision I perceive immeasurable light and see immeasurable forms, even for a whole night or a whole day or a whole day and night.”¹

Only when the mind is cultivated (*cittabhāvanā*) does the luminous mind shine brightly. This statement clearly expresses that when the Buddha was in *Jhāna* he had the light and vision of the luminous mind. As soon as he lost this *Jhāna* he also lost the light

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and vision. Having considered the reason for this disappearance, he found that when one of the imperfections arose in his mind concentration fell away. When concentration fell away he lost the light and vision. He would then practice mindfulness until he had regained the concentration, vision and light. When he lost concentration again, he would also, once again, lose the light and vision. When he reflected on the reason this had happened he realized that another mental imperfection had arisen in him. He would then start mindfulness practice again and regain concentration, vision, and light. This is unmistakable evidence that mindfulness must be present in concentration in order to understand and recover from lost concentration.

When there is bright light our vision is clear and we can see things as they really are. When we come out of *Jhāna*, we lose this vision and clarity of mind.

Just as gold loses its luminosity and is corrupted by five things: iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver, so, too, the mind loses its luminosity because of the five hindrances.² When the hindrances appear, *Jhāna* is lost.

The belief that one must come out of *Jhāna* to gain supernormal knowledge (*abhiññās*) or to destroy defilements and attain enlightenment is based on an assumption that the concentrated mind becomes one with the object of meditation and is absorbed into that object. For this reason some people translate *Jhāna* or *samādhi* as absorption concentration. If the mind is absorbed into the object then the mind is paralyzed and incapable of doing anything.

This may be true when the *Jhāna* is gained without mindfulness. This is what happened to the teachers of the Bodhisatta Gotama. They were stuck in *Jhāna* but they thought that they had attained enlightenment. This cannot happen when you practice *Jhāna* with mindfulness. When we attain right *Jhāna*, our mindfulness is pure, our equanimity is strong, our concentration is strong and our attention is sharp. Right concentration³ consolidates all the mental factors that the Buddha has listed in the *Anupada Sutta*⁴. Concentration is one of the factors present in right *Jhāna*. You are fully aware, without words or concepts, of the subtlest impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness that takes place in this state of *samādhi*. These are your direct experience, not philosophical or logical thoughts. You know that you are in *Jhāna*, but you don't say, "Ah! I am in *Jhāna*."

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If you are not aware of consciousness, mindfulness, attention, and concentration then you are in deep sleep. This is the state you go through when you are under an anesthetic. We struggle to attain concentration not to get into this kind of deep sleep and forget ourselves. We strive very hard to gain concentration to become fully aware of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of the body, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations and consciousness.

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

The *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*⁵ says this, about attaining *Jhānas*, “Having reached the first *Jhāna*, he remains in it. And whatever sensations of lust that he previously had disappear. At that time there is present a true but subtle perception of delight and happiness, born of detachment, and he becomes one who is conscious of this delight and happiness. In this way some perceptions arise through training, and some pass away through training.”

“Again, a monk, with the subsiding of thinking and pondering, by gaining inner tranquility and unity of mind, reaches and remains in the second *Jhāna*, which is free from thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and happiness. His former true but subtle perception of delight and happiness born of detachment vanishes. At that time there arises a true but subtle perception of delight and happiness, born of concentration, and he becomes one who is conscious of this delight and happiness. In this way some perceptions arise through training, and some pass away through training.”⁶ This final statement is repeated for the other *Jhānas*.

Praising Venerable Sāriputta’s perfection in noble virtue, noble concentration, noble wisdom, and noble deliverance the Buddha explained how venerable Sāriputta was able to use his concentrated mind to know everything that happened when he was in *Jhānas*. Venerable Sāriputta knew the arising, presence and passing away of all mental states from the first *Jhāna* up through the base of nothingness.

The mental states he found in the first *Jhāna* were: “applied thought, sustained thought, rapture, pleasure, and unification of mind; contact, feeling, perception, volition

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and the mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention. Known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: ‘So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.’”

In the second *Jhāna* he found inner tranquility⁷, rapture, pleasure, and unification of mind; contact, feeling, perception, volition and mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention.

In the third *Jhāna* he found equanimity, pleasure, mindfulness, full awareness, and unification of mind; contact, feeling, perception, volition and the mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, and attention.

In the fourth *Jhāna* he found equanimity, neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, mental unconcern due to tranquility, purity of mindfulness, and unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, volition and the mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, and attention.

In the base of infinite space he found perception of the base of infinite space and unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, volition and mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, and attention.

In the base of infinite consciousness he found perception of the base of infinite consciousness and unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, volition and the mind, zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, and attention.

In the base of nothingness he found perception of the base of nothingness and unification of mind, contact, feeling, perception, volition and the mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, and attention.

“These states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared.”⁸

The Venerable Sāriputta emerged mindfully from the base of nothingness and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. It is never stated in the Sutta that he came out of any of the previous *Jhānas* or bases.⁹

In the base of nothingness there are some mental states that venerable Sāriputta defined one by one as they occurred; knew those states as they arose, knew that they were present, knew that they disappeared. In his pure, clear, uninterrupted mind as they appeared and disappeared, he knew, “So indeed, these states, not having been, come

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into being; having been, they vanish.” This is not intellectual or logical or rational thinking. When these states happened in his mind he simply became aware that they were happening.

On the night the Buddha attained enlightenment he attained the fourth *Jhāna*. Then he recalled previous lives, saw beings dying and taking rebirth according to their Kamma and destroyed defilements. There was never a time when the Buddha was not mindful. His mind was always pure, clean, equanimous, imperturbable, bright, shining, and steady. Even so he attained the fourth *Jhāna* in order to get the sharpest and most powerful one-pointed concentration. With this he was able to perform many kinds of miracles like disappearing from one place and reappearing in another.

Even a very tiny little spec of dust can distort the clarity and purity of the most powerful telescope. It then cannot operate at its fullest strength nor can it bring images of pristine clarity to human eyes. Our own heart, brain, and nervous system will not operate at their maximum capacity nor perform their appropriate functions if there is any iota of dirt in them. These are the faculties we use for perceiving relatively gross material objects. Needless to say it is much more important for the mind, that is dealing with spiritual matters, to become totally free from impurities in order to recall previous lives, see beings dying and taking rebirth according to their kammās and above all, most importantly, to destroy all defilements. This kind of understanding is not intellectual speculation. These truths are understood directly with a pure, clean and well-concentrated mind. This happens naturally without any great effort. The concentrated mind sees the truth as it really is without any wishing.

The law of Dhamma tells us:

“Monks, for one who is virtuous, in full possession of virtue, there is no need for the purposeful thought: ‘May freedom from remorse arise in me.’ This, monks, is in accordance with nature—that for one who is virtuous, in full possession of virtue, freedom from remorse arises. Monks, for one who is free from remorse there is no need for the purposeful thought: ‘May joy arise in me’. This, monks, is in accordance with nature—that for one who is free from remorse joy arises. Monks, for one who is joyous there is no need for the purposeful thought: ‘May rapture arise in me.’ This, monks, is in accordance with nature—that for one who is joyous rapture arises. Monks, for one whose heart is enraptured there is no need for the purposeful thought: ‘May my body be

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calmed.’ This, monks, is in accordance with nature—that for one whose heart is enraptured the body is calmed. Monks, for one whose body is calmed there is no need for the thought: ‘I feel happiness.’ This, monks, is in accordance with nature—that one whose body is calmed feels happiness. Monks, for one who is happy there is no need for the thought: ‘My mind is concentrated.’ It follows that the happy man’s mind is concentrated. Monks, for one who is concentrated there is no need for the thought: ‘I know and see things as they really are.’ It follows naturally that one concentrated does so. Monks, for one who knows and sees things as they really are there is no need for the thought: ‘I feel revulsion; interest fades in me’. It follows naturally that such an one feels revulsion and fading interest. Monks, for one who feels revulsion and fading interest there is no need for the thought: ‘I realize release by knowing and seeing.’ It follows naturally that he who feels revulsion and fading interest realizes release by knowing and seeing.”¹⁰

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

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

It is in the *Jhānic* state and only in the *Jhānic* state that equanimity, mindfulness and concentration are powerful enough to perform these activities. Once the meditator comes out of *Jhāna* the mind’s strength and power begin to weaken. The longer the meditator is out of *Jhāna* the weaker becomes that power and strength because the hindrances slowly return in their full strength. Finally the mind becomes as it was before attaining *Jhānas*.

When you have climbed a mountain you have a much wider vision of the surroundings. So long as you are there you can see the entire surrounding area because your eyesight and visibility go so far. If you come down even one step you lose some of that vision. The farther down you go the narrower the visibility becomes.

Similarly, so long as you are in *Jhāna* the clarity, purity, steadiness, stainlessness, whiteness, equanimity and imperturbability of the mind are very powerful. You can

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understand things clearly. But when you come out of the *Jhāna* they become weak and eventually they are lost. Then you cannot directly see past and future lives nor destroy defilements. You can think rationally and logically about them, but you cannot experience them directly.

The Meditator does not become one with the object.

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

“This mind, Oh monks, is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is; therefore for him there is no mental development.

This mind, O monks, is luminous, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The instructed noble discipline understands this as it really is; therefore for him there is mental development.”¹¹

This luminous mind no longer requires any external objects or their counterpart images. It stays focused on the bright light. The mind becomes clear and sharp and one-pointed. Now the mind holds everything together by its own power and strength.

It is only when we are in the deepest level of concentration that we can experience the most minute changes taking place in our mind and body. Words, thoughts and verbal concepts have stopped, but the feeling of impermanence goes on. This is when we understand that the Dhamma is unaffected by time¹². This is where we experience time consuming us and ourselves consuming time. It is here that we see suffering without succumbing to it. We can see the truth of dhammas, feelings, consciousness, thoughts, and perceptions. The truth that we see in all of them is that they all are flowing through our awareness. This truth can only be clear when we gain concentration with

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mindfulness; otherwise the truth will be obscure. This is when we experience a subtle desire to hold on to fleeting pleasure, a pleasure which is incessantly changing. Our desire is always attempting to stick to the pleasure, but the pleasure is always changing. Our attempt to hold on to pleasure is like trying to balance a mustard seed on a tip of a fast moving needle in a sewing machine. We try to attach to the experience of impermanent pleasure while it is changing. Because desire can never stick to any object, a person with desire always experiences frustration. Because they are not able to stop and freeze pleasure they cannot keep enjoying it forever. From time to time insight arises and we realize that this is an impossible attempt. With that realization revulsion arises. This leads to the abandonment of desire altogether. By abandoning desire we experience moments of relief and a glimpse of happiness. We know the truth of Dhamma that the Buddha so clearly pointed out. Every time we see this truth of impermanence, our trust and confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha increases. This happens only in the *Jhāna* state. We can neither gain the same experience out of *Jhāna* nor can we explain it in the way we have experienced it while in *Jhāna*.

In contrast, when we are outside this meditative experience, we use our knowledge of logic, philosophy, psychology, physics, chemistry and mathematics to explain the connection between desire, impermanence and suffering. We can talk for hours about it without making any sense. These are all words, but there is no experience.

The *Jhānic* state is a perfect state of mind from which to focus on the four noble truths, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness. It is the perfect state from which to realize Nibbāna by eliminating all the fetters. Once we attain *Jhāna* we use its powerful concentration with the light and vision to see things as they really are.

Training for gaining *Jhānas*.

In order to enter *Jhāna* one must go through vigorous training. One must have virtue, restraint, mindfulness, clear comprehension, contentment, and make effort. One must choose a secluded place and practice *mettā* to gain concentration of this quality. Since you are not attached to these wholesome thoughts, even though they are very pleasing, you can stay mindfully in this state without being attached to it. This is what the Buddha meant when he said, “Protect what has been won, clinging to nothing,”¹³

Your attention, mindfulness, and concentration work together to see the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of the *Jhānic* factors. These are not

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thoughts but dynamic actions or activities in the mind and body. The mind can easily notice these three characteristics as they occur. In fact in *Jhāna* they are clearer and more prominent than at any other time. After coming out of *Jhāna* you may remember the factors that were present in *Jhāna*, but the characteristics you experienced are gone. Reflecting on the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of these factors should be done while they are present, not before nor after they occur. What you do after or before your experience is only intellectualizing or philosophizing using logic and reason.

One meaning of *Jhāna*, as venerable Buddhaghosa pointed out, is to burn away the factors opposing *Jhāna*. You cannot burn these away by thinking about them. You can only burn away real objects while they are present. . In *Jhāna* you dissolve the influxes and out-fluxes (*āsavas*), which are deep down in your subconscious mind, but which are coming to the conscious level in very subtle and small doses. Since the *Jhānic* state is very calm, peaceful and quiet, the concentrated mind, with mindfulness that has been purified by equanimity, has no emotional reaction to these influxes and out-fluxes. It can uproot them. If you try to do this outside *Jhāna*, you will simply use logical and rational thinking to hide the influxes (*āsavas*) from yourself. You will not succeed in eliminating them.

If you burn away a fetter in a mundane *Jhāna* your mind quickly pushes you to a supramundane *Jhāna*. For instance, if you see the root of doubt about the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha buried in delusion while you are in a mundane *Jhāna*, you will experience their full impact on your conscious mind. Your *Jhānic* concentration, mindfulness, and equanimity can penetrate this root in your subconscious mind and you can eliminate it right then and there. When you have eliminated even one fetter, your mundane *Jhāna* instantly becomes supramundane and you attain the Path of Stream Entry. You must surely be in supramundane *Jhāna* to burn away all the fetters.

During the training period for the attainment of *Jhāna* we begin to suppress hindrances. While we are in *Jhāna* the *Jhānic* factors hold them at bay. Once we master the first *Jhāna* the mind finally loses interest in applied thought (*vitakka*) and sustained thought (*vicāra*). Because these two create thoughts, which eventually turn into words, the mind cannot become very calm while they are present. The mind wearies of this commotion and then it just glides into the second *Jhāna*. In the first *Jhānic* state the

presence of joy was very pleasant, but it gradually becomes coarse as the mind repeats and masters the second *Jhāna*. When the mind loses all interest in this coarse joy it glides naturally into the third *Jhāna*. While mastering the third *Jhāna* the mind experiences even the coarseness of happiness. With this the mind loses interest in the third *Jhāna* and glides into the fourth *Jhāna*. This is the elimination process, which is found in attaining all the *Jhānas*. This process occurs at each stage of higher attainment, first from the non-*Jhānic* state to the first *Jhāna*, and then from the first *Jhānic* state to the formless state. There is no intermediary state between a lower *Jhāna* and a higher *Jhāna*. When the mind is ready it will just naturally glide from one to the next.

The Base of supernatural power (*Iddipāda*) can be cultivated from within the Fourth *Jhāna*

When one is in the fourth *Jhāna*, all the mental states that the Buddha has seen in Venerable Sāriputta's mind will take place.¹⁴ Mindfulness, attention, concentration and equanimity are sufficiently present in the fourth *Jhāna*, to note the subtlest changes of the five aggregates, the subtlest degrees of suffering and the deepest awareness of selflessness.

When one uses the fourth *Jhāna* for cultivating the knowledge of recalling previous lives, seeing beings dying and taking rebirth and focusing the concentrated mind for the destruction of taints, there is no transition from the fourth *Jhāna* to any intermediary state. The development of supernormal powers always follows the fourth *Jhāna* in every Pali Sutta. The meditator uses the concentration with purity of mindfulness and equanimity found in the fourth *Jhāna* for developing the three kinds or five kinds of knowledge. During the interval between attaining a lower *Jhāna* and attaining each of the next higher *Jhānas* the meditator undergoes further training and mastering of the lower *Jhāna*. During this period when concentration, mindfulness, clear comprehension and equanimity undergo the process of purification so that they will be in perfect condition when the meditator attains the fourth *Jhāna*. The fourth *Jhānic* qualities provide the mind the best opportunity for seeing the minutest changes in the five aggregates.

“When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives....

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When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings....

When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. He understands as it actually is: ‘This is suffering’;... ‘This is the origin of suffering’;... ‘This is the cessation of suffering’;... ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’;... ‘These are the taints’;... ‘this is the origin of the taints’;... ‘This is the cessation of the taints’;... ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.’”¹⁵

These passages are repeated in many places in the Pali Suttas. They refer to the fourth *Jhāna*. It is the fourth *Jhāna* itself that is purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability. In this passage there is no suggestion at all that the meditator should leave the fourth *Jhāna* to attain these understandings.

This is the state of mind the Buddha ascribes to Venerable Sāriputta in Anupada Sutta. “And the states in the fourth *Jhāna*—the equanimity, the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, the mental unconcern due to tranquillity, the purity of mindfulness, and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and the mind; zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention—known to him those state arose, known they were present, known they disappeared.”¹⁶ .

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

In order to attain *Jhānas* you must memorize the object of your meditation. When you use the breath to gain concentration, the breath is your preliminary object and is called the preliminary sign (*parikammanimitta*). When the breath becomes so subtle that you may not be able to notice it but you still remember the very subtle sensation of the breath, this memory is your learning sign (*uggahanimitta*). Concentrating on the learning sign gives rise to the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāganimitta*), which is the conceptualized image. Your mind becomes concentrated when you focus your mind on this counterpart

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sign. Your preliminary meditation object and the counterpart sign are two different things. Having left the meditation object behind you focus on the counterpart sign. When you finally gain concentration you have neither the original object, nor the secondary counterpart sign. The mind becomes concentrated and is focused on itself. This is like the vortex in a whirlpool. A vortex needs nothing external. It is only the circular motion of water that creates the cavity in the center. Similarly when the mind is free from hindrances it gathers force within itself in order to gain further concentration.

This is a pre-verbal process. It is the same pre-verbal process that can take place while listening to a Dhamma talk. During the Dhamma talk your mind may go into the deep meaning of the words being uttered. When that happens you will see the intrinsic nature of the things the speaker explains. The Dhamma becomes perfectly clear and your vision of the Dhamma becomes clear and pure. As this realization arises, your mind experiences the pristine purity of Dhamma and doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha can vanish from your mind.

This is nonverbal non-conceptual realization. You don't think in words or in a philosophical way about suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, the path leading to the end of suffering, the taints, their origin, their end and the way to their end. When you realize the four noble truths at this level they are not gross in nature. They are the finest level of the four noble truths. The taints you eradicate are deeply settled in your mind. Only with this kind of nonverbal non-conceptual mindfulness, clear comprehension, and equanimity can you reach the very root of the taints. In this state verbal conceptualization has totally ceased. The pure concentrated mind clearly comprehends these things without the sound of words or the vibration of thoughts. This is not a verbalizing or thinking stage.

Once we attain a *Jhāna* we do not abandon it. We don't let it subside and we don't overcome it. We have been working very hard to attain the *Jhāna*. We do not discard it, but we use it for developing insight and/or supernatural powers. As venerable Ānanda elucidated in his discourse¹⁷ one can use any *Jhāna* to attain any stage of enlightenment because every *Jhāna* has sufficient clarity and purity of mind, the necessary mental factors and sufficient mindfulness, clear comprehension, concentration and equanimity. Although the factors present in the lower *Jhānas* are not as perfect, as they become in the

fourth *Jhāna*, they are strong enough to focus the mind on the four noble truths and the taints.

When the meditator is in *samādhi* all mental factors don't simply disappear. *Samādhi* (*saṃ+ā+dhā*) means collectedness or consolidation of all wholesome mental factors. These operate in harmony with one another maintaining a perfect balance of mind, which is calm, relaxed and peaceful without any disturbance from external objects. The mind does not go out to bring in new sound, smell, taste, and touch. The mind must be wholesome and equanimous to remain calm while seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness. It is impossible for a mind without *samādhi*, polluted by external stimuli and emotions, to develop impartial and mindful awareness of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness.

The meditator who has attained a *Jhāna* should master it for two reasons. The first is to go to higher *Jhānas*. The second is to make the *Jhānic* mind sharper in order to destroy the *anusaya*. When the *Jhānic* mind loses interest in a *Jhāna* the meditator automatically comes out of it. When that happens he should attain it again. He should repeat the attainment of that particular *Jhāna* until his mind is ready to go to the next higher *Jhāna*. After completely mastering any particular *Jhāna* the mind will be ready to go to next. After a meditator attains the same *Jhāna* again and again his mind gradually glides into the next higher *Jhāna*.

This is like climbing a ladder. When you climb a ladder you step from one rung to the next rung without getting down between each rung. You don't climb down the ladder each time you want to climb to the next higher rung. Similarly when you have mastered the lower *Jhāna* your mind is ready to put itself on the next higher *Jhāna* without leaving the *Jhānic* state entirely before doing it.

The Buddha has taught that the destruction of taints is dependent on attaining any of the *Jhānas* excepting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception *Jhāna* and the cessation of perception and feeling *Jhāna*.

I" declare, Oh monks, that the destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first *Jhāna*, the second *Jhāna*, the third *Jhāna*, the fourth *Jhāna*; in dependence on the base of the infinity of space, the base of the infinity of consciousness, and the base of nothingness.

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... “Here, monks, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and dwells in the first *Jhāna*, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. Whatever states are included there comprised of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations or consciousness: he views those states as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a boil, as a dart, as misery, as affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as empty, as non-self. Having viewed them thus, his mind then turns away from those states and focuses upon the deathless element: “This is peaceful, this is sublime: that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. If he is firm in this, he attains the destruction of the taints; but if he does not attain the destruction of the taints because of that attachment to the Dhamma and that delight in the Dhamma, then by the destruction of the five lower fetters he is due to be spontaneously reborn (in a celestial realm) and there attain final Nibbāna, without ever returning from that world.

Just as, monks, an archer or his apprentice might practise on a straw man or a pile of clay, and thereby later become a long-distance shot, an impeccable marksman who can fell a large body, just so it is with a monk who reaches the destruction of the taints in dependence on the first *Jhāna*.”¹⁸

(The same formula is repeated for the remaining *Jhānas*.)

Situations where one does come out of *Jhāna*:

Thus, monks, the penetration to final knowledge takes place to the extent that there are attainments with perception. But as to these two bases—the attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and the cessation of perception and feeling—I say that these are to be extolled by those monks who are meditators, skilled in their attainment and in emerging from the attainment, after they have attained them and emerged from them.”¹⁹

This passage shows very clearly that the mental contents in these two highest attainments are so extremely refined and subtle that even the purest mindfulness and concentration cannot explore them. Therefore these two attainments cannot be used as the basis for insight. For this reason the experienced meditator practices them, comes out of them and uses any lower samādhi, from first *Jhāna* up to the base of nothingness, to destroy defilements.

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It is reported in *Anupada Sutta* that Venerable Sāriputta emerged from the base of nothingness and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception in order to contemplate the state that had passed, ceased, and changed and also in order to attain the cessation of perception and feeling.²⁰

For the emergence from signless deliverance there are two conditions, attention to all signs and non-attention to the signless element. This suggests that while he is in this very refined *Jhāna* the meditator is consciously paying attention to his sign, which is his object during this attainment. Otherwise he could neither withdraw from the signless element nor could he pay attention to signs.²¹

Mahāparinibbana Sutta,²² on first reading, seems to give us different advice. It reports that the Buddha entered and emerged from each *Jhāna* before he entered the next higher *Jhāna*. After attaining the cessation of feeling and perception he came down to the first *Jhāna*. He then returned to the fourth fine material *Jhāna* and came out of it. Immediately after leaving the fourth *Jhāna* this final time he attained the Final passing away (*Parinibbāna*).

This rendition is different because this is a description of what happened just before the Buddha's final passing away. His mind was already purified and he had accomplished everything. There was nothing at this level left for the Buddha to accomplish. He attained the *Jhānas* and quickly came out of them because he did not have any taints to destroy while being in *Jhāna*. He had done what had to be done, nothing more was to be done. But the ordinary person or trainee, whose mind is not free from defilements, should make use of the *Jhānas*. While being in *Jhāna*, the trainee should use the *Jhāna* to destroy taints and to attain enlightenment. An unenlightened persons' deep *samādhi* with mindful attention, clear comprehension and equanimity naturally burns taints like a laser beam burning a cataract in the eye.

In addition to the five specifically *Jhānic* mental factors, there are many other mental factors in *Jhāna*. All of them have particular individual functions within the *Jhāna*. In *Anupada Sutta* the Buddha has credited Venerable Sāriputta with identifying all the mental factors one by one as they occurred. Each factor performs its specific function. Venerable Sāriputta's mind was so clear, sharp, bright, steady, undisturbed, concentrated, equanimous and luminous that he was able to define these factors one by one. Since there are no defilements present in that state, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness

become very clear without any distortion. Despite his wisdom, he does not seem to have defined them intellectually. This is the stage where mental states appear in the mind just like objects reflected in a mirror. The mind free from hindrances sees them as they appear clearly and distinctly one by one.

Significantly, the name of this Sutta, Anupada, means uninterrupted. Ven. Sāriputta not only saw the mental factors in each *Jhāna* by turn, he did it without leaving the *Jhānic* state. His *Jhāna* was uninterrupted.

The Buddha has given a series of similes to illustrate how knowledge of the mind-made body is experienced. “Just as though a man were to pull out a reed from its sheath and think thus: ‘This is the sheath, this is the reed; the sheath is one, the reed is another; it is from the sheath that the reed has been pulled out; or just as though a man were to pull out a sword from its scabbard and think thus: ‘This is the sword, this is the scabbard; the sword is one, the scabbard another; it is from the scabbard that the sword has been pulled out’; or just as though a man were to pull a snake out of its slough and think thus: ‘This is the snake, this is the slough; the snake is one, the slough another; it is from the slough that the snake has been pulled out.’ So too, I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to create from this body another body having form, mind-made, with all its limbs, lacking no faculty. And thereby many disciples of mine abide having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.”²³

One cannot do this kind of thing while out of *Jhāna*. All this must happen while one is in *Jhāna*. This requires very powerful mental work, which itself requires being in *Jhāna*. After a person comes out of *Jhāna* he would not have the power necessary to perform these supernatural feats.

The Eight Liberations:

Another very vivid paradigm for using *Jhāna* to liberate the mind is given in the same Sutta under eight liberations. The meditator sees forms; sees forms externally; becomes aware of infinite space; becomes aware that "consciousness is infinite", becomes aware that "there is nothing" and becomes aware of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. He can become aware of all of them only when he is in those specific *Jhānas*. The meditator is fully aware of everything happening in each *Jhāna* while he is in that *Jhāna*. When he comes out of the *Jhāna* he may only have some memories of what has occurred. That memory is not strong enough for the meditator to be fully aware of what

was happening while in the *Jhāna*. Mindful awareness can only be completely effective when it is focused on what is happening right now.

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta gives us a very important word to remember. It talks of “Establishing Mindfulness in the present”²⁴. The key word that we should remember here is “*Parimukhaṃ*”. This word means that we must establish mindfulness in the present, not as it is sometimes translated, in front of the mouth or nose. The function of mindfulness is the same in *Jhāna* as it is out of *Jhāna*. The mindful mind becomes aware of whatever is present. This awareness is not verbalization or conceptualization. It is a pure pre-conceptual awareness of whatever truly exists.

The meaning of the Pāli word “*anupassī*” is also very significant. It means seeing in accordance with. “*Anupassanā*” means seeing what is happening as it is happening. This means mentally seeing things as they are happening while they are happening, not before, nor after they have happened.

Investigation:

While we are in *Jhāna* we are sensitive to mental states and conditions but we do not engage in discursive investigation. This has already been done when we were practicing the enlightenment factor of investigation. This applies to both *Jhāna* attainers and to non-*Jhāna* attainers. When we are in *samādhi* there is equanimity with its equipoise balanced mindfulness, concentration, faith, effort and wisdom and all the factors that are present in the *Jhānas*. This is especially true in the fourth *Jhāna* where equanimity is the leader or commander. Under its command, mindfulness and concentration act together taking note of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness. Mindfulness is mindful of not letting words, concepts, ideas, logic, philosophy and psychology disturb the smooth running of *samādhi*. It does not get swept away with their verbal specifications. Attention simply keeps paying attention to whatever is happening without verbalizing, conceptualizing and it makes sure that this is non-conceptual awareness. Mindfulness at the highest level does not use concepts.

In this state of mind we can finally understand pre-conceptual awareness. When the senses and their respective sensory objects meet, consciousness arises. The combination (*sangati*) of these three factors is called contact. Feeling follows contact. When feeling arises the mind cognizes or knows the feeling. We then perceive feeling, contact, consciousness and sensory objects without words.

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Here we can see that consciousness, contact, feeling and perception arise before concepts. The mindful meditator, who has attained *Jhāna*, has four moments to be mindful of what is going on before conceptualizing takes place. Pre-conceptual awareness arises during these four mind moments and uninterrupted mindfulness continues from mind moment to mind moment without conceptualizing anything. As soon as a concept arises this continuity of mindfulness will be interrupted and the flow is broken.

Strike when the iron is hot:

The three moments found in all conditioned things are totally ignored by most people when they translate the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*'s instruction on how to be mindful of rising (*uppāda*), standing (*thiti*) and passing away (*bhanga*). The Sutta says: "The bhikkhu lives seeing rising phenomena of the body, vanishing phenomena of the body and rising-and-vanishing phenomena of the body."²⁵ These three phases are repeated in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* for feeling, consciousness and Dhamma sections with appropriate changes. People interpret these three stages as, "At one time the meditator becomes mindful of rising phenomena, at another time he becomes mindful of vanishing phenomena and at yet another time he is mindful of both rising phenomena and vanishing phenomena." Instead, they should be understood as appearing, disappearing and the minutest change that takes place between the appearing and disappearing of body, feelings, perception, volitional formation and consciousness.²⁶

When a blacksmith wishes to shape a piece of iron into something he should heat it. Only when it is red hot can he shape the iron into something by hammering it. He does not wait until the iron is cool to hammer it into the shape he needs. When we sharpen a knife we don't make it blunt to use it to cut something. We use the knife when it is sharp. Also, we don't strike iron when it is in the fire. Nor can we cut something while we are sharpening a knife. Similarly while we are preparing to attain *Jhāna*, it is difficult to use it for seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness.

While we were in the training period, before attaining *Jhāna*, the mind was not free from hindrances. Only when the mind is concentrated should we use that mind to cultivate supernormal powers, one of which is the attainment of liberation from suffering. The mind is free from blemishes when we are in *Jhāna* and once we come out of *Jhāna* the hindrances return to the mind. *Jhāna* suppresses them as a porous pot suppresses moss in a

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pond while it is pressing down into the water. The moss stays away while the pot is in the water. As soon as we remove the pot the moss returns and covers the water. Similarly as soon as we come out of *Jhāna* the hindrances that have been held at bay, or pushed into the subconscious mind, will return.

Suppose we drill a hole at the bottom of the pot and focus a powerful spotlight through the hole. Then we could see the roots of the moss through the clear water. We could cut through the roots of the moss in the water. Similarly concentration, attention, and mindfulness look through the pure and luminous mind to see impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness and remove the fetters.

The mind free from hindrances is luminous. This temporary luminosity and purity become more prominent in the mind at the attainment of the fourth material *Jhāna*.

Conclusion:

In conclusion we would like to cite a passage from *Cūla-hatthipadopama Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya*. This passage is conclusive evidence that one should not come out of *Jhāna* in order to attain full enlightenment by seeing the Four Noble Truths and destroying the taints.

“When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. He understands as it actually is: ‘This is suffering’; ‘This is the origin of suffering’; ‘This is the cessation of suffering’; ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’; ‘These are the taints’; ‘This is the origin of the taints’; ‘This is the cessation of the taints’; ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.’ ... When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ He understands: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.’”²⁷

¹ *Upakkilesa Sutta* #128; *MN. III. 161 -162* ; *MLDB. By B B. 1014-1015*; “*yasmim̐ kho samaye paritto Samādhi hoti, parittaṃ me tamhi samaye cakkhu hoti; so ‘haṃ parittena cakkhunā parittaṃ c’eva obhāsaṃ sañjānāmi paritāni ca rūpāni passāmi. Yasmim̐ pana samaye apparitto me Samādhi hoti, appamānaṃ me tamhi samaye cakkhu hoti; so’haṃ appamānena cakkhunā appamānaṃ c’eva obhāsaṃ sañjānāmi ca rūpāni passāmi kevalaṃ pi rattim̐ kevalaṃ pi divasaṃ kevalaṃ pi rattindivanti.*” (*MN. III. 160*).

² SN. V. 92; CDB by BB, 1590

³ *sammā Samādhi*

⁴ MN. # 111

⁵ DN. # 9

⁶ DN. # 9, *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, 181-187; The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya, by Maurice Walshe, 161

⁷ *ajjhataṃ sampasādana*

⁸ MN. iii. # 111, *Anupada Sutta*; MLDB by BB. 899-902.

⁹ “So tāya samāpattiya sato vuṭṭhahati. So tāya samāpattiya satovuṭṭhahitvā ye dhammā atītā niruddhā vipariṇatā te dhamme samanupassati: Evaṃ kira ‘me dhamma ahutvā sambontī hutvā pativedentīti. So tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vipparamutto viṣamyyutto vmariyādikatena cetasa viharati.” MN. III. # 111, *Anupada Sutta*, 25-29.

¹⁰ “Sīlavato bhikkhave sīlasampannassa na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘avippaṭisāro me uppajjatū’ ti. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ sīlavato sīlasampannassa avippaṭisāro uppajjati.

“Avippaṭisārassa bhikkhave sīlasampannassa na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘pāmujjam me uppajjatū’ ti. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ avippaṭisārassa pāmujjam uppajjati.

Pamuditassa bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘pīti me uppajjatū’ ti. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ pamuditassa pīti uppajjati.

Pīṭimanassa bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘kāyo me passambhatū’ ti Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ pīṭimanassa kāyo passambhati.

Passaddhakāyassa bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘sukhaṃvediyāmi’ ti. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ passaddhakāyo sukhaṃvediyati.

Sukhino bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘citta me samādhiyatū’ ti Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ sukhino cittaṃsamādhiyati.

Samāhīṭassa bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘yathābhūtaṃ

pajānāmi passāmiti. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ samāhīto yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti passati. Yathābhūtaṃ

bhikkhave jānato passato na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘nibbindāmi ti’. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ

yathābhūtaṃ jānaṃ passaṃ nibbindati. Nibbindassa bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ ‘virajjāmi’ ti.

Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ nibbindo virajjati. Virattassa bhikkhave na cetanāya karaṇīyaṃ

‘vimuttiñāḍadassanaṃ sacchikaromi’ ti. Dhammatā esā bhikkhave, yaṃ viratto vimuttiñāḍadassanaṃ sacchikaroti.” (AN. V. pp. 312-313; GS. V. 3-4).

¹¹ *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, An Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Translated and edited by Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, 36;

Pabhassaraṃ idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti. Tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa citta-bhāvana n’atthī ti vadāmi.

Pabhassaraṃ idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. Taṃ sutavā ariyasāvako yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Tasmā sutavato ariyasāvakassa citta-bhāvana atthī ti vadāmi. AN. I, vi, 1-2.

¹² *akāliko Dhammo*

¹³ *Dhp. # 40.*

¹⁴ MN. # 111, *Anupada Sutta*

¹⁴ MN. # 27, 182-183; MLDB. by BÑ & BB, 276

¹⁵ MN. # 111, 26-27; MLDB. by BÑ & BB, 900

¹⁶ MN. # 52, *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta*

¹⁷ AN. IV. 422, IX, 36; *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, an Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikaya*, by Nānaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, 234—235

¹⁸ AN. IV. 422, IX, 36; *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, an Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikaya*, by Nānaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, 234—235

²⁰ MN. III. # 111, 25-29; MLDB by Ña & BB. 899-902.

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²¹ MN. I. #. 43, Mahāvedalla Sutta, 297; MLDB by BÑ & BB. 312

²⁰ DN. #16, p. 156

²² MN. # 77, Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta, 17-18; MLDB by BÑ & BB 643

²³ Parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā

²⁵ Samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, vayadham,manupassī vā kāyasmim viharatai samudayavayadhammānupassivā kāyasmim viharati.

²⁶ Uppādo paññāyati, vayo paññāyati t̥hitassa aññatatt̥ham paññāyati. SN. III. 37; AN. I. 152

²⁷ MLDB, By Ña & BB. 276 277.

So evaṃ samāhite cite parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṃgane vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye t̥hite ānejjappatte āsavānaṃ khayañāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmeti. So: idaṃ dukkhanti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ dukkhasamudayoti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhoti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ime āsavāti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ āsavasamudayo ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ āsava nirodho ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ āsavanirodhagāminī paṭipadāti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti.... Tassa evaṃ jānato passato kāmāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, avijjāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, vimuttasmim vimuttam it̥ñānaṃ hoti; khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ. Kataṃ karaṇiyaṃ naparaṃ itthattāyāti pajānāti.” MN. I, # 27, Cīlahatthipadopama Sutta, 183-184.