

The background of the entire page is an abstract, textured composition. It features a mix of deep reds, vibrant oranges, and dark, almost black, swirling patterns that resemble ink or charcoal on a lighter surface. The overall effect is one of intense, organic energy and depth.

THE STILLNESS OF THE JHĀNAS

THE SEEING THAT LIBERATES

Guy Eugène DUBOIS

THE STILLNESS OF THE JHĀNAS

—THE SEEING THAT LIBERATES—

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De Stilte van de JHĀNA'S
—De Weg naar het Zien dat Bevrijdt—

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—THE SEEING THAT LIBERATES—

Guy Eugène DUBOIS

• *Spiritual wisdom is a gift to be shared with insight and compassion and not exploited for vulgar personal gain. When wisdom is commercialized — ‘marketed’ — it loses its purity and degenerates into a commodity, giving profound insights a valuation, which undermines their transformative power.* •

(Guy E. Dubois)

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• *Yaṃ kiñci samudaya dhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirōdha
dhammam—All that is subject to arising,
is subject to passing away. •*

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

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INTRODUCTION

• *When the mind comes to rest within itself, a knowing reveals itself that reaches deeper than words. The silence of the *jhānas* is not emptiness, but a gateway to truth.* •

This book is not a general introduction to Buddhism. It does not provide an overview of doctrines, nor a systematic exposition of the various traditions.

The spark for this book was ignited during an extensive, contemplative conversation with Jotika Hermesen about the necessity of *samatha* as a prerequisite for the unfolding of insight. Not so much nourished by study, but carried by practice in silence—by what could deepen and clarify in stillness. What arose was neither a question nor an answer, but a direct experience: a shared inner space, a spiritual connectedness that was lived in silence and is quietly held to this day.

What touched me was her recognition of the *jhānas* as I experience and attempt to describe them—without naming them as such. An encounter understood in silence, a recognition that echoed in the heart of another. This book is steeped in personal meditation. I therefore dedicate this practice to her.

This book is an exploration of a forgotten path—not a technical manual, nor a contemplative overview, but a gradual unfolding of insight from inner calm.

A path frequently mentioned in the early Buddhist suttas, yet never thoroughly explained. It is the path of the *jhānas*—from which insight can blossom when the mind is refined to rest, equanimity, and one-pointedness.

The *Pāli Canon* does provide descriptions of meditative experiences, but these are usually brief, formulaic, and functional. They generally lack detailed psychological or phenomenological interpretation, especially when compared to later commentaries or modern meditation literature.

This is particularly true for the *jhānas*.

Instead, standardized formulations are used repeatedly, as if they were fixed patterns of memory. This is not a flaw, but a natural consequence of the way the teachings were transmitted.

For nearly five centuries after the *parinibbāna* ¹ of the Buddha in the fifth century BCE, until around 32 years before the start of our era, his teachings were passed down orally.

This transmission followed a meticulously organized oral tradition, with groups of monks—*bhaṇaka* (Skt: *bhaṇakah*) ²—entrusted with the verbatim memorization and transmission of specific portions of the teachings to future generations.

Some specialized in the discourses (*suttas*), ³ others in monastic discipline (*vinaya*), ⁴ and still others in the psychological teachings (*abhidhamma*). ⁵ Each text was recited rhythmically, often in groups, allowing errors to be immediately noticed and corrected.

In such a context, it was crucial that the formulations were simple, repeatable, and standardized. The teachings were not to be analyzed by the *bhaṇaka*, but memorized—remembered. That is, not dissected and intellectually grasped, but passed on as something living. ⁶

A good example of this is the formula with which the first *jhāna* is described almost everywhere in the canon:

• *Vivicc'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamam jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati* — *Free from sensual desires and unwholesome mental states, he enters upon and dwells in the first jhāna: born of seclusion, filled with joy and happiness, sustained by applied and sustained thought.* •

This formula appears dozens of times, without further explanation or contextual elaboration. However powerful and carefully constructed, the description remains succinct.

What does it mean to 'enter upon the first jhāna'? What exactly is meant by 'savitakka' and 'savicāra'—initial and sustained thought? How is that joy and happiness experienced, and what is its nature?

The text remains silent. The experience is not explained—only mentioned. What becomes clear is that the key does not lie in words, but in practice.

The fixed formulas we encounter repeatedly in the canon—not only those describing the *jhānas*—were not meant to articulate inner states in psychological terms, but to make their essence recognizable to those who had experienced them directly.

The texts pointed the way, but it was assumed that the listener grasped the transmission not conceptually, but through direct experience or personal instruction from a teacher.

What 'savitakka' and 'savicāra' meant in the living, direct experience of the meditator was not explained. The function of these texts was therefore not didactic in the modern sense; they served as pillars of memory, not as psychological treatises.

Those who wished to understand these states had to practice them—not analyze them. The deeper insight was not

contained in the words themselves, but in the experience to which they pointed. What mattered was not the form, but the essence.

It was only toward the end of the first century BCE that the orally transmitted teachings were first committed to writing—on palm leaves, in Pāli, in Sri Lanka (then known as Tambapaṇṇī or Ceylon). This likely occurred out of necessity, as periods of famine and political unrest threatened the collective memory of the *Saṅgha*. What had until then been preserved in living memory was, for the first time, transformed into text. The *Pāli Canon* is one of the oldest complete literary transmissions from ancient India to have been preserved in its entirety.

This also means that we should not read the canon as we read modern books. The words are preserved, but what they truly signify must be understood from within. The texts preserve the formulations, but the meaning resides elsewhere—not in thinking, but in becoming still; not in understanding, but in seeing.

Those who listen to these texts with the heart can hear what is not said—clear, silent, and wise.

The descriptions of the *jhānas* are not a manual but a reference. They speak in the rhythm of memory, not in the vocabulary of analysis. These are states of mind that cannot be captured in words—refined, direct experiences that mature through practice, not through analysis. In the end, the ancient texts offer us a veil, not a technical manual. They are invitations to practice, not to intellectual dissection.

To understand, one must practice. To know, one must let go—and ask the right questions. Only then does what is hidden in the texts become visible.

This book does not aim to provide dogmatic answers, but rather offers an invitation to exploration. The *jhānas* are not

a theory, nor an end in themselves. They are moments of deep stillness—a purification of mind and heart; a merging of attention and calm into a living force that opens toward wisdom.

The texts in this book have emerged from practice. They are not academic in nature, but grounded in direct experience and contemplation—rooted in the ancient teachings of Theravāda Buddhism, and enriched with comparative reflections from other traditions, wherever these felt meaningful to me.

The approach is intense, but not closed; personal, but not self-important. What is shared here does not aim to proclaim a truth, but to open a space in which the reader can taste, test, and realize for themselves.

In this book, the *jhānas* are not presented as a final goal, but as a necessary deepening along the path to *vipassanā/vipaśyanā*—the seeing that liberates. They offer a silent foundation, a fertile ground where insight can take root and grow.

This work invites the reader to explore that inner ground—layer by layer, step by step—with patience, clarity, and a willingness to truly become still. This inner surrender does not refer merely to outer silence, but to a deep attitude of openness and receptivity. It is the willingness to set aside the familiar stream of thoughts, judgments, and concepts, and to turn inward with quiet attention.

True silence does not arise from forcing anything, but from softening—by releasing resistance to what is, and resting in a deeper listening. In this silence, the need to name, to understand, or to control gently begins to fade.

This silence resides in a realm of rarefied stillness.

Space opens up to allow for direct experience (*paccanubhoti; pratibudhyate*)⁷—free from interference by conceptual thought. It is a state of being in which clarity, stillness, and insight naturally come to the forefront—precisely because nothing is added, and everything is allowed to be as it is.

Whoever reads this book is not merely reading about the *jhānas*. They are reading about the path inward. About attention ripening. About a mind learning to let go. And about the quiet joy of seeing that nothing is lacking. About the quiet realization that everything is perfectly fine just as it is.

In the context of meditative deepening and the path of the *jhānas*, this seeing signifies an inner breakthrough: a moment of silent and effortless presence, in which the mind no longer searches, compares, or feels lack. What remains is simplicity—the quiet completeness that was never lost, only forgotten.

It is an intuitive knowing that reality, in its original simplicity, is enough—that the fullness of being is present right here and now, when the mind comes to rest. *Samādhi*.

Up until now, the focus has been on experience, on becoming still, and on inner understanding. But on the path of meditation, there is also a need for clarity: for insight into what hinders, confuses, or distracts us. Silence is vulnerable. It needs protection—and for that, insight is required.

The tone now shifts accordingly.

What follows is a more analytical approach, intended to clarify the nature of the Five Hindrances—and their subtle impact on body and mind. This analysis is not an end in itself, but a support for practice. Understanding where the mind becomes entangled makes letting go possible. The language becomes sharper, the view more focused—but the

aim remains the same: freedom of mind, clarity of heart. It is from that clarity that this analysis is offered.

Concentration begins with overcoming the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*)—the primary obstacles to meditative progress.

The Five Hindrances are:

- Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda; id.*): the craving for pleasant sensory experiences.
- Ill will (*vyāpāda; id.*): aversion, anger and negative emotions directed towards others.
- Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha; styāna*): mental and physical dullness, leading to lethargy and a lack of energy.
- Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca; uddhatya-kaukrtya*): a restless mind preoccupied with future concerns or regrets about the past.
- Doubt (*vicikicchā; vicikitsā*): uncertainty or a lack of confidence in the path, or in one's own capacity for awakening.

These Hindrances are overcome through the cultivation of mindfulness (*sati; smṛti*) and the development of the four form-based meditative absorptions (*rūpa-jhānas*). These *jhānas* are composed of specific mental factors (*jhānāṅga/jhānāṅgāni; dhyānāṅga/dhyānāṅgāni*), which counteract or transcend the influence of the hindrances.⁸ In these meditative states, the practitioner reaches deep levels of mental calm (*samatha; śamatha*) and concentration (*samādhi; id.*), free from the influence of the Five Hindrances.

Samatha and *samādhi* are closely related concepts in Buddhism, yet they carry different meanings and functions within the meditative path.

Samatha means 'calming', 'mental stillness', or 'resting in tranquility', and refers to the process of stabilizing and soothing the mind. This is accomplished by directing attention to a single object, such as the breath, the rising and falling of the abdomen with each inhalation and exhalation, the flame of a candle, or the silent repetition of a *mantra*.

The purpose is to diminish disruptive emotions such as restlessness, desire, and fear, allowing a state of deep calm and inner balance to arise. A tranquil mind forms the necessary foundation for further meditative development.

Samādhi means 'concentration' or 'absorption' and refers to the state of one-pointed mental focus (*ekaggatā; ekāgratā*) that arises from successful *samatha* practice, reaching its culmination in the *fourth jhāna*. In this state, the mind is completely free from distraction and fully absorbed in the chosen meditation object, dissolving the boundary between subject and object—an ideal ground for the arising of insight (*vipassanā; vipaśyanā*).

Samādhi is not only the result of *samatha*; it is also an essential condition for gaining deep insight into the true nature of reality. It supports the practitioner in directly experiencing the three fundamental characteristics of existence—impermanence (*anicca; anitya*), suffering (*dukkha; duḥkha*), and the absence of a fixed self (*anattā; anātman*).

Thus, the difference between *samatha* and *samādhi* lies in their role and function. *Samatha* is the process of calming and stabilizing the mind, while *samādhi* is the concentrated state that naturally emerges from it.

Both are essential within the Buddhist meditative path and complement one another. *Samatha* prepares the mind for the depth of *samādhi*, and this concentrated state facilitates the arising of insight through *vipassanā* into the nature of existence.

Although meditation is a deeply personal journey and results may vary, it is recommended to practice under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

This helps ensure that techniques are applied correctly and that the full benefit of the practice can unfold. Ultimately, however, it is up to each *yogi* to choose the approach that best suits their needs and aspirations. It is not the teacher who takes the lead; it is the practitioner who determines the direction.

In what follows, the form-based *jhānas* are briefly described, presenting the characteristics through which deep concentration becomes visible and accessible.

- The *first jhāna* is characterized by joy (*pīti*; *prīti*) and happiness (*sukha*; *id.*), accompanied by applied (*vitakka*; *vitarka*) and sustained attention (*vicāra*; *id.*), and one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*). In this *first jhāna*, the five *jhāna*-factors (*jhānāṅgāni*; *dhyānāṅgāni*)⁹ are present and play a central role in stabilizing meditative absorption.¹⁰

- The *second jhāna* drops *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and is characterized by joy (*pīti*; *prīti*), happiness (*sukha*; *id.*), and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*).

- The *third jhāna* lets go of *pīti* and is marked by happiness (*sukha*; *id.*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*). Equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*) is not formally a *jhāna*-factor, but it becomes prominent in the *third* and *fourth jhānas*.

- The *fourth jhāna* lets go of *sukha* and is defined by one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*) with a strong presence of pure equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*).

In short, the *jhāna*-factors evolve through the successive *jhānas* as follows:

- The *first jhāna* includes all five factors.

- The *second jhāna* lets go of *vitakka* and *vicāra*.
- The *third jhāna* abandons *pīti*.
- The *fourth jhāna* releases *sukha* and retains only *ekaggatā*.

With a calmed and one-pointedly concentrated mind, the *yogi* then develops insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*). Insight meditation is directed toward seeing the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

By recognizing and deeply understanding these insights (*pariyatti*; *pariyāpti*), ¹¹ embodying them through practice (*paṭipatti*; *pratipatti*), ¹² and realizing them directly (*paṭivedha*; *pravedha*), ¹³ the *yogi* sees into the true nature of reality and releases craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*) and attachment (*upādāna*; *id.*).

Through the realization of this deep insight, the *yogi* attains the first 'fruit' (*phala*) ¹⁴ of the path: the stage of 'stream-enterer' (*sotāpanna*; *śrotāpanna*).

A *sotāpanna* has entered the stream that flows toward liberation and has broken free from the first three fetters (*saṃyojana*; *id.*): ¹⁵ the belief in a fixed, unchanging self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*; *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*), attachment to rites and rituals (*śīlabata-parāmāsa*; *śīlavrata-parāmarśa*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*). Such a person will no longer be reborn in the lower realms (*apāya*) ¹⁶ and is assured of final liberation within seven life-times.

The final paragraph is evocative and vivid, but may benefit from further clarification.

In the traditional teachings of Buddhism, the *sotāpanna*—or 'stream-enterer'—is one who has seen into the essence of the *Dhamma*, not through conceptual reasoning, but through direct and transformative experience. This first stage of awakening marks an irreversible shift: the *yogi* has

entered the stream of liberation, the current that flows unerringly toward *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*).

When the *suttas* state that a *sotāpanna* no longer returns to the 'lower realms,' they mean that, through insight, this *yogi* will never again engage in karmic actions that give rise to rebirth—to becoming (*bhava*; *id.*)¹⁷—in unfortunate or unwholesome planes of existence, such as those of animals, hungry ghosts, or beings in hell. Yet this is not merely a metaphorical way of describing a 'cosmological' destiny.

These 'lower realms of existence' may also be understood as inner states of consciousness: lives governed by instinct, greed, aggression, or delusion—where ignorance, confusion, fear, and craving prevail.

A *sotāpanna* is freed from such states—not because suffering no longer arises, but because they have seen through the mechanism that perpetuates it. Their confidence in the *Dhamma* has become unshakable.

This is what the second half of the phrase points to: 'assured of final liberation within seven lifetimes.' This is not to be taken as a literal number, but as an expression of inner certainty—that the path will inevitably lead to full liberation, however long it may take. The reference to seven lives symbolizes a finite and traversable span of the journey—a conclusion already set in motion through stream-entry (*sotāpatti*; *srotāpatti*).

There is no longer any danger of becoming lost, of turning back, or of falling into fundamental confusion. More broadly, this metaphor speaks of irreversibility and direction.

The stream-enterer has crossed the Rubicon. The current now carries them forward, beyond the point of return: the *yogi* has become a traveler on a path no longer governed by ignorance. What began as insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*) will, in

time, unfold into liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*) and ultimately culminate in final extinction (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*).¹⁸

In summary, on the Buddhist path, the overcoming of the Five Hindrances and the attainment of the *jhānas* provide the foundation for the development of insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*). This process leads the practitioner from the state of an ordinary worldling (*puṭhujjana*; *prthagjana*)¹⁹ to that of a noble disciple (*ariya-puggala*; *ārya-pudgala*)²⁰—a term synonymous with stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*; *śrōtāpanna*)—in which moral discipline (*sīla*; *id.*), concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), and insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*) play a central role in their spiritual development.

This book is not simply an introduction to the *jhānas*, but above all an invitation to understand why these meditative states are essential for the unfolding of spiritual wisdom and the realization of awakening.

But what exactly are these *jhānas*?

In the Theravāda tradition, where *Pāli* is the primary language, the term *jhāna* is used. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, which draw on Sanskrit, the corresponding term is *dhyaṇa*. Both point to the same meditative state of deep stillness, concentration, and absorption (*samādhi*; *id.*).

Two broad categories are usually distinguished: the *form jhānas* (*rūpa-jhānas*; *rūpa-dhyānas*), which are associated with material form; and the *formless jhānas* (*arūpa-jhānas*; *arūpa-dhyānas*), which are oriented toward immaterial or formless meditative dimensions.

*Rūpa*²¹ refers to meditative states associated with form and materiality, as they are gradually revealed to the practitioner in deep concentration.

The *rūpa-jhānas* are characterized by deep absorption in an object with form—be it physical or conceptual. The *arūpa-*

jhānas go beyond this world of form, drawing the mind into refined, formless dimensions of awareness.

Entering the *jhānas* nurtures a still and refined inner space, in which profound insight into the nature of reality can naturally unfold.

When the mind rests in calm, clarity, and concentration—as it does within the *jhānas*—it opens to the subtle layers of experience and consciousness. From this stillness, insight can arise into the three marks of existence: impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Grounded in the stability and clarity of the *jhānas*, the practitioner begins to perceive these insights directly, as lived experience—an essential unfolding on the path toward liberation (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*).

Meditation is an intimate and personal journey. Each practitioner arrives with their own experiences, temperament, and ways of seeing. It is thus no surprise that a wide range of meditative paths has taken shape.

Throughout the Buddhist tradition, many techniques and methods have taken shape. At the heart of these approaches lie two foundational practices: *samatha* (Skt.: *śamatha*)—the cultivation of calm—and *vipassanā* (Skt.: *vipaśyanā*)—the development of insight.

Samatha meditation is the quieting of the mind through calm and stillness; *vipassanā* is the clear seeing into the nature of reality. These two form the foundation upon which the Buddhist meditative path rests.

Samatha meditation supports the calming and steadying of the mind by focusing on a single object, such as the breath, a mantra, or a visual form. This process gradually leads to a

state of inner stillness and one-pointed concentration (*ekag-gatā; ekāgratā*).

Vipassanā meditation invites a deep and direct inquiry into the nature of experience—into thoughts, emotions, and sensations as they arise. Its aim is to reveal the three marks of existence (*tilakkhaṇa; trilakṣaṇa*): impermanence, suffering, and not-self. From this seeing, wisdom (*paññā; prajñā*) naturally unfolds, opening the way to liberation (*vimutti; vimukti*) and awakening (*nibbāna; nirvāṇa*).

Though deeply valuable, *samatha* meditation alone does not in itself lead to liberation (*vimutti; vimukti*). It calms and stabilizes the mind, but without the deep wisdom (*paññā; prajñā*) that penetrates the true nature of reality, extinguishing (*nibbāna; nirvāṇa*)²²—the ending of 'becoming' (*bhava*)—does not occur.

Yet the true potential of *samatha* only becomes clear when one first sees what clouds the mind's natural clarity.

For true deepening in meditation, what clouds clear awareness must first be recognized. The Five Hindrances are not abstractions, but living forces that manifest in many forms—such as restlessness, desire, and doubt.

When these disturbances have been calmed, the space opens for *samatha* to arise: a gentle, sustaining stillness in which the mind becomes clear, simple, and undisturbed.

Within this stillness, *vipassanā* ripens: the direct seeing of the three characteristics of existence (*anicca, dukkha, anat-tā*), not as ideas, but as living reality. Insight breaks through, the veil of ignorance falls away, and the path to awakening unfolds.

Samatha and *vipassanā* are like two wings of the same bird: *samatha* carries the mind into stillness, *vipassanā* opens the eyes to what has always been so.

Some practitioners deepen in the *jhānas* to steady the mind and rest in calm; others devote themselves to insight meditation and the direct seeing of impermanence. Yet whatever the emphasis—stillness or insight—the path points to the same destination: liberation, awakening, the end of illusion.

The *jhānas*, though understood in different ways, appear across all major Buddhist traditions. In Theravāda, they are given a central role in the meditative path. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, the language and approach may differ, yet the cultivation of deep meditative absorption remains a shared pursuit.

Within Theravāda Buddhism, the *jhānas* are regarded as a central pillar of meditative practice. The path typically begins with *samatha*—the quieting of the mind—followed by *vipassanā*, the unfolding of insight into the nature of reality.

In the Theravāda tradition, the *jhānas* are regarded as important stages on the path to deep insight and, ultimately, awakening. The emphasis falls primarily on the four *material jhānas* (*rūpa-jhānas*), with less—and sometimes no—focus on the four *immaterial jhānas* (*arūpa-jhānas*).

In the Theravāda tradition, the four *rūpa-jhānas* are seen as powerful stages of *samādhi*—concentration that purifies and gently refines the mind, preparing it for deep insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*). Through these absorptions, the *yogi* overcomes the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *pañca nivāraṇāḥ*) and settles into a field of inner calm and clarity. From this stillness, liberating insight can arise—into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

The *formless jhānas* (*arūpa-jhānas*) are recognized in Theravāda as subtle and refined states of concentration. They extend beyond the *rūpa-jhānas* in meditative absorption, but are not seen as essential for the realization of *nibbāna*/*nirvāṇa*. Though tranquil and expansive, they do not inher-

ently lead to deeper insight into the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*).

On the contrary, there is a clear warning that the subtle bliss and abstraction of these meditative states can give rise to attachment to refined forms of becoming, thereby obstructing the process of liberation. For this reason, the *vipassanā* tradition within Theravāda emphasizes the four *rūpa-jhānas* as a stable and sufficient basis for the unfolding of liberating insight.

In both the canonical texts and traditional meditative practice, the Buddha consistently highlights the first four *jhānas* as the direct foundation for the realization of liberation.

By contrast, the formless attainments (*arūpa-samāpattis*)²³ are generally seen as optional. While deeply refined, they are not liberating in themselves. Some teachers view them as the most subtle expression of conditioned existence—something an *arahant* ultimately leaves behind.

The *rūpa-jhānas* provide a stable and reliable basis for contemplation, free from the risk of becoming entangled in the subtle ecstasies of the formless realms—states that, while refined, are not liberating in themselves.

In this book, the *arūpa-jhānas* are acknowledged and discussed—not as meditative stages to be actively pursued, but for the sake of completeness: as an additional possibility for *yogis* with exceptionally refined concentration.

Within Mahāyāna Buddhism—widespread in countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—daily and popular practice places less emphasis on the cultivation of the *jhānas*. Instead, meditations grounded in compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) take a central role, often making use of analytical reflection to deepen insight into the nature of reality. Meditation on emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is frequently central

to the path, and the *bodhisattva* aspiration remains ever-present.²⁴

Yet in some Mahāyāna traditions, such as Zen Buddhism, deep concentration and meditative absorption remain essential—though not always named as *jhānas*.²⁵ In Zen, the silent practice of *zazen*, seated in stillness and unwavering presence, lies at the heart of the path. It resonates closely with the *jhānas* as they are described in the *Pāli* Canon.²⁶

In Vajrayāna Buddhism, primarily practiced in Tibet, Bhutan, and Mongolia, meditative absorption and deep concentration are integrated into tantric practices. Although the terminology differs and the emphasis lies on visualizations, mantras, and rituals, these states of concentration remain an essential aspect of the yogic path.

Rooted in the Mahāyāna tradition, Vajrayāna introduces tantric methods aimed at transforming the mind and swiftly deepening insight. These include visualizations of enlightened beings, the recitation of mantras, and ritual practices that harmonize body, speech, and mind into a unified field of presence. Practices such as *tonglen*—the giving and taking of suffering and compassion—are also embraced within this sacred path.²⁷

These practices are passed on through qualified teachers (*lamas*) and often require initiations (*abhisheka*)²⁸ and empowerments (*wangkur*).²⁹ Such initiations are not simply ritual forms, but deep spiritual transmissions—moments in which something essential is silently handed over from teacher to disciple, establishing a direct connection with the heart of the meditative path.³⁰

The lama holds a central place within Vajrayāna—as spiritual guide, teacher, and embodiment of the path. Hence this brief clarification.

The Tibetan word *lama* literally means 'high' or 'exalted,' referring to one who, through direct experience and deep insight, is capable of guiding others toward liberation. Lamas are revered as the primary guides on the path, entrusted with the transmission of the rituals, visualizations, and meditative practices that define this tradition.

A *lama* serves as a spiritual mentor, offering personal guidance and instruction to their disciples. They are entrusted with the transmission of tantric knowledge and esoteric teachings, which form the heart of Vajrayāna practice. This includes rituals, mantra recitation, visualizations, and meditative techniques that are essential to the unfolding of the path.

Lamas confer initiations (*abhisheka*), which are essential for receiving these advanced teachings and practices. Such initiations open the door to profound insights that can only be transmitted through the direct blessing of an authorized *lama*.

The relationship between a *lama* and their students is grounded in deep trust and reverence. This trust is vital to the unfolding of both the learning and meditative process, as the *lama* is seen as an embodiment of enlightened beings or *bodhisattvas* who have appeared specifically to transmit the teachings. *Lamas* are living expressions of the Vajrayāna path—their personal conduct and meditative presence serve as a source of inspiration and a living model for their disciples.

Beyond their role as personal teachers, *lamas* also serve a vital function within the broader Buddhist community. They lead rituals, ceremonies, and daily religious observances, offering spiritual guidance and compassionate support to the community of practitioners.

In summary, *lamas* are central figures within Vajrayāna—guiding both individuals and communities along the path to

awakening, through profound teachings and the example of their lived practice.



The integration of meditative approaches from various Buddhist traditions can deepen and accelerate insight into the true nature of reality. By weaving together different techniques and perspectives, experienced and independently-minded *yogis* cultivate a more balanced and holistic path toward realization. Such integration offers a wider range of tools and skilful means, enriching meditative practice, helping to dissolve obstacles, and supporting the unfolding of spiritual maturity and awakening.

The Theravāda approach offers the discipline and structure necessary to stabilize the mind. Mahāyāna methods help to weave compassion and wisdom into the fabric of daily life, while Vajrayāna techniques open the doorway to deep transformation through advanced meditative practices.

Combining these elements calls for insight, maturity, and inner freedom—but it can lead to a richer and more integrated spiritual path.

A few final remarks may help to offer clarity and support accurate interpretation.

To avoid possible misunderstandings, I have included the corresponding *Pāli* and *Sanskrit* terms alongside most key concepts. For the experienced reader or practitioner, these terms may serve as stepping stones toward deeper understanding—not merely as intellectual notions, but as invitations to silence, contemplation, and direct recognition.

This calls for some explanation.

The original terms often contain layers of meaning that go *beyond* standard translations. When approached with care,

they invite us to listen beyond the words and let direct experience unfold. Liberating practice arises from lived experience, not from conceptual understanding.

As in my previous works, I have included clarifications and personal reflections in the footnotes at the back of this book. It is my sincere hope that this may bring the stream a little closer—and that stepping into it may become a little easier.

May this book inspire and support you on your meditative and spiritual journey, and help uncover the deeper layers of consciousness and the true nature of reality.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my friend and *kalyāṇamitta*, Jan Dewitte, for his meticulous editing and generous care. With his insight into the subject and his keen eye for detail, Jan reviewed the text with exceptional care and precision.

His thoughtful feedback and suggestions have significantly enhanced the clarity and accuracy of this work. Jan's dedication and insight have been truly invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for his presence along this unfolding path.

Namaste,

Guy

Beerzel, Belgium, May 2025

THE JHĀNAS - BEGINNING AND END OF A PATH

“Who sees dependent origination, sees the Dhamma;
who sees the Dhamma, sees dependent origination.”

Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta

There is a wondrous simplicity in the life of the Buddha. No spectacle, no dramatic revelations—only a path that unfolds silently within the inner world of the mind. And it is precisely there, in that inward landscape, that the *jhānas* quietly open like gates, leading from confusion to clarity, from restlessness to stillness.

When the future Buddha had driven his ascetic efforts to the utmost and was on the verge of collapse under the weight of self-mortification, he turned his mind inward—toward a memory. Toward a moment from his childhood, seemingly insignificant.

He was sitting in the shade of a rose apple tree, while his father, Suddhodana, was ploughing the fields. Without seeking, without purpose, his mind naturally settled into a state of peaceful attention.

A moment of deep stillness in the life of Siddhattha—long before his awakening, long before his words would touch the world. A child beneath a tree, far from the noise, far from ambition or self-awareness. Resting in a natural, unforced quiet. Without craving, without struggle.

Later, just before his awakening, the memory resurfaced.

And in that quiet recollection, he recognized that within this simple stillness lay the seed of the true path. On the brink of physical collapse, after years of harsh austerity, the memory returned—silent and luminous, like a lamp in the darkness.

The *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* ³¹ describes this echo from the past in the following classical words:

“Then I remembered: once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose apple tree, I entered the first stage of meditation—withdrawn from sensual pleasures, withdrawn from unwholesome states, accompanied by thought and examination, born of seclusion, and filled with joy and happiness. Could this be the path to awakening?” Then, right after that memory, I realized: “This is the path to awakening!”

(...)

“By the stilling of thought and examination, I attained inner peace and one-pointedness of mind. I entered the second stage of meditation, free from thought and examination, born of concentration, filled with joy and happiness, and remained therein.”

(...)

“By the fading of joy, I dwelled in equanimity, with mindfulness and full awareness, experiencing bodily happiness—what the noble ones describe as ‘dwelling in happiness with equanimity and mindfulness.’ Thus I entered the third stage of meditation and remained therein.”

(...)

“By the letting go of pleasure and pain—and with the prior fading of joy and sorrow—I entered the fourth stage of meditation, beyond pleasure and pain, purified by equanimity and mindfulness, and remained therein.”

(...)

“When my mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, un-

blemished, free from defilements, malleable, wieldy, steady, and imperturbable, I directed it..." 9 32

This passage marks a turning point—not a theological insight, not a cosmic revelation, but the remembrance of a state of being in which the mind comes to rest on its own. Not through force, but through letting go. Not through striving, but through softness.

In that simple question—'*Could this be the path to awakening?*'—an entire worldview is turned upside down. For what Siddhattha recognizes in that moment is that the path to liberation does not lie in violence against the body, nor in suppression, but in the subtle cultivation of mindfulness and equanimity—a path that arises not from control, but from letting go.

The *first jhāna* was not a random moment from Siddhattha's childhood, but proved to be the beginning of the true path: the Middle Way (*majjhima paṭipadā*)—a way of life, *une façon de vivre*, that is neither indulgence in sensual pleasure nor extreme self-mortification.

When Siddhattha sat beneath the Bodhi tree in Uruvelā (present-day BodhGayā), no longer at war with the body but nourished by Sujātā—relaxed, receptive—it was not will-power, but stillness that guided him.

Not a sudden jolt of insight, but a slow deepening into stillness. One by one, he entered the *jhānas*—states of pure attention where the mind grew quiet and clear, untouched by distraction, released from all tension.

It is from within this deepening that the structures of existence reveal themselves. Insight does not come before stillness—it arises from it. In the calm of a mind that no longer grasps, the wheel of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītyasamutpāda*) becomes clear. There, in the refined stillness of the *fourth jhāna*, awakening is quietly born.

The *jhānas* are not incidental. They carry the path.

They uphold the silence upon which insight rests. Without that deep silence, wisdom remains shallow. For insight does not arise within contraction. Seeing requires a gentle, undivided attention to what presents itself to the *yogi*, moment by moment. And seeing requires space. Space arises when the mind no longer reacts, no longer represses, no longer grasps—when the mind itself becomes space.

The *jhānas* make this possible. They bring the mind to stillness, clarity, and unobstructed openness. They purify attention from craving, aversion, and distraction, and lead it toward full receptivity. In that openness, the mind becomes ripe for insight—for the direct seeing of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the absence of a lasting self.

And yet, it is sometimes suggested today that the *jhānas* are optional, perhaps even unnecessary—or suited only for those who happen to have enough time to meditate deeply.

But anyone who takes the Buddha's life seriously sees that the Master himself sought out, practiced, and embodied these states. They were no mere backdrop, no spiritual ornament—they were the vehicle of his transformation.

The mind stabilized in the *jhānas* does not grow dull or sluggish, but becomes more sensitive, more refined, more precise. No longer pulled outward through the senses, it attunes to the deeper rhythm of existence. Impermanence reveals itself—not as an idea, not as a concept, but as a directly felt truth. Never forget: insight is not produced; it is uncovered.

I practice the *jhānas* because they prepare the ground—not as an end in themselves, but as a necessary foundation where insight can take root. Without calm (*samatha*; *śamatha*), there is no insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*). Without silence, there is no liberation.

The mind that clings, chases, and pushes cannot see what has always been visible—yet veiled. Only when the mind grows still does what was hidden come into view.

The Buddha points to this again and again: stillness, concentration, right effort, purification of the mind—these are not side-paths. This is the path itself.

The *jhānas* mark not only the beginning of his path, but also its end. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, just before his passing, the Buddha once again enters the *jhānas*—moving in reverse order, from the first to the highest formless state, even to the cessation of perception and feeling. Then he returns, step by step. Ultimately, he enters *parinibbāna* from the *fourth jhāna*—the state of pure awareness, equanimity, and peace.

I quote from the *sutta*:

“Then the Blessed One entered the first *jhāna*, from the first to the second, from the second to the third, from the third to the fourth... then into the cessation of perception and feeling. From there he returned, down to the first, and ascending once again, he entered the fourth *jhāna*. And from there, he passed into *parinibbāna*. ”

What a quiet perfection. Just as the path began, so it ends: not in words, but in stillness. Not in concepts, but in being. Not in metaphysical thought, but in the direct seeing of what is.

The *jhānas* are not merely the trace of the Buddha's liberation—they are also his final breath.

Whoever wishes to walk this path cannot turn away from this. It is the spiritual legacy of the Buddha himself. The *jhānas* are not a hindrance, not a luxury, not some esoteric terrain.

They are the natural unfolding of a mind releasing itself from craving and aversion, turning toward clarity. And it is precisely that all-encompassing clarity that makes insight possible.

This book is written for those who sense this truth. For those who see that liberation is not found in the accumulation of knowledge, but in the relinquishment of confusion—the restlessness of thought, the urge to control, the attachment to views, opinions, and self-images. In short, everything that fragments and clouds the mind.

The *jhānas* are a training in letting go. They are not a final destination, but a gate—a necessary threshold. To skip it is to risk building one's path on unsteady ground.

Just as the Buddha began his path in silence and ended it in silence, so too are we invited to train the mind in silence.

Not the silence of isolation—physical or mental—but the silence of clarity. Not the silence of absence, but the silence of pure presence (*sati; smṛti*).

In that silence, there is no mystery waiting—only something simpler: a mind that no longer grasps, and so sees everything as it is.

That is where insight begins—in the pause between the sixth and seventh links of dependent origination, between contact (*phassa; sparśa*) and feeling (*vedanā; id.*).

In that brief, silent moment—before grasping arises, before the chain of reactivity sets in—the possibility of freedom opens. It is here that the trained mind sees clearly, not through suppression, but through stillness.

• *Yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati, so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati, so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati— Who*

sees dependent origination, sees the Dhamma; who sees the Dhamma, sees dependent origination. ♪ ³³

And he was right.



HINDRANCES - WHAT THEY ARE? HOW THEY WORK?

“ Every problem that arises during meditation will be one of these Five Hindrances, or a combination of them. ”

Ajahn Brahm

To truly enter the *jhānas*—those refined states of meditative absorption (*appanā-samādhī*; *apraṇihita-samādhī*)³⁴—one must first gain insight into the workings of the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*). These mental obstacles are the direct cause of restlessness, distraction, and obscuration of insight. As long as they are not clearly recognized and overcome, the mind remains unfit for deepening and stillness.

In Buddhist meditation practice, the mind is often compared to clear water. By its nature, this water is pure and transparent—just as consciousness is, in its essence, open, luminous, and unstained. But when mud leaves, or foam enter the water, it becomes clouded. It loses its capacity to reveal the bottom. In such a state, one cannot see through the surface—clarity is lost.

In the same way, the mind becomes clouded by the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*): sensual desire, aversion, sluggishness, restlessness, and doubt. Each of these mental disturbances acts like a form of inner sediment or turbulence in the water. They make it impossible to see clearly—to gain insight into the true nature of phenomena.

However, when we allow the mind to become still—not through force, but through attentive presence—the sediment begins to settle naturally. Just as the mud in a pond sinks to the bottom when no longer stirred, so too the mind settles when we no longer feed the hindrances. The water becomes clear again—and what has always been present at the bottom naturally comes into view.

This metaphor reveals that insight is not something we create, but something that becomes visible when the mind is clear and still enough to receive it.

As the Buddha himself states in the *suttas*:

• *Dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opanayiko paccat-taṃ veditabbo viññūhī* — *The Dhamma is visible here and now, timeless, inviting investigation, oriented toward inner awakening, and to be realized by the wise.* • ³⁵

Meditation practice is therefore not an attempt to add something to the mind, but rather to recognize, release, and allow to settle the disturbances that obscure clarity. In that silence—which naturally arises when the mind no longer chases or pushes—the *Dhamma* appears: not as a dry theory, but as a living truth in a mind that has come to rest.

Just like the image of tainted water in a pond, the Five Hindrances obstruct the mind's natural ability to come to rest, to become clear, and to penetrate the deeper layers of insight. The Buddha did not refer to these hindrances as obscurations of wisdom (*paññā-nivāraṇā*) ³⁶ by coincidence—for as long as they remain active, the true nature of phenomena stays veiled.

These hindrances are not abstract concepts, but direct experiences familiar to every practitioner: desire that clings to what is pleasant (*kāmacchanda*; *id.*); aversion or resistance toward what is unpleasant (*vyāpāda*; *id.*); dullness and lethargy of body and mind (*thīna-middha*; *styāna-middha*); restlessness about the future (*uddhacca*; *auddhatya*), and inner unease, remorse, or regret about the past (*kukkucca*; *kaukrtya*); and finally, doubt that undermines confidence (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*).

The Five Hindrances form a subtle yet powerful web of conditioning that keeps the mind caught in fragmentation and non-freedom. They pull attention outward, disrupt the inner

balance, and anchor the mind in a worldly orientation. They are like shadows that obscure the light of concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*) and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

The names given to the Five Hindrances in the Buddhist tradition are not merely technical terms, they carry a profound metaphorical significance.

In both Pāli and Sanskrit, the term *nīvaraṇa* literally refers to something that blocks or shuts off—like a curtain that keeps out the light, a veil that clouds the view, or a layer of mud that turns clear water opaque. The hindrances are not merely mental disturbances; they are veils that stand between the mind and reality.

Each individual hindrance is named in a way that not only describes its function, but also evokes a vivid image of the inner state in which it arises.

Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; *id.*) is like a fragrance that seduces and draws the mind along—it is impossible to see clearly while chasing what one craves. Aversion (*vyāpāda*; *id.*) is like smoke that clouds the gaze, a burning inner resistance that closes the heart. Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*; *styāna-middha*) are like a heavy fog—a dulling density of awareness in which clarity is muffled. Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*; *auddhatya-kaukrtya*) make the mind tremble like wind on water: always in motion, never at ease. And doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*) is like a winding path in the dark—directionless, lacking trust.

Whoever contemplates these terms deeply will see that they do not merely refer to mental states, but to veiling forces that stand between insight and direct experience. By reflecting on their names as metaphors for a mind in confusion, one not only gains a deeper understanding, but also opens the space for discernment—and, ultimately, for liberation.

This is why the purification of these hindrances is not a side issue, but the gateway to true meditation.

It is no coincidence that the Buddha, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas* and throughout the *Pāli* Canon, gave careful attention to the recognition, understanding, and transcendence of these forces. Without such preparation, the *jhānas* cannot be entered.

And those who have not thoroughly examined the hindrances will encounter them again—even within the unfolding of the *jhānas*, though in more subtle forms. They do not vanish on their own; they transform only when deeply understood and penetrated.

Paradoxically, the Five Hindrances also offer us a chance: they show us exactly where and how we are attached, where the mind loses itself in craving, resistance, or doubt.

Each hindrance that is recognized and released makes the mind freer, lighter, and clearer. In that process, the space arises in which the *jhānas* can unfold naturally—not as an end in themselves, but as manifestations of a pure, open, and silent mind.

By not ignoring the hindrances, but studying them with full attention, we take a crucial step on the path to liberation. They are the mirror in which we see through the play of *saṃsāra*—and that clarity is the very condition for any deep insight.

Overview and Context

The Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *id.*)³⁷ are mental states that significantly obstruct the progress of meditation and the development of both concentration and insight.

They are relevant to every meditator, as they disturb the mind and prevent it from settling into calm and focus.

Understanding and overcoming these hindrances is therefore essential for the unfolding of meditation and for accessing deeper states of awareness and insight.

Ajahn Brahm (Brahmavamso) expresses it as follows: ³⁸

‘The deliberate thought to overcome these Five Hindrances is important because it is precisely these Five Hindrances that block the path to both the jhānas and to wisdom. They are what feed avijjā. The Buddha said they are the nutriment, the food of delusion.’ ⁹

Ajahn Brahm also points out that every difficulty encountered in meditation stems from one or more of these hindrances: ³⁹

‘Every problem that arises during meditation will be one of these Five Hindrances, or a combination of them. So, if you experience any difficulty, use the framework of the Five Hindrances as a checklist to identify the problem. Only then will you know which antidote to apply—putting it into practice carefully—to move beyond the active hindrance into deeper meditation.’

When the Five Hindrances are fully overcome, every barrier between the yogi and the bliss of jhāna falls away. The fact that you gain access to jhāna is the ultimate proof that the Five Hindrances have been conquered.’ ⁹

These obstacles should not be viewed as ‘sins’; rather, they are better understood as mental hindrances or blockages encountered by the practitioner on the path to self-realization.

Unlike many monotheistic traditions, where inner tendencies such as desire or anger are often seen as moral faults or transgressions against a higher will, the Buddha’s teaching does not speak of sin. Nothing is considered ‘sinful’—only a

form of ignorance that can be seen through and transcended by insight.

The Five Hindrances are not misdeeds, but natural movements of a mind that has not yet come to rest. There is no moral condemnation—only an invitation to understanding, clarity, and liberation.

It is important for the *yogi* to recognize that the presence of these hindrances often goes hand in hand with a strengthening of the ego. The sense of ‘I’ becomes more pronounced precisely when the mind resists, clings, or closes itself off.

This ‘I’ manifests as control, as resistance, as impatience or craving—and in doing so, it feeds the hindrance itself. A mind that does not want to feel, does not want to let go, or seeks something to hold on to, makes the ego the axis of its perception.

And yet, for self-realization, the opposite is required: a softening of the sense of self, a letting go of identification, the dissolution of the control center.

Self-realization is, quite literally, a *contradictio in terminis*.

For in the end—who, or what, would be realizing?

What is ultimately realized is precisely this: that no permanent, independent ‘self’ exists. Not an ‘I’ that attains something, but the insight that the very image of ‘I’ is a construction.

The paradox lies in the fact that this realization can only dawn when the ego no longer sustains itself—when the mind becomes silent, transparent, and willing to vanish as the center, the navel of the world.

This is why the hindrances not only cause agitation, but also subtly reinforce the sense of 'I'. Those who do not see through them remain caught in a cycle of identification.

And consequently: of *dukkha*. And *saṃsāra*.

Where do the Five Hindrances come from?

A pressing question arises: where do the Five Hindrances come from? What is their origin—their deeper ground of arising?

The Five Hindrances are mental obstacles that obstruct progress in meditation and spiritual development. They include sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt.

Their origin is complex and deeply embedded in the human psyche. They arise from deeply conditioned emotional and mental patterns—formed by the ways we perceive, interpret, and respond to experience.

They are the fruits (*phala*; *id.*)⁴⁰ of previous conditioning, sustained by our automatic reactions (*saṅkhāra*; *saṃskāra*)⁴¹ to sensory impressions.

According to the Buddhist teaching, these hindrances arise in part as a result of *kamma* (*karma*)⁴² and mental conditioning.

Our past intentions,⁴³ thoughts, words, and actions leave traces in the mind. They shape tendencies and habits that express themselves again and again, eventually manifesting as hindrances on the path.

In this way, sensual desire, aversion, dullness and lethargy, restlessness and remorse, and doubt arise—not out of nowhere, but as the natural result of a mind that keeps repeating itself. In a certain sense, this may be seen as a form of

inner rebirth: each time craving, aversion, or doubt arises, an old pattern is born again—and the cycle of suffering renews itself. ⁴⁴

In the context of the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariya saccāni; catvāri ārya satyāni*), which describe suffering and its causes, the Five Hindrances are understood as primary obstacles that sustain that suffering.

They are not merely theoretical concepts, but direct inner experiences that arise during meditation—manifestations of the mind's resistance to silence, clarity, and insight. The way we relate to these mental disturbances—how we recognize them, meet them, and ultimately transform them—largely shapes the course of our spiritual development.

In addition to personal conditioning, social and cultural influences also play a role. The way we are raised, and the environment in which we live, often reinforce the roots of these hindrances: desire is encouraged, doubt is fed, and restlessness is seldom restrained.

By recognizing how deeply these hindrances are interwoven with both our inner and outer world, we come to see that their transparency—and thus their cessation—can arise only through mindfulness, patience, and a quiet trust in the path.



HOW THE HINDRANCES INFLUENCE THE MIND

‘Practice without the Five Hindrances brings inner peace, clarity, and wisdom. When they are not eradicated, the mind remains trapped in illusion and craving, obstructing all forms of spiritual progress.’⁹

The careful analysis of the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*; *pañca nīvaraṇāṇi*) is essential—both from a Buddhist perspective and for the personal development of the *yogi*.

These hindrances—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt—are fundamental obstacles that cloud the mind and hinder the deepening of meditation and spiritual growth.

By carefully examining these hindrances (*yoniso manasikāra*; *yukti-manaskāra*),⁴⁵ profound insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*)⁴⁶ arises into their subtle workings and their influence on the mental state. This insight deepens self-awareness, enabling the *yogi* to recognize and transcend the underlying patterns in thought, speech, and action. In this transparent clarity, consciousness refines itself, becomes more stable and receptive, and the quality of inner contemplation deepens.

This refinement of awareness has a direct effect on meditative practice. The hindrances are, after all, the primary disruptors of concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*) and inner calm (*pasaddhi*; *praśrabdhi*).⁴⁷

When the *yogi* learns to understand them, natural strategies begin to emerge—ways of softening, seeing through, and letting go. Meditation thereby becomes not only deeper, but also more purposeful and fruitful.

In this sense, the Five Hindrances are not a peripheral phenomenon, but a central aspect of the Buddhist path toward liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*) and cessation (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*).

Their insightful elimination is a necessary and inevitable step on the path of clarity, purification, and release.

Practice free from these hindrances gives rise to inner peace (*santi*; *śānti*)⁴⁸ and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).⁴⁹ When they are not removed, the mind remains caught in illusion and craving, obstructing and preventing all forms of spiritual growth.

Moreover, the Five Hindrances have a clear impact on emotional and mental well-being.

Sensual desire can give rise to addictive patterns. Restlessness and remorse generate inner agitation and stress. Ill will and doubt erode trust and undermine relationships.

By examining the nature and function of these hindrances, the *yogī* discovers ways to transform them—leading to a more balanced and harmonious life.

This approach not only deepens meditation practice, but also strengthens one's understanding of the Buddhist teaching. It refines comprehension of the nature, origin, and impact of mental defilements (*kilesā*; *kleśa*).

Through the clear and mindful observation of the hindrances, the *yogī* begins to recognize the underlying mechanisms that obstruct spiritual growth. In doing so, the personal path to liberation becomes fertile ground for sharing insight and spreading the *Dhamma* within the community.

At the same time, this practice supports the cultivation of core qualities such as wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*). By gaining insight into one's own obsta-

cles, one's capacity for empathy and understanding naturally deepens.

A careful, step-by-step approach makes it possible to systematically recognize, understand, and release each hindrance—without being overwhelmed by its force.

It supports the meditation practice, promotes emotional and mental well-being, and strengthens the development of liberating qualities such as wisdom and compassion. It is a systematic and effective way to overcome the hindrances and to clear the path toward awakening and inner peace.

The ascending structure of the *jhānas* represents, at least for me, one of the few aspects of the *Dhamma* in which I wholeheartedly affirm the value of clear, systematic progression and structure—not as dogma, but as a subtle learning pathway that prepares the mind for insight.



KĀMACCHANDA

• *The teaching that goes against the stream is deep, subtle, and hidden—it remains invisible to those blinded by desire.* •

Sumana Samanera

Kāmacchanda ⁵⁰ stands for ‘desire for sense pleasure’; the longing for ‘sensual craving.’

Though we all intuitively sense what is meant here, this moment invites a careful and attentive exploration. Let us not reject this intricate constellation called ‘sensual desire’, but regard it with quiet presence. Like an investigator who observes with patience and precision—attentively, without judgment—merely to understand what unfolds.

By attentively engaging in this process of introspection and self-reflection, we gain insight into our mental, verbal, and physical actions. In doing so, we develop a method or ‘technique’ to break through the conditioned existence shaped by habitual patterns.

What is this really about?

Kāmacchanda refers to the intense longing or craving for pleasure and gratification derived through the senses. It is the fulfillment of sensual contact—that is, everything belonging to the domain of the senses—from grasping at objects to thirsting for the most exquisite experiences. It encompasses desires that are fueled by both sensory and mental stimulation.

Sensual craving involves all kinds of experiences: Visual pleasure (the longing for beautiful and attractive things such as art, nature, people), Auditory pleasure (the desire for

pleasant sounds, like music, the sounds of animals, water, wind, trees, natural phenomena), Olfactory pleasure (the craving for delightful scents like perfume, food, flowers), Gustatory pleasure (the craving for delicious tastes and food), Tactile pleasure (the longing for pleasant touches, such as soft fabrics, massages, physical contact), and mental pleasure (the desire for pleasant thoughts, fantasies, and memories).

Sensual desire is, at its core, a subtle refusal to fully accept the present moment. Rather than resting in reality as it unfolds, the mind turns toward something else—something more pleasant, something yet to come, something outside the now.

This craving expresses itself in countless forms: the pursuit of beauty, possessions, success, sensuality, or spiritual experiences. Even subtle desires such as ‘a better meditation session’ or ‘faster spiritual progress’ fall into this category. The purer the mind becomes, the subtler the desire manifests.

In a Buddhist context, it is important to understand that sensual desire is not inherently wrong. It is the excessive and ungoverned craving that gives rise to difficulty—addiction, distraction, and emotional unrest.

Buddhist practice is directed toward cultivating awareness and insight, in order to understand and gently tame desire.

This helps the practitioner lead a more balanced and fulfilling life, free from the restlessness and suffering caused by uncontrolled sensual desire.

Through the cultivation of mindfulness and meditation, the practitioner learns to observe desire without giving in to it, thus cultivating inner peace and spiritual growth.

An undisciplined mind drowns—both literally and metaphorically—in its subjective fantasy world of thoughts about sex, food, career, possessions, travel, music...

The movements of an undisciplined mind are largely reactions to sensory stimuli, lacking true insight or any real prospect of liberation...

No prospect of liberation... This is the ever-turning wheel of birth and death, of arising and passing away, without beginning or end. *Saṃsāra*. This is the fate of the vast majority of all sentient beings—our companions in that never-ending story of birth, aging, illness, and death...

This inevitably raises the following question: is there then no liberation possible from *dukkha/duḥkha*?

There is—certainly so—but not in the way the untrained mind of the worldling (*puthujjana*; *prthagjana*) conveniently imagines it.

Liberation from suffering can only be realized when the *yogi* no longer allows their happiness to depend on the impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*)—on that which is subject to change: a position, a person, an experience...

As long as there is craving (*taṇhā*; *trṣṇā*) for the pleasant, aversion (*paṭigha*; *pratigha*) toward the unpleasant, and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*) about the nature of existence, *dukkha/duḥkha* will continue to repeat itself. This is what the Buddha calls *saṃsāra*: going in circles—doing the same thing over and over again, always hoping for a different result: rebirth as the endless, futile cycle of birth and death.

True liberation is not an escape from the world, but an inner transformation: a direct seeing-through of the three characteristics of existence—impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā*;

anātman)—and the letting go of attachment to what does not last.

Only when the mind turns toward the unconditioned (*asaṅkhaṭṭha dhamma*; *asaṃskṛta dharma*)⁵¹ does the endless process of 'becoming' (*bhava*; *id.*) come to an end, and liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*) comes into view—through the quenching of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion, known as *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*.

To make this turning inward tangible, the Buddha did not resort to abstract concepts, but to imagery that speaks directly to the heart. Metaphors, in his time as now, spoke to the mind with clarity, directness, and unforgettable force.

In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*,⁵² the Buddha compares sensual desires to: gnawed bones; a hunk of meat; a grass torch; a pit of glowing embers; a dream; borrowed goods; a fruit tree; a slaughterhouse; a sword; and a serpent's head.

Let us journey back to that distant past: more than 2,600 years ago, the Buddha brought the essence of his teaching to life in a way that was unforgettable—with a force that still resonates to this day.

— Sensual desires are like gnawed bones thrown to a hungry dog. They do not satisfy hunger—so too, sensual cravings never provide lasting fulfillment.

— Sensual desires are like a chunk of meat that birds of prey fight over. The one who holds it is at risk of being torn by the deadly beaks and claws of the others. Because many people crave the same things (*Skr. bahuśādhāraṇa*),⁵³ conflict is inevitable.

— Sensual desires are like a grass torch that may give light in calm conditions but burns the one who carries it carelessly when the wind rises. Likewise, sensual desires cause serious harm when we are unaware of their danger.

— Sensual desires are like a pit of glowing embers into which one is thrown. If one cannot escape, one burns. Similarly, desires drag us to our misfortune, whether through our own bad actions or bad company.

— Sensual desires are like a dream—a dazzling dream that vanishes upon awakening. So too are sensual cravings mere illusions that dissolve when we're confronted with reality.

— Sensual desires are like borrowed goods: the borrower proudly flaunts them, but once reclaimed, the emperor has no clothes. In the same way, sensual pleasures are only temporary and offer no lasting joy.

— Sensual desires are like a fruit tree that a greedy man climbs to pick its fruit. Another man, coveting the same fruit, chops the tree down. If the first man doesn't get down in time, he breaks his neck. Likewise, chasing desires leads to ruin.

— Sensual desires are like a slaughterhouse, killing all that is noble in a person and severing their spiritual development.

— Sensual desires are like a sword, piercing deep and leaving painful wounds. Unfulfilled desires leave lasting scars.

— Sensual desires are like a serpent's head, posing great risk to those who walk carelessly through the jungle of sensual craving.

These metaphors illustrate the destructive nature of *kāmacchanda*: sensual desire leads to disappointment, conflict, suffering, and ultimately, spiritual blindness. Desire clouds our perception and prevents us from seeing things as they truly are.

What the Buddha makes vividly clear in this sutta is that a mind intoxicated by sensual craving is incapable of perceiving reality as it truly is (*yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana*).⁵⁴

Sumana Samanera defines it clearly:⁵⁵

‘*The teaching that goes against the stream is deep, subtle, and hidden—it remains invisible to those blinded by desire.*’

Back to the 21st century. What are most people doing, if not shopping? Bargain hunting with a frenzied, almost savage gleam in the eye. Just look at the sales seasons. I always wonder: *who is the hunter? Who the prey?*

This perpetual craving for more, always more, ever-different sensory stimulation that cries out for satisfaction, leads to suffering, sorrow, and frustration, and becomes the root cause of ongoing discontent—the unbearable lightness of being...

Śāntideva:⁵⁶

‘*In the cycle of existence, there is no satiation in regard to sensual pleasures—honey on the edge of a razor blade.*’

Sensual desires essentially mean that we want something other than what we have right now. And whenever we want something other than what is present *now*, we are pulled away from the present moment. Naturally, joy and inner peace become distant.

Sensual desires are obsessive and insatiable, because greed (wanting to possess something) and craving (longing for something that belongs to another) are never-ending.

The following quote is taken from *Jātaka* #402:⁵⁷

‘*There are sixteen things that are never satisfied.
Which sixteen?*’

*All rivers in the world do not satisfy the ocean;
fuel does not satisfy fire;
wealth does not satisfy a king;
evil deeds do not satisfy a fool;
an immoral woman is never satisfied with adultery,
ornaments, or the bearing of children;
a brāhmaṇa is never satisfied with mantras;
a yogi is never satisfied with attaining desired states;
a renunciant is never satisfied with giving up worldliness;
one who is content with little is never satisfied
with fulfilling his duties;
one who is full of energy is never satisfied with exertion;
a storyteller is never satisfied with telling tales;
a learned man is never satisfied with followers;
a faithful devotee is never satisfied
with serving the Saṅgha;
a generous person is never satisfied with giving;
a wise person is never satisfied with hearing the Dhamma;
and the four assemblies of followers ⁵⁸
are never satisfied with beholding a Tathāgata. ⁵⁹ ♀*

Naturally, this first hindrance forms the greatest obstacle: it is deeply embedded in our very genes.

Sensual desires thus also constitute the greatest hindrance to understanding the true nature of things. They continually agitate us and keep us in deep ignorance.

This is Māra ⁶⁰ in his most potent form. Desires build walls around us; without desire, these walls become gateways to insight.

The key word here is identification.

In the context of Buddhist psychology and philosophy, the term *identification* is essential, because identifying with desire and ego (the sense of a separate self) is the root cause of suffering.

According to the Buddha's teaching, craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*) and attachment (*upādāna*; *id.*) are the causes of suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*). When we identify with our desires and regard them as part of who we are, we reinforce our sense of self and construct mental barriers.

Identification with desire and ego reinforces the self-image. This ego-based self-image creates separation and duality, leading us to view reality through a limited, self-centered lens. This obstructs any real insight into the nature of reality (*yathā-bhūta*; *id.*).

When, on the other hand, we stop identifying with our desires, we reduce both our attachment and the sense of a fixed, unchanging self. This softens the mental boundaries and opens the way to insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*) and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

Without identification with desire, our experiences no longer appear as walls that confine us, but as gates that open to deeper understanding. We then recognize the true nature of phenomena—as impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: ⁶¹

** Pure awareness does not mean you feel nothing—
it simply means you do not identify with what you feel. ⁶²*

*It doesn't mean you have no body—
you simply don't identify with the body.*

You are just who you are.

In that pure, open awareness, everything is present.

*Everything manifests from there,
spontaneously and flexibly.*

*The best is when everything that arises
is instantly liberated.*

*Otherwise—as happens in our daily experience—
something beautiful arises
and we try to hold on to it.*

*We cling to it,
and then that very beauty begins to fade
and eventually turns into something ugly.
Just like a wonderful romance
can end in a painful breakup.
Why did that blissful experience of love not last?
Simply because there was no open awareness.
So try to shift your sense of self
into that open awareness. **

If we look, listen, smell, taste, feel, or think with expectation, with craving, with identification, we will never truly understand what is actually happening.

Then we go on living like zombies in the wheel of *saṃsāra*, endlessly repeating the same patterns in the unrealistic hope that the outcome will somehow be different.

Then we will—like on a cloudy day—never get to see the sun. Then we ‘understand’ things, phenomena, *dharmas*, merely subjectively, always different from how they actually are.

With identification, it becomes impossible to see the true nature of phenomena (*svabhāva*).

And this true nature—*yathā-bhūta*—is the process of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Bertjan Oosterbeek: ⁶³

** All of our eyes see exactly the same thing.
It's only when our thinking—our ego—interferes
that we begin to see things differently.
That is a restriction of our vision,
because we can no longer see
what we are actually seeing.*

*It is there that our confusion arises,
where our suffering arises,
where all suffering arises. °*

Sensual desire is deeply intertwined with the ego—with ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘mine’: it is shaped by personal preferences. Because the sense of self is so closely involved in these desires, they lead to identification, and thus to suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*).

Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; *id.*) does not arise from the objects themselves, but from the way these objects are perceived and interpreted through the senses. It is our perception (*saññā*; *saṃjñā*) that determines whether something is experienced as pleasant or unpleasant, and it is based on this colored perception that craving or aversion arises. The desire is not directed at the object itself, but at the mental image formed of it.

‘*Saññā*’ plays a crucial role in this: it colors our experience deeply—it makes our world recognizable and meaningful, but also deceptively self-evident.

‘*Saññā/saṃjñā*’ is fast, dominant, and often blinding, precisely because it is so closely tied to the illusory ‘self’. It creates a world that seems naturally meaningful and objective, while that meaning is in fact assigned by the mind. ‘*Saññā/saṃjñā*’ is not a neutral phenomenon.

A scent that evokes disgust in one person can be pleasant to another—not due to the olfactory consciousness itself (*ghāṇa-viññāṇa*), ⁶⁴ but through the interpretation that occurs in the mental consciousness (*mano-viññāṇa*), ⁶⁵ shaped by perception (*saññā*; *saṃjñā*).

What we see, hear, or smell is therefore never just a sensory impression, but always a form of interpretative perception—a subtle interplay between sense, mind, and habitual pattern.

In that sense, *saññā/saṃjñā* is not mere observation, but the bridge between sense and meaning: it turns consciousness into a world of recognition, expectation, and projection.

Saññā/saṃjñā is ‘perceptive knowing’—and precisely because of that, it is both indispensable and misleading. It offers orientation, yet simultaneously creates illusion.

This is why understanding the function of *saññā/saṃjñā* is so fundamental on the path to liberation: it reveals how meaning arises, and how attachment subtly embeds itself in experience.

The key to liberation lies precisely in the transition between contact (*phassa; sparśa*) and feeling (*vedanā; id.*)—the sixth and seventh links in the process of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda*).

Although liberation ultimately arises through insight into the full process of dependent origination, there is a particularly sensitive turning point in the transition between contact and feeling. Precisely there—before the arising of craving (*taṇhā; tṛṣṇā*)—the chain can be broken. For the attentive practitioner, this is where the gateway to liberation opens.

It is the point at which a feeling (*vedanā; id.*) does not automatically lead to craving (*taṇhā; tṛṣṇā*), clinging (*upādāna; id.*), and becoming (*bhava; id.*), but instead gives rise to clear insight (*vipassanā; vipaśyanā*) and liberation (*vimutti; vimukti*).⁶⁶

This insight marks a pivotal shift in Buddhist psychology and on the path to liberation. It is the kind of core realization that, once embodied, brings about a complete transformation in practice and perception.

For example: the scent of jasmine reaches the nose. The sensory contact itself is neutral. But within a fraction of a second, the mind recognizes the scent as pleasant. A subtle

preference arises—a tendency to hold on. That one scent is no longer just a scent, but has become a desire. Precisely in that in-between space—where perception shifts into attachment—lies the field in which liberating insight becomes possible.

As mentioned earlier, the feeling of pleasantness or aversion does not arise from the object itself, but from the way it is interpreted.

In an experience colored by *saññā/saṃjñā*, expectation plays a decisive role: when reality aligns with what we hope for or desire, we experience joy or excitement; when it deviates, disappointment or frustration arises.

This mental reaction (*saṅkhāra; saṃskāra*) colors our feeling (*vedanā; id.*): pleasant when there is preference, unpleasant when there is aversion, or neutral when there is no strong involvement.

This coloring does not come from the object itself, but from how the mind interprets the object based on past experiences and expectations—rooted in conditioning.

A curious phenomenon is that sensual desires become more subtle—meaning harder to recognize—as the mind becomes purer. But this does not make them less ego-centered.

An example: the ultimate desire for self-realization. Or the desire for a 'good' meditation session.

No matter how spiritual the desire may seem, it remains desire—and thus a hindrance.

This does not mean we are not allowed to experience joy through the senses. Sensuality in itself is not the problem—it is the attachment to it, the grasping, that turns it into an obstacle.

Mary Oliver: ⁶⁷

*• To live in this world, you must be able to do three things:
to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones
knowing your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes,
to let it go, to let it go. •*

We are allowed to enjoy life fully—as long as we respect one boundary: maintaining harmony in its broadest sense.

But the craving for that enjoyment—we must dissolve. To enjoy without craving. To enjoy without being a slave to desire: without desire, inner peace remains undisturbed and everything stays in balance.

When we crave, dissatisfaction takes hold of us. Desire is synonymous with ego: as long as there is an 'I,' there is desire; as long as there is desire, there is suffering.

Dukkha is universal and inseparably bound to our entire existence. All physical and mental phenomena carry the mark of suffering: nothing is stable; nothing is reliable; nothing is controllable. Everything is in constant flux; there is no continuity. No phenomenon offers shelter.

All that is impermanent inevitably leads to distress. Impermanence creates the suffocating truth that whatever arises is doomed to pass away—with no escape route.

Every birth, every becoming (*bhava*), turns out—literally and figuratively—to be a dead-end street. Pure anguish.

Sayadaw U Pandita: ⁶⁸

*• To live means to come into existence.
For human beings, this means an extremely
painful birth process, with death waiting at the end.
Between those two points, we experience*

illness, accidents, and the pain of aging.

*There is also emotional pain: not getting what we desire,
depression and decline, and the unavoidable
entanglement with people and things we reject. 9*

Dukkha has its roots in craving. If, however, we are without craving, we become peaceful: when desire (*taṇhā*; *trṣṇā*) ends, suffering also ends.

It is therefore of utmost importance to block these desires (even temporarily), and ultimately to eradicate them.

The Buddha said: ⁶⁹

• *Taṇhāya mūlaṃ khaṇatha — Dig up the root of craving. 9*

Our consciousness uses every moment of ignorance to reach for pleasant forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts.

We are so addicted to this eternal longing that, for most, it is nearly impossible to imagine that there could be other forms of happiness than sensual desire.

Liberation is only possible if we come to see the impermanence and unreliability (*anicca*; *anitya*), the suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and the not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) nature of all conditioned phenomena through direct, personal experience (*paccakkha ñāṇa*; *pratyakṣa jñāna*). ⁷⁰

This deeply personal, experiential realization—this 'penetration'—of the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*) is the transformative force toward ultimate liberation.

Once we succeed—after establishing moral purity (*sīla*; *id.*)—in opening up the inner space of meditation with concentrated awareness (a fusion of *samatha/śamatha* and *vipas-sanā/vipaśyanā*), ⁷¹ and with wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*), then

conditioning and all knowledge fall away, and our mind is entirely surrendered to that special, independent, self-purifying dynamic that—spontaneous and autonomous—naturally inclines toward ever-deepening stillness and inner peace.

Kathleen Dowling Singh: ⁷²

• *We long for the experience of unwavering peace (acalaṃ sukham), regardless of what arises—regardless of each new wave. We long for the grace that is only present in an awareness free from self-centeredness, from clinging to the self, from nurturing the self. Such an awareness no longer personalizes any wave in an automatic, reactive way.* •

Daniel Coleman: ⁷³

• *To reach effortless sīla [moral purity], the ego must 'die'—meaning, desires rooted in thoughts about the self must cease to be the primary driver of behavior.*

According to the Visuddhimagga, when this 'death' occurs through the development of samādhi [concentration], the ego persists as latent tendencies (anusayā). These remain dormant as long as the mind is concentrated, but reemerge once concentration weakens.

If, however, the death of ego is the result of the maturation of paññā/prajñā [wisdom], the ego ceases to exist as a guiding force in one's behavior, even if it may still appear in thought—as old mental habit.

With full insight, the mind remains unattached to ego-driven desires, now seen as impermanent (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactory (dukkha; duḥkha), and not-self (anattā; anātman).

At the first glimpse of nibbāna/nirvāṇa [upon entering the stream—sotāpatti/srotāpatti], sīla is perfected: the potential for impure actions is completely relinquished.

From an Eastern perspective, this final state is virāga—a condition of coolness, dispassion, and effortless moral purity. ⁷⁴

Sīla does not merely mean refraining from forbidden actions, but also implies avoiding even the intention to think, speak, or act in such ways—for in Buddhism, intentions are seen as the root of all actions.

This is why the Visuddhimagga advises the practitioner, when lustful thoughts arise, to immediately counter them by contemplating the unattractiveness of the body.

The purpose of moral purity is to free the practitioner from thoughts filled with regret, guilt, or shame. ⁹

In practical terms for meditation practice, a few suggestions:

—If the meditator's thoughts, especially at the beginning of the session, drift toward sensual desire, the practical approach—aligned with the time-tested method of *satipaṭṭhāna*—is to observe what is happening in the mind with diligent effort (*ātāpi*), non-reactive mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), clear comprehension (*sampajañña*; *saṃprajanya*), and equanimity—free from craving and aversion (*vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassa*; *vinīya loke abhiṣyanda-daumanasya*).

The *yogi* notices the desire without giving it any further response—without getting caught in its story. 'Desire' here refers to a mental state that is dissatisfied with the present moment and seeks gratification through sensual objects.

At its core, desire is a form of delusion: it makes something outside ourselves appear to be a source of fulfillment, while in truth it strengthens the sense of a self that constantly lacks and longs. They create the sense of an 'I' that desires, that searches, that connects itself to the object of longing.

In this sense, desires are ego-constructing: they continually rebuild the feeling of a separate self.

Thus, desires are deceptive impulses—they cloud perception and continually reinforce the self-sense. The attentive *yogi* remains quietly present with the arising and passing of desires, without elaborating or identifying with them, without shaping them into something concrete.

— This in essence is the examination of the five aspects of the hindrances: (a) when the obstacle arises in the practitioner, (b) when it is absent, (c) how it arises in the mind, (d) how it can be abandoned once arisen, and (e) finally, how it can be prevented from arising again in the future.

— The only option available to the practitioner to overcome sensual desire is relatively straightforward: to observe the thoughts mindfully, like a gatekeeper ⁷⁵ or a bouncer, to note them, and to let them go...

The Buddha: ⁷⁶

“Guard your own mind with determination! One who tirelessly practices the Dhamma and Discipline will transcend the cycle of rebirth and bring suffering to an end.”

— De-identifying ⁷⁷ from desire: the practitioner begins to see clearly the nature of the desires he is preoccupied with —ephemeral, impermanent, ever-changing, unsatisfying, insubstantial. Upon deeper examination, this will naturally arouse disenchantment (*nibbidā*; *nirvidā*), ⁷⁸ leading to effortless letting go.

— The fire of sensual passion (*chandarāga*) ⁷⁹ will continue to burn only as long as the practitioner fails to realize the impermanence and emptiness of that desire within himself.

⁸⁰

Once this is understood and deeply felt, he lets go of his sensual cravings.

— Let it be clear: the practitioner has no other option than the progressive, gradual dismantling of sensual desire—if he wishes to attain deep states of meditation.

Practically, this means:

- Recognizing the arising of desire during meditation.
- Observing the desire without reacting, without feeding it.
- Investigating the cause of the desire: what need or inner emptiness lies behind it?
- Consciously directing and redirecting attention (when it drifts) to the meditation object as an anchor in the here-and-now.



VYĀPĀDA

“In mettā meditation, you focus your attention on the feeling of loving-kindness, developing this beautiful emotion until it completely fills your entire mind.”

Ajahn Brahm

*Vyāpāda*⁸¹ refers to anger, hatred, annoyance, irritation, and aversion. It is the mental tendency to reject an experience, a situation, or a person.

Anger arises when we long for a different reality than the one we are presently in. In other words, it is a form of resistance to what is unfolding right now.

This second hindrance expresses itself primarily as inner resistance—the refusal to open to reality as it arises in the immediacy of the present moment.⁸²

Anger, hostility, irritation, aversion, and ill-will all contribute to the formation of enmity. Even subtle forms, such as mild irritation or quiet dislike, fall within this domain. *Vyāpāda*—a near-synonym of *kodha/krodha*⁸³—stands in direct opposition to goodwill, benevolence, kindness (*mettā*; *maitrī*) and compassion (*karuṇā* ; *id.*).

Ill-will is essentially a collection of everything we do not want. And once again, the same dynamic unfolds: when we are confronted with something we resist, we are drawn out of the here-and-now. In such moments, joy and peace become difficult to access.⁸⁴

Ill-will contracts both body and mind. It creates a field of tension in which the mind becomes entangled in loops of negative thought and emotional reactivity.

As a result, our mental spaciousness and openness diminish—leaving less room for kindness, compassion, and clear

seeing. This hostile state of mind heightens stress, activates the fight-or-flight response in the nervous system, and keeps the mind in a posture of vigilance and unease.⁸⁵

The repetition of negative thoughts and emotions gives rise to a vicious circle of ill-will, in which resentment and anger are continuously reinforced. This ruminative mental state sustains suffering.

On a physical level, ill-will often manifests as muscular tension. Prolonged anger can give rise to chronic issues such as headaches, back pain, and other tension-related symptoms. The deep interconnection between body and mind is a central theme in Buddhist psychology.

Within the Buddhist teachings, *vyāpāda* is classified as a mental defilement (*kilesa*; *kleśa*)—a state that harms both mental and physical well-being.⁸⁶

Meditative practices such as loving-kindness (*mettā*; *maitrī*) and compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*) are recommended as skillful means to transform and transcend these unwholesome states.

To transform here means to consciously cultivate wholesome qualities out of negative tendencies—within the relative framework of *saṃsāra*.

To transcend goes further: it points to the letting go of all dualities—good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome—and to the realization of an insight that lies beyond the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*; *id.*).

Ill-will can manifest in three directions: toward others or the world, toward ourselves, and even toward our meditation.

– Ill-will toward something or someone blocks our ability to see things as they truly are. We reject the person or situa-

tion as it appears, and thus obscure the truth that is being revealed.

– Ill-will toward ourselves often appears as denial—denial of aging, illness, or death. We turn away from these inevitable aspects of existence and prefer illusion over truth.

– The same mechanism applies to our attachment to opinions. Rather than admit we may have been mistaken, we subtly distort reality. Truth is then cleverly suppressed.

Anger increases the sense of separation between ourselves and others, reinforcing division. It obstructs a calm and balanced mental state, and thus seriously impedes the path to self-realization and liberation from the illusion of ignorance. It distorts our vision and undermines our capacity to see clearly what is.

– Even our meditation can become the object of irritation. When the conditions in which we practice—or the behavior of fellow practitioners—displease us, our annoyance may turn against the practice itself.

As previously mentioned, the most effective antidote to this hindrance lies in the cultivation of the two *brahmavihāras*:⁸⁷ loving-kindness (*mettā*; *maitrī*)⁸⁸ and compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*).⁸⁹

These qualities calm the mind—a necessary foundation for the blossoming of self-realization (cfr. below).

Through the cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā*; *maitrī*) and compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*), a deepening sense of connectedness with all living beings begins to unfold. Whether we like it or not, we are all on the same train—every being longs for happiness and seeks to avoid suffering. These two qualities form a bridge to a deeper realization of our mutual interdependence: despite all apparent differences, we are intimately one with the whole.

In the light of *interbeing*—the deeply felt understanding that nothing exists in isolation—every being acquires immeasurable significance.

In the Buddhist tradition, it is said that all beings have at some point been your mother—a notion that is not merely a metaphor for the endless cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*; *id.*), but above all a reflection of the deep interwovenness of all life. Every existence is embedded in a web of relationships, where care, pain, joy, and dependence continually intertwine.

When we allow this truth to touch us fully, the boundary between self and other begins to dissolve. What remains is a quiet sense of awe: how often has this very being—who now perhaps suffers or appears harsh—been your origin, your comfort, your refuge in a distant past? Compassion then no longer arises as a moral duty, but as the natural expression of remembrance.

In the awareness of *interbeing*, the illusion of separateness vanishes. Every being becomes a mirror of one's own being, a reminder of the endless flow of giving and receiving that we call life. In that clarity, it becomes evident: love is not a choice, but a natural state of being-connected.

When this connectedness is deeply felt—not as a concept, but as direct experience—it becomes the fertile ground for both insight and concentration. *Mettā*, *karuṇā*, and the deep stillness of the *jhānas* then appear not as separate practices, but as different expressions of the same fundamental resonance of connected being.

More generally, one could say that the cultivation of the *brahmavihāras* and the *jhānas* function as communicating vessels: they subtly strengthen and support one another.

In practice, during meditation, the *yogi* may first become aware of a subtle ill-will directed inward—often shaped by a

deeply ingrained Western sense of guilt. When he begins to feel well, a quiet shame may arise, whispering thoughts like: '*Do I really deserve this?*'

And *mutatis mutandis*: when a moment of peace dawns, he may begin to suspect that something must be wrong.

In doing so, he denies himself the joy, the bliss, and the liberation that meditation naturally offers (*kusala dhamma*).⁹⁰ This is a refined form of conditioned ill-will—directed at one's own inner being.⁹¹

Yet it is precisely this quiet, radiant liberation that belongs among the most intimate and exalted experiences of this life.

The essential response lies in cultivating a new inner attitude—an attitude of loving-kindness. To free himself from this deeply rooted guilt-and-penance complex, the practitioner gently and systematically develops *mettā* (*maitrī*).

Ajahn Brahm expresses it this way:⁹²

“*In mettā meditation, you focus your attention on the feeling of loving-kindness, developing this beautiful emotion until it completely fills your entire mind.*”

The *yogi* gradually comes to recognize how ill will can also be directed at the meditation object itself: the breath (*ānāpāna*; *id.*).

Instead of viewing it as a dull technique, he learns to recognize the joy that the breath can generate. He approaches the breath with loving-kindness, seeing it as a gateway to deep joy, bliss, and freedom—richer than anything sensual desire could ever offer.

The breath becomes the quiet instrument that frees him from the grip of sensual craving and opens him to deeper,

more refined experiences of happiness. The *yogi* practices *mettā* toward the breath—not as a routine, but as a sincere expression of respect.

At the same time, he sees the impermanent nature of ill will: both in its appearance and in the causes that nourish it. He applies the same loving-kindness to silence, and to the present moment itself—the Now. Each moment is met by his open heart with attention and gentleness.

This is not intended as a doctrinal analysis, but as a contemplative expression of an experiential process within meditation. It points to the possibility that loving attention may also be directed toward the meditation object itself—such as the breath or silence—thereby opening the door to release.

A few contemplative reflections may support the recognition and transformation of this second hindrance—anger, resentment, irritation, and aversion:

— The *yogi* endeavours to recognize anger at the very moment it flares up, and to isolate it before it can spread. He prevents its arising through alert presence: awareness is half the work—or rather, all of it. Anger arises from an initial emotion, followed by an automatic, often unconscious reaction (*saṅkhāra*; *saṃskāra*): a conditioned impulse or inner tendency to act.

— At the root lies the ego—the sense of “I” that feels hurt or offended. The *yogi*, therefore, *de-identifies* with the anger. He names it, acknowledges it, and releases it—without engaging or fueling the fire. He sees clearly that anger brings only suffering, to himself and to others.

— Moreover, every new outburst of anger deepens the habitual tendency (*saṅkhāra*; *saṃskāra*), reinforcing the groove of reactivity. The deeper the groove, the narrower the path.

— Meditation becomes an expression of a universal, impersonal love—not confined to personal well-being, but extended to others, to the extent that one, as a small link in the greater whole, is able to contribute. ⁹³

This altruistic attitude embodies the spirit of awakening (*bodhicitta*) ⁹⁴ and reflects the path of the *bodhisattva*—the ideal of the Mahāyāna tradition. ⁹⁵



THĪNA-MIDDHA

• *This path calls for dedication and energy.
Meditation is not a casual resting point,
but an active effort to keep the mind
awake and focused on
what truly matters.* •

Thīna-middha (P.); *styāna-middha* (Skt.) ⁹⁶ refers to sloth and torpor, or mental sluggishness and dullness. These two obstacles are associated with inner inertia, apathy, and a lack of interest or vitality. *Thīna* tends to have a more persistent or latent character, whereas *middha* often appears as a temporary and situational state.

Thīna, or mental sloth, points to a mind that has become heavy, passive, and disengaged. In the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, ⁹⁷ *thīna* is described as a mental state that renders the cognitive process ineffective due to a lack of effort and engagement. It is seen as a deeply embedded state: a subtle but persistent resistance to involvement, marked by inertia and a lack of initiative. Even when not actively manifest, *thīna* may persist as an underlying tendency (*ānusaya*; *anusāya*), ⁹⁸ waiting for the right conditions to re-emerge—especially when meditation demands energy and attentiveness.

Middha, or torpor, refers to a mind that is dull, sluggish, sleepy, and mentally numb. A mind clouded by this hindrance lacks the vitality and sharpness required for insight and liberation. When trapped in lethargy, the mind cannot reach liberating clarity.

Middha—often experienced as physical tiredness or drowsiness—is more acute and situational. It arises in response to fatigue or reduced bodily alertness. It is typically reactive: for example, after a heavy meal, in warm conditions, during

extended meditation sessions, or when rest has been insufficient.

Unlike *thīna*, *middha* is usually temporary and can be lifted more easily through practical means—such as adjusting posture, breathing fresh air, or arousing joy (*pīti*; *prīti*).

A mind that is habitually dull and foggy—a sluggish mind—cannot meditate on what truly matters. Such a mind will never come to see clearly, never attain right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*; *samyak-dṛṣṭi*).

Let us examine more deeply:

— **Sloth** (*thīna*; *sthīna*) is a sinking into lethargy, passivity, and inertia. It reflects a lack of inner drive—a state born from the absence of inspiration or direction, a deficiency of energy. It is the mind acting out, doing 'its own thing.' It is a withdrawal into laziness and complacency. As long as the *yogi* does not gently restrain and reorient the mind, he remains a plaything of distraction and inertia. But as he learns to direct and stabilize attention, a natural peace begins to arise.

In practice, this means the *yogi* must continually remember the direction he wishes to follow. He does not allow himself to be distracted from his ultimate goal: liberation. He becomes aware—profoundly so—of how rare and precious it is to have this human opportunity for self-realization.

This path demands commitment, energy, and a heartfelt sense of urgency. Meditation is not a passive interlude—it is a deliberate, intimate, and engaged effort to keep the mind awake and attuned to what is essential.

— **Torpor** (*middha*) is sluggishness, dullness, and drowsiness. It manifests as an inner fog, a lack of mental clarity and presence.

Every *yogi* recognizes this experience: sitting without truly knowing why one is sitting; a vague absence; a gentle fading away of presence. The breath is lost, the silence unnoticed, the now-moment unreachable.

In the *Capāla Sutta* ⁹⁹—also known as the *Pacāla Sutta*—the Buddha describes how he gave Mahā Moggallāna specific instructions to overcome drowsiness. The full text is included here, as dullness is one of the most persistent obstacles that every *yogi* must face sooner or later:

• [1] *Now then, Moggallāna, whatever perception you are attending to when drowsiness overcomes you, do not give attention to that perception, do not pursue it. It is possible that by doing so, you will shake off your drowsiness.*

[2] *But if, by doing this, you do not shake off your drowsiness, then recollect the Dhamma as you have heard and memorized it. Reflect on it, contemplate it deeply in your mind. It is possible that by doing so, you will shake off your drowsiness.*

[3] *If that still does not help, recite the Dhamma out loud and in detail, just as you have heard and remembered it.*

[4] *Then tug at your earlobes and rub your limbs with your hands.*

[5] *Next, rise from your seat, wash your eyes with water, and look around in all directions—even upwards, toward the most prominent stars and constellations.*

[6] *Then turn your attention to the perception of light. Train yourself to perceive daylight: dwell at night as if it were day, and during the day as if it were night. With such open and unimpeded awareness, your mind becomes clear and luminous.*

[7] Then, fully aware of what lies in front of you and behind you, establish a path for walking meditation. Walk up and down, with your senses turned inward and your mind not straying outward.

But if, despite all of this, you still do not shake off your drowsiness, then lie down on your right side in the lion's posture, ¹⁰⁰ one foot placed upon the other, mindful and clearly aware, with the intention to rise again.

As soon as you awaken, get up quickly with the thought: 'I will not give in to the pleasure of lying down, the pleasure of resting, the pleasure of sleepiness.'

Thus should you train yourself. •

This ancient advice finds an interesting modern echo in the reflections of Ajahn Brahm, who explores the deeper energetic dynamics behind drowsiness. ¹⁰¹ He explains that the mind, as a source of energy, consists of two aspects: the 'knower' (the passive, observing awareness) and the 'doer' (the active, controlling part of the mind). Both draw from the same inner reservoir. In an overly active life, the doer consumes all available energy, leaving the knower depleted and worn out. The result: drowsiness and mental dullness.

There are only two possible responses to this sluggishness —but only one is truly helpful:

The first (unskillful) response is resistance. The *yogi* tries to stay 'awake' at all costs. But in meditation, you never get what you desire. Desire agitates the mind and feeds restlessness and frustration. Meditation is not about control—it is about surrender.

At the beginning of a session, we often feel we must 'do' something: regulate the breath, silence the thoughts, reach a certain state. But this subtle pressure—the urge to force

an outcome—creates the very conditions for fatigue, tension, and discouragement. When the mind can no longer hold the strain, it collapses into the opposite extreme: it becomes heavy and dull. This is *thīna-middha*: the mind retreats into lethargy, the body grows sluggish, and awareness is clouded by indifference.

What is truly needed is not more effort, but a soft releasing. A gentle receptivity, a quiet willingness to stay with what is—without grasping, without forcing. Letting go does not mean giving up. It means releasing contraction, expectation, and judgment. It is a quiet trust: that the mind, left undisturbed, will find its own balance.

When this inner space opens, dullness fades—not because it was overcome, but because the tension that sustained it has melted away.

Thīna-middha loses its hold not through effort, but through clarity. And clarity does not arise from control, but from stillness and presence.

This is an invitation: to let go of desire, and rest in what is. Not getting what you want becomes a doorway—an opening into peace, into freedom from the illusion of control.

The second—and skillful—response is investigation. The *yogi* gently inquires: what lies behind this drowsiness? Perhaps he meditated after a heavy meal, or did not sleep enough. By recognizing the cause, he can address the issue at its root.

Drowsiness in meditation is often the sign of a weary mind. Sometimes, the most appropriate response may simply be a short rest.

And—as always—common sense remains essential. What we eat, and how much we eat, has a direct impact on our physical condition, energy levels, and mental clarity. As the

old German saying goes: ‘*Man ist, was man isst*—*You are what you eat.*’ In meditation, this truth becomes tangible: food is not neutral. It affects not only the body, but also our mood, our clarity, and our willingness to rest in what is.

Those who meditate would do well to approach food not from rules or rigidity, but from mindful care.

Prefer foods that nourish without weighing down. Fresh fruits and vegetables offer lightness and vitality. Whole grains—like brown rice, quinoa, and oats—sustain the body gently and ground the mind without heaviness. Plant-based proteins such as beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, and nuts support renewal and strength without dullness. Healthy fats—from avocados, olive oil, or coconut—nurture the nervous system and encourage mental clarity.

Avoid foods that agitate the body or cloud the mind. Heavy, greasy, or highly processed meals often create a sense of bloating or inertia, making stillness more difficult. Sugary snacks and drinks lead to sudden highs and lows, unsettling both energy and mood. Even stimulants like caffeine—though seemingly helpful—can scatter the mind and pull it away from presence.

Alcohol and drugs are outright harmful to meditation: they dull awareness and obstruct clarity. Even overly spicy or salty foods can cause discomfort—thirst, burning sensations—that pull attention away from the inner work.

When food is seen as part of the practice, the right choices become supportive of calm, clarity, and steadiness—exactly the qualities we seek to cultivate through meditation.

Drink plenty of water, both before and after a meditation session. A well-hydrated body supports a clear and stable mind—both of which are essential for deep and sustained meditative practice. Water may seem ordinary, yet its importance is often underestimated. When drunk mindfully, one

can feel the body softening, tensions dissolving, and the mind becoming more refreshed and present.

Proper hydration nourishes many aspects of practice. A hydrated body functions with more ease: discomforts such as headaches, tension, or cramps—often caused by dehydration—can be avoided, especially during longer sittings. Concentration, too, is supported. The brain is largely made up of water, and sufficient hydration enhances its functioning: clarity, focus, and alertness are more easily maintained.

During meditation, the body's temperature may shift subtly. Water helps to regulate these fluctuations, contributing to a sense of physical ease. It also plays a key role in the body's detoxification processes, assisting in the release of waste and fostering a quiet sense of inner purity—a feeling gently mirrored in the stillness of meditation.

Lastly, drinking enough water helps maintain energy levels. Dehydration often leads to fatigue, heaviness, or dullness—precisely the conditions in which *thīna-middha* (*sthīna-middha*) tends to arise. Water keeps the current flowing: clear, simple, unforced—just like the practice itself.

Pay close attention to posture—especially the uprightness of the spine, which is fundamental. The way we sit influences not only the body, but also our breathing, energetic balance, and clarity of mind. A straight back is not about form—it is a subtle support for the entire meditative process. It makes sitting not only more comfortable, but also deeper and more effective—a quiet condition for the ripening of *samādhi*, the collected stillness and luminosity of mind.

An upright spine supports natural, unimpeded breathing. When the posture is aligned, the lungs have space to fully expand and release. This enhances the flow of oxygen throughout the body, nourishing the brain as well: concen-

tration, ease, and clarity are gently strengthened. The breath (*ānāpāna*) becomes smoother, the mind more quiet—directly nurturing *satipaṭṭhāna*, the foundation of mindfulness.

Many contemplative traditions hold that a straight spine allows energy to move—not through force, but through natural openness. The life force (*prāṇa*) flows more freely when the posture offers no resistance. This promotes alertness, equilibrium, and lightness of being. In this way, the body is no longer an obstacle, but becomes an ally on the path.

On a physical level too, proper posture fosters stability and comfort. It prevents unnecessary strain in the neck, shoulders, and lower back, allowing longer sittings to unfold with greater ease. When the body rests in natural balance, the mind is no longer drawn to it—and is free to grow still.

What we are pointing to here is the principle of *sappāya*: that which is suitable, supportive, and conducive to practice. Within the meditative path, it refers to anything that nurtures rather than hinders—be it a quiet environment, nourishing food, an attuned posture, good companions, or the right time to sit.

In the Pāli Canon, the *sappāyas* are described as conditions that do not distract or disturb, but rather create space for inner stillness and the unfolding of insight. They remind us that the path to liberation does not rely on willpower alone, but also on a gentle attunement to what is wholesome and supportive.

One of these supporting factors is posture itself. The mind, too, is shaped by it. A slouched position may draw attention inward, but often in the form of dullness or drowsiness. An upright, dignified posture, on the other hand, supports *sati*: presence, attentiveness, and open receptivity. The posture

becomes a form of practice—a quiet gesture of wakeful awareness.

To sit like a rock; to sit in sovereign stillness like a king—these are not gratuitous descriptions. They are expressions that carry the essence of meditation.

Good posture is also preventive: it protects against chronic tension or pain in the back, neck, or shoulders that may arise through habitual misalignment. Sustainable practice requires care for the body, just as it requires care for the mind. In this embodied mindfulness, a meditative wisdom begins to grow—one that no longer separates inner from outer.

A straight spine carries symbolic weight as well: it expresses determination, reverence, and quiet devotion—not only toward the practice, but toward the path unfolding within. We do not merely sit; we take our seat in silence—with sincerity and gentleness. The body becomes a temple, the breath a prayer, the silence our answer.

Wake up early. And early truly means early: between 3 and 5 a.m. Rising at this hour has long been encouraged in the context of intensive practice—not from dogma, but through direct experience. Those who sit in silence during these hours encounter a different quality of awareness: fresh, unclouded, undisturbed. These early moments offer a unique meeting point between practical support and spiritual deepening.

In the early morning, the world is still. The house sleeps, the streets lie quiet, even the birds wait. This absence of external input creates a natural cradle for the mind to settle. There is less distraction, less tension, less noise. The mind has nothing to process—and in that simplicity, it becomes more available to *sati/ smṛti*—the quiet knowing that grasps nothing, yet fully abides with what is.

This awareness is not seeing with the eyes, but a direct knowing of reality as it appears and dissolves in the present. It is the clear seeing of impermanence, fragility, and openness—not a thought, but a realization. In *vipassanā*, this insight begins to ripen—not as concept, but as lived truth: a *paṭivedha*,¹⁰² a liberating penetration that releases all grasping. And the early morning is uniquely attuned to this unfolding.

Something within has shifted as well. After a night of rest, the mind awakens refreshed—not yet caught in the complexity of the day. Thoughts move slowly. The ego, still soft. Before the thinking mind resumes its habits, deeper layers become accessible. These early hours invite stillness and simplicity.

Across spiritual traditions—from early Buddhism to the Vedic teachings of the *Brahma Muhurta*¹⁰³—this time has been honored as especially auspicious for inner work. Nature is in balance, energies subtler, and the mind more porous. It is a time when little is asked, yet much is possible—if one is willing to yield to it.

Waking early also helps regulate the body's natural rhythm. The biological clock synchronizes with the cycle of light and darkness, promoting overall well-being. And as the Buddha often reminded us: a healthy body is a *sappāya*—a favorable condition—for clear and steady awareness.

There is something else: rising early requires effort. Not the strained effort of forcing, but an inner *virīya*—a conscious resolve not to be overpowered by sleep. *Virīya* as a factor supporting awakening.

Rising is no small matter. It reflects discipline, dedication, and respect for the practice. Even when the body resists, the heart knows what must be done.

Those who cultivate the habit of rising at roughly the same early hour each day will find the mind begins to align itself accordingly. A quiet rhythm emerges—and within that rhythm, something begins to mature that cannot be willed into being: a subtle joy in simplicity, in sustained attention, in sitting before the world awakens.

And a cold shower—always—works wonders. What first appears unpleasant becomes, in practice, a powerful support for both body and mind. The shock of cold water evokes no resistance when met with mindfulness. On the contrary: it sharpens awareness, awakens energy, and reminds us that openness—even to discomfort—is a form of freedom.

A cold shower fosters alertness. Circulation is stimulated, oxygen flows more freely to the brain, and the mind becomes clear, focused, awake. The body, too, awakens—and with it, a sense of grounded presence, exactly what is needed for meditation.

Cold water activates the sympathetic nervous system, releasing natural chemicals like adrenaline and noradrenaline. The result is an immediate energy boost—without the restlessness or crash of artificial stimulants. The body feels vibrant, yet steady.

Mood is gently uplifted as well. Endorphins—those quiet hormones of well-being—are released. This gives rise to a subtle joy—not euphoric, but light and content, quietly deepening the meditative atmosphere.

Circulation improves, blood moves freely, bringing oxygen and nutrients throughout the body. This readies the body for stillness: open, alive, and rooted. Cold water may also help reduce inflammation and ease muscle tension—especially beneficial for those who sit for extended periods.

Over time, regular exposure to cold water can strengthen the immune system and enhance vitality. And when the body is in balance, the mind is free to sink into silence.

But perhaps the greatest benefit is this: taking a cold shower requires both discipline and surrender. The body wants to retreat, but the mind gently says yes. That simple act—not resisting, but allowing—cultivates will. And that will is not harsh, but steady and sincere.

This is where true meditation begins—not in avoidance, but in remaining—in *adhiṭṭhāna* (*adhiṣṭhāna*): ¹⁰⁴ the silent resolve that does not strain, but endures.



UDDHACCA-KUKKUCCA

• *Uddhacca reaches forward into the future.
Kukkucca clings to the past.
Together they form a bridge that
never allows the yogi to arrive
in the only domain where
liberation can unfold:
the NOW. •*

Uddhacca-kukkucca (P.); auddhatya-kaukr̥tya (Skt.) is the fourth hindrance on the path to liberation. It is a double disturbance: on the one hand, restlessness; on the other, remorse. Two seemingly opposite movements of the mind—one pushes forward, the other pulls back—but both draw the *yogi* away from the calm clarity of the present moment. What they share is this: they remove the mind from the *now*, and thereby from its true power.

Uddhacca—restlessness—is a mind that cannot settle. It keeps moving, searching, leaning into a vague hunger for something 'else,' something 'better,' something that has not yet come. It leaps from thought to thought, from desire to expectation, never finding rest, never arriving home.

Kukkucca—remorse—is that same movement, turned backward: the gnawing sense that something went wrong, that something was said or done in error—a misstep, a mistake. Sometimes it is sharp; sometimes it lingers as a vague unease. It is guilt, shame, worry. And often, it hides: unrecognized, unchallenged.

Restlessness can disguise itself as diligence, ambition, or even spiritual zeal. Remorse may wear the mask of moral conscience, responsibility, or the drive for self-betterment. Yet behind these seeming virtues lies a subtle tension—an

inner movement that prevents stillness and quietly erodes the depth of true meditation.

What makes *uddhacca-kukkucca* so difficult to recognize is that it neither craves like sensual desire nor roars like anger—it whispers.

Both terms describe a fine mist that silently spreads throughout the mind, hard to grasp, and only noticed when one suddenly realizes the thread of meditation has been lost.

A mind affected by *uddhacca-kukkucca* cannot develop deep concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), because it cannot rest in what is. *Samādhi* requires a delicate balance: effort and ease, clarity and absorption. Too much effort leads to restlessness; too little gives rise to remorse and doubt. This hindrance reminds us how vital it is to find the right tension in meditation—awake, yet at ease.

Uddhacca reaches forward into the future. *Kukkucca* pulls backward into the past. Together, they form a bridge that never allows the yogi to settle in the only domain where liberation occurs: the *now*. Whether the mind reaches out toward the future or grasps back at the past—in both cases it loses contact with its own essence.

Liberation becomes possible when the *yogi* sees—clearly and directly—the utter futility of this unrest. Restlessness and remorse resolve nothing. On the contrary, they weaken the mind's strength and stability. When these movements are seen for what they are—completely irrelevant—the hindrance loses its foundation.

• *The past is history, the future a mystery—only the present is a gift.* • This simple wisdom is not a slogan but a living insight. When the *yogi* realizes this truth directly, letting go is no longer a task, but a natural unfolding.

Uddhacca is marked by inner agitation and instability. Its root lies in a subtle discontent with the present moment. ¹⁰⁵
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A contented mind rests. A mind that seeks more, wanders. When the *yogi* feels their meditation is 'not enough,' the mind is already leaning forward, looking for what has yet to come. In that moment, the *now* is lost—and with it, the mind's strength.

The practice, then, is to cultivate contentment with what is. The *yogi* learns to rest in the moment as it arises, allowing presence to be enough. They find satisfaction in the simple recognition of awareness—in being an observer, a silent witness.

And they realize—not as belief, but as direct experience—that nothing, not even sensory pleasure, provides the deep fulfillment that silence brings. This is the 'coming home' that only the deeply trained recognize. ¹⁰⁷

When the mind truly settles and contentment deepens, space opens for something refined—an inner phenomenon that arises spontaneously in moments of deep concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*): the *nimitta*. This meditative sign—often described as a subtle light or form—is not an end in itself, but an indication that the mind is beginning to stabilize in stillness. When the *nimitta* appears, the *yogi* simply lets it be. They neither reach for it with desire, nor shrink back in fear.

Uddhacca destroys the *nimitta* precisely because it agitates the mind, seeks more, and tries to force the process. Contentment—rest—lets the *nimitta* unfold at its own pace, gently opening the path toward *jhāna*. ¹⁰⁸

The *nimitta* rarely appears as a perfect, clear sign all at once. It often begins as a faint glow, a soft impression—

what is called the *parikamma-nimitta*.¹⁰⁹ As the mind becomes steadier, the sign clarifies into the *uggaha-nimitta*.¹¹⁰ And when absorption deepens, it transforms into a bright, pure, motionless light: the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*¹¹¹—the full sign that opens the gate to deep absorption. But this unfolds only in stillness. Restlessness repeatedly breaks the process. Contentment allows it to ripen.

The *yogi* recognizes the sign, yet does not cling to it. They understand it is not a destination, but a bridge—a support preparing the mind for the silent depth of *jhāna*.

Their attitude remains soft, open, unstriving. In this subtle phase of the practice, the presence of a wise teacher can be of great support—someone who knows the terrain, recognizes the signs, and helps meet them without excitement or confusion.

Ajahn Brahm expresses it clearly:¹¹²

“When contentment deepens, the door to the *jhānas* will open. Contentment is the path that leads to the *jhānas*. ”

Contentment opens. Restlessness closes.

In moments of restlessness, the *yogi* patiently returns to the meditation object—the breath, the body, the sound of silence. To be with the breath is to be with the present; to be in the NOW. And to be in the NOW is to be without thought. Zen calls this *hishiryo*.¹¹³

Remorse (*kukkucca*; *kaukr̥tya*) is the dark shadow of conscience. It arises when the *yogi* rejects something within—a deed, a thought, an impulse—and becomes entangled in self-reproach.

Whatever the past was: it is gone. But the mind keeps resurrecting it, like a ghost that cannot find rest.

When this form of brooding takes root, it can block the entire spiritual unfolding. The *yogi* may feel unworthy, tainted, not pure enough for the path. ¹¹⁴

But this is the lie of the guilt complex—a residue of conditioning that has nothing to do with *Dhamma*.

The remedy, however, is simple: acknowledgment of the mistake; forgiveness of oneself; and learning from the error—without continuing to identify with it. ¹¹⁵

Above all: maintaining *mettā*—loving-kindness—for oneself. The advanced *yogi* sees the mechanism of guilt and punishment, sees through it, and lets it go.

Jotika Hermesen:

• *Guilt carries an element of self-hatred: it drains our energy and paralyzes us. Remorse, on the other hand, sets us free. We forgive ourselves for the pain we have caused ourselves and others. We use the released energy to move forward. We make the firm intention not to repeat the mistake. We need our energy to leave behind harmful habits—especially aversion and hatred. We move from guilt to remorse; we forgive ourselves, and we continue on.* •

The *yogi* frees himself from this painful cycle—not out of weakness, but out of wisdom. From the clarity of the present moment, he resolves: this past is not who I am.

He turns his mind toward the *Dhamma* (*Dharma*), to its pure and liberating power. And as always, spiritual friendship is a powerful medicine.

Simply knowing that wise companionship softens the heart, shows the way, and reminds one of their deepest nature—the unconditioned awareness ¹¹⁶ that precedes all things

and into which all things return: the not-self, ¹¹⁷ beyond every story.



VICIKICCHĀ

‘If on your journey you find no companion better than yourself, or equal to yourself, then resolutely walk the path alone. Do not take a fool as a companion.’

Dhammapada, Verse 61

Vicikicchā (P.); *vicikitsā* (Skt.)—skeptical doubt—is the fifth hindrance that obstructs the mind on the path to liberation.

It is not the open, investigative doubt that leads to insight, but a paralyzing uncertainty that undermines trust and scatters the mind. A form of inner disorientation: the direction is lost, the inner compass gone.

This doubt can manifest on many levels. One might doubt the Buddha: was he truly fully awakened? Did he really realize the ultimate truth?

Or one might doubt the *Dhamma*: is this teaching truly a path to liberation—or just another philosophy or metaphysical system among many?

There may also be doubt about the Saṅgha: are the monks and nuns truly reliable guides, and is the teaching still transmitted in an authentic way?

But perhaps the most insidious form of doubt is doubt in oneself: uncertainty about one's own capacity for insight, about the power of meditation, or about the fundamental potential for awakening.

Illusory questions such as 'Who am I?', 'Who was I?', or 'What will I become?' may also arise in this atmosphere—

not as deep contemplations, but as confusing and fruitless mental loops.

Sometimes the *yogi* no longer knows the way.

There is a crossroads, but no direction feels clear. Doubt grips the heart. What is the right path? What is truly wholesome, and what merely a subtle form of attachment or illusion?

This inner paralysis is known in the Buddha's teaching as *vicikicchā*—sceptical doubt. It is not open inquiry or honest reflection, but a state of confusion that clouds the mind and closes the heart to clear insight.

In such a state, the *yogi* no longer knows what to trust, and loses the ability to discern what leads to liberation. The mind circles endlessly, but finds no rest, no direction, no solid ground.

And yet, within this very confusion lies a quiet invitation—a call to awaken the power of the five spiritual faculties (*pañca balāni*), ¹¹⁸ like four horses pulling forward, guided by a wise charioteer. ¹¹⁹

The first horse is faith (*saddhā*; *śraddhā*), the silent assurance that liberation is possible. Not blind, but rooted in experience—in the deep knowing that the path bears fruit.

The second is energy (*virīya*; *vīrya*), the inner fire that helps the *yogi* remain upright, even when everything seems to tremble. It is the strength of perseverance and inner courage.

The third horse is mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), which anchors the heart in the present moment, allowing the flow of experience to be illuminated—without grasping, without resistance.

The fourth is concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), the gathered power of the mind that brings stillness and creates space for deep insight.

And then there is the charioteer: wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*). Not knowledge in words, but the direct seeing into the nature of things—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. A quiet knowing that does not waver.

When these five powers come to life in the *yogi*, *vicikicchā* dissolves like morning mist in the sunlight. What was murky becomes clear. What was paralyzed gives way to trust and movement. And thus the *yogi* finds the path again—step by step, carried by clarity, inner strength, and guiding insight.

When *vicikicchā* enters the mind, the practitioner loses clarity and direction. Often this doubt is the result of not yet knowing what is wholesome (*kusala*) and what is unwholesome (*akusala*),¹²⁰ or simply due to lack of meditative experience.

As soon as insight begins to arise—as soon as the *Dhamma/Dharma* is no longer just a concept, but a direct and lived reality—doubt begins to dissolve.

The Buddha encouraged his disciples to inquire, to test his teachings rather than accept them blindly.¹²¹ This healthy skepticism, a posture of open yet critical discernment, forms the foundation of a vibrant spiritual path. But *vicikicchā* is not an invitation to inquiry—it is the inability to trust, even after inquiry.

When reality is experienced directly—*bhāvanā-maya paññā* (wisdom rooted in meditative cultivation)—when things are seen as they truly are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñānadarśana*), doubt loses its grip. Such insight cannot be reached through study or reasoning alone—it is born from meditation.¹²²

In this experience, a profound inner shift occurs: the practitioner *knows*—and knows that they know. Not as a concept, but as inner certainty. In practice, this means the *yogi* develops confidence (*saddhā*).¹²³

When the *yogi* sits down and simply does what they intended—meditating without delay or detour—something fundamental shifts.

The inner peace, freedom, and joy that arise from this nourish trust from within. Not belief. Not hope. But a quiet recognition: this works, this is true, this is my path.

Doubt may also be triggered by certain experiences that arise during practice—experiences that may be unusual, intense, or difficult to interpret.

Renowned masters such as Mahāsi Sayādaw, Pa-Auk Sa-yādaw, and Ajahn Chah have consistently advised not to analyze such phenomena during meditation itself. The reason is simple yet profound: analysis arises from the thinking mind, while insight arises from mindful observation.

When one begins to interpret, question, or compare in the midst of practice, the clarity of direct seeing is clouded, and the subtle thread of awareness is easily lost.

Instead, let the mind rest. Let everything go. Trust the stillness of the moment. Gently return to the object of meditation, or remain open and present with whatever is unfolding—without commentary. Only after the meditation is complete should reflection take place, from a grounded and spacious awareness.¹²⁴

This inner stillness becomes fertile ground for deeper understanding. Knowledge of the *Dhamma/Dharma* deepens trust, as does the cultivation of the *brahmavihāras*—the four divine abodes: loving-kindness (*mettā*; *maitrī*), compassion

(*karuṇā*; *id.*), empathetic joy (*muditā*; *id.*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*).

These four heart-qualities not only purify relationships, but also support the inner stability needed for deep *vipassanā*/*vipaśyanā*, and for the release of deeply rooted karmic patterns:

• *The brahmavihāras initiate a sense of inner well-being. This well-being purifies the yogi's relational karma (kamma) and fosters the arising of equanimity (upekkhā). This equanimity forms an essential foundation for the letting go and uprooting* ¹²⁵ *that take place in vipassanā.* • ¹²⁶

Here too, the importance of spiritual friendship cannot be overstated. Connection with wise companions—*kalyāṇamit-tā* ¹²⁷—is a powerful antidote to doubt. Not to take over our thinking, but to resonate with those who already embody the path.

And yet, vigilance is always needed, as the *Dhammapada* reminds us: ¹²⁸

• *If on your journey you find no companion better than yourself, or equal to yourself, then resolutely walk the path alone. Do not take a fool as a companion.* •

Vicikicchā does not vanish through theoretical answers, but through the growth of trust (*saddhā*; *Skt. śraddhā*) rooted in direct, liberating experience. Insight is the true medicine, and meditation the path that leads to it.



UNDERSTANDING THE HINDRANCES

‘ Unless you develop strong concentration, you will never understand impermanence on a deep and subtle level —a level on which it can liberate you ’

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

The Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*) constitute a foundational concept in Buddhism and are of crucial importance for both meditative practice and the broader spiritual path.

While various Buddhist traditions may introduce nuances in their interpretation, the essence of these hindrances and the methods to overcome them remain strikingly consistent. Their universal recognition highlights the shared ground of inner development and liberation throughout the Buddhist path.

And yet, the importance of deep insight into the Five Hindrances is often underestimated. In many teachings, a thorough examination of them is omitted, as though this were self-evident knowledge. But such omission is more than a shortcoming—it is a serious oversight. Without recognizing, understanding, and transcending these mental obstacles, liberation remains out of reach.

Too often, teachers focus on more complex or—so it is believed—more elevated topics, while a clear and practical understanding of the *pañca nīvaraṇāni* forms the indispensable foundation for any fruitful meditative practice.

The Five Hindrances—sensual desire (*kāmacchanda; id.*), ill will (*vyāpāda; id.*), sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha; styāna-middha*), restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca; uddhatya-kaukr̥tya*), and doubt (*vicikicchā; vicikitsā*)—are

not abstract ideas, but tangible experiences that directly influence the mind.

They manifest on various levels—sometimes coarse and obvious, sometimes extremely subtle and difficult to discern. Frequently, they go unnoticed, and yet they can deeply disturb the meditative process. That is why it is essential that these hindrances are taught explicitly and systematically.

Teachers carry a great responsibility in this: they must offer clear and applicable instructions that enable practitioners to recognize and overcome these obstacles.

Specific methods—such as cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā; maitrī*) to soften ill will (*vyāpāda; id.*), or developing mindfulness of the body (*kāyagatā-sati*) to counteract torpor (*middha*)—should be central components of any meditative training.

Moreover, it is not enough to teach these techniques as isolated practices. Practitioners must understand how these methods contribute to the ultimate goal: the realization of *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*. When this connection is missing, practice becomes formalistic and loses its liberating power.

Meditative techniques such as mindfulness (*sati; smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi; id.*), and loving-kindness (*mettā; maitrī*) are not ends in themselves. They are skillful means (*upāya; upāyaḥ*) to develop wisdom (*paññā; prajñā*), which leads to the cessation of *dukkha*. When these means are separated from their aim, the broader perspective is lost.

The Five Hindrances must be understood within the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi; samyak dṛṣṭi*) into their arising, functioning, and cessation forms a crucial link on the path to liberation. Without this foundation, the practice loses direction.

That is why it is a vital task for teachers and spiritual guides to give the hindrances the attention they deserve. Without clear, explicit, and practical teaching, an indispensable element of the path is forgotten. A spiritual teacher speaks clearly and without evasion about what is essential. He does not remain silent when the heart is in need of guidance.

The overcoming of the *pañca nīvaraṇāni* is not incidental—it is a prerequisite for the development of deep concentration and insight. Without eliminating these hindrances, access to the *jhānas/dhyānas*—and consequently to the path of liberation—remains blocked.

It is rightly said that transcending these obstacles is a condition for stream-entry (*sotāpatti*; *srotāpatti*).

Like all sense phenomena, the Five Hindrances arise and pass away due to specific causes (*hetū*; *hetavaḥ*) and conditions (*paccayā*; *pratyayāḥ*). This is the law of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*; *pratītyasamutpāda*). That is why it is crucial to learn to recognize these causes—especially at the very moment they arise. In this process, mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) plays a central role.

Why?

Mindfulness enables us to be present in the *now*, so that we can recognize the subtle arising of desire, aversion, laziness/sluggishness, restlessness/remorse, and doubt the moment they appear—that is, before they gain a firm hold on us. When we are able to notice these hindrances at an early stage, we can meet them with wisdom and compassion, rather than reacting to them automatically.

Sati/smṛti helps prevent us from becoming entangled in unconscious patterns of suffering. Moreover, mindfulness allows us to see that the Five Hindrances are neither fixed nor permanent, but arise and pass away due to specific causes and conditions. By cultivating mindfulness, we begin

to understand and influence these causes and conditions more clearly, which in turn makes it possible to release the hindrances and experience greater freedom and joy in our lives.

The *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* ¹²⁹ provides a remarkably clear framework for attentively observing the Five Hindrances as part of the contemplation of mental states (*cittānupassanā*).

• *And how, monks, does a monk dwell observing mental states in mental states?*

Here, a monk observes the presence of sensual desire (kāmacchanda) in himself, and recognizes:

“Sensual desire is present in me.”

When it is not present, he understands:

“Sensual desire is absent in me.”

He understands how unarisen sensual desire arises.

He understands how arisen sensual desire is abandoned.

He understands how abandoned sensual desire does not arise again in the future.

Likewise with ill will (vyāpāda), sloth and torpor (thīna-middha), restlessness and remorse (uddhacca-kukkucca), and doubt (vicikicchā).

Thus he dwells observing the mental states internally, externally, and both internally and externally.

He dwells observing the arising of phenomena in mental states, the passing away of phenomena in mental states, and the arising-and-passing-away of phenomena in mental states.

Now, mindfulness is firmly established in him:

“This is a mental state.”

In this way, he abides detached, not clinging to anything in the world (of body and mind).

This, monks, is how a monk abides observing mental states in mental states with regard to the Five Hindrances. •

Each time I read this passage, I am struck by the clarity and methodical nature with which the *suttas* examine the mind. This analytical approach, almost clinical in its precision, enables practitioners to unravel their inner world.

By dissecting each hindrance, recognizing its cause, understanding its function, and guiding its dissolution, purification of the mind unfolds. This is not abstract theorizing, but a direct and liberating process of insight. It is phenomenal literature—composed more than 2,600 years ago.

The *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* reveals different layers of contemplation:

First, the simple yet crucial observation of whether a hindrance is present or absent. If present, the practitioner remains aware, registers the condition without judgment, and gently let's go.

Next, the attention turns to the arising of the hindrance (diagnosis), its cessation (healing), and the prevention of its recurrence (prevention).

This is a deeply contemplative process, based on responsibility and insight: recognizing the situation, understanding what went wrong, correcting it, and developing the intention to act differently in the future.

The path to liberation does not begin with grand realizations, but with this simple clarity of mind. The Buddha repeatedly emphasized in his teachings that wrong view (*aku-sala diṭṭhi*)¹³⁰ is the origin of much suffering.

Whenever the mind is based on false perceptions of sensory reality, the Five Hindrances arise.

This occurs whenever the practitioner approaches the world through one of the following illusions:

- believing the body is attractive or desirable;
- assuming that experiences are lasting or permanent;
- expecting external circumstances to bring lasting happiness or control;
- believing there is a stable core—a 'soul' or 'self'—at the basis of all experience.

As long as these misconceptions are not seen through, the hindrances will keep returning. The path therefore begins with the development of right view—*sammā-diṭṭhi/samyak dṛṣṭi*—in which the world is seen as it truly is (*yathā-bhūta*), not as one thinks, hopes, or fears it to be.

To remove the Five Hindrances—at least temporarily—from consciousness, the *yogi* must approach the sensory world from this right perspective: unclouded by desire or aversion, but seen as it truly is.¹³¹

Pure mindfulness (*sati; smṛti*) is the tool available here. Since consciousness can only hold one object at a time, the hindrances are temporarily suppressed the moment attention (*sati; smṛti*) is sustained and clearly directed to a meditative object such as the breath (*ānāpāna; id.*). In that moment, consciousness excludes all other objects—including the mental defilements that cloud the mind.

But the suppression of the hindrances is only the first step. For lasting liberation, insight is needed—deep insight into the true nature of the hindrances, their arising, and their impermanence.

When the practitioner recognizes the three characteristics of existence—impermanence (*anicca; anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha; duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā; anātman*)—in the Five Hindrances, a transformation takes place.¹³²

Then these hindrances are no longer seen as 'problems' or 'enemies,' but as transient processes, arising due to causes, without intrinsic substance. ¹³³

The difference between illusion and insight becomes fully apparent when the practitioner directly experiences how these obstacles arise, briefly persist, and then dissolve. ¹³⁴

This insight dismantles the temptation to identify with them. The realization that the hindrances lack all stability, core, or fixed ground allows the practitioner to see them for what they are: passing phenomena.

With this arises the recognition that nothing in the mind is 'mine'—not even the deeper tendencies (*anusaya; anuśaya*) ¹³⁵ toward craving, aversion, or ignorance.

What the practitioner once regarded as 'my problem,' 'my weakness,' or 'my failure' turns out to be nothing more than a conditional process.

This is the point at which *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana* arises—'the seeing and knowing (*janāmi passāmi; janāmi paśyāmi*) ¹³⁶ of things as they truly are.' This insight does not emerge merely from conceptual understanding but matures through direct, experiential observation.

Through practice (*bhāvanā-maya paññā; bhāvanā-mayī prajñā*), ¹³⁷ the *yogi* develops an inner clarity, by which he directly experiences (*paccanubhoti; pratyanubhūti*) ¹³⁸ reality as impermanent (*anicca; anitya*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha; duḥkha*), and selfless (*anatta; anātman*).

This experience, nourished by embodied wisdom, enables the *yogi* to place suffering (*dukkha; duḥkha*) in its proper context and thus open the way to personal liberation. ¹³⁹

Insight cannot arise from ordinary thinking. According to the Buddha, the intellect is not to be trusted when it comes to

comprehending the deepest nature of existence. Our thinking is conditioned by duality: it divides experience, uses concepts, and builds upon memory and anticipation.

What the Buddha calls liberation is the unconditioned (*asaṅkhaṭa*; *asaṃskṛta*): that which is not created, not constructed, and therefore not subject to decay or death. It is not something that can be conceived or summoned through willpower.

That is why the Buddha emphasizes the importance of direct experience (*paccanubhoti*; *pratibudhyate*): a clear awareness that is silent, uncontrived, and free from conceptualization. Thought can point the way, but must ultimately be relinquished.

When thought falls silent, and the mind opens without grasping or expectation, a space emerges for something that cannot be captured in words.

Only in that open stillness does the unconditioned become accessible—as that which is not known by thinking, but by letting go.

When this openness deepens, a space arises for clear awareness—an insight that is not actively sought, but arises quietly and of its own accord. Within that awareness, the practitioner begins to see how the Five Hindrances are conditioned by causes and circumstances, how they arise and dissolve again, leaving no enduring essence behind.

This insight marks a turning point in the practice.

Consciousness begins to loosen its grip on identification, and a calm clarity penetrates. The hindrances lose their power—not because they are 'gone,' but because the illusion of their relevance has been pierced.

The practitioner comes to the direct experience of *anicca*: that nothing lasts. What arises, passes away—sometimes even before it can be consciously named. The illusion of permanence, solidity, and stability—so often the root of suffering—is dismantled. And precisely there, in the clear seeing of that impermanence, lies liberation.

When insight does not arise merely from listening (*suta-maya paññā*) or from wisdom through reflection (*cintā-maya paññā*), but matures through direct experience, we speak of *bhāvanā-maya paññā*—wisdom that arises through meditative development.

This wisdom arises when the practitioner not only observes, but truly sees what is occurring in body and mind (*nāma-rūpa*)—without interference from concepts, judgment, or preference.

In *vipassanā* meditation, this process is profoundly deepened. The practitioner learns not only to understand the impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*) of all phenomena, but to experience it directly, moment to moment. At a certain point, the mind becomes so refined that it begins to see the ongoing disintegration of phenomena—an experience known in the tradition as *bhaṅga* (P.) or *bheda* (Skt.).¹⁴⁰

Bhaṅga literally means 'break,' 'dissolution,' 'disintegration.' It refers to the immediate breaking apart of the five *khandhas/skandhas*—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—which are often taken to be the 'person' or 'self' in Buddhist thought.

At death, these aggregates fall apart, marking the end of a form of existence or manifestation. This process of dissolution is essential to understanding impermanence and the absence of a lasting 'self' (*anattā*; *anātman*). This dissolution takes place mentally long before the physical disintegration.

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana describes the deep level of concentration required to 'see phenomena as they truly are' (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñānadarśana*) in the following remarkable way: ¹⁴¹

*‘ Unless you develop strong concentration,
you will never understand impermanence
on a deep and subtle level—
a level on which it can liberate you
(bhāvanā-maya paññā; bhāvanāmayī prajñā).*

*You must reach a point where the world of your experience
arises and vanishes so quickly
that there is nothing left to hold onto.*

*Nothing lasts long enough for your mind to glue it together
and make ‘something’ out of it.*

*The moment you turn your attention to an event,
it disappears.*

*As soon as an event is touched by pure awareness (viññāṇa;
vijñāna), it vanishes into nothingness.*

*Everything arises and vanishes, leaving no trace,
because there is simply no time for it. ¹⁴²*

*As soon as something new enters the mind,
what was already there is pushed out,
without leaving anything behind.
After the experience, there is no tangible memory
of what took place.*

*The only thing left is a lingering impression of things
coming and going faster than the mind can grasp.*

*This is what we call:
‘seeing things as they truly are.’ ⁹*

The process of *bhaṅga* occurs not only during meditation, but also on the most fundamental level—at physical death. When the body dies, the five *khandhas/skandhas* disintegrate: form decays, sensations and feelings extinguish, perceptions dissolve, mental formations vanish, and consciousness returns to stillness.

What was once regarded as 'I' proves to be nothing more than a temporary assemblage of phenomena.

The practitioner who fully realizes this lets go of the illusion of a lasting identity. They see clearly that there is no entity that endures—only a causal stream of dependencies, in which one condition gives rise to another, without fixed beginning or end.

What ends at death is not a 'self,' but the compounded whole of conditioned processes.

In Buddhism, rebirth is therefore not understood as the passage of a soul, but as a continuous process of causality—a chain of conditionality in which mental and karmic formations (such as *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*) give rise to new existences in dependence upon causes and conditions. This is precisely what is meant by *paṭicca-samuppāda/pratītya-samutpāda*—the arising of phenomena based on causes and conditions, without any enduring self underlying the process.

The full cycle of the twelve links of dependent origination shows how ignorance (*avijjā; avidyā*) leads to volitional formations, consciousness, name-and-form, sense contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and suffering. Rebirth is the consequence of this, not the result of a permanent soul passing on, but of conditioned arising.

As long as ignorance (*avijjā; avidyā*), craving (*taṇhā; trṣṇā*), and attachment (*upādāna; id.*) persist, the continuation of experience arises again and again—a process metaphor-

ically described as 'rebirth.'

But when these roots are cut, the process that gives rise to new forms of existence comes to an end. This cessation—the extinguishing of the chain of becoming—is what the Buddha referred to as *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*: ultimate liberation.

Bhaṅga is thus not only an insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), but also a direct confrontation with the not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) of what one once believed oneself to be.

It reveals that every act of clinging gives rise to suffering, and that liberation is only possible when grasping ceases. In the experience of *bhaṅga*, it becomes clear that there is nothing to hold onto—because nothing was ever truly 'mine' to begin with.

This insight is both unsettling and liberating.

Unsettling, because it undermines the taken-for-granted solidity of the world.

Liberating, because it removes the very foundation upon which attachment and aversion rest. When there is nothing to grasp, there is no need to hold on.

When the practitioner directly experiences this process of *bhaṅga*, the tendency to identify with body or mind (*nāma-rūpa*) dissolves. They see that what was once thought to be 'I' is, in reality, a continuous stream of causes (*hetū*; *hetavah*) and conditions (*paccayā*; *pratyayāḥ*), without any enduring core.

This stream cannot be held, controlled, or possessed. What remains is pure perception—clear, silent, and detached.

And it is precisely in this that liberation lies.

When the practitioner experiences the continuous change and dissolution of all phenomena directly, they begin to release their attachment to everything once believed to be essential.

The things once thought 'necessary' for happiness; the situations that 'had' to be resolved to feel free; the plans, relationships, and pursuit of meaning—all become transparent. One sees: all of it is merely temporary, ephemeral phenomena.

Just as a river flows without ever repeating the same drop; just as a cloud forms and dissolves again into the sky. Nothing remains. Everything comes and goes. Automatically and spontaneously—like the breath that flows in and out, ever-changing, never to be grasped, never to be understood.

The Buddha in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*: ¹⁴³

• *Whatever is subject to arising is also subject to cessation.* •

Each experience is unique in its impermanence. ¹⁴⁴ No moment can ever be repeated, no matter how similar it may appear. When the practitioner truly sees this, the impulse to cling to what is pleasant, to resist what is unpleasant, or to remain indifferent out of ignorance, begins to dissolve. ¹⁴⁵

They begin to understand that both joy and sorrow, success and loss, are merely waves that rise and fall in an ocean of movement. Rather than yearning for repetition or fearing loss, an openness emerges for whatever presents itself.

Impermanence is no longer experienced as a threat, but as liberation—the release from the illusion that anything can ever be held onto.

What was once experienced as inner struggle—the grasping for what one desired, and the rejecting of what one feared—gives way to a quiet wonder.

Within that wonder, a deeper layer of meaning unfolds. Impermanence is no longer seen as a bare fact, but as a gateway to liberating insight. It reveals itself as a dance of arising and passing, complete in itself, requiring nothing to be fulfilled.

The practitioner sees: reality is complete in its changeability. What is revealed here is not a philosophy, not a doctrine, but a direct knowing: everything that appears, disappears; nothing possesses a fixed core; all is alive in motion.

And it is precisely here that freedom is found—the freedom to fully experience each moment, without becoming entangled in it.

The 'seeing' of the concentrated mind is not sensory perception in the usual sense. It is a pure, silent presence—a clear awareness that does not grasp, reject, or label.

In this state, there is only observation, without goal or result. There is only the witnessing itself—clear, transparent, untouched. This 'seeing' refers to the Buddhist phrase: *‘Janāmi passāmi/janāmi paśyāmi—I know and I see.’*

But this 'I' is no longer the familiar, habitual 'self'.

It refers to a direct and unfiltered realization of reality in its most naked form: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless.

In this state of transparent awareness, there is no longer a tendency to structure or appropriate the experience.

The practitioner simply 'sees.' Nothing needs to be held, nothing needs to be achieved. They understand that any

form of attachment or striving for result is not only futile, but also the cause of unnecessary suffering.

The things once thought to bring fulfillment—desires, plans, relationships, narratives—lose their weight. They are seen as mere fragments of a constantly flowing process. Just as water has no fixed shape, so too do one's former certainties dissolve into movement.

In this quiet clarity, the experience of *suññatā/sūnyatā*—emptiness—becomes visible. But it is not a nihilistic emptiness. It is the absence of inherent substance, of 'something' separate from the whole, of something existing apart. It is an open space in which everything arises, changes, and vanishes—without beginning or end, without an owner.

The practitioner no longer experiences consciousness (*viññāṇa*; *vijñāna*) as something 'of theirs,' but as a stream—a flow that manifests temporarily, without fixed form, without ownership.

And from this insight, peace arises—a deep peace that no longer desires, because there is nothing left to attain.

Nibbāna/nirvāṇa does not appear as something beyond this world, but as the release from clinging to this world. It is the extinguishing of thirst, the letting go of self-construction, the end of struggle. The mind rests in itself—without center, without edge, without defense. The practitioner lives in harmony with what is—without expectation, without resistance, without illusion.

When the practitioner reaches this deep insight—that all which appears is empty of fixed essence and devoid of a lasting 'I'—the urge to grasp falls away. The mind becomes transparent, clear, free from resistance. What arises, arises. What fades, fades. Nothing needs to appear, and nothing needs to be rejected.

In this absence of resistance, there is no abyss—only a silence that feels like presence.

This silence is not the absence of experience, but the absence of struggle. The space that then reveals itself is that of *suññatā/sūnyatā*—an openness without boundary, without origin, without destination. It contains nothing to possess, nothing to control, nothing to hold, nothing to chase. Everything flows spontaneously—like a breath that breathes itself, effortlessly.

In that insight, what defies all description becomes directly knowable: *acalaṃ sukhaṃ*, the unshakable happiness.

Acalaṃ sukhaṃ refers to a happiness that is not dependent on conditions. It is a happiness that does not waver with the fluctuations of existence. It is a stillness that no longer seeks. It is not static, but alive—a clear awareness that becomes entangled nowhere. It is the peace of the liberated mind, which no longer resists the coming and going of things. The Buddha pointed the way to this perfect, unchanging peace.

It is not the happiness of sensual pleasures, fulfilled desires, or realized ideals. It is the deep peace that arises when the mind becomes utterly still—not through force of will, but because all attachment has fallen away. Nothing needs to be different from how it is.

The practitioner rests in that which has no center. The mind no longer moves in the direction of hope or fear, of 'I want' or 'I must.' And precisely in that, he finds what he could never grasp: freedom, joy, lightness.

What remains is simplicity—a natural state of being in which nothing needs to be manipulated. The practitioner lives in trust—not in the belief that everything will be fine, but in the knowing that nothing needs to be held. This is true happiness: silent, unshakable, undisturbed.

When the mind no longer moves toward grasping or rejecting, the 'self' too begins to dissolve—not as something being destroyed, but as something that never truly existed.

The practitioner sees clearly: what was previously regarded as 'I' was merely a temporary aggregation of conditionings —*saṅkhāras*—strung together into a fictitious center.

There was never an essential core—only the continuous arising and passing of mental formations, driven by craving, aversion, and ignorance. In the light of *bhāvanā-maya paññā*, this 'I' loses its grip. The structure of identification becomes porous; the stories the mind once wrapped itself in fall silent. What remains is simple presence—without content, without reference point. Consciousness 'knows' without mediation, 'sees' without commentary.

In this purity of perception, there is no longer any distinction between 'subject' and 'object'. The old dualistic perspective—the observer opposed to the observed—fades away.

There is no longer an 'I' that is aware of something, but only awareness knowing itself as open presence. The mind is quiet and transparent. It no longer needs anything to affirm itself. Or to establish itself.

No name, no form, no position, no recognition. Everything is simply what it is—arising, passing, without any need for meaning. This is not a nihilistic emptiness, but a fullness without content. Empty fulfillment. A conscious clarity that seeks to grasp nothing and clings to nothing.

A reality that suffices in itself—not through isolation, but through the falling away of all separation.

The practitioner simply 'sees'. Not as someone who sees, but as awareness itself. ¹⁴⁶ There is no longer any need to 'become' (*bhava*; *id.*); for one is nothing but the stream of what arises. And it is precisely in this that liberation lies: not

in attaining a state, but in the cessation of the compulsion to become.

Existence is no longer a problem to be solved, but an open space in which everything finds its place—silent, beyond judgment, beyond condemnation, beyond acceptance, beyond rejection. Beyond comparison. Beyond traditions. Beyond religions. Beyond structures. ¹⁴⁷

When the practitioner no longer needs to hold on to anything, space arises for an entirely different way of being: a way of living not based on striving, defense, or affirmation, but on openness.

The *yogi* sees: each experience, precisely because of its impermanence, is a singular manifestation of the flow of existence. Nothing remains—and in that lies freedom: the freedom to live without possession, without fear, without constriction.

No moment can ever be repeated. Even that which resembles what came before is always new. And when this is seen in its deepest truth, the tendency to cling to what is pleasant, to resist what is unpleasant, or to dwell in ignorance begins to dissolve. Both joy and sorrow are recognised as passing forms within an ocean of continuous movement.

This realization brings a profound liberation. Not as a dramatic event, but as a quiet relaxation of the heart.

Rather than struggling with the current of life, the practitioner is carried by its natural rhythm. A refined wonder arises at the effortless way in which everything comes and goes.

And within that wonder, something is felt that reaches deeper than understanding: a sacred sense of impermanence. Not as something tragic, but as a gateway to authenticity, to

intimacy with what is. Impermanence is recognized as an expression of reality itself—without beginning or end, without religion or morality. Without intention. Pure and spontaneous.

In this openness, each moment becomes an invitation to let go (*vossagga; viśrarga*), ¹⁴⁸ to come home to that which seeks no possession. Life is no longer experienced as something to be controlled or understood, but as a free dance of appearance and disappearance.

Nothing remains—and that is good. For in that non-abiding, the peace of *nibbāna/nirvāṇa* is revealed: not as a state, but as the end of struggle. A complete stilling of every urge to become, to grasp, to defend.

What remains is pure presence—*acalaṃ sukhaṃ*—unshakable happiness, without center, without boundary. In that space, nothing is excluded and nothing needs to be held on to.

It is not an experience that ‘belongs’ to someone, but the falling away of every border between experiencing and being experienced.

The practitioner then lives in accordance with reality as it is: simple, changing, empty of self—and precisely for that reason, complete. Free from confusion, free from craving, free from aversion, free from ignorance, free from fear.

Free—simply free.



FROM HINDRANCE TO UPROOTING – PURIFICATION

‘ When the fetters of the mind have vanished, we can see
the truth of impermanence of all conditioned things.
This leads us to total liberation. ’

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

In the Buddhist tradition, the Five Hindrances are not regarded solely as obstacles, but also as invitations to awareness.

They offer opportunities for growth: by clearly seeing their nature and origin, ¹⁴⁹ the practitioner learns how the mind functions, how suffering arises, and—essentially—how liberation becomes possible: the freedom not to interfere or react. The silent, immense freedom of pure awareness.

The Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*) are extensively discussed in various *suttas* of the *Pāli Canon*, where they are systematically analyzed in terms of their arising, their manifestation, and the path to their purification.

At their root lie the latent tendencies of the mind—subtle undercurrents (*anusaya*; *anuśaya*) that remain active as long as they are not seen with clear understanding. It is precisely these deep tendencies that bind beings to *saṃsāra*—the endless cycle of birth, death, and suffering.

These *anusayā* are intimately linked with the three unwholesome roots (*akusala-mūla*): craving (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*), which underlie the Five Hindrances.

From these roots (*mūla*) ¹⁵⁰ arise various forms of mental defilement, including the latent tendencies (*anusayā*) and the fetters (*saṃyojanāni*).

Anusayā refers to dormant predispositions that lie hidden in the mind and emerge under certain conditions as obstructive emotions or reactions.

Samyojanāni, on the other hand, are binding forces that tether beings to *saṃsāra*. They represent more consolidated expressions of the same tendencies—what in *anusayā* still exists as potential, takes form in the fetters.

According to the Buddha, it is essential to gradually eradicate these fetters (*saṃyojanāni*) in order to clear the path to liberation. Only when both the latent tendencies (*anusayā*) and the binding factors (*saṃyojanāni*) have vanished, can deep inner freedom unfold.

This liberation from the fetters does not occur through will-power, but as a natural consequence of profound insight. ¹⁵¹

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana expresses it as follows: ¹⁵²

• *When the fetters of the mind have vanished, we can
see the truth of impermanence (anicca; anitya)
of all conditioned things.
This leads us to total liberation.* •

Yet caution is needed. It is essential to realize that what is visible—what appears before us—is rarely the root (*mūla*) itself. The cause is usually not what presents itself. The cause is what remains hidden. So do not fight what appears—for then you are wrestling with shadows.

This insight is fundamental: it teaches us that what is visible is often merely superficial appearance—flamboyant scenery. What presents itself as a hindrance is rarely the real cause—the true source lies deeper, in rooted beliefs, emotional patterns, *kamma*, and unconscious structures. As long as we merely react to what appears, we fight symptoms while the causes remain untouched.

The Buddha emphasizes that one should not attempt to solve problems at the surface level. Those who do are like Don Quixote battling windmills. They waste their energy on appearances that are but the tip of the iceberg, while the true causes remain submerged.

For this reason, the Buddhist commentaries distinguish between five lower and five higher fetters (*saṃyojanāni*), the so-called shackles that prevent the practitioner from attaining awakening. These fetters bind the mind to the cycle of *samsāra* and obstruct the breakthrough of insight.

For insight to genuinely arise, these fetters must be recognized and dismantled. Within the Buddhist tradition, they are carefully identified and classified.

The commentaries distinguish between five lower and five higher fetters, each linked to specific stages on the path to liberation.

The first five are the foundation of worldly attachment. They are called the 'lower' fetters because they must be broken first on the path to freedom:

Belief in a personal 'self' (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*; *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*): the conviction that there exists a stable, enduring 'I'—an essence or soul underlying our experiences.

Attachment to rules and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*; *śīlavrata-parāmarśa*): this refers to the clinging (*upādāna*; *id.*) to the belief that self-realization can be achieved through adherence to religious rules or formal rituals. This stands in stark contrast with the *Dhamma*, which teaches that liberation is only possible through direct experience.

Skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*): deeply rooted doubt about fundamental matters such as the Three Jewels, the moral precepts (*pañca sīla*), the law of *kamma*, dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*), and

the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*). Doubt in oneself, the meditation method, or the teacher also fall under this fetter. Doubt undermines confidence and can severely hinder the practice. Its antidote (*paṭipakkha*; *prati-pakṣa*)¹⁵³ is right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*; *samyak-smṛti*), which leads to clear seeing of things as they truly are (*yathā-bhūta*; *id.*), equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

Sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*): the illusion that sensual pleasures can bring liberation or lasting happiness—a persistent delusion.

Ill will or hostility (*vyāpāda*; *id.*): anger, irritation, aversion, or hatred in response to disappointment, rejection, or misunderstanding. The delusion that one can attain liberation through force or confrontation.

The five higher fetters—the bonds of the Other Shore¹⁵⁴—are:

Desire for fine-material existence (*rūpa-rāga*): attachment to subtle meditative states, such as the first four *jhānas*. While these states are refined and often marked by deep inner peace, they can give rise to attachment to ‘heavenly worlds’ or subtle forms of ‘being.’ This attachment is a subtle yet powerful bond to *saṃsāra*.

Desire for immaterial existence (*arūpa-rāga*): craving for abstract, formless realms such as the four *arūpa-jhānas*, or existence in immaterial worlds. This is a longing for continued existence in formless states of consciousness, such as infinite space or infinite awareness. It is a refined attachment disguised as spiritual aspiration, yet at its core, it remains a binding force.

Conceit (*māna*): pride, ego, self-importance—the subtle belief that there is still an ‘I’ that is or has achieved something,

even in spiritual attainments. It is not just arrogance but includes the subtle sense of ‘I am’ or ‘I exist.’

Even the thought ‘*I am awakened*’ can be a form of *māna*. As long as subtle identification persists, this fetter remains. *Māna* is often the last to fall away, precisely because it masks itself as spiritual maturity.

Restlessness (*uddhacca; uddhatya*): the inability to settle in the present moment; the tendency to escape into activity, planning, or a craving for change. Restlessness prevents the full stabilization of the mind.

Ignorance (*avijjā; avidyā*): the deepest and most fundamental obstacle. It is not only the final fetter but also the root (*mūla*) of all the others—the failure to see reality as it is (*ya-thā-bhūta; id*); the misunderstanding of the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa; trilakṣaṇa*), the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariya saccāni; catvāri ārya satyāni*), and dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda*).

These ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) are expressions of the three poisons (*kilesa; kleśa*): craving (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa; dveṣa*), and ignorance (*moha*).¹⁵⁵ They are the forces that turn the wheel of *saṃsāra*. Liberation becomes possible only when these bonds are recognized, seen through, and ultimately uprooted.

The process of liberation (*nibbāna; nirvāṇa*) is essentially the complete eradication of these three poisons. The breaking of the ten fetters is a direct consequence of this purification.

This reveals how the entire path is unified in a single direction: through the gradual weakening and eventual extinction of desire (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*), suffering comes to an end and final liberation—extinction (*nibbāna; nirvāṇa*)—is realized.

The three poisons are present in all ten *saṃyojanāni*, manifesting on varying levels of subtlety.

Lobha becomes especially evident in the fetters of sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*), desire for fine-material existence (*rūpa-rāga*), and desire for immaterial existence (*arūpa-rāga*). From coarse attachment to pleasure to subtle spiritual longing—it remains a movement of becoming, wanting, and clinging.

Dosa manifests in *vyāpāda*—anger, hatred, and aversion. Even subtle irritation can undermine clarity and estrange the mind from its own serenity.

Avijjā, as the deepest fetter, is both the final and the principal root (*mūla*)¹⁵⁶ of the entire chain. It refers to the non-seeing of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*), and of the principle of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*).

Manifestations of *avijjā* include personality belief—the mistaken view in a lasting ‘self’ (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*), arising from a lack of trust and understanding in the *Dhamma*.

Confusion (*moha*; *id.*) can be regarded as a manifestation of the deeper ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*) that underlies *saṃsāra*. Illusion (*māyā*; *id.*) refers to the deceptive nature of phenomena that arise from this ignorance.

They obscure the mind and prevent clear insight into the true nature of reality. *Māyā* makes the conditioned (*saṅkhatā*; *saṃskṛta*)¹⁵⁷ appear solid, reliable, and truly autonomous—while in reality, it is impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), empty of inherent existence (*suññatā*; *śūnyatā*), and dependently arisen (*paṭicca samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*).

These poisons also lie subtly hidden at the root of the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *id.*). Whoever wishes to break

the fetters must begin with purifying the mind of these intoxicating and misleading forces. They obscure the clarity of vision, disturb inner balance, and hinder the maturation of both concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*) and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

In both *suddha-vipassanā*—the direct path of insight—and *samatha-vipassanā*—where insight arises following deep concentration—these poisons and fetters must be gradually recognized, understood, and transcended.

Though these approaches differ in method and emphasis, they share a common core: liberation arises from insight—not from belief, theory, or tradition, but from direct experience of how things truly are.

Both paths lead to the same goal: the breaking of the fetters that bind, and the complete uprooting of suffering.

In what follows, we will take a closer look at both approaches: the direct path of *suddha-vipassanā* (*śuddha-vipaśyanā*) and the combined path of *samatha-vipassanā* (*śamatha-vipaśyanā*), as they are taught and practiced within the Theravāda tradition.

The Direct Path: *suddha-vipassanā* / *śuddha-vipaśyanā*

Suddha-vipassanā (*śuddha-vipaśyanā*), often referred to as 'the direct path,' is commonly associated with the approach of 'bare insight' or 'dry insight.'¹⁵⁸ This method involves observing phenomena exactly as they present themselves, without prior cultivation of deep concentration or meditative absorption.

The emphasis lies entirely on direct insight into the impermanence and emptiness of all phenomena, without the mind needing to first enter deep tranquility or states of absorption. The focus is on pure attention—free from internal dialogue, subjective elaboration, and interpretation.

Through this pure, unconditioned, non-reactive awareness, the practitioner learns to regard everything that manifests through the senses as transient phenomena—without clinging (craving) or attempting to reject (aversion) them. This process leads to deep insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*)—not as the result of discursive thinking, but through the direct experience (*paccanubhoti*; *pratyanubhūti*)¹⁵⁹ of the ever-changing nature of all phenomena.

The fruit of this unconditional perception is the unfolding of wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*): the discernment between name and form (*nāma-rūpa*); insight into dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītyasamutpāda*); and the realization of the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*) of existence: impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-control or non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

This approach takes on concrete form in certain traditions, each with their own emphasis and methodology. A brief glance at these variants offers a fuller picture: the 'direct path' focuses on *vipassanā* from the very beginning, without the longer preparatory phases of calming concentration (*samatha*; *śamatha*) typical of the *jhānas*.

This form of meditation is closely connected with the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition, where the practitioner observes the immediate experience of physical and mental phenomena with pure, non-reactive awareness. It is a direct approach that accelerates the process of insight and aims at liberation from suffering through deep realization of reality.

This method finds its roots in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, where the path to liberation is outlined through seven stages of purification (*satta visuddhiyo*),¹⁶⁰ ranging from ethical purification to the realization of ultimate truth.

Some practitioners make use of a preliminary form of concentration (*parikamma-samādhī*)¹⁶¹ to support the develop-

ment of insight. Here, the mind is briefly stabilized by focusing on an object such as the breath or a mantra. This helps reduce mental distraction without necessarily leading to the deep absorptions of the *jhānas*.

S.N. Goenka's method aligns with *suddha-vipassanā*, albeit with some nuances that distinguish it from, for example, the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition or other *vipassanā* systems.

Goenka places strong emphasis on awareness of sensations (*vedanā*; *id.*), approached with an attitude of equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), without clinging or aversion.

His technique focuses on observing the impermanence of sensations, thereby cultivating insight into the three marks of existence (*anicca/anitya*, *dukkha/duḥkha*, *anattā/anātman*), without requiring the development of deep meditative absorption (*jhāna-samādhi*).

The aim is liberation through direct, unconditioned observation of the present moment, free from mental constructions and conceptual elaboration.

This approach aligns with the very essence of *suddha-vipassanā*: the direct seeing of the *svabhāva* ¹⁶²—the true nature—of phenomena as they are, without focusing on the cultivation of deep absorptions where subject and object merge. In the silent, direct observation of body and mind (*nāma-rūpa*), ¹⁶³ suffering is revealed, along with its root causes. Liberation unfolds through the clarity of this insight.

Because *vipassanā/vipaśyanā* revolves around recognizing the impermanent nature of all phenomena, it is essential that the mind be free of disturbances. The Five Hindrances form a major obstruction in this regard, as they cloud the mental clarity and sensitivity required to see the deeper truths of existence. Cultivating an open, equanimous awareness enables the practitioner to overcome these obstacles and deepen their insight.

The Combined Approach: *samatha-vipassanā* / *śamatha-vipaśyanā*

The second method—*samatha-vipassanā* (*śamatha-vipaśyanā*)—is often referred to as the gradual path of deepening. It combines deep concentration (*samatha-bhāvanā*; *śamatha-bhāvanā*) with clear insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*).

Samatha-bhāvanā, or concentration meditation, cultivates calm and stability by focusing the mind on a single object, such as the breath. This brings peace, clarity, and a profound sense of stillness, freeing the mind from distraction.

Although this stability forms an indispensable foundation, *samatha* alone does not lead to insight into the true nature (*svabhāva*) of reality. It brings mental tranquility and purification, but not the direct realization of *anicca/anitya*, *dukkha/duḥkha*, and *anattā/anātman*. The power of concentration is like fertile soil, but insight cannot sprout unless the seed of clear awareness is planted. For that, *vipassanā/vipaśyanā* must be introduced once concentration has become steady and firm.

This form of insight meditation focuses precisely on that investigation. Its aim is direct knowledge of the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the absence of a solid self.

Through direct and intuitive observation of the arising and passing away of phenomena, the practitioner realizes that everything is in flux, that conditioned things offer no lasting satisfaction, and that there is no independently existing, enduring 'self'. This insight frees the mind from illusions such as ignorance, clinging, and aversion.

Without *vipassanā/vipaśyanā*, meditation remains limited to calming the mind, without penetrating the fundamental nature of phenomena. Insight requires active inquiry and direct observation of reality as it unfolds in the NOW-moment.

Only through direct insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*) into the true nature of mind and matter (*nāma-rūpa*) does the practitioner see through the illusion of solidity and of an autonomous, stable, and controllable ‘self’. For this reason, *vipassanā* is indispensable—it enables the liberating insight that calm alone cannot provide.

Sayadaw U Pandita summarizes it as follows: ¹⁶⁴

• *What exactly is missing in concentration meditation (samatha bhāvanā)? It simply cannot lead to an understanding of the truth. For this we need vipassanā meditation. Only intuitive insight into the true nature of mind and matter can free the yogi from the concepts of ego, person, ‘self’, or ‘I’.*

Without this insight, which arises through the process of pure awareness, the yogi cannot break free from these concepts. Only an intuitive understanding of the mechanism of cause and effect—the perception of the interrelation and repetition of mind and matter—can release the yogi from the illusion that things happen without a cause.

Only by seeing the rapid arising and passing away of phenomena (udayabbaya) ¹⁶⁵ can the yogi be freed from the illusion that things are permanent, solid, and continuous.

Only by experiencing suffering in this same intuitive way can the yogi deeply learn that saṃsāric existence is not worth clinging to. Only the insight that mind and matter simply follow their own natural laws, without anyone behind them, can lead the yogi to realize that there is no ‘attā’ or self-essence. •

This makes clear what *samatha-vipassanā/śamatha-vipaśyanā* stands for. The classical Buddhist tradition considers the fourth *jhāna* (*catuttha-jhāna*; *caturtha-dhyāna*) as the ideal gateway to *vipassanā*.

In this state, the mind is free from joyful excitation (*pīti*; *prīti*) and has settled into equanimous clarity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*)—precisely the mental atmosphere in which insight can ripen most fully. From within this exalted stillness, the mind becomes transparent, allowing the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*) to become directly visible in everything that arises: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self of all conditioned phenomena.

The unique strength of this combined method lies in its synergistic nature: *samatha* purifies and stabilizes the mind, *vipassanā* penetrates reality. Each strengthens the other—stability supports insight, and insight deepens stillness. What begins as a mind focused on one object evolves into a mind that suffuses and comprehends the whole.

Unlike the direct path, this approach requires more preparation, practice, and time. It demands commitment to the technique of absorption (*jhāna*; *dhyāna*) and a subtle sense of timing: when is the right moment to shift from calm to insight?

A skilled teacher can offer guidance, but ultimately it is the *yogi* who must intuit when the mind is ripe for the observation of arising and passing phenomena.

At the same time, it is important that the practitioner does not get caught in the refined stillness of the *fourth jhāna*. However peaceful and pleasant this state may be, it is not the endpoint, but merely a threshold. One who rests in this mental state risks losing sight of the open expanse of insight that lies just beyond it.

The *samatha-vipassanā* method is often recommended for those with sufficient time, discipline, and experience.

Especially in the context of long retreats and deep practice, this path offers a solid foundation for insight and unshakable equanimity. It is like a mountain trail: less abrupt than

the direct—but risky—leap into the abyss, yet stable and reliable, with a view that gradually unfolds—towards clarity, understanding, and liberation.

In Conclusion

The choice of meditative method—whether the direct path or the *jhāna/dhyāna* path—ultimately rests entirely with the practitioner.

Although a teacher often offers initial guidance by recommending a particular technique, it remains essential that the practitioner feels inwardly attuned and genuinely connected to the chosen method. Meditation is not a rigid path that applies equally to everyone: it is a personal journey, one that must leave room for discovering which approach resonates with one's own nature, needs, and conditions.

It is of great importance that the practitioner learns to listen deeply to themselves. Whichever technique is chosen, the key to fruitful practice lies in sensing an inner 'click' with the method being used.

Meditation should never become an obligation, nor a form of dogma. It must be a natural connection to one's own inner process—an invitation to explore the mind and cultivate insight. Only when the practitioner feels truly aligned with the method can the depth of the experience be fully cultivated and realized.

Here too, a vital principle deserves to be emphasized: the practitioner is their own guide, their own refuge. Teachers, texts, and traditions may offer valuable guidance, but the ultimate responsibility for inner growth always rests with the practitioner alone.

Vipassanā teacher Sayadaw U Pandita expressed this responsibility as follows:

‘A teacher may have a personality that tastes like honey,
but if that honey is not free and sticky, the fly will die.
Freedom must always transcend
attraction to personalities.’

A teacher may have a personality like honey—attracting students with charm, warmth, or inspiration. But if that honey clings—if the personality becomes too dominant or fosters dependency—it hinders the student’s growth.

Like a fly that dies in the sweet stickiness of honey, a student can become trapped in the attraction to a teacher. Therefore, it is essential that a teacher not only inspires, but above all, creates the conditions for freedom.

The method offered by the teacher should be more important than the teacher’s personality. True guidance liberates; it does not bind. A genuine teacher points the student toward themselves, without clinging or creating dependency in the relationship.

The practitioner must *feel for themselves* what works—what method bears fruit, what suits their capacities. This requires both trust and openness: the willingness to experiment and learn from experience, regardless of outcome.

No technique is superior or inferior in itself. It is never about the method as an end, but about its function as a means. Each method is a skillful means (*upāya*; *upāyah*)—a vehicle toward calm, insight, and liberation. What works for one may be less effective for another.

This means the practitioner must play an active role in evaluating their own experience. If a method does not yield the hoped-for results, this is not failure, but a meaningful moment of learning—an invitation to try something else. Self-inquiry and adaptation are integral parts of the path.

A good teacher supports this process and allows space for personal preferences and experience. Their role is not to impose rigid rules, but to share wisdom, offer direction, and encourage inner autonomy.

Meditation is not a competition, not an achievement. It is a path of returning to oneself. Whether through deep concentration or the cultivation of insight, the chosen method must be felt as an authentic expression of where the practitioner stands at this moment. Only by remaining faithful to this inner honesty can meditation truly bear fruit.

In my own practice, I make use of both methods, depending on the time available to me and the circumstances in which I find myself.

The *direct path* is especially well-suited to apply at any free moment. It is a kind of master key—always accessible—a direct invitation to clear awareness.

This method allows me to observe the arising and passing of all phenomena as they present themselves. For me, this is spontaneous insight, moment to moment—also known as *udayabbaya*—in its purest form. In this way, I can observe life as it unfolds in constant change and impermanence, and draw wisdom from it. Repeatedly witnessing the arising and fading away of experience remains, for me, a source of wonder, stillness, and deep insight.

At the same time, I would not wish to be without the *jhāna* (*dhyāna*) path. Especially during longer, formal meditation sessions, the *jhānas* create a pleasant and calm atmosphere of awareness that not only brings peace, but refines and deepens the mind.

Years ago, I familiarized myself with the *jhāna* technique and can move through its stages relatively quickly, allowing the practice to integrate naturally into my path without requiring excessive time or effort.

The *jhānas* offer me a solid foundation of mental clarity and equanimity. These deep states of concentration protect the mind from distraction and restlessness, and as a result, the transition to *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*)—once the *fourth jhāna* is reached—unfolds naturally. In this stillness, the mind is free of inner noise, forming the ideal ground for investigating the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, suffering, and non-self.

One important point in practicing the *jhānas*, however, is not to linger in their pleasant states of awareness. These are marked by intense joy (*pīti*; *prīti*), happiness (*sukha*; *id.*), calm, and deep concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), which arise when the mental hindrances—such as sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; *id.*), ill will (*vyāpāda*; *id.*), and restlessness/remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*; *uddhatya-kaukr̥tya*)—have been abandoned.

Although this state is deeply peaceful, it remains a passage—not a destination. The *jhānas* are a springboard for insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-control. They are the ground, but not the fruit.

The Buddha warned that attachment to meditative absorptions can hinder progress toward liberation. The ultimate aim is not to remain in pleasant states of consciousness, but to develop profound insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and the absence of a permanent self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Once the mind has calmed and stabilized through the *jhānas*, it is essential to investigate the true nature of reality. True liberation lies in penetrating these three marks in all that arises and passes away.

This process unfolds in three phases.

First comes *pariyatti*: the understanding of the *Dhamma* through listening, through hearing the teachings. Then fol-

lows *paṭipatti*: the putting into practice of those insights in the stillness of meditation. Finally, there is *paññā*: the inner realization of truth—not as thought or theory, but as direct experience. When these three converge—understanding, practice, and realization—insight becomes alive, and liberation can unfold.

The combination of both techniques offers a significant advantage: the *jhāna* states bring added stability and concentration, allowing the mind to become sharper and the arising and passing of phenomena to be observed with greater refinement and clarity.

In my practice, I have gradually learned letting go of all attachment to the *jhāna/dhyāna* states. The deep insight that these conditioned, impermanent states of consciousness arise from specific causes and conditions—and are not the ultimate aim of the practice—was decisive in this process.

The combined practice of the ‘direct path’ and the path of the *jhānas* offers the space to work towards inner growth and liberation in different ways, depending on the circumstances. In this way, a dynamic, attuned practice arises—one that remains faithful to the moment, to each and every moment.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Buddha himself regarded the *jhānas* as essential for the development of morality (*sīla*; *id.*), concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*). He encouraged his disciples to cultivate these refined states of consciousness as a foundational element of the spiritual path.

In the *Majjhima Nikāya* and other discourses, the Buddha describes how practitioners, by progressing through the *jhānas*, ultimately reach the insight that leads to the cessation of suffering and the realization of liberation (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*).

For instance, in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*,¹⁶⁶ the *Sāmañña-phala Sutta*,¹⁶⁷ and the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*,¹⁶⁸ the Buddha explicitly refers to the *jhānas* as important aids on the path to awakening. They are not a goal in themselves, but provide the fertile soil in which insight may gently come to fruition.

Samādhi is one of the seven factors of awakening (*satta sambojjhaṅgā*) taught by the Buddha. It is more than just a method—it is a vital force on the path to freedom. Without *samādhi*, true and lasting transformation cannot unfold.

As one of these seven factors, *samādhi* plays a decisive role in the maturation of insight and the ultimate realization of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*). Without deep concentration, the mind remains scattered, lacking the stability required to see truth directly.

Samādhi brings clarity, calm, and unity of mind. In this stillness, the other factors—such as mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*)—can fully blossom.

It would be a mistake to view *samādhi* as incidental or something that can easily be bypassed. It is not a secondary tool, but a vital condition in which the deepest insight can emerge.

In the silence of *samādhi*, an inner space opens where truth is not merely thought, but known—not through concepts, but through being.



THE JHĀNAṅGĀNI

- *The jhānaṅgāni serve as an inner compass within the landscape of stillness.* •

Those who deeply engage in the practice of the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) will soon discover that these meditative absorptions do not arise randomly, nor do they depend on mystical circumstances. They occur when specific mental factors (*cetasika*; *cittasaṃskāra*) ¹⁶⁹ come together harmoniously, bringing the mind to stillness.

In the Buddhist tradition, these factors are known as the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*)—literally, the 'factors' or 'components of *jhāna*.' These elements form the psychological foundation for each stage of meditative absorption.

The *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are extensively discussed in early Buddhist literature, including the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, and *Saṃyutta Nikāya*.

In these texts, they are not only listed but also functionally explained as essential conditions for the arising, sustaining, and deepening of *jhāna*.

Their presence or absence marks the difference between the various stages of absorption, helping the practitioner to recognize where they are within the process of inner stillness.

Traditionally, five *jhāna* factors are distinguished:

Vitakka – the initial application of the mind; consciously directing attention to the meditation object.

Vicāra – the subtle sustaining of attention, the continuous returning to the object, leading to intuitive familiarity; ¹⁷⁰ the investigative quality that keeps the mind anchored.

Pīti – joy; an uplifting energy of spiritual enthusiasm.

Sukha – happiness; a deep sense of satisfaction and inner well-being.

Ekaggatā – one-pointedness of mind; the silent, unified focus in which all distractions dissolve.

These factors do not arise arbitrarily but correspond to the stage the mind has reached.

In the *first jhāna*, all five are present. In the *second jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* fade away—the mind no longer needs to actively apply or adjust itself. In the *third jhāna*, *pīti* subsides, leaving a peaceful happiness (*sukha*). In the *fourth jhāna*, even *sukha* as a felt sensation dissolves, leaving only *ekaggatā*, accompanied by *upekkhā* (*upekṣā*)—the serene equanimity that characterizes this depth.

Understanding these factors is not merely an intellectual matter. For the *yogi*, they serve as subtle markers, living reference points.

They help discern whether the mind has truly settled or whether subtle restlessness remains—in the form of thinking, expectation, or attachment.

In this regard, the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) act as an internal compass within the landscape of stillness.

While the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) find their primary expression in the practice of *samatha* (*śamatha*)—the calming of the mind—they play a foundational role in preparing for *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*).

This should come as no surprise, since the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are considered the direct counteragents (*paṭipakkha*; *pratipakṣa*) to the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *pañca nivarāṇāni*).

By undermining these hindrances, they purify the mind (*citta*; *id.*), providing a stable basis for insight meditation (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*). Without ethical purity (*sīla*; *śīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) cannot arise.

In practical terms, this means:

- Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; *kāmacchanda*) is countered by initial application (*vitakka*; *vitarka*), sustained application (*vicāra*; *id.*), and joy (*pīti*; *prīti*).
- Ill will and aversion (*vyāpāda*; *id.*) are countered by happiness (*sukha*; *id.*).
- Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*; *styāna-middha*) are countered by initial application (*vitakka*; *vitarka*).
- Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*; *auddhatya-kaukr̥tya*) are countered by one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*).
- Doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*) is countered by sustained application (*vicāra*; *id.*).

In this way, the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are seen not only as the building blocks of deep concentration but also as powerful tools for purifying the mind of disruptive forces, creating a clear and stable field (*gocara*; *id.*) in which insight can mature.

A mind purified of the Five Hindrances and supported by these factors possesses the clarity and stability that allows for profound insight to arise.

In this sense, the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are not an end in themselves but a necessary foundation for the maturation of wisdom.

When *vitakka* and *vicāra* have naturally subsided, when *pīti* and *sukha* fade away, and when only one-pointedness and equanimity remain, space opens for a direct, non-conceptual breakthrough into the nature of reality.

It is important to acknowledge that not all meditative traditions place the same emphasis on these factors. In some approaches—particularly where *jhāna* is not explicitly cultivated—the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are scarcely mentioned.

Some even regard a strong focus on these mental components as a distraction from the ultimate goal: liberation.

But for those who follow the path of *jhāna* as a basis for insight, the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are not incidental but form an essential and refined part of the inner process.

I personally fully embrace this view.

Thus, in this book, the *jhānaṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*) are approached as helpful but non-restrictive descriptions. They are not a rigid framework into which experience must be forced but a subtle vocabulary that helps us track the movements of the mind with care and sensitivity.

While the practice remains alive and open, this ancient terminology can serve as a quiet guide—a language that helps us approach the inner landscape with mindfulness and discernment.



THE JHĀNAS AND THEIR INNER STRUCTURE

‘The *jhānas* prepare the mind for the liberating gaze of insight. Without them, the mind is often too restless, too coarse, too fragmented to truly see deeply. To see. That is why they should not be regarded as optional. They form the foundation upon which insight rests.’⁹

Those who enter the meditative path as transmitted in the *Pāli Canon* (*tipiṭaka*; *tripiṭaka*) will discover that the journey toward inner stillness unfolds as a refined and gradual purification of consciousness.

This path does not merely lead to relaxation, but to a deep breakthrough into a different state of being, in which the mind transcends its habitual patterns and opens itself to a clarity that is free from confusion.

The meditative absorptions encountered along this path are known as *jhānas* (*Skt.*: *dhyānas*)—a term referring to a state of 'penetrating contemplation' or 'inner radiance,' in which the mind seems to glow with silent attention.

This 'radiance' does not refer to any outward intensity, but to a deep inner saturation of awareness, where the mind becomes fully absorbed in its object—free from distraction, interpretation, or inner commentary.

Attention becomes so pure and still that it not only observes the meditation object, but seems to merge with it—as a flame burns steadily without flicker: bright, stable, and uninterrupted.¹⁷¹

This is not a mechanical process, but a subtle, organic movement of stilling, in which the mind gradually releases the coarse noise of craving, aversion, and restlessness, and

begins to orient itself toward increasingly refined awareness. This inner stillness does not come through force or suppression, but through an increasingly delicate attunement to what causes agitation, and what brings peace.

The mind naturally learns to discern the difference between that which generates tension—such as chasing pleasant sensations (*rāga; id.*), ¹⁷² resisting the unpleasant (*dosa; dveṣa*), ¹⁷³ or restlessly seeking for footholds—and that which softens, opens, and calms it. In this refined tuning, space arises: the energy that was previously turned outward, returns inward, and awareness deepens in its own presence.

Thus, trust begins to grow that silence is not 'empty' in the sense of absence, but filled with clarity. What extinguishes is not life itself, but the habitual tendency to always become, to achieve, to grasp.

In this way, the mind becomes like water that has come to rest: clear, still, and reflective. In that stillness, awareness is no longer just a function of mind, but its source and ground.

This pure state of awareness—at first still supported by a subtle object of attention (*vitakka; vitarka*) and sustained engagement with it (*vicāra; id.*)—acquires a quiet and radiant quality, marked by joy (*pīti; prīti*) and followed by a deep, inner contentment (*sukha; id.*). In this refined state, the mind begins to recognize itself in its own potential for unguarded presence, supported by unification of mind (*ekaggatā; ekāgratā*).

This experience of clear, unconditioned awareness is referred to in Buddhism as 'emptiness' (*suññatā; śūnyatā*): ¹⁷⁴ not emptiness in a nihilistic sense, but a transparency in which nothing superfluous arises, and no independent, enduring 'self' can be found.

What remains is a quiet intimacy with the present moment, free from commentary, free from the push and pull of desire and aversion, free also from the compulsive need for self-definition—the subtle longing to *be* someone.

In this way, the *jhānas* open the door to liberating insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*), as they render the mind capable of directly discerning the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self nature of all phenomena.

Traditionally, the *jhānas* are divided into two series: the *rūpa-jhānas*, the absorptions that remain within the domain of form, and the *arūpa-jhānas*, which are formless and gradually open the mind to ever subtler spheres of consciousness.

Although this distinction has a functional role within meditative practice, it also reflects an inner, spiritual movement: from the tangible to the refined, from the conditioned to the boundless, from form to an emptiness (*suññatā*; *śūnyatā*) that does not denote the absence of experience, but the absence of limitation.

In the *rūpa-jhānas*, the meditation object is still connected to a certain form—whether physical, mental, or conceptual. The mind settles on a simple, clear object, and thereby develops the strength to stabilize, refine, and gradually disengage from the sensory world.

This concentration is supported by mental factors (*jhānaṅgas*; *dhyānāṅgas*) that become increasingly subtle as the *jhānas* deepen. In the *first jhāna*, for instance, initial (*vitakka*; *vitarka*) and sustained attention (*vicāra*; *id.*), joy (*pīti*; *prīti*), and pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*) are clearly present. In the subsequent *jhānas*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* fall away, followed later by *pīti* and *sukha*, until finally, only serene equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*) and clarity remain.

The *first jhāna* is marked by the presence of initial (*vitakka*; *vitarka*) and sustained (*vicāra*; *id.*) application of the mind, along with a strong sense of joy (*pīti*; *prīti*) and pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*). The mind becomes deeply anchored in the object, and the experience is one of vibrant silence, carried by a conscious but steady effort.

In the *second jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* fall away. The mind is now fully immersed in the object, without any mental movement or effort. What remains is ecstatic joy (*pīti*; *prīti*), pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*), and deep unification (*ekaggatā*; *ekā-gratā*). Discursive thinking has ceased, and the experience radiates effortless presence, naturally sustained by clarity.

In the *third jhāna*, joy (*pīti*; *prīti*) gives way to equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), while pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*) remains. The mind is calm, clear, no longer ecstatic, but peaceful, silent, and even. There is quiet contentment, a balance no longer stirred by excitement, desire, or aversion.

The *fourth jhāna* even transcends that pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*), which is here released. What remains is pure awareness, deep equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), and unshakable clarity. The mind is utterly serene, no longer moved by pleasure or pain. Mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) and equanimity reach full maturity here.

In these stages, the foundation is laid for further deepening of the path. The mind, having been trained, refined, and released from sensory attachment, is now ready to turn toward the formless (*arūpa*; *id.*).

The *arūpa-jhānas* are not separate experiences; they build upon the work done in the *rūpa-jhānas*.

They represent a further refinement of consciousness: a letting go of all form, all tangible objects, all traces of limitation. Here, the mind is no longer oriented toward a concrete

meditative object, but toward boundlessness, toward infinity itself.

The *fifth jhāna*—the first formless absorption (*arūpa-jhāna*; *ārūpya-dhyāna*)—is the sphere of infinite space (*ākāśa-nañcāyatana*; *ākāśānantyāyatana*).¹⁷⁵ The *yogi* lets go of the object and turns attention toward the boundlessness of space. Consciousness expands into the infinite, into that which is no longer limited by form or location.

In the *sixth jhāna*, attention shifts from space to consciousness itself (*viññāṇañcāyatana*; *viññānānanty-āyatana*).¹⁷⁶ The *yogi* realizes that which perceives space is itself without boundary. What emerges is the direct realization of infinite consciousness—unbounded, unrestricted, centerless.

The *seventh jhāna* is the sphere of nothingness (*ākīñcaññ-āyatana*; *ākimcanyāyatana*).¹⁷⁷ The *yogi* sees that even infinite consciousness still contains subtle characteristics, and now turns attention to the absence of all objects. What remains is the realization of emptiness—a deep silence in which nothing appears, and nothing is held.

The *eighth jhāna* is the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*; *naivasamjñānā-samjñāyatana*).¹⁷⁸ Here the mind is so refined, so quiet, that perception is only present at the threshold. It is not absent, but not clearly present either: a subtle state beyond recognition, beyond concept. This is the most delicate state the *yogi* can reach before the full cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*; *samjñā-vedanā-nirodha*)¹⁷⁹ occurs for those who have the requisite development.

In these *arūpa-jhānas*, the mental factors (*jhānaṅgāni*; *dhyānāṅgas*) of the *rūpa-jhānas* fall away. *Vitakka/vitarka*, *vicāra*, *pīti/prīti*, and *sukha* disappear. The mind comes to rest in a still point where only the subtlest remains. This does not make these states necessarily 'better,' but more rarefied, lighter, without foothold.

But importantly: these formless absorptions are not the final goal. The Buddha also described them as conditioned (*saṅkhata*; *saṃskṛta*), impermanent, and not ultimate. This means that liberating insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*) does not arise within these states themselves, but afterward—when the mind, nourished and purified by deep concentration, turns to seeing reality as it truly is: impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and without enduring self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Which brings us to the conclusion that the *jhānas*, both with form and formless, are not ends in themselves. They are the vehicle, the ground, the container.

They prepare the mind for the liberating gaze of insight. Without them, the mind is often too restless, too coarse, too fragmented to truly see deeply. To truly see things as they are.

That is why the *jhānas* are not optional—they are essential. They form the foundation upon which insight rests.



THE PRACTICE OF THE JHĀNAS

- *The jhānas are not an endpoint, but a refined preparation.
A mind that has learned to become still, that has freed
itself from form, can now see clearly.
And what it sees is not another world,
but this world—as it truly is.* •

Those who embark on the path of meditation do not walk a straight road from A to B, but travel through a landscape that gradually reveals itself as the mind becomes more refined. In this landscape, the *jhānas* form a series of inner gateways: from coarse to subtle, from movement to stillness, from attachment to release. Each stage opens a new dimension of awareness, in which the mind frees itself from what binds it, and learns to rest in its own clarity.

The practice begins with letting go of the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*; *pañca nivāraṇāḥ*)—forces that keep the mind constantly out of balance. When these defilements are temporarily fully suspended (*vikkhambhana*; *vikṣepaṇa*),¹⁸⁰ space arises for inner stability.

The mind then turns to a single object, undistracted, and settles into the *first jhāna*. This first absorption is supported by initial application (*vitakka*; *vitarka*) and sustained engagement (*vicāra*; *id.*), joy (*pīti*; *prīti*), pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*), and one-pointed concentration (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*). It is an experience of deep focus and uplifting joy, as if the mind remembers, for the first time, what it feels like to truly be at home within itself.

As the meditation deepens, the coarser mental movements begin to subside. In the *second jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* fall away, allowing *pīti* to reach its full intensity—not through excitement, but through the simplicity of a mind that is

effortlessly present. Attention now rests completely in the object, unwavering, free from doubt.

In the *third jhāna*, joy gives way to calm pleasure (*sukha*; *id.*), as the mind opens to equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*). There are no longer emotional highs or mental surges, only a gentle, stable contentment. The mind is clear and balanced—an inner equipoise no longer disturbed by preference or aversion.

In the *fourth jhāna*, even the subtle pleasure is relinquished. What remains is pure equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*) and mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), still and unobstructed. Pleasure and pain have subsided. The mind is clear, serene, and entirely free from reactivity. This unshakable stillness provides the ideal ground for insight.

From this foundation, the formless domain opens. In the *fifth jhāna*, the mind turns toward infinite space. All traces of form have been released. What arises is an awareness of boundlessness, of openness without center.

In the *sixth jhāna*, attention shifts to consciousness itself. Not space, but that which is aware of space becomes the object. The *yogi* experiences consciousness as limitless, infinite, with no division between inside and outside. Here, the realization of a universal dimension of mind arises, beyond the individual self. Some traditions describe this as the realization of emptiness (*suññatā*; *śūnyatā*)—the insight that all phenomena are empty of independent essence, or that the mind itself is present as open, luminous potential—*buddha-nature* (*tathāgatagarbha*).¹⁸¹

The *seventh jhāna* even leaves behind consciousness. Now the mind turns toward nothingness. What appears is the awareness of absence—no object, no content, only emptiness. This experience marks the release of all mental construction.

In the *eighth jhāna*, even perception becomes so refined that it is barely present as such. Neither-perception-nor-non-perception: a state in which the mind can no longer be located within the usual categories of experience. Here, even subtlety dissolves, and only the ineffable remains.

Yet even these formless *jhānas* are not the end. Like the earlier stages, they form a preparation for insight. Through these deep absorptions, the mind is purified of noise, of preference, of concept. When that purification is complete, *vipassanā* becomes possible: the clear, direct seeing of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*). Without the stability of this deep concentration, the mind would be too restless to truly discern these subtle characteristics of reality.

That is why the *jhānas* are not an endpoint, but a refined preparation. A mind that has learned to grow still, that has become free from form, can now see clearly. And what it sees is not another world, but this world—no heaven, no hell, but reality as it is: unadorned, direct, free from all metaphysical speculation.



THE JHĀNAS AS TECHNIQUE

• *The jhānas are the gateway. Insight is the path.
Awakening the goal.* •

In my own practice, I do not regard the *jhānas* as an end in themselves, but as a technique—a skillful means (*upāya*; *upāyaḥ*) to bring the mind to stillness and establish deep concentration. For me, they are not a final destination, but a path, a method, an inner tool used carefully and purposefully. The *jhānas* offer me a stable foundation—a launching platform for the practice of insight. That is how I use them: functionally, as preparation—not as some exalted or meta-physical ideal.

Technique in itself is not mystical. It is something one learns through doing, where repetition leads to proficiency, to mastery. Just as a knee surgeon specializes in prosthetics and eventually performs their movements almost blindly, so too does the meditative mind develop a certain skill through repetition. What begins with effort and conscious attention eventually becomes spontaneous and effortless. This is not a loss of depth; on the contrary—it points to the integration of technique into the structure of consciousness. The act becomes simpler; the awareness deeper.

In Buddhism, habitual patterns are not inherently unwholesome. The distinction lies in intention (*cetanā*; *id.*)¹⁸² and the results that follow.

Unwholesome habits (*akusala*)—such as sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; *id.*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*; *id.*), sluggishness (*thīna-middha*; *styāna-middha*), restlessness (*uddhacca-kukkucca*; *auddhatya-kaukr̥tya*), or doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vici-kitsā*)—pull the mind away from calm and liberation.

They lead to distraction, attachment, and suffering. But wholesome habits (*kusala*; *id.*)—such as ethical conduct

(*sīla*; *id.*), meditative training, loving-kindness (*mettā*; *maitrī*), or reflection on the *Dhamma*—create imprints in the mind that lead to harmony, insight, and release.

A structured meditation practice is such a wholesome pattern. It brings discipline, inner stillness, and stability, and forms the fertile ground for a concentrated mind—a necessary condition for clear insight.

When we meditate systematically and with commitment, a habit of returning arises: returning to simplicity, to silence, to presence. And precisely in that field of inner stillness, insight can unfold.

In this context, the *jhānas* are not magical solutions, but powerful techniques to refine and direct the mind toward a state of deep one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*). By placing your attention on a single meditation object—such as the breath—a state of mental calm and absorption gradually develops. With sufficient training and repetition, this state becomes increasingly accessible.

In my own practice, that is always the *fourth jhāna*—a point of complete stillness, luminous equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), and refined concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*).

It serves as the ground for insight meditation (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*), and at the same time as a living bridge between traditions. It is the state in which both the analytical sharpness of Theravāda *vipassanā* and the concept-free clarity of *shikantaza* (Mahāyāna) and *dzogchen* (Vajrayāna) find their natural foundation.

It is this shared ground of silent openness that moves me to take the *fourth jhāna* as the starting point for further contemplation—regardless of tradition.

I refuse to be one-eyed—to keep staring stubbornly through a single slit, while the light pours in from all directions.

It is precisely this openness that allows the technique not only to deepen, but to unfold—revealing itself as a living path rather than a fixed structure.

The benefits of this technique are clear. They allow the practitioner to swiftly enter a state of clear, one-pointed mind in which it becomes possible to see 'the true nature of things.'

The structure of the *jhānas*—their discipline, their simplicity, their focus—helps calm the countless thoughts and impulses of the mind. What remains is silence. And what reveals itself in that silence cannot be grasped by concepts, but may be recognized in terms like impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

The *jhānas* build an inner basecamp within the mind—a stable foundation the *yogi* can always return to. But they are not the goal. Never. The goal is liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*), awakening, the breaking of the veil of ignorance. And that only happens when one dares to let go of technique—when one leaves the *jhānas* behind and opens to the workings of insight.

Even though the *fourth jhāna* is a refined and powerful state, it remains a preparatory stage. Without insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*), there is no awakening. The Buddha repeatedly emphasized this: insight is the key. It is insight that breaks through ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*), understands the cause of suffering, and brings about liberation.

The *jhānas* offer, at best, a temporary peace—an inner stillness that vanishes once concentration is relinquished. Awakening is of a different order: lasting, irreversible, and rooted in the direct seeing of the true nature of things.

That is why it is important to approach the *jhānas* soberly and functionally. They are at the service of the mind, not the other way around. They bring us to stillness, so that we may see. They purify the field of experience, so that insight may unfold. But they are not sufficient in themselves.

Without insight, we remain bound—even in the highest states of concentration.

'Insight into the true nature of things' (*paccakkha ñāṇa*; *pratyakṣa jñāna*) refers to the direct, non-conceptual knowing of the nature of phenomena—their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and impersonality. Seeing how all things arise and pass away, how every phenomenon is inherently empty. That is true awakening. That is where the path culminates. From this perspective, the *jhānas* are a technique with a purpose. And that purpose is nothing less than the seeing through of all illusions.

Once the *fourth jhāna* is reached, I let go of the technique. In my approach, the *arūpa-jhānas* add little to insight. They lead to deeper stillness, but not to liberation. The aim of the *Dhamma* is not to attain the deepest possible calm, but to awaken. To free ourselves from *dukkha*.

Not the calming of my mind (*samatha*; *śamatha*) is my final aim, but liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*): the extinguishing of craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), aversion (*dosa*; *dveṣa*), and the transcendence of ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

Seen in this way, the *jhānas* are only the gateway. Insight is the path. Awakening is the goal.



THE FIRST JHĀNA

- *The first jhāna is a threshold: the transition from a reactive mind to a mind that is present without grasping.
It marks the beginning of a new sensitivity
—an inner delicacy that makes it possible,
once the time is ripe,
to look with clarity into
the nature of all that arises.* •

Only when the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *id.*) are not merely temporarily suppressed, but deeply understood, fully felt, and genuinely overcome, does the silent and luminous inner space arise in which the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) begin to unfold—not by force, but naturally.

This inner purification is not a technical accomplishment, but the result of a mind freed from sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; *id.*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*; *id.*), dullness and sluggishness (*thīna-middha*; *sthīna-middha*), restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*; *auddhatya-kaukrtya*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*).

When these hindrances have truly fallen silent through insight, a ground of stillness emerges in which concentration deepens not through any deliberate effort, but as a natural unfolding—like water remaining clear when it is no longer stirred by mud. The *jhānas* are then no longer experienced as meditative attainments, but as the spontaneous expression of a mind that has stopped seeking, because it has found repose in the silent intimacy of what is.

This purification is not a one-time event, but a subtle and continuous process of precise, receptive, and repeated observation—seeing with a mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) that does not remain at the surface, but gently and persistently penetrates the undercurrents of the mind.

The Hindrances are like veils of smoke that obscure inner vision and block access to deeper concentration (*samādhi*; *samādhi*). As long as this smoke continues to rise, the fire of contemplation—the quiet, radiant insight of clear presence—cannot unfold freely. That is why overcoming the Hindrances is not incidental, but an essential condition for anyone who wishes to cultivate the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*).

The *jhānas* are not artificial states summoned through force of will, but a natural refinement of the mind that has come to rest in itself. They do not arise from doing, but from the release of inner resistance. They emerge as the flowering of a mind that has become simple, unburdened, and receptive. They are the fruit of a gradual refining of attention, trust, and surrender—a ripening that unfolds when seeking dissolves into silent clarity.

In these stages of increasingly subtle one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*), the mind begins to let go of its tendency to construct, interpret, and manipulate. The surface-level complexity of mental patterns dissolves, and a quiet, stable joy emerges—a joy not dependent on the sensory world, but arising from inner calm itself.

What unfolds here lies beyond the domain of 'doing' and 'striving.' The practitioner does not reach this state through willpower, but by creating the conditions in which the mind naturally settles—just as a lake becomes still when the wind dies down. It is not the hand that forces the water to calm, but the absence of disturbance that allows the reflection to appear. This deepening comes not from ambition, but from softening. Not from forcing, but from sinking.

When the mind begins to let go of itself, awareness arises that is free from goal-orientation. The urge to achieve something falls away, along with the subtle tension that every self-directed meditation entails. There is no longer a separation between attention and its object; the mind rests quietly, without naming, without claiming.

In this inner stillness, something becomes apparent that precedes thinking, choosing, or willing: a clear presence that needs nothing. It is not the result of any act, but the consequence of the cessation of doing. This state is not spectacular, but profoundly simple—so unadorned that it is often overlooked. And yet, it is precisely this simplicity, this natural refinement of attention, that opens the gate to true insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

When the mind has come to rest and is no longer tossed by desire or aversion, space opens for something deeper: the direct seeing into the nature of experience itself. In the silence of *jhāna* (*dhyāna*), it becomes possible to see how all things arise and pass away—without core, without solidity, without self.

This clarity is not intellectual understanding, but immediate, direct experience. It is as if the usual layers of interpretation, memory, and expectation fall away, and the mind opens to the pure stream of what is. No filter, no grasping, no resistance—only the dance of awareness with the ever-changing, in all its vulnerability and beauty.

In that silence, it becomes visible that every experience, however intense or subtle, arises due to causes and conditions, and ceases when those conditions fade. Forms, feelings, thoughts, sensations—they arise like waves on an ocean, without lasting essence. Even the thought 'my experience' turns out to be merely a temporary construction, composed of habit, memory, and identification.

And precisely in the fading of that identification, liberating insight begins to open: the realization that nothing in the stream of experience can be pointed to as a 'self.' No enduring core, no governing agent, no owner—only the flowing itself. This wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) is not something one acquires, but something that reveals itself when the mind is quiet and clear enough to truly see.

The *jhānas* provide a quiet ground for this. They are like an inner lake in which the reflection of impermanence can appear unobstructed. It is not that insight is created within the *jhāna*, but that the mind, in this stillness, finds the clarity to recognize what has always already been the case—without the interference of the 'I' that previously stepped in to grasp, label, judge, and evaluate.

The absence of noise is the condition for the arising of truth. And that is why the deep stillness of *samādhi* is not the end, but the quiet birthplace of liberating insight. The *jhānas* are not a conclusion, but a beginning. They are like the opening of a room in which the lamp of insight can begin to burn—softly, clearly, without shadow. And perhaps that is the greatest paradox of practice: that the further the 'I' recedes, the closer one comes to truth.

The *first jhāna* (*paṭhama-jhāna*; *prathama-dhyāna*) marks a decisive shift in the mind: the moment when attention withdraws from the sensory world and anchors itself in inner stillness.

This stage arises only when the Five Hindrances have been overcome. Only a mind free from desire, aversion, laziness & dullness, restlessness & remorse, and doubt can rest effortlessly on a single object, without being pulled back into the sensory world of forms, sounds, scents, and long-ing.

What then arises is not a flat stillness, but a vibrant presence that gradually deepens. The *first jhāna* is like stepping into an inner garden where the winds of the senses have fallen still. The mind, which usually scatters itself across countless impressions, now turns inward and finds a quiet ground.

The experience is not empty or absent, but filled with a serene intensity—a softly pulsing vitality that does not seek,

grasp, or flee. In this space of stillness, attention acquires a new quality: stable, rooted, open.

Stable, because the mind no longer leaps from one object to another, no longer driven by impulses of desire or aversion. This stability is not tense or rigid, but natural—the stillness of a bird that no longer needs to fly because it has found its branch. Attention remains without effort, because nothing pulls it out of balance.

In this stability, all seeking comes to rest.

Rooted, because attention no longer floats or drifts, but is deeply anchored in direct experience. It is no longer abstract or scattered, but fully embodied. The mind stands like a tree in the ground: firm, still, yet alive. From this rootedness in the present moment arises a sense of coming home—not in another world, but right here, in the heart of what presents itself.

Open, because attention excludes nothing. It is not focused on control, but on availability. Everything is welcome within this field of awareness: sound, feeling, thought, silence. Everything may appear. There is no struggle, no rejection. The openness is like the blue sky in which all things move, without the space itself ever being threatened.

In this openness, the sense of 'I' begins to dissolve—every impulse to grasp or push away is gone.

When attention embodies these three qualities—stable, rooted, and open—an inner state arises that is different from what is commonly understood as 'concentration.' There is no narrowing of awareness, but a deepening of presence; a clarity without effort, a calm without closure, a knowing that nothing needs to be held.

To me—experientially—this is the threshold where *samādhi* flows into *paññā*: not as thought or reasoning, but as the

silent seeing of what is. From this attention that is stable, rooted, and open, it becomes possible to truly see how all things arise and pass away—without core, without clinging, without self.

As one sinks more deeply into this state, the experience of attention shifts. It is as if the mind leaves itself behind at the surface and gently descends into a silent undercurrent. There is no sense of control or direction, and yet no loss of clarity. On the contrary: presence deepens, like a body naturally relaxing in warm water—held, no longer tense. This sinking is not a disappearance, but a dissolving of resistance. The mind slips out of its habitual tendencies to do, plan, compare, or analyze. What remains is intimate presence—without friction, without direction, without goal. As if the mind no longer positions itself in relation to what is, but simply merges with it—in silence.

In this sinking, the sense of 'I' loses weight. Not because the *yogī* loses themselves, but because there is nothing left that needs to be held. The breath flows unsteered. Attention rests without boundary. The silence is not sought—it is simply there, as an atmosphere in which everything softens and deepens.

As the *yogī* sinks deeper into this state, it becomes palpable that this silence is not without form, but is carried by subtle forces that hold the whole together—like an invisible ground that envelops and supports the experience.

In the Buddhist tradition, these forces are called the *jhānāṅgāni* (*dhyānāṅgāni*): the mental factors that together form the inner fabric of a *jhāna*.

For the *first jhāna*, the tradition names five of these subtle forces: *vitakka* (*vitarka*), *vicara* (*vicāra*) , *pīti* (*prīti*), *sukha* (*īd.*), and *ekaggatā* (*ekāgratā*).

Vitakka (*vitarka*), the first factor, refers to the initial application of attention to the chosen meditation object. It is the first inner movement by which the mind turns away from the sensory world and intentionally focuses on the field of contemplation.

This application is not a forced effort, but a gentle turning—an invitation to attention to rest on a single point. This anchor can vary: it may be the breath, a visual object such as a *kaṣiṇa*,¹⁸³ or an elevated mental state such as *mettā* (*maitrī*).¹⁸⁴ But it can also be silence, light, space—any object that does not draw the mind outward but allows it to settle inward.

What these objects have in common is that they center the mind. The application of *vitakka* is like carefully placing a bowl on a flat surface—not randomly, but with awareness and care. In this simple, intentional movement lies the beginning of stabilization: the mind stops seeking, and chooses to remain. To anchor itself in the now. To root itself.

What follows is *vicāra*—sustained attention. If *vitakka* is the first contact, *vicāra* is the gentle resting upon that spot. The mind does not actively examine the object, but remains with it like a flame that burns steadily without flickering. *Vicāra* is the factor of refinement: attention must not only be directed (*vitakka*), but also remain steadily and fluidly connected to the object (*vicāra*).

From this stability of direction (*vitakka*) and continuous resting upon the meditation object (*vicāra*), inner joy arises—*pīti*. This joy is not sensual pleasure, not a delight arising from external stimulation or possession, but a rising, spiritual rapture that wells up when the mind feels liberated from distraction and fragmentation. It has no outer cause, nor is it constructed or produced—it arises spontaneously from the depth of stillness, as a natural response of the mind to its own freedom.

Pīti may manifest in various intensities—sometimes subtle, sometimes overwhelming. In early stages, it may appear as tingles of happiness coursing through the body—like the sudden chills that arise from deep recognition or moving beauty. At other times, it flows like a warm wave, as a sense of tingling release or inner spaciousness. It may express itself as lightness, as if the body has lost its weight and is effortlessly held in silent space.

Sometimes *pīti* arises as an inner smile that permeates everything—not as an emotion, but as an atmosphere of inexplicable joy. And in more intense forms, it may manifest as a jubilant lightness: an almost ecstatic clarity in which the mind feels carried, frictionless, and free from seeking.

In all its forms, *pīti* is an experience of freedom: not the freedom of fulfillment, but the freedom of letting go—of no longer needing anything.

Pīti is the inner sign that the mind has broken free from its sensory shell and returned to its original simplicity—the quiet presence that was already there, before grasping, before naming, before the search for anything other than what is directly and immediately given.

This simplicity is not empty or passive, but clear, open, and uncomplicated. It resists nothing, projects nothing, and needs no explanation. It is 'being' itself, prior to all interpretation. The mind rests in its own ground—not as a subject confronting an object, but as a space in which all things arise and dissolve without conflict.

When the mind rests in its own ground, the seeking subsides. There is no longer a compulsion to grasp or reject. The distinction between a 'me' who sees and a world that is seen begins to soften. What remains is a quiet, open space in which all things may come and go as they will—without provoking conflict, without touching anything that is 'mine.'

This is the free state of presence—not as someone, but as an awareness that excludes nothing and defends nothing.

In this simplicity, the tendency to improve, to control, to strive for results dissolves. There is nothing left that needs to be resolved, no experience that still needs to be reached. Only this awareness—quiet and unimpeded—that knows itself without needing to be named.

It is the simplicity of a clear lake without ripples, of a breath that comes and goes on its own, of a presence that no longer needs to prove its existence. Here, freedom is not something achieved, but something recognized—as something that was never absent.

Pīti opens the heart and permeates the body, making meditation no longer feel like discipline, but like coming home. Joy is not the goal, but the consequence—and at the same time, a subtle teacher: it shows that joy need not come from the outside, that the mere ceasing of craving is enough for happiness to arise.

It is no coincidence that *pīti* is mentioned in the Buddhist doctrine as one of the seven factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅga*; *bodhyaṅga*).

In that context, *pīti* is not only meditative joy, but a deeply structural quality of the path to awakening. It breaks open the dryness that can result from overly forceful 'wanting.' It softens the heart, makes the mind receptive, opens a field of trust and lightness in which one may sink further into silence...

...Sink further into *passaddhi* (*praśrabdhi*): the calm of body and mind that spontaneously wells up when joy settles into silence. While *pīti* still carries an upward movement—a jubilant release—*passaddhi* descends like a blessing of stillness. It is no longer ecstasy, but deep peace. The body

feels weightless and quiet, the mind soft and clear like untroubled water.

In this state, meditation becomes not only effortless but also inwardly silent. There is no more seeking, no more wanting, no form of striving—only presence, rooted in relaxation. And thus a ground opens in which insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*) is no longer driven by the desire to know, but may arise on its own from the openness of being...

...Truth begins to reveal itself. It is in this inner receptivity—free from expectation, free from the urge to control—that knowing arises. Not as thought, not as concept, but as a quiet clarity in which the distinction between subject and object begins to fade.

In this openness, nothing needs to be fixed or named. The mind is no longer seeking certainty, but rests in the mystery itself—clear, awake, unburdened. In this absorbed presence, it becomes evident that wisdom is not a possession, but a movement of life itself. It comes like a spark in the dark and vanishes without a trace—yet leaves behind a scent of freedom, a space in which the ordinary becomes suddenly transparent.

Here, *paññā* (*prajñā*) does not arise from analysis, but from intimacy with silence. It is the wisdom born in the shadow of surrender, in the softness of not-knowing. Not a harsh truth, but a quiet recognition—a knowing-without-words, held within the space in which all things arise and pass away...

When *pīti* is present, meditation is no longer driven by willpower or discipline, but carried by joyful naturalness. The practitioner realizes that nothing needs to be added—there is enough 'being' in the moment itself.

This is the taste of freedom—the joy of not being scattered, of having nothing to protect or chase. *Pīti* is not the end, but

the first glimpse of the freedom that will later fully bloom in insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

Alongside *pīti*, there arises *sukha*—a more stable, peaceful feeling of happiness. Where *pīti* is dynamic, *sukha* is quiet and supportive. It is the soft foundation upon which awareness rests. *Sukha* is not excited or ecstatic, but soaked in peace. The body feels relaxed, the mind light and anchored in stillness. This happiness is not the result of an object, but of the absence of struggle.

When the mind is freed from distraction and has found its resting point, *sukha* appears as a quiet, sustaining joy.

Sukha is the gentle continuation of *pīti*—less exuberant, but more deeply grounded. Where *pīti* rises like a jubilant wave—a sign of breakthrough and release—*sukha* is the calm basin that follows.

Sukha is a sense of well-being steeped in peace. It is not explosive, not ecstatic, but gentle, spacious, and soothing. In *sukha*, there is no movement upward or outward—all energy turns inward and comes to rest.

The body feels warm, relaxed, balanced; the mind clear, light, and open. There is no urge to be anywhere else than exactly here. *Sukha* is the quiet happiness of coming home to oneself in the now.

But the 'happiness' of *sukha* is not pleasure in the worldly sense. It is the happiness of not needing. The happiness of no inner resistance. It is the flavor of peace that arises when the mind no longer rejects anything, no longer chases anything. It is the happiness that arises without anything being added—a state of being whose strength lies in its simple fullness.

When *sukha* is present, meditation becomes not only sustaining but quietly joyful. A kind of natural trust emerges—

not in something specific, but in the fact that it is enough simply to be present. There is a grounded sense of safety, as if one has returned to an inner home that was never truly lost, only momentarily forgotten.

In the silence brought by *sukha*, attention finds the space to root itself. Not through effort, but through the gentleness of peaceful presence. Because there is no longer anything pushing or pulling, the mind can simply remain. When there is no longer a force drawing the mind outward, nor a resistance pushing it away—then it returns to its own center. It no longer needs to go anywhere. And precisely in that lies the simplicity—the mind remains, quietly and clearly, with what is. It no longer grasps, no longer defends itself.

This is the simplicity that characterizes the *jhāna*: a deeply rooted presence in which nothing is missing, and nothing is needed.

Sukha makes it possible for attention to deepen without tension—not as effort, but as relaxation turning inward. Attention relaxes into itself, and precisely in that relaxation it becomes quiet and deep. The mind no longer needs to strive to reach anywhere; it simply sinks into the field of experience. Thus, attention is no longer a performance, but a form of inner stillness that unfolds further inward—gentle, supported, free from craving.

‘Gentle’ here does not mean weak or passive, but the absence of tension, harshness, or resistance. In the experience of *sukha*, there is no inner friction: nothing is pushed away, nothing is clung to. Attention is fluid, supple, and receptive. This gentleness is a refinement of the mind. It stands in contrast to the usual mental rigidity of wanting, needing, fixing, improving. It is the mind that no longer tries, but simply abides—kind, still, clear.

‘Supported’ suggests a sense of safety, trust, and inner holding. The mind does not feel adrift or uprooted, but sta-

ble within itself—resting in a ground that sustains without interfering. This points to the fact that *sukha* is not only an experience of inner softness, but also of balance, of harmony—physically and mentally. The mind feels carried by the silence, by the stability of concentration, by the absence of struggle. The word also resonates with surrender: the practitioner is carried, no longer needs to carry. That is a profound characteristic of *jhāna*: it is not about doing, but about being carried—in this moment, in every moment.

'Free from craving' means that the mind is no longer seeking something external to complete what is already present. Here the liberating quality becomes apparent. There is no striving, no goal, no subtle urge of 'this must be different.'

This is a mind that lacks nothing, desires nothing, rejects nothing. And precisely because of that, a pure presence emerges—a state of being in which everything is allowed to be as it is, without commentary or interference.

This craving-free awareness is the doorway to insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*), because only in such rest can the true nature of experience reveal itself as it is. Only when the mind is still does the pushing and pulling stop. Then there is no more distortion of what appears.

And only then—in that quiet receptivity—can experience show itself as it truly is: impermanent, without fixed core, and without anything that is 'mine.' Insight does not arise because we do something, but because we finally stop standing in the way.

In this sense, *sukha* also forms a ground for *paññā* (*prajñā*). For only a mind that feels safe and well, that can be present in a relaxed way without defending or inflating itself, is capable of truly seeing. This seeing is not a mental understanding, not thinking about experience, but a direct seeing-through—clear, uncolored, without interference. The mind no longer tries to understand, to control, or to grasp. It al-

lows what arises to be, and sees how it comes and goes—without an 'I' stepping in to grasp or reject. It is in this relaxed openness that insight unfolds—not as something new, but as a recognition of what has always been so.

Sukha not only calms the senses, but also the subtle tendencies of ego: the wanting to know, to control, to accomplish. *Sukha* invites gentle receptivity.

To taste *sukha* is to taste trust in the path. Not as a concept or belief, but as direct experience: here, in this stillness, in this simplicity, life is exactly as it should be. No higher state, no perfection—but a peace that needs nothing more to be complete.

The *fifth jhāna* to appear is *ekaggatā* (*ekāgratā*), the one-pointedness of mind. In a way, it is not simply one factor among the others, but the silent backbone upon which all the other *jhāna* factors rest. *Ekaggatā* is the gathering of the mind into a single field—without distraction, without interruption, without a second.

Ekaggatā literally means 'one-pointedness': the unification of the whole mind around a single object, a single field of experience, without division or multiplicity. In the *first jhāna*, this one-pointedness is still surrounded by movement: *vitakka* and *vicāra* are active, *pīti* and *sukha* rise and flow. Yet amid this subtle activity, there is already a core of stability—a silent axis around which everything organizes itself.

That axis is what *ekaggatā* constitutes. The mind is no longer fragmented. It is not dwelling in past or future, not pulled between inside or outside. Everything is drawn into a single field, and attention rests there like a flame that does not flicker.

Yet this one-pointedness is not a strained fixation, not a narrowing of awareness. On the contrary, it is spacious, supportive, and natural.

Spacious, because *ekaggatā* cannot be compared to a tight, constricted focus that excludes everything but the object. On the contrary, it arises within a field that feels broad and open. Attention is not narrowed into a tunnel, but rests quietly in an awareness that stretches like a clear, unbounded space. What disappears is not the world, but the urge to wander off into it. What remains is an open orientation—alive, breathing, wide.

Supportive, because *ekaggatā* is not sustained by willpower, but carries itself out of stillness. It is not something that must be constantly 'maintained,' but a natural state in which the mind allows itself to be held—like a leaf lying quietly on the surface of a pond. It offers a subtle foundation in which the other *jhānaṅgāni*—*vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*—can move naturally without disturbing attention. It is the base upon which the entire field of meditation rests, without drawing attention to itself.

Natural, because *ekaggatā* is not something manufactured, but something that arises when all noise and resistance have subsided. It is not a mental construction, but the result of a mind that has come to rest in its own ground. Just as water naturally becomes still when the wind dies down, one-pointedness arises by itself when craving, aversion, and restlessness fall silent. It is spontaneous, without force—the natural state of a mind that no longer wants anything, and needs to be nowhere else but here.

The mind is 'one' because it no longer desires more. There is no motion toward anything else, no aversion toward what is. The mind has come to rest: clear, still, simple. In that state, the mind is like water in a clear bowl: it reflects without ripple, without distortion.

Ekaggatā brings the mind home to itself—not by drawing boundaries, but by dissolving itself as center. What remains is not 'attention' looking at something, but an open field in which seeing and seen are no longer two.

In relation to *paññā* (*prajñā*), *ekaggatā* forms the necessary ground for clear seeing. For only when the mind is no longer tossed about by impressions, preferences, and aversions, can it truly be aware. *Ekaggatā* is like the lens that no longer quivers, allowing the image to become sharp. It is the condition for insight, but not insight itself.

It creates the clarity in which *paññā* can flare up—not as thought, but as immediate recognition of the way things truly are: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

In this sense, *ekaggatā* is not a technical form of concentration, but a mode of stillness in which the mind reveals its true nature. It is no longer an effort, no act of control or mastery, but a state of quietly resting in simplicity. The mind is no longer directed outward, nor caught in inner commentary. It rests silently, unobstructed, in itself.

Not as a separate thing, but as space in which nothing is lacking. Consciousness is no longer experienced as a separate 'something'—not as a perceiver confronting the perceived—but as a quiet, open field in which all things appear, move, and disappear. It is not an entity, not a center, not a 'self,' but the very ground of experience. In this space, nothing is missing, because nothing is excluded. Whatever comes, is welcome. Whatever goes, is free to go. What remains is presence—clear, empty, still—in which nothing is missing because nothing is rejected.

The *Pāli Canon* speaks here of *acalaṃ sukhaṃ*: the unshakeable happiness that does not arise from anything, but appears when the mind no longer needs to add or resist. It is a happiness without movement—not a fleeting joy, but a sphere of completeness, the quiet fulfillment of inner peace. And it is precisely in that quiet completeness that *paññā* (*prajñā*) can begin to glow—not as a thought, but as *yathābhūta*: the silent seeing of what has always already been so.

On this ground, the first jhāna rests: as a living field in which the mind comes home to itself—and opens to a deeper seeing.

Together, these five factors form a refined interplay in which consciousness not only becomes calm, but also more subtle. They sustain the field in which wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) can take root. For although no active contemplation yet takes place in the *first jhāna*, a new kind of clarity arises nonetheless: the realization that inner stillness is possible, that freedom is not far or abstract, but intimately present in the quieting of the mind.

The experience that one can become free from craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*) and sensory distraction—even if only temporarily—plants a seed of confidence.

It is this confidence that prepares the practitioner for a deeper insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*; *anātman*). Here, the foundation is laid for the insight that liberation does not lie outside of us, but in the stilling of the mind as it is.

The *first jhāna* is therefore a threshold: the transition from a reactive mind to a mind that is present without grasping. It marks the beginning of a new sensitivity—an inner refinement that makes it possible, when the time is ripe, to look with clarity into the nature (*svabhāva*) of all that arises.

That clarity is not born of thought or striving, but grows in the space where nothing is needed—in the open ground of inner stillness. There, the practitioner begins to listen to what makes no sound, to look at what does not move: the quiet presence that excludes nothing.

It is not silence as absence, but a quiet awareness—clear and alive, free from disturbance. Not an emptiness without content, but the supporting ground in which the mind learns

to see without judgment, without the urge to grasp or define.

In that silent ground, nothing new is created, but what has always been present becomes visible. When the mind ceases to seek, insight arises on its own.



THE SECOND JHĀNA

‘ In this state of deep rest,
where every inner movement has stilled,
insight may arise naturally—without being sought. ’

The transition from the first to the *second jhāna* (*dutiya-jhāna*; *dvitīya-dhyāna*) marks a subtle yet fundamental shift in the nature of attention and awareness.

Whereas in the *first jhāna* there is still a subtle movement of the mind—*vitakka* (*vitarka*) and *vicāra* (*id.*) express the initial directing toward the object and the continued staying with it—this activity comes to rest in the *second jhāna*.

The mind no longer needs to make an effort—no more directing, no more staying—for it has arrived and now naturally abides with the object, like water that settles when it no longer flows anywhere, like a bird carried through the air without the need to flap its wings. The gentle intention of applying and sustaining, which was still necessary in the *first jhāna*, has now become unnecessary.

In the *second jhāna*, *vitakka* and *vicāra* fall away—not because they are suppressed, but because they have become redundant. The mind has found its anchor and no longer needs movement to stay there. The initial phases of directing and sustaining have fulfilled their purpose: consciousness now rests quietly in itself, unassisted. It is as though the boat has been moored, and the ropes need no longer be held—the current is still, the riverbed deep. ¹⁸⁵

The falling away of *vitakka* and *vicāra* brings with it a quiet form of stability. While in the *first jhāna* attention still gently fluctuates—like a flame that softly sways in a windless room—here it burns unmoving, clear and unwavering.

This is the *jhāna* where confidence in the process is born: the steady assurance that the mind can support itself without pushing or pulling. Here, silence is no longer achieved—it is recognized as the natural state.

This stillness has an immediate effect on the other factors: *pīti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā* deepen in a way that is difficult to describe—not only becoming more intense, but also purer, simpler, and more natural.

The experience of the *second jhāna* is purer because it is no longer mingled with mental activity that carries subtle traces of intention or effort. However refined, *vitakka* and *vicāra* bring a degree of motion to the mind: the ongoing directing and returning to the object—a faint tremor beneath the surface. When these supporting factors fall away, *pīti* (*prīti*), *sukha* (*id.*), and *ekaggatā* (*ekāgratā*) become clearer and deeper—not through addition, but because even the subtlest inner movement has subsided. Nothing now mingles with the experience; it is untouched, transparent, clear as still water.

What unfolds here is simplicity—not as a lack of depth, but as a liberation from complexity. The mind no longer needs to do anything: no aiming, no holding, no subtle adjusting or evaluating. There is no inner layering of striving, following, or controlling. Everything is reduced to a single-pointed stillness in which the mind no longer splits between observer and object, between movement and fixation. This simplicity is not a flattening, but a profound, silent refinement—a direct presence with what is, free from embellishment, free from addition.

The state of the *second jhāna* feels more natural because it arises effortlessly once the mind has come to rest. It is not the result of technical control or directed will, but the expression of a mind that has rediscovered its own natural harmony. It is a homecoming to silence, to an attention that sustains itself without needing to be guided. The experience

does not impose itself, but unfolds naturally—like breathing that continues on its own once one stops trying to breathe. In this naturalness, the sense of anyone 'doing' something disappears: there remains only silent being, in which the mind no longer requires an 'I' to know itself.

What remains is a deeper stability—a *samādhi*: a settling—that supports itself. *Pīti* (*prīti*) and *sukha* (*id.*) are still present, but now anchored in a quieter foundation, free from the friction of actively constructing attention.

Pīti, which in the *first jhāna* could still be jubilant and ecstatic, becomes quieter in nature. Its energy is less exuberant, less coursing through the body, and more absorbed in a gentle, elevated rapture. The experience of *pīti* at this stage is that of an inner smile that needs nothing. It is no longer an outburst, but a stilled joy that permeates everything—soft, clear, directionless. This is not euphoria, but a quieter ecstasy that seeks nothing, for all is already present.

Sukha becomes at once more palpable and more subtle. Unlike the more pronounced sense of lightness and well-being that characterizes the *first jhāna*, here arises a kind of fullness of being so silent and natural that it barely draws attention. The body is not only relaxed—it is suffused with peace. There is no resistance, no boundary. The mind lies like a leaf on water: weightless, buoyant, open. *Sukha* here is not pleasure, not delight, but a state of inner well-being in which nothing needs to happen.

Ekaggatā—the one-pointedness of mind—anchors itself more deeply than before. What already felt stable in the *first jhāna* now becomes nearly unshakable. The mind has come fully to rest in a single field, without the slightest inclination to turn away. There is no recoil into the senses, no urge to analyze, compare, or name. Awareness is silent and fully present, like a mirror that does not choose what it reflects, but mirrors everything in an uncontrived clarity.

At this stage, it becomes clear that silence has a structure—not something rigid or defined, but a field of complete harmony between awareness and object. Everything is in its place. Nothing pushes, nothing pulls, nothing is missing. The mind is like a crystal bowl filled with clear water: empty of disturbance, full of presence. What remains is not self-consciousness, but a quiet clarity that is sufficient unto itself.

The difference between the *first* and *second jhāna* is not dramatic, but it is profound. It is not a leap, but a sinking. The *first jhāna* still contains an element of movement: a gentle dynamic of directing and remaining. There is still a subtle knowing of 'I am meditating'—an inner orientation toward the object. But in the *second jhāna*, even that falls away. What was once a directing and staying becomes simply 'being'. The mind is no longer on its way to silence—it is silent.

The difference may seem small, but the taste is different. In the *first jhāna*, there is joy because the mind releases itself from distraction. In the *second jhāna*, there is joy because no movement is needed at all. Everything is here. Nothing pulls, nothing pushes. The mind no longer swims against the current—it is the current. The distinction between effort and ease fades. What remains is a directionless clarity, a joy without cause, a silence no longer made—but simply present.

In this state of deep rest, where every inner movement has stilled, insight (*paññā*, *prajñā*) may arise naturally—without being sought. Not as analysis, not as reflection, but as a clear illumination of what is—from within. There is no mental activity striving to understand. It is the silence itself that is capable of seeing.

Where in earlier stages the mind still grasped at seeing, there now emerges a form of knowing that requires no movement. No questions, no concepts—only a refined re-

ceptivity in which seeing occurs without a seer. What becomes clear is a transparent stillness of experience: that all things appear and vanish without core, without hold. Not as conclusion, not as result, but as direct experience.

This is insight that does not become possession. It is not 'my' insight, not a milestone, not an achievement. It is like an opening in the clouds through which the light briefly shines upon reality as it is. Nothing is constructed, nothing attained. The mind is quiet, and precisely in that quiet, what was always visible may now be seen.

Finally, let me offer a few reflections on the experiences that may accompany the *second jhāna*: trust (*saddhā*; *śraddhā*), noble silence (*ariya tuṇhībhāva*; *ārya tūṣṇībhāva*), and the falling away of self-reflection.¹⁸⁶

Trust (*saddhā*; *śraddhā*)¹⁸⁷

In the *second jhāna*, the urge to steer or seek vanishes. What remains is a silence that supports. The following reflection attempts to approach this state not through analysis, but through felt experience.

In the silence of the *second jhāna*, where the mind no longer steers or searches, something arises that is hard to name but deeply felt as trust—*saddhā*.

It is not a belief in something outside of oneself, nor a conceptual (purely intellectual, rational) or dogmatic (blind, authority-based) acceptance of a teaching, but an inner certainty grounded in direct experience. Not in what is merely known, but in what is inwardly borne.

When the mind experiences that it can come to rest without effort, and that this rest sustains itself, a deep trust in the path arises—spontaneously. Not as conviction, but as recognition. Something within the mind knows: *this is it*. Not as result, not as goal, but as a directionless homecoming. In

that trust, the tension of needing to succeed or make progress dissolves. There is no measuring stick, no search for confirmation. The silence suffices—it supports.

And this may be the most liberating insight at this point in practice: that there is nothing one needs to become, nothing one needs to achieve, because one has never been anything other than open presence.

This trust is silent.

It seeks no expression, no form. But it changes everything. Because the mind now dares to relax into the unknown. Because the ego no longer needs to maintain itself, no longer needs to assert its presence. Because insight is no longer a project, but a self-evident illumination—like the sunrise, effortless, when the horizon clears.

Noble Silence (*ariya tuṇhībhāva; ārya tūṣṇībhāva*) ¹⁸⁸

What becomes apparent at this stage of practice is the disappearance of inner commentary. Not because it is suppressed, but because it loses its relevance.

The mind no longer speaks to itself. There is no commentary on what arises, no questioning of meaning, no inner whisper of right or wrong. What remains is silence—*tuṇhībhāva*. Not the absence of sound, but the absence of a center that constantly names itself; the absence of an 'I' that regards itself as the center of experience.

The Buddha calls this in the *suttas* 'noble or ariyan silence' (*ariya tuṇhībhāva*). Not merely 'not speaking'—the silence of restraint—but the silence of absence: no speaking, no thinking, no conceptualizing. Only awareness, without words, without story.

In the *first jhāna*, there is still a thin layer of 'I am meditating.' In the *second jhāna*, even that disappears.

The silence is no longer something one *does*, but something one *is*. There is nothing left that steps outward. No inner echo, no need to interpret experience. It is a silence without beginning or end—a fullness without sound, a knowing without formulation.

And precisely within that silence, insight becomes possible. For as long as the mind continues to name itself—that 'I' constantly calling for attention—it remains in relation to itself.

But when that self-reflection falls away (*cfr. infra*), space opens to truly see. Not as a subject looking at an object, but as a clarity in which the division between them dissolves.

Ariya tuṇhībhāva is not a technique and not a goal, but a sign that the mind has let go of the burden of self—the invisible pressure to do and become. What remains is not only free from fixed identity (*anattā; anātman*), but also silent by nature. And precisely in that silence, something unexpected reveals itself: the possibility of liberation.¹⁸⁹

Falling Away of Self-Reflection

What gradually unfolds in the *second jhāna* is the fading of inner mirroring. The mind stops relating to itself. Not only does verbal commentary fall silent, but also the subtle tendency to 'see that one is seeing,' to 'feel that one is feeling,' dissolves.

The transparent intermediate layer in which experience was still reflected against an inner self-image disappears. What remains is directness—not coarse or unrestrained, but quiet, pure, and clear.

This is not the loss of consciousness, but the loss of self-consciousness as the central axis. There is still awareness, and even an extraordinary clarity, but that clarity no longer points anywhere, and no longer arises from anywhere. The

mind is no longer the point of departure for perception—it is perception itself. ¹⁹⁰

Let me try to say it differently, once more: duality dissolves. As long as the mind still regards itself—even subtly, as in 'I feel calm' or 'I see the breath'—there remains a kind of doubleness. In the *second jhāna*, this duality dies. There is no perceiver reflecting on what appears. No inner subject shaping experience. There is only the field (*gocara*). ¹⁹¹ Only the field.

In this state, not only thought is released, but also the '*knowing that one knows*'.

And perhaps that is the most radical silence: the absence of any center, of any echoing 'I' that recognizes, interprets, or affirms. Not metaphysical fireworks, but simplicity appearing in deep silence. ¹⁹²

This also prepares the way for the *third jhāna*, where even joy (*pīti*; *prīti*) comes to rest. But that is for later.

What becomes clear here is that silence is not a stage, but a progressively finer peeling away of what is no longer needed—of what stands between us and the NOW. And the more the mind no longer needs to be anything, the more deeply it rests in what it has always been: an open, clear awareness that has no owner.

The *second jhāna* is the silence after the directing, the natural abiding with what no longer moves. Here, the effort of attention disappears, the inner voice of self-reflection fades, and the need to name dissolves.

What remains is a quiet clarity without boundary, a presence without self. In this immersed simplicity, there is no ecstasy, but peace—not seeking, but coming home.

And yet this is not the end of the path.

For even this state still carries a certain refinement of joy—a subtle uplifting, a faint gladness that still stirs somewhere in the field of awareness. And where something still moves, however lightly, there remains the potential for further stillness. The mind, quiet yet alert, senses this. And thus the gate opens—effortlessly, without striving—toward a yet deeper silence: the *third jhāna*.



THE THIRD JHĀNA

• *Yaṃ kiñci samudaya-dhammaṃ, sabbam taṃ nirodha-dhammaṃ — Whatever is subject to arising, is subject to cessation.* •

—*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*

The transition into the *third jhāna* (*tatiya-jhāna*; *ṭṭīya-dhyāna*) is so quiet and natural that it is barely experienced as a shift. There is no threshold, no border, no clearly defined moment. What was previously present as a subtle rapture—the gentle uplift of *pīti* (*pīti*)—comes to rest. The joy that had lifted the mind dissolves into silence. Not because it vanishes, but because it has reached fulfillment. What remains is a peace deeper than ecstasy—a happiness that no longer seeks, that no longer displays.

In the *third jhāna*, the mind sinks more deeply into itself than ever before. Everything has settled. The waves of *pīti* have subsided, and what emerges is *upekkhā* (*upekṣā*): a quiet equanimity that is not indifferent, but clear, gentle, and unattached. *Sukha* remains—a peaceful sense of well-being that permeates everything—but it now carries a different quality. It is no longer the joy of release from restlessness, but the serene flavor of a mind completely at home with what is.

In this state, *pīti* recedes. Not because it is rejected, but because its function has been fulfilled. The jubilant joy of breakthrough, so characteristic of the earlier stages, has calmed the mind. Now its ecstatic excitement is no longer needed. What remains is a peace that no longer moves—*sukha*, but quieter, deeper, vaster than before.

Sukha endures as a soft bed in which awareness rests. But even this experience of happiness loses its former luster. It

is no longer the joy of overcoming the hindrances, nor the peace of 'not needing.' It becomes a background quality—an inner naturalness, a fragrance of silence—more atmosphere than sensation.

The body still feels relaxed, the mind spacious and supported, but there is nothing that marks this state as exceptional. Everything is equal, everything is quiet, everything is as it should be. Sufficient.

And so space is made for *upekkhā*—equanimity in its purest form. Not the chill of detachment, but the clarity of non-attachment. *Upekkhā* is not numbness, but a loving dispassion: a mind that allows everything to be, without preference, without aversion, without rejection, without exclusion, without interference. It is the quiet balance in which the inner landscape is allowed to be itself.

In this state, experience is no longer weighed or judged. There is no inner tendency to adjust anything, no expectation, no shadow of striving. What arises, arises. What ceases, ceases. And the mind rests in this like in an open field without edges. Everything is held in the same clarity. Nothing falls outside of attention, nothing pushes itself to the foreground.

In this deep stillness, *paññā (prajñā)* is no longer born from the brightness of attention, but from the absence of division. There is no inner more or less, no preference, no aversion. The mind is present with everything that arises, without relating to it. And precisely in that evenness, in that absence of clinging, insight dawns by itself—not as a result of analysis, but as a quiet unveiling of the way things truly are.

How could insight arise clearly if the mind is still choosing, craving, comparing?

The foundation is laid in the first *two jhānas*: the mind is calmed, soothed, collected. But only in this *third state*—

where every inner impulse to interfere has faded—does the space open in which things reveal themselves. Not as one wishes them to be, nor as one thought they were, but as they are: *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana* ¹⁹³—direct, uncolored, without interpretation.

The equanimity of *upekkhā* here is not passivity. It is a form of wordless wisdom: a knowing that expects nothing but what is. And in that gentle acceptance, the last inner resistance dissolves. There is no more struggle with what appears, and therefore no more distortion of what is. Everything becomes transparent—not because it is understood, but because the mind no longer places itself between itself and the experience.

Thus, in the *third jhāna*, a field of clear intimacy with reality opens. Not an intensified experience, not mystical rapture, but a calm, silent seeing: all that arises, arises according to conditions, and what has arisen will cease.

This insight is not new—it lies at the heart of the Buddha's teaching, ever since he described his awakening as the full realization of *paṭicca samuppāda* (*pratītya-samutpāda*), the dependent arising of all phenomena.

But in the *third jhāna*, this is not a philosophical principle or object of contemplation. It becomes tangible, palpable, even inescapable. The mind no longer needs to understand it—it sees it. Because everything that appears in this calm clarity arises without foundation. No experience can support itself. No form, no sensation, no thought remains. Everything is dependent on causes and conditions—and disintegrates as those conditions change.

What makes this stage so powerful is that this seeing is no longer disturbed by reactivity. There is no resistance, no defense, no desire for things to be otherwise. The mind witnesses the arising and passing of conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhārā*; *saṃskārā*) with an open, equanimous heart.

Precisely because *pīti* has faded and *upekkhā* is beginning to stabilize, this impermanence can be witnessed—experienced—without fear or attachment.

There is also no self left that identifies with what appears. What remains is a mind that no longer needs to claim anything. No attempt to make an experience 'mine,' no subtle motion to hold on or assign it to a 'self.'

The mind is present without clinging, without projection, without inner identification. It is not that sensations no longer arise—they continue to come and go as always. But there is no one who identifies with them. No owner writing their name on what appears, no possessor organizing experience into '*this is me*' or '*this is mine*.' What arises is allowed to arise; what fades, is allowed to fade.

The mind rests in a freedom that does not come from control, but from the realization that there is nothing that needs to be assigned to a center that never existed.

And this is what makes the insight so pure: ¹⁹⁴

• *Yaṃ kiñci samudaya-dhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodha-dhammaṃ* — *Whatever is subject to arising, is subject to cessation.* • ¹⁹⁵

Not as a moral message. Not as a form of comfort or despair. This is not a doctrine to be accepted dogmatically, but something experientially seen. It is the natural law of existence (*Dhammo sanantano*), ¹⁹⁶ revealed when the mind is still and clear enough to place nothing between itself and reality. Here, insight is cleansed of all metaphysics, all projection. No thought, no belief—only attentive seeing and direct experience.

In this *third jhāna*, the insight into impermanence (*anicca; anitya*) is not forced. It arises on its own—as the background tone of a mind no longer resisting.

Here, *vipassanā* begins not as a technique, but as the result of silence. A silence that no longer grasps, and therefore sees all things as they truly are.

The mind no longer looks at life from the outside—it rests in itself, clear and empty. And in that emptiness, there is no longer a seeker—only insight that arises spontaneously, because nothing obstructs it.

But *dukkha* (*duḥkha*) also becomes visible here—not as gross suffering, not as pain or conflict, but as the insight-born recognition that anything that arises cannot, by its nature, ultimately fulfill. For what arises, will pass. And anything that passes cannot serve as lasting refuge.

Even the joy still subtly present in this *jhāna*—*sukha*, the quiet well-being—is seen in its conditionality. It is refined, deep, and calm—but still an experience that arises and passes. And precisely because the mind no longer clings, it can feel this fully: that even the pleasant is impermanent, and therefore vulnerable.

What we call 'happiness' always rests on the edge of disappearance. What disappears can never truly be held—it is a grand illusion, a mirage.

Here, *dukkha* appears as the impossibility of finding ultimate satisfaction in any phenomenon. Not because the experience is wrong, but because it is unstable, beyond our control. It is this quiet understanding that does not weigh the meditator down, but rather loosens their grip on any form of subtle attachment—even to inner silence, even to happiness.

At this stage, a nearly imperceptible but profound detachment arises. Not because one seeks distance, but because there is nothing left to build upon. The mind has seen that whatever arises will also pass, and that everything which ends—no matter how refined—offers no solid ground.

Thus, *dukkha* becomes no judgment on existence—no rejection or lament—but a clear knowing, born from direct insight. The realization that even the most refined experiences offer no lasting hold.

And so expectation softens, and the compulsive search dissolves. The mind no longer needs to attain anything, no longer needs to hold on to anything. It rests in the knowing that nothing needs to 'remain' to be meaningful. ¹⁹⁷

And then, in this quiet clarity, *anattā* (*anātman*) too becomes visible. Not as a theory or doctrine, but as direct evidence: there is nothing in this stream of experience that belongs to itself. Forms arise, feelings appear, sensations and perceptions move through the body—but nowhere is there a center that owns, directs, or carries them.

As long as there is still a subtle 'I' identifying with what arises—as perceiver, as enjoyer, as seeker—there remains a (though illusory) sense of coherence, a shadow of ownership. But in the *third jhāna*, where even joy is no longer claimed, this center vanishes.

There is no longer a need to make anything out of the experience, no inner voice saying, '*I am the one experiencing this.*'

What remains is appearance without owner. An open field of awareness in which nothing anchors, in which everything arises, moves, and passes—without core, without a center that grasps or retreats. Experience unfolds as a silent stream of being, with no one watching, no one knowing.

The mind is clear—like a mirror without content, aware, but without focus. Not 'self'-conscious, but 'non-self'-aware: a knowing free from ownership, without identification, without boundary. All lives in that open field, but no one lives it.

There is only the dancing of appearances, the spontaneous flickering of phenomena, free from grasping, free from urge. What remains is only this: an open, boundless awareness in which the notion of '*I am*' has fallen silent—a reality revealing itself, unclaimed by anyone.

This is the deep seeing of *anattā*: not that there is 'no one' in a nihilistic sense, but that the idea of a fixed, enduring, inner 'self' is nowhere to be found in direct experience. And when the mind sees this without resistance, there is nothing left to defend, nothing left to protect, nothing left to affirm.

There is only that open, silent motion of existence itself—without inside or outside, without subject or object. No 'I' looking at life, but life revealing itself—*unfolding*—without interference.

In the silence of the *third jhāna*, the heart of the Buddha's teaching is not studied (*pariyatti*), not practiced (*paṭipatti*), but realized (*paṭivedha*). *Anicca* appears as the arising and passing even of the subtlest forms of peace; *dukkha* reveals itself as the realization that nothing that arises can ever fully satisfy; and *anattā* becomes evident in the falling away of any impulse to appropriate.

The Three Characteristics of Existence (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*) are not deduced here, but embodied—as a quiet self-evidence that arises when the mind no longer constructs anything.¹⁹⁸ It is in this silence, free from resistance and longing, that the Path no longer needs to be proven: it is lived, directly, without mediation.

That final phrase—'*It is lived, directly, without mediation*'—points to liberation, clothed in language. It is the harvest of the entire Path: not to attain anything, but to reveal what remains when everything that stood in the way has fallen away.

It is lived—There is no longer an 'I' striving to achieve or preserve something. What once appeared as a path to be walked now flows spontaneously and effortlessly. Practice is no longer an action, but a state of being. The path is no longer followed—it lives itself, like breath that moves autonomously once the will to control is relinquished.

Directly—There is nothing between the experience and the knowing of it. No ideas, no steps, no explanation. What appears is known immediately—not through thought or interpretation, but in its pure, unshaped presence. This is the clarity of a mind that does not grasp, does not push, does not color. Here, all is transparent: what is seen, is what it is—without conceptual overlay.

Without mediation—Here, the last residue of 'self' falls away. No inner commentator, no subtle appropriation of experience. No center observing, interpreting, or wondering what this means. Only an open field where life reveals itself, free from subject and object. This is the end of resistance, of craving, of duality. What remains is pure awareness, with no need to cling to anything. Not because something has been accomplished, but because nothing remains that needs to be.

In this complete openness, where nothing is claimed, something else begins to ripen—not as experience, but as the tone of being: a balance that requires no effort. A quiet equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), not born of indifference, but of the deep seeing of impermanence and non-possession.

When nothing needs defending, even the subtle tendency to crave, to seek, or to hold on disappears. And thus a new domain of insight opens: a mind that is silent—not out of refusal, but because it no longer pursues anything. It is the calm balance of a mind that no longer needs to add, reject, or resist.

In the early stages of practice, the mind is often moved by enthusiasm, longing for peace, hope for insight. But *upekkhā* means: the fire of that movement has burned itself out, without leaving ash. The mind shines not through what it does, but through what it no longer needs to do.

This detachment is not cold withdrawal, not aversion or fear of the world. It is a quiet clarity, an open knowing in which desire simply no longer arises. What appears is welcomed as what appears; what vanishes, vanishes. Nothing is held, nothing is rejected.

This is the domain of *nekkhamma* (*naiṣkramya*)—the pure renunciation as understood within the Buddhist tradition: not as asceticism, not as moral self-mortification, but as the natural result of insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*). It is renunciation arising from wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*), not from compulsion or control. ¹⁹⁹

In this context, detachment is not the extinguishing of feeling, but the release of clinging. The heart remains sensitive, open, receptive—yet free. Whatever arises is welcome. Whatever ceases is not mourned. Not because the heart has hardened, but because it has seen that nothing can be held onto permanently. All flows, all changes, all is dependently arisen.

Upekkhā is the quiet affirmation that nothing falls outside the field of awareness. Everything belongs. Nothing needs to be different than it is. And it is precisely within this receptive stillness that wisdom takes root—not as striving, but as the subtle blossoming of insight into what was never hidden.

In the *third jhāna*, not only the coarse desires fall away—those for sensuality, control, or confirmation—but also the subtle longing for experience itself. The mind no longer seeks a pleasant state, not even clarity, not even liberation.

There is no grasping for a next moment. No inner impulse to remain or to change. Even silence—however refined—can become an object of attachment.

When the mind leaves behind the coarseness of sensory stimulation and settles into stillness, a natural desire for that silence may arise. It seems peaceful, pure, almost sacred. But as long as there is a subtle yearning—to preserve that silence, to not lose it—the mind remains bound by expectation. There is still an 'I' that longs for peace, an 'I' that wants to be still.

But as insight ripens, and even this subtle identification is seen through, the tendency to treat silence as a goal disappears. Then not only restlessness fades, but even the desire for rest. Not because silence vanishes, but because no one is grasping at it anymore. It no longer needs to be maintained. It no longer needs to be confirmed.

At that point, silence is no longer experienced as a possession, not something to attain or hold onto. It is no longer an experience for someone. It becomes transparent. Selfless. Free.

Freed from itself—this means that silence loses its status as a 'thing.' It is nothing other than the absence of resistance. The absence of seeking. It is no longer an experience mirrored within consciousness. It is like an open sky—boundless and centerless. Like a clear sky without the thought *'this is a clear sky.'* No self experiencing it, no 'I' trying to keep it. Only presence, without reflection, without boundary. A silence that says nothing about itself.

In that depth, nothing remains that clings to silence, nor anything that resists sound. There is only awareness—unstained and uncentered. What remains is simplicity, openness—and a silence that does not know it is silence.

This marks a turning point on the inner path.

As long as even a fine thread of desire is woven into the fabric of experience, something in the mind remains tense. But when even that final thread loosens, an openness appears—not born from effort, but from fulfillment.

The mind has tasted, and become quiet. It no longer desires the tasting itself. And it is precisely in that quiet detachment—gentle, unforced, clear—that it becomes evident: the deepest peace is not something one achieves, but something that appears when nothing is lacking. No result to obtain, but a natural unfolding of what was already present. ²⁰⁰

The *third jhāna* is the stage of satiation—an inner field where the mind no longer strives, no longer names, no longer rejects. ²⁰¹

Everything has become quiet.

And yet, for those who rest deeply in this stillness, it may become clear that even *sukha*, however subtle, still carries a trace of movement. There is still preference, a refined pleasure that is experienced as agreeable.

And wherever there is preference—even the quietest—there remains the potential for further release. Not out of aversion, but from a subtle sense that even this is not the end.

The *fourth jhāna* does not need to be sought: it arises naturally when every tendency toward preference or aversion has disappeared.



THE FOURTH JHĀNA

‘*In the fourth jhāna, there is no boundary between seeing and being—no center framing the experience. Only openness, equanimity, simplicity.*’

The transition into the *fourth jhāna* (*cattuttha-jhāna*, *caturtha-dhyāna*) is so quiet and refined that it hardly allows itself to be described. Nothing stands out, nothing presents itself as an event—and yet, a fundamental shift takes place here.

Even the subtlest happiness (*sukha*, *id.*) is relinquished. What remains is not emptiness, but a purity entirely free from preference. No pleasant or unpleasant, no arising of joy (*pīti*, *prīti*), no release of tension—but a perfect balance, clear and unshaken.

In this quiet ripening, *upekkhā* (*upekṣā*) comes into full bloom—not as distance or coolness, but as a completely natural and refined equanimity. There is no more seeking, no more striving, no more inner movement. The mind has nowhere left to go. It no longer wants to hold, deepen, or evoke anything. What remains is a completely restful presence: clear, unmoved, perfectly simple.

Clear: this clarity is not a mental sharpness that analyzes or distinguishes, but a radiant self-evidence of awareness that no longer needs to penetrate anything. It is the open, silent presence of a mind that no longer projects, nor rejects. Clarity, in this sense, is like the shine of a mountain lake on a windless day: nothing moves, yet it reflects the whole sky. In this clarity, everything has become transparent—both phenomena and the tendency to grasp them. It is a consciousness that simply is: undivided and unstained.

Unmoved: this stillness is not rigidity or apathy, but a complete stability free from clinging. The mind is no longer

dependent on outer or inner stimuli to affirm itself. Nothing affects it, because it no longer identifies with what appears. It is the end of reactivity, the extinguishing of the impulse to resist or to want. This unmoved state is like a flame that stands perfectly upright, undisturbed by wind. The silence is not constructed—it unfolds naturally when the causes of restlessness have fallen away.

Perfectly simple: this simplicity results from the release of all complexity the ego once constructed. There is no more need for concepts, nor for refined states of being. Everything has returned to its purest, most uncontrived form. It is simplicity born of the complete absence of conflict. In this simplicity, even the desire for enlightenment disappears.

What remains is an essential simplicity of being—like a flower that blooms for no reason, or a child that laughs without a goal. The mind has become so simple that it needs to be nothing more.

Awareness remains. And also *sati (smṛti)*—mindfulness—but without inner commentary, without any mental motion. No whisper of the ‘I’ that experiences. No preference for the object (*ālambana; id.*), ²⁰² no aversion (*paṭigha, pratigha*). ²⁰³ Only presence without content, like a mirror that reflects without retaining anything of what it reflects.

In this *fourth jhāna*, everything has come to rest. Even the subtle wave of well-being that *sukha* was, has disappeared. Not out of denial, but from a deeper knowing that even the finest pleasure carries a certain preference. And where there is preference, however subtle, there is tension.

What reveals itself here is a state without preference, without aversion, without movement. Not as something impersonal or distant, but as a quiet fullness in which everything is precisely right—not because it feels good, but because nothing is missing.

Upekkhā, which was already gently present as balance in the *third jhāna*, now becomes the bearer of the entire field. It is no longer a quality of the mind, but the mind itself. Everything rests in balance. What arises is not touched. What fades is not mourned. There is no ‘I’ relating to the experience—only the unfolding itself: silent, clear, and open.

At the same time, *sati*—mindfulness, clear awareness—is fully present. But unlike in earlier stages, there is no longer any sense of direction or effort.

Sati here is no longer a function, as in directing (*vitakka*; *vitarka*) or staying with the object (*vicāra*), but a quiet property of consciousness itself. It is as if awareness no longer needs to follow, label, or maintain anything. There is only clarity, effortless and self-evident. Without object. Without boundaries. Without craving (*taṇhā*, *trṣṇā*) or aversion (*paṭigha*, *pratigha*).

This transparency is without orientation—pure, uncolored, free. And precisely because nothing is needed anymore, nothing interferes, this silence reveals itself as something rare—not because it is hard to attain, but because it is so natural that it often goes unnoticed.

It is a silence rarely recognized—not due to difficulty, but because it is so quietly ordinary that it is usually overlooked. There is nothing striking, nothing overwhelming. Everything is simply present—without center, without distortion—quiet, clear, complete.

And it is precisely for this reason that *the fourth jhāna* is considered by practitioners to be the most transparent ground for insight. Not because it generates insight, but because it no longer obstructs it. The mind is clear like a still pond without ripples. And in that reflection, the arising and passing of all phenomena can be seen as they truly are—impermanent, conditioned, selfless.

It is in this clarity—where nothing is excluded or appropriated—that *upekkhā* takes its true form: not as distance, but as silent receptivity.

Upekkhā is often misunderstood as indifference, as a flattening of feeling or a withdrawal from life.

In the *fourth jhāna*, it shows its true nature: a deep, non-selective receptivity. It is not 'not feeling,' but a feeling that no longer clings. It excludes nothing and chooses nothing. Everything is allowed to appear within the same openness, without preference.

In this sense, *upekkhā* is not passivity but a form of mature presence. It is not based on numbness, but on freedom from reactivity. The mind is not cold, but clear. Not dull, but still.

Upekkhā is not the end of engagement, but the end of confusion. The end of 'this must be different,' and the beginning of an attentiveness that no longer rejects or exaggerates anything.

When the mind no longer grasps or resists—when it no longer needs to change anything—another kind of clarity emerges. Not a moment of insight, but a quiet transparency that reveals everything as it is.

In earlier stages, insight often arises as a kind of spark: a flash of clear seeing, a sudden breakthrough. In the *fourth jhāna*, it is different. Here there is no moment of insight, but a field in which everything becomes transparent.

Because the mind no longer pushes against anything, everything appears just as it is. Impermanence (*anicca*, *anitya*) reveals itself not as a concept, but as the structure of the moment—of every moment. Unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*, *duḥkha*) is not something imagined, but felt in every attempt to hold on—which here is absent. And non-self (*anattā*,

anātman) is not a conclusion, but the natural state of a mind that experiences no center anywhere.

Paññā/prajñā here does not arise. It has always been present—now no longer overshadowed. Not a realization as climax, but a knowing without friction—like air moving without resistance.

At such depths of stillness, all labels fall away. What once was name becomes essence again, without the grasp of identity.

One is reminded of Nietzsche's quiet provocation: ²⁰⁴

‘*Der Christ hat alles verneint, was jetzt christlich heißt.*’ •

The one who truly lived the teaching denied everything now called ‘Christian.’ In this light, even the word ‘yogi’ becomes too much. Only clarity remains—unbound by title, free of need.

And when insight becomes so quiet that it needs nothing, there unfolds a recognition that even this stage is not the end—but a completion that opens toward the formless (*arūpa*). ²⁰⁵

The *fourth jhāna* is often described in the texts as the highest purity of calm (*samatha*; *śamatha*). It is the refinement and fulfillment of the realm of form (*rūpa-loka*) ²⁰⁶—the domain in which even the subtlest movements of feeling and direction have come to rest. And at the same time, it is a threshold, a quiet edge, opening toward what lies beyond: the formless states (*arūpa-āyatana*, *ārūpya-āyatana*).

But this does not happen out of striving, nor from dissatisfaction with what is. It unfolds as the natural consequence of what has here reached completion. For in the *fourth jhāna*, there is nothing left that binds the mind. And in that complete fulfillment, the possibility arises—by itself—to let

go even of this calm fullness, and to open to the formless, boundless field beyond.

There, another trajectory begins—one even quieter, even less 'experience,' and marked by an even deeper letting go of all reference points. But here, in the *fourth jhāna*, the mind still rests fully in the purity of its own clarity. Nothing is lacking.

In the *fourth jhāna*, everything falls still. No seeking, no elevation, no release. There is only this: a clear presence that no longer demands, no longer defends, no longer names. Here, there is no boundary between seeing and being—no center framing the experience. Only openness, equanimity, simplicity.

And perhaps this is the wonder of this state: that it contains nothing spectacular, and precisely for that reason is so rarely recognized. It is like water without ripples, breath without desire, light without direction.

What remains is a mind that no longer bumps into anything, no longer sticks to anything.

Whether this silence is the end or a new gateway—cannot be said. What is clear is that the mind in this silence lacks nothing.

And precisely in that absence of lack, another refinement begins—one that will even let go of the boundaries of form, space, and self. But more on that later.

For now, this suffices: The mind has become still. And that stillness is enough. In this silence, where even joy has been released, insight may arise spontaneously.

The insight that nothing which appears has a fixed core. That everything changes. That nothing is truly 'mine'.

As Ajahn Chah expressed it:

‘The Buddha taught that all conditioned phenomena—
whether internal states, bodily conditions, or external
circumstances—are not-self; their nature is
impermanence and change.
Contemplate this truth deeply,
until you see it clearly.’⁹

This simple yet profound statement reminds us that liberation does not come from resisting change, but from clearly understanding its inevitability. In that clarity, detachment arises, peace unfolds, and eventually compassion awakens: when we see that others, too, suffer under the idea of a fixed ‘self’, compassion arises naturally.

The Buddha taught that all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra*; *saṃskāra*)—whether internal states, bodily conditions, or external circumstances—are not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*); their nature is change (*anicca*; *anitya*).

Ajahn Chah’s words thus touch the very heart of the path to liberation. Everything that arises through causes (*hetū*; *hetavaḥ*; *id.*) and conditions (*paccayā*; *pratyayāḥ*) is temporary, subject to decay, and beyond control. Precisely for this reason, it cannot be a lasting or independent self.

When we turn inward and begin to investigate our own experience, we see how internal states (*cetasika*)—such as thoughts, moods, desires, and intentions—are constantly changing. They arise, linger briefly, and fade, often without us knowing exactly why. What we once regarded as a fixed identity turns out to be a stream of events in consciousness. Nothing in that stream is lasting, solid, or truly ours. They are beyond our control.

The body itself—our bodily condition (*rūpa*)—is equally subject to change. What is healthy today may be fragile tomorrow. Sensations come and go, the body ages and trans-

forms. Even the sense of ‘my body’ reveals itself, upon closer contemplation, to be a composite and impermanent phenomenon, made up of physical elements that do not, in themselves, belong to any self.

And then there are the external circumstances (*bahiddhā dhamma*): the world around us, with its people, situations, possessions, status and roles. These, too, prove unpredictable—dependent on countless causes (*hetū*; *hetavaḥ*; *id.*) and conditions (*paccayā*; *pratyayāḥ*) far beyond our control.

As long as we seek happiness, stability, or safety in this impermanent world, we will inevitably be met with disappointment and suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*). Whatever we cling to, whatever we try to hold on to, will sooner or later slip from our hands.

In all these domains—the inner, the bodily, and the external—the attentive *yogi* begins to perceive the same pattern: no phenomenon is lasting, nothing is truly mine, and nothing is ultimately under our control.

This is the insight into not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*)—not as abstract theory, but as living realization. And this realization grows as we directly perceive impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*) in the immediacy of the now.

Instead of a fixed core or unchanging identity, we find a continuous flow of arising and passing. And it is precisely in this flow that the key to liberation lies. What is impermanent is not worth clinging to. What is subject to change, we can learn to release. And what is not-self no longer needs to be defended, confirmed, or protected.

Put differently: in this releasing (*vossagga*), space arises—clarity, calm, and a deep inner freedom.

The Buddha invites us not merely to reflect on this truth, but to truly see it—to know (*janāmi*) and to see (*passāmi*; *paśy-*

āmi) for ourselves. Not as an intellectual concept, but as a direct experience (*paccanubhoti; pratibudhyate*), born from mindful contemplation (*vipassanā; vipaśyanā*). When we truly begin to see how everything comes and goes, ownerless and lacking a core, wisdom (*paññā; prajñā*) arises effortlessly. And from that wisdom, a natural compassion (*karuṇā; id.*) is born—gentle, unconditional, and boundless. For others, too, suffer under the same delusions, the same grasping at what is impermanent and passing.

Let this truth not remain a thought, but become a living realization. One that is expressed in how we look, how we speak, how we act—and how we rest in silence. When wisdom (*paññā; prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā; id.*) merge, a presence emerges that needs nothing, yet embraces everything.

Then the path becomes clearly visible—not as something to be attained, but as something that has always been here, behind the veil of illusion, at the very heart of change itself.

What, then, is that which has always been here? What escapes the grip of time, the laws of cause and effect?

The Buddha spoke not only of arising and passing away, but also of that which has never arisen—and therefore never ceases.

Beyond movement and striving, he pointed to a presence not made, but always present.

Before we continue with the description of the formless *jhānas*, let us pause and reflect on what the Buddha referred to as the unborn, the unbecome, the unconditioned.



THE PRESENCE OF THE UNCONDITIONED

‘ Precisely because the unborn exists—because there is something not subject to causality— liberation is possible. ’

No matter how deep the stillness of the *fourth jhāna* may be, how refined its equanimity, how pure its mindfulness— as long as the conditioned is still experienced as real, the cycle of becoming (*bhava*; *id.*) continues.

Even the most serene meditative state remains dependent on causes, bears the mark of change, and is subject to arising and passing away.

Yet there is a way out.

A possibility of truly releasing oneself from the web of cause and effect. Not by doing something, but by seeing. Not by adding, but by letting fall what obscures the view.

The Buddha points to this in a remarkable passage from the *Tatiyanibbāna Sutta*.²⁰⁷

Because I consider this passage so essential, I cite it here in full in the original Pāli, followed by my English translation:

‘ *Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam. No cetaṃ, bhikkhave, abhavissa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, na yetha, bhikkhave, jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyati.*

There is, monks, the unborn, the unbecome, the unmade, the unconditioned. If this unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned did not exist, there would be no escape here

from the born, the become, the made, the conditioned. But because the unborn, the unbecome, the unmade, the unconditioned exists, escape from the born, the become, the made, the conditioned is possible. 9

Without that 'unborn,' everything we know—everything that comes and goes, arises and fades—would inevitably be subject to impermanence. There would be no escape from the cycle of arising and ceasing (*saṃsāra*; *id.*), no release from the chain of causality (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*), no liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*) from the endless process of becoming (*bhava*; *id.*).

But precisely because the unborn does exist—because there is something not subject to causality—liberation is possible.

Not as a new state to be created, but as something that has always been present. Something simply overlooked, veiled by craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

When striving ceases and attachment dissolves, the unborn becomes visible—not as an object, not as an experience in the usual sense, but as a bottomless openness, a space of *acalaṃ sukhaṃ*, unshakable peace, ²⁰⁸ in which all things arise and pass without the need to hold on.

This is what the *suttas* refer to as *asaṅkhata* (*asaṃskṛta*): the unconditioned. ²⁰⁹

Not a thing, not a concept, not a state—but a profound absence of what binds, pushes, and pulls.

It is the only true liberation from the cycle of arising and ceasing.



THE FORMLESS JHĀNAS

“ My own meditative path concludes with the fourth *jhāna*.
As with many experienced yogis, this is not merely
a matter of personal preference, but a result
of the direct experience that the fourth *jhāna*
provides the most fertile and suitable
ground for the arising of insight. ”

After the description of the unconditioned as that which is not subject to cause and effect, we return to the inner world of subtle concentration.

The formless *jhānas* (*arūpa-jhānas*) are meditative spheres in which even the refined experience of the body and mental form disappears.

Although extraordinarily refined, they still belong to the conditioned domain (*saṅkhata dhamma*): they arise through intentional focus (*manasikāra*; *manaskāra*)²¹⁰ and depend on attention, concentration, and gradual refinement.

Yet, if not misunderstood, they can further release the mind from form, self-construction, and identification.

In the classical descriptions of the Buddhist path, four further states of meditative absorption are mentioned beyond the *fourth jhāna*: the so-called *arūpa-jhānas*, or formless spheres. These refined states of consciousness transcend any experience of physical form (*rūpa*) and are entirely based on subtle mental representations.

They are sometimes presented as an extension of the *fourth jhāna*, yet due to their distinct structure and experiential quality, they deserve a separate treatment.

Traditionally, these four formless spheres are described in the following order:

- The sphere of infinite space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*)
- The sphere of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*)
- The sphere of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*)
- The sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*)

Although these states are recognized in the *Pāli* Canon as forms of deep concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), their role in the path of liberation is not uncontroversial.

In many *suttas*, the Buddha clearly states that these refined states of concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*) do not in themselves lead to liberating insight. Far more crucial is the purification of the mind from the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *id.*) and the cultivation of clear awareness (*sati*, *smṛti*) and wisdom (*paññā*, *prajñā*).

The Canon contains numerous examples of monks, nuns, and laypeople who attained liberation (*vimutti*, *vimukti*) without ever entering these formless spheres (*arūpa-āyatana*, *ārūpya-āyatana*). What characterized them was a mind free of defilement, clearly focused, and receptive to truth.

It is from the clarity and balance of the *fourth jhāna* that my own practice finds its completion. As with many advanced *yogis*, this is not a matter of personal preference, but the fruit of direct experience: that it is precisely the *fourth jhāna* which offers the most fertile ground for the arising of insight (*vipassanā*, *vipaśyanā*).

From the quiet clarity of this equanimous state (*upekkhā*, *upekṣā*), the mind becomes transparent for the seeing of things as they are (*yathābhūta-ñānadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñānadarśana*). The more abstract spheres of the *arūpa-jhānas* (*arūpa-āyatana*, *ārūpya-āyatana*) seem, in this regard, less directly supportive: while they are highly subtle, they

offer little ground for deepening insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*).

For many, they remain fascinating yet secondary possibilities within the path of liberation.

For that reason, I choose to treat the *arūpa-jhānas* (*arūpa-āyatana*, *ārūpya-āyatana*) in this book solely in a theoretical manner. What follows is not a report of personal experience, but a synthesis of transmitted knowledge and canonical interpretation.

The reader is invited to explore these spheres with an open yet discerning mind—not as necessary steps on the path, but as possible states of deep absorption (*samādhi*; *id.*) that are not inherently transformative or liberating (*vimutti*; *vimukti*).

The Sphere of Infinite Space (*ākāsānañcāyatana*)

After the complete settling of body and mind in the *fourth jhāna*, the field of attention may subtly expand.

When attention is released from a specific object and opens to the infinite nature of space, the experience of boundless vastness arises.

The boundaries of inner and outer dissolve, and the mind rests in an openness without center, without form.

The Sphere of Infinite Consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*)

Here, attention shifts from space itself to that which is aware of it: the consciousness perceiving that space.

What arises is an experience of boundless awareness—an endless field of knowing without fixed limits, in which all distinctions between subject and object temporarily dissolve. Everything is experienced as consciousness, unbroken.

The Sphere of Nothingness (*ākāṅkhaññāyatana*)

When the awareness of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*; *viññānānantyāyatana*) is recognized as a subtle orientation, the mind lets go of even that. Attention shifts once again—this time to the experience of absence.

What remains is the sphere of 'there is nothing there' (*ākāṅkhaññāyatana*, *ākāṅkanyāyatana*): a realm of pure emptiness, where no objects appear, no forms arise, no movements occur. This is not a denial of existence, but a refined witnessing of the absence of any object the mind might cling to.

The Sphere of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*)

The final of the *arūpa-jhānas* lies at the very threshold of experience. Here, perception becomes so subtle, so attenuated, that it is no longer possible to say with certainty whether awareness remains or has ceased. It is a state in which perception and non-perception seem to dissolve into one another—neither clearly present, nor entirely absent.

In the tradition, this sphere is regarded as supremely refined, yet not liberating. The Buddha explicitly distinguished it from *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*—true release, which lies beyond all formations and conditions.

While each of these formless spheres presents a unique refinement of consciousness, their role in cultivating liberating insight requires careful reflection.

Insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*) does not necessarily arise from entering ever more abstract states of consciousness, but from clear awareness (*sati*; *smṛti*) of the impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*, *duḥkha*), and selfless (*anattā*; *anātman*) nature of all phenomena.

The Buddha repeatedly warned against attachment (*upādāna*; *id.*) to these exalted states, precisely because they are so refined that one might easily mistake them for liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*). Stillness is not the same as awakening.

For many—including myself—the *fourth jhāna* (*catuttha-jhāna*, *caturtha-dhyāna*) forms the endpoint of absorption (*samādhi*; *id.*) and, at the same time, the gateway to insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*). From the equanimous clarity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*) that characterizes this state, the capacity for true seeing arises.

The *arūpa-jhānas* (*arūpa-āyatana*; *ārūpya-āyatana*) may be studied for the sake of completeness, but need not necessarily be explored on the path to liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*). Their refinement is remarkable, but not necessarily refinement is not the same as realization.



THE TRADITIONS & THEIR MEDITATIVE APPROACHES

• *There is no answer. There will be no answer.
There has never been an answer.
That is the answer.* •

Gertrude Stein

Beyond the quiet equanimity of the *fourth jhāna (dhyāna)*, a deeper and wider perspective on the path opens up. The mind has settled, the heart has refined itself—no longer fixated on achieving meditative absorption, but receptive to insight, ripe for liberating seeing.

What arises is not a diversion, but a natural widening of the field of vision: a spontaneous and organic expansion of perspective that flows from the ripening of one's meditative experience. It is not something imposed or forced from outside, but something that appears by itself when the mind has come to rest, the heart has been refined, and the vision is clear.

When the mind is calm, the heart refined, and the vision clear, space opens for an exploration of the path in its full breadth. Not as a distraction, but as a deepening. The gaze naturally expands toward the richness of approaches that have arisen throughout the centuries.

How do the various traditions approach the meditative path?

This exploration of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna is not a mere intellectual comparison, but an invitation to recognition. Recognition of what resonates within one's own experience, what brings liberation, what points inward. It is not about external forms, but about their essence. Not about doctrinal differences, but the underlying current that

animates them—the transcendence of *dukkha* (*duḥkha*) and the awakening to freedom.

The mature *yogi* approaches this with an open gaze, free from attachment to schools or methods. He appreciates what is pure and effective in each tradition, but does not bind himself to any. What remains is the timeless message of the Buddha—a message that transcends the boundaries of traditions, structures, and conventions.

This openness sooner or later evokes a fundamental question. Not as an intellectual doubt, but as an existential intuition that ripens in the silence of deep practice.

An essential question that arises in this maturation of the path is whether the *yogi* must strictly adhere to the meditative approach of their tradition, or whether they are free to shape their practice from direct wisdom (*paññā*, *prajñā*).

In the *Pāli* Canon, the Buddha repeatedly emphasizes the personal responsibility of the practitioner. He points to the necessity of clear insight and sincere examination, not blind following. The true touchstone is not tradition, but liberation.

In the *Dhammapada* ²¹¹ we read:

‘*Attā hi attano nātho—ko hi nātho paro siyā — One is one's own protector. What other protector could there be?*’

These words strike at the heart of the path the Buddha points to: a way of autonomy, of direct experience, of inner investigation—not of dependence on dogma or external authority.

Though each tradition offers valuable guidance, the mature *yogi* is expected to possess the insight and take the freedom to attune their practice to their own spiritual path, without losing sight of the essential goal of the Buddhist path: the liberation from *dukkha*.

In the *Dhammapada*, ²¹² the Buddha urges us to seek the essential, not the secondary:

• Those who regard the unimportant as essential, and the essential as unimportant, will never discover the essence. But those who see the essential as essential, and the unimportant as unimportant, will reach the heart of the matter. •

Go to the core. Also in your meditation. Meditate without detours, without loops, without personal projections. Leave metaphysical speculations for what they are. Let go of craving and aversion. Meditate without striving, without wanting to become anything. That is pure *Dhamma*.

Metaphysical speculations are thoughts about the existence or non-existence of the world, of a soul, of the universe before or after death, or about the supposed eternal nature of consciousness. These are questions the Buddha left unanswered, because they do not lead to liberation, but to confusion. ²¹³ They may seem profound, but in essence they are conditioned mental constructions, arising from *saṅkhāra*—mental formations rooted in ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*). They pull the mind away from direct experience and anchor it in conceptual frameworks. It is not thinking that liberates, but immediate seeing.

The immediate seeing referred to by the Buddha is not seeing with the eyes, nor is it understanding through thought. It is a direct knowing of reality as it is—unmediated by mental constructions, untouched by time, judgment, or narrative.

This seeing is clear, silent, and uncontrived. It grasps at nothing, seeks nothing, defends nothing. It is pure awareness in which things arise and pass away, without any 'I' that intervenes, interprets, or assigns meaning.

In the Buddhist tradition, this immediate seeing is referred to as *vipassanā*—an insight not derived from theory or

reflection, but arising spontaneously in the stillness of a mind that no longer grasps. It is the insight that emerges when the mind has come fully to rest, no longer driven by craving, aversion, or ignorance—as in the one-pointed state of mind (*ekaggatā; ekāgratā*) found in the *fourth jhāna*.

This 'seeing' (*janāmi passāmi; janāmi paśyāmi*) reveals the impermanence (*anicca; anitya*) of all phenomena, the unsatisfactory nature (*dukkha; duḥkha*) of all that arises and passes away, and the absence of a lasting self (*anattā; anātman*) in what we take to be 'I' or 'mine'. It is important to note that this kind of seeing is the essence of the Buddha's first two discourses in Sarnath. It is the foundation of the Teaching, the ground upon which the *Buddhasāsana* rests.

What ceases in this seeing is the endless construction of realities: opinions, convictions, identities, imagined futures and memories.

What remains is direct experience (*paccanubhoti; pratibudhyate*)—pure, unformed, free from resistance or attachment. That is: free from reactive and conditioned impulses; free from the *saṅkhāra/saṃskāra* of craving and aversion.

This immediate seeing is liberating, not because it adds anything to experience, but because it removes everything that burdens it: the grasping of self, the veil of expectation, the projection of meaning.

In this sense, immediate seeing is not a technique, not a goal, and not an achievement. It is the natural illumination of wisdom (*paññā; prajñā*) in a mind no longer clouded by ignorance (*avijjā; avidyā*).

It is not an activity, but the cessation of activity—of thinking, willing, or becoming (*bhava*). Where thinking ends, seeing begins—not as something new, but as that which has al-

ways been present: free from construction, free from confusion, free from struggle.

In the stillness of meditation, such speculations have no place. Pure *Dhamma* is not found in speculation, nor in interpretation. What matters is direct seeing. Anything beyond that belongs to the domain of speculation, not of liberation. The *suttas* of the *Pali Canon* repeatedly emphasize the danger of speculative and interpretative thinking, which clouds direct insight into *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*.

Let go of the 'I'. Let the mind become clear in seeing reality as it is. Straight to the goal: *anicca*.

Observe the process of arising and passing away—not in theory, but directly. Let this process be the core of your observation. Return to it again and again, in everything that presents itself.

Be present with the arising of the in-breath, with the passing away of the out-breath. See how each moment arises and dissolves. Meditate on nothing else but this: the coming and going of phenomena. Experience the flow of impermanence. Face your own impermanence clearly. Receive it with equanimity. Realize *anicca* within yourself.

Anicca. Anicca. Anicca. That's what it all comes down to. Stay with the essential. With what truly matters. Not with what you think is essential—that is just conditioning. Whoever realizes *anicca* is freed from the illusion of a self.

Yet whoever walks the path independently will sooner or later encounter an apparent paradox: If the advanced *yogi* must walk their own path, why still study the approaches of the Buddhist traditions? Has that not become superfluous?

A seeming paradox then arises: if the mature *yogi* must follow their own path, why delve into the approaches of the

Buddhist traditions at all? Has that not become unnecessary?

The answer lies in the nature of true autonomy. In the Buddhist sense, autonomy is not arbitrariness or subjective preference, but a form of freedom rooted in insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*) and clarity. Precisely by consciously deepening their understanding of the tradition, the yogi learns to discern what truly brings liberation and what does not.

Traditions are not straitjackets, but mirrors. They reveal the underlying principles that, in diverse forms, time and again point to the same thing: the letting go of attachment, the seeing through of illusion, the realization of liberation. Exploring these paths is not a contradiction of inner freedom, but a deepening of it.

Each great tradition—Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna—has developed its own approach, shaped within its specific cultural, philosophical, and spiritual context. Yet despite these differences, they all point toward the same reality.

For the *yogi* who has developed sufficient maturity and insight, the possibility arises to thoughtfully integrate techniques from different traditions.

Not out of random eclecticism,²¹⁴ but from a clear understanding of the underlying principles, and with a sensitive eye for what works inwardly—what liberates the mind, what opens the heart.

Theravāda

Within the Theravāda tradition, the emphasis lies on the purification of the mind through ethics (*sīla*; *śīla*), concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*), and wisdom (*paññā*, *prajñā*). This triad forms the core structure of the Noble Eightfold Path and is practiced not as a sequential process, but as an interwoven whole.

The meditative path within this tradition knows two complementary approaches: *samatha* (*śamatha*) and *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*).

Samatha develops deep inner stillness and stability by cultivating one-pointed attention, for example through breath meditation (*ānāpānasati*; *ānāpāna-smṛti*). This practice leads to the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*), in which the mind frees itself from coarse mental disturbances.

Vipassanā, on the other hand, focuses on direct insight into the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (*anicca*, *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Through clear mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), the *yogi* learns to see through the process of arising and passing away, and thus liberating insight arises.

This path is supported by ethical purity, study of the *Dhamma*, and contemplation of the impermanent nature of all phenomena. The goal is *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*): the extinguishing of craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), aversion (*dosa*; *dveṣa*), and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

Mahāyāna

Where Theravāda emphasizes individual liberation through insight into impermanence and non-self, Mahāyāna opens to a broader horizon: the liberation of all beings, carried by the bodhisattva spirit (*bodhisatta-citta*; *bodhicitta*).²¹⁵

This spirit arises from the deep union of compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*) and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*)—where wisdom aims at the insight into emptiness (*suññatā*; *sūnyatā*), and compassion expresses itself in the unwavering resolve to awaken for the benefit of all.

Meditation in Mahāyāna often includes *dhyāna*—similar to the *jhānas* of Theravāda—as well as visualizations, *mantras*, and contemplations on the emptiness of all phenomena. Through these practices arises a clear seeing of the illusory nature of reality: all things are empty of inherent, independent existence.

Compassion is cultivated by opening the heart to the suffering of others, and through the sincere wish to lead all living beings to liberation. In this tradition, wisdom and compassion are never seen apart: they are the two wings of the same bird—both equally necessary to truly fly.

Vajrayāna

Where Mahāyāna opens the path of compassion and emptiness, Vajrayāna—the Diamond Vehicle—introduces a powerful acceleration in the transformation of the mind.

This tradition adds tantric methods to the previous elements, aimed at directly breaking through the illusions that veil the true nature of the mind.

Visualizations, mantras, mudrās, and rituals are not seen merely as symbolic acts, but as direct means to actualize the enlightened potential. The *yogi* identifies with a *yidam*—an enlightened being or aspect of Buddha-nature—and gradually embodies their own original purity. This approach gradually transcends the duality between practitioner and goal.

In advanced practices such as Mahāmudrā ²¹⁶ and Dzogchen, ²¹⁷ the *yogi* focuses on the immediate recognition of the nature of mind: open, empty (*śūnya*; *id.*), luminous.

This direct path requires great sensitivity and trust, for it lets go of all conceptual striving. There is nothing more to achieve—only the clarity of the present moment, free from constructions. From this immediate insight, liberation arises,

not as a distant goal, but as the natural nature of what was always already present.

A Personal Synthesis

The mature *yogi*, rooted in ethics, shaped by meditation and purified by insight, may draw from the treasure houses of all traditions. The *jhānas* of Theravāda can stabilize their mind. The compassion and emptiness meditations of Mahāyāna can open their heart and deepen their understanding. The powerful techniques of Vajrayāna can accelerate the path.

But this is not a casual blending.

It requires a delicate sensitivity, clear discernment, and a deep attunement to the inner reality. What truly works is that which opens the heart, purifies the mind, and deepens insight. What truly works defies description.

The ultimate touchstone is the liberation from suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*). No tradition as a goal in itself. No form without essence. The practice must be tested again and again in the fire of direct experience.²¹⁸ What does not endure, falls away. What is pure, remains.

Similarities and Differences

Despite their differing methods and emphases, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna share a deep kinship. The three traditions recognize a common goal: the liberation of the mind (*cetovimutti*; *cittavimukti*),²¹⁹ the awakening to that which is neither born nor dies. All three emphasize the importance of ethics as foundation, concentration as stabilization, and insight as liberating power.

Yet the emphasis shifts.

Theravāda focuses on meticulous observation and analysis of the impermanent nature of things, with insight into the three characteristics of existence as the key.

Mahāyāna invites a broader view: a life rooted in compassion and carried by the insight into emptiness, wherein the self (*attā*) is seen through as a construction.

Vajrayāna, finally, touches the deepest layers of the mind through potent symbolism and the immediate recognition of the pure nature of con-sciousness itself.

Where *Theravāda* analyzes, *Mahāyāna* connects, and *Vajrayāna* transforms, they complement one another. They cannot be mechanically combined, but in the heart of the mature *yogi*, they may converge as resonances of the same truth—a truth that cannot be captured in words or forms, but opens in silence, clarity, and simplicity.

Thus arises a living practice.

A practice that remains true to essence, yet free in form. That rests in the spirit of the Buddha, regardless of the tradition through which it is expressed. And in this way, even tradition becomes not a boundary, but a vehicle—a personal vehicle.

As long as the tradition followed moves in the direction of liberation, it is valuable.

The *yogi* then becomes the raft that carries them to the Other Shore. No external power or authority guides them, but their own clarity, their own insight, their own unconditional surrender to Truth.

In that surrender, name and form vanish. What remains is silence. Not as absence, but as presence without boundary. Not as the end of the path, but as the space in which the path dissolves.

When the *yogi* becomes the raft, the path is no longer experienced as something outside of them. They embody the insight that all forms are but temporary vehicles—means, not ends.

In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*,²²⁰ the Buddha expresses this through a powerful image:

“Just as one builds a raft to cross a river, but does not carry it on one’s back after reaching the far shore, so too must the Dhamma be let go once its function is fulfilled.”

These words are not an invitation to arbitrariness, but to freedom. The *Dhamma* is essential to cross the river of *dukkha*, but it must be let go of as soon as its purpose is fulfilled. The *yogi* does not cling to method or doctrine, but is carried by insight, by clarity, by a deep surrender to the stream of awakening.

When name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) fall away, when the mind no longer grasps or labels, silence appears.

Not a dead emptiness, but a luminous openness—a presence without center. Here, there is no longer a striving for liberation, for even the striving has ceased.

What remains then is no self, no goal, no path—but an open knowing that has always been present.

“No self,
no goal,
no path.
What remains
is not found,
but recognized.
An open knowing
without beginning,
without name,
without boundary.”

*No step left to take—
and yet
everything is carried
by silence. ’*



VIPASSANĀ – THE SEEING THAT LIBERATES

• *Vipassanā pierces the taken-for-granted nature of identity. Not by denying it, but by rendering it transparent. Insight arises where the 'self' no longer needs to defend itself—where 'experiencing' is no longer framed by preference, aversion, fear, or resistance.* •

When we look, listen, smell, taste, feel, and think with expectation, with desire, with aversion, with identification—driven by craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), ego (*māna*; *id.*) and attachment to views (*diṭṭhi*; *dṛṣṭi*)—we can never clearly understand what is truly taking place.

We wander like sleepwalkers through the wheel of *samsāra*, endlessly repeating the same patterns in the futile hope that the outcome will ever be different.

Just as the sun is hidden on a cloudy day, so too are things, phenomena, and dhammas obscured from us. We do not 'understand' them as they truly are, but see them through a distorted lens of subjective perception—through what is referred to in the teachings as *vipallāsa* (*viparyāsa*)—errors in perception, thought, and understanding. ²²¹

When we identify with what is perceived—based on *atta-saññā* (*ātma-saṃjñā*) ²²²—it becomes impossible to discern the true nature of phenomena (*sabhāva*; *svabhāva*).

Ignorance (*avijjā*; *moha*), in this light, is not the absence of knowledge, but misknowing. Misguided knowing. Delusive knowing. *Micchā-diṭṭhi*. ²²³

Avijjā is the failure to understand things as they truly are. It is the identification with impermanent processes, the assumption of an 'I' in what is, in essence, merely arising

and passing away. It is the loss of clarity—the wandering into stories, ideas, and projections that veil reality.

This ignorance is the root cause of *saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of birth, ageing, sickness, and death—a cycle driven by craving, attachment, and delusion, again and again leading to dukkha. To pain. To suffering. Because we cannot—or will not; or dare not—see what is truly present? Who or what this 'I' is that experiences? What it means that phenomena appear and disappear?

In our ignorance, we project ideas of existence onto ourselves and others. We cling to imagined certainty in a world made of change, unpredictability, and impermanence. Out of this longing, we create concepts we call gods—projected illusions, shaped by our desires and fears, in our own image and likeness, but above all by our need for something to hold on to. ²²⁴ And so we continue walking on thin ice, unaware of the danger. When it cracks, it is no surprise that *dukkha* is our reward.

These insights are not modern contemplations—they were already taught by the Buddha in his earliest descriptions of reality as it truly is. ²²⁵

And yet, the nature of things—*yathābhūta*—is none other than impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), fundamental unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*; *anātman*). Only direct seeing of these characteristics, with grounded and lucid insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*), liberates the mind and the heart.

But how do we avoid these distorting filters? How do we see reality clearly?

By cultivating silent clarity.

We do not transcend these filters through force or denial, but by turning inward and quieting the mind. When the mind

no longer grasps, no longer rejects, no longer flees, clarity arises naturally—like still water in which everything is reflected just as it is.

We train in mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), collected stillness (*sa-mādhī*; *id.*), and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*). This is not a process of thought, but a gradual ripening of presence. We learn to see without adding anything, without filtering experience through hope, fear, or identity. The practice is not about gaining something new, but about seeing through the illusions that obscure what has always been here.

True seeing arises in the absence of grasping. Reality reveals itself when the one who tries to grasp it falls silent. And in that silence, the *Dhamma* becomes visible: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self—but also radiant, empty, and free.

When the mind is quiet—not through suppression, but through the gentle discipline of attention—and when the waves of sense desire and inner struggle dissolve into silent equanimity, a new dimension of the path opens. There begins insight. There *vipassanā* is born—not merely as method, but as the spontaneous illumination of insight, rooted in silence, carried by mindfulness.

As long as the mind is wild, driven by craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*) and aversion (*dosa*; *dveṣa*), true seeing cannot occur. Insight requires stillness—not passive stillness, but alert openness grounded in calm.

The *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) are not the end point, but the fertile ground in which the seed of wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) can take root. *Vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*) is not a separate path, not an alternative route—it is the unfolding of inner ripening.

Vipassanā arises when the mind no longer views the world through the lens of self (*atta-saññā*; *ātma-samjñā*), but has

become transparent—clear, still, no longer clouded or distorted.

What the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) uncover is the pure capacity for bare awareness (*sati*; *smṛti*), freed from the interference of preference and aversion. In that space, the process of arising and passing away becomes visible—not as philosophy, but as direct experience of an unbroken stream. Everything that appears disappears. Everything that exists changes. Nothing has a lasting core.

The *jhānas* give the mind the ability to see this without confusion, and to remain in it without resistance—not as an observer, but as clarity itself. In this way, insight opens—not as more knowledge, but as a light that sees through everything.

In *vipassanā*, this stream is seen through. The *yogi* no longer focuses on the content of experience, but on its structure. The question 'what' gives way to the question 'how.'

The awareness of arising and passing marks the beginning of insight. For the practitioner of *vipassanā*, this is a first recognition (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*; *udayavyaya-jñāṇa*): ²²⁶ a clear awareness of the flow, though still movement ²²⁷—no cessation, no release. Only when even that process comes to rest, when nothing arises or ceases, is the silence of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) directly realized.

How does this moment arise? How does it vanish? How does this sensation come to be? This feeling? This thought? This image? This impulse? And then, more subtly: who is it that experiences all this? Does that one exist as a 'thing' in itself? Or is that too merely a construction—a temporary interplay of processes, continuously arising, briefly existing, and fading away?

The Buddha describes this in the *Anattālakkaṇa Sutta*, ²²⁸ when he speaks of the five *khandhas*—form (*rūpa*; *id.*), sen-

sations and feelings (*vedanā*; *id.*), perception (*saññā*; *saṃjñā*), mental formations (*saṅkhārā*; *saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*; *vijñāna*).

He says:

‘*This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.*’

This statement applies both to the whole and to each of the five *khandhas* individually. The Buddha not only shows that no enduring core can be found, but also that true liberation becomes possible only when this illusion is fully seen through:

‘*When he sees that this is not his... he lets go of it.
And through letting go, he is liberated.*’

What we call the ‘self’ turns out to be a sequence of phenomena, dependently arisen, with no fixed core.

Vipassanā pierces the illusion of identity (*atta-saññā*; *ātma-saṃjñā*). Not by denying it, but by making it transparent—revealing its impermanence.²²⁹ Insight arises where the ‘self’ no longer needs defending—where ‘experience’ is no longer shaped by preference, aversion, fear, or resistance.

The mind of the practitioner who has learned to let go in the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) now remains at ease—not as concentration, but as insight. Not as focus, but as receptivity. As acceptance: everything may arise, everything may pass away. The *yogi* trains in seeing without grasping, in knowing without holding on.

This seeing is clear, unburdened by commentary. It is the seeing of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), of the unsatisfactory nature (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*) of all that arises, and of the absence of a lasting core (*anattā*; *anātman*).

These three characteristics are not just teachings—they are windows through which reality reveals itself. They reveal the inability of phenomena to offer stability, certainty, or fulfillment. They disclose the nature of existence as stream, as process, as flow. In other words: they reveal that existence is not something that ‘is,’ but something that is continually ‘becoming’ (*bhava*; *id.*)—an existential attunement to the ceaseless unfolding of things, without beginning or end, without fixed center.

And the knowing?

It is not holding on to what has been seen, not labeling, not explaining. It is a silent intimacy with the impermanent nature of all things—a knowing that does not interpret, but is quietly present. A knowing that does not try to understand, but is free of confusion. It is not knowing about something, but knowing with the whole of your being. Knowing not as concept, but as a way of being—as in bare awareness. *Paṭivedha-ñāṇa*—lived insight, not theoretical understanding.²³⁰

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,²³¹ this process of seeing and knowing—of direct discernment—is precisely described.²³²

The *yogi* contemplates the body as body, feelings as feelings, mind as mind, and *dhammas* as *dhammas*,⁶ *with clear comprehension, without attachment, without desire for anything in the world.*⁹

There, the practitioner is not led by will (*cetana*; *cetanā*),²³³ but by the seeing and knowing itself.

6 He dwells observing the arising of phenomena... their passing away... their arising and passing. 9

This is *vipassanā*: not thinking about impermanence, but directly seeing and knowing it—not as idea, but as imme-

diate experience. This clear, non-discursive knowing is what the *suttas* call *sampajañña*.²³⁴

Vipassanā/vipaśyanā is not a cold analysis. It is an intimate insight, a felt recognition of truth. The *yogi* sees, and the heart is transformed. A softening occurs. Not by moral exhortation, but through understanding. The grip of craving loosens. The reflex of aversion diminishes. The tendency toward identification dissolves in the light of knowing.

In the silence that arises, it becomes evident that there is no 'one' who liberates themselves. Liberation takes place. Letting go happens. Not as an act of ego, but as the natural unraveling of illusion. Just as mist dissolves in the first sunlight, so too does the sense of 'I' dissolve when truth is seen without resistance.

This is why the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) are essential. Not because they offer spectacle, but because they make the mind receptive to what always is. They quiet the mind enough to perceive the subtlest truth.

Vipassanā/vipaśyanā is not something that 'follows,' as if it were a separate phase. It is what unfolds spontaneously when the mind has learned to rest in itself. In this stillness, experience is no longer sought—but seen as it is: as something that arises and passes. *Udayabbaya-ñāṇa* (*udayavyaya-jhāna*).²³⁵

What remains is clarity.

No conclusion, no dogma. Only a knowing that possesses nothing, controls nothing, sustains nothing. And it is precisely in this that peace is found. Not in control, but in release. Not in certainty, but in insight.

This is the fruit of *jhāna*: that the mind becomes quiet enough to see what it could not see before. And this is the

work of *vipassanā*: that the *yogi* learns to look without needing to know—and in that very letting go, truly understands.



NIBBĀNA – BEYOND ARISING AND PASSING

• *Those who have reached emptiness
and the unconditioned goal—
their path is hard to trace,
like the flight of birds
in the sky.* •

Dhammapada, Verse 92

What remains after insight, is silence.

No more questions, no more need to explain. Only the seeing that nothing endures, nothing can be possessed, nothing is lasting.

Yet even that insight is still movement. There is still perception, understanding, the knowing of arising and passing (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*, *udayavyaya-jñāṇa*).

But those who become truly silent will notice: even that dissolves. Even that insight fades, like all things fade.

In this chapter, the description of the process follows: how even the subtlest perception dissolves, how the stream of impermanence fades out by itself, and how the mind—without adding anything—arrives at the unborn. From *bhaṅga*, the insight into decay, dissolution, disintegration, to the moment when nothing remains.

What is described here follows the natural unfolding of the deeper stages of insight (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), ²³⁶ as indicated in the tradition—not as doctrine, but as an inner process.

No new technique, no extra practice. Only the unfolding of a mind that has learned to desire nothing (*taṇhā*), to become nothing (*bhava-taṇhā*)—not by adding anything, but by letting go of everything.

In this silence, there is nothing left that calls—nothing that demands attention, no phenomenon that imposes itself. What appears is seen as quickly arising and passing away, without grasping, without essence: the insight into arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*, *udayavyaya-jñāna*) becomes clear.

With the passing of each phenomenon, the awareness of fragility grows, the unreliable nature of all experiences—a natural maturing of the insight into dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*, *bhaṅga-jñāna*).²³⁷

Then a feeling of danger arises—not as a worldly, emotional fear, but as the deep, existential realization of the frailty of all that arises (*bhaya-ñāṇa*, *bhaya-jñāna*).

At the same time, the insight into the inadequacy and emptiness of all conditioned things unfolds (*ādinava-ñāṇa*, *ādinava-jñāna*), followed by disgust—a deep existential aversion, a natural inner turning away from what once seemed desirable (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*, *nibbidā-jñāna*).

The mind turns away from the search for experiences and directs itself toward liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*, *muñcitukamyatā-jñāna*).

From this deep urge arises a reflective clarity, in which every phenomenon is examined, comprehended, and released (*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*, *pratisaṅkhyā-jñāna*).

Thus, in the mind ripens a quiet equanimity: no longer fascination for what appears, no aversion for what disappears, but an untainted seeing of the entire process of arising and passing away (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*, *saṃskārupekkhā-jñāna*).

What remains is only the understanding that every arising is immediately followed by passing away, and that even seeing this is part of the same movement. As long as there is

still perceiving, there is still arising. As long as there is someone observing, there is still a subtle movement of the mind.

When impermanence is fully seen, such that no attachment remains, the Other Shore comes into view: liberation (*magga-ñāṇa*, *mārga-jñāna*).

Then what does not arise, does not fade, does not know, and has no place opens up. No experience—but the cessation of experience. No reality to know—but the liberation of knowing itself.

Not by a leap. Not by achieving something. But like ripe fruit naturally falling from the branch.

In the deep silence of the mind, even insight loses its shine. Not because it is false, but because it is no longer needed.

What follows lies beyond all description. It is referred to in the doctrine as the realization of nibbāna—the unborn (*ajāta*), the uncreated (*abhūta*; *id.*), the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*, *asaṃskṛta*), the invisible (*anidassana*).²³⁸

It is not something that is seen, but the cessation of seeing itself. Not a state of being, not an experience of transcendence, but the cessation of all conditioning. The chain of causality (*paṭicca samuppāda*, *pratītya samutpāda*) falls away—without time, without duration.

What remains, leaves no trace. Like birds in the sky leaving no trace, so too does the stream of experience quiet down—without direction, without destination, without return.

And yet the *yogi* returns. Not as one who has found something, but as one who no longer needs anything. No wisdom, no experience, no truth to preserve. Only silence.

What has been realized is not of this world. It cannot be thought, it cannot be named. It is not something one possesses henceforth, but rather that in which everything is released.

The mind knows: there is nothing to hold on to, and therefore there is nothing to lose. Nothing to defend, and thus nothing to fear. ²³⁹ No certainty, but a deep peace that needs no confirmation.

What ends is not the stream of experience, but the need to disappear into it.

What remains is simplicity. Silence. Freedom.



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FOOTNOTES

¹ 'Parinibbāna' (P.); *parinirvāṇa* (Skt.) literally means 'complete extinguishment' or 'final liberation'. It refers to the definitive passing away of a fully awakened being (*arahant*), in this case the Buddha, in which not only the mental defilements are eradicated, but the physical existence also comes to an end. After *parinibbāna*, there is no further rebirth—it is the complete cessation of the *samsaric* process.

² 'Bhaṇaka' (P.); 'bhaṇakaḥ' (Skt.) is derived from the verb 'bhaṇati', which means 'to speak', 'to utter', or 'to recite'. A 'bhaṇaka/bhaṇakaḥ' is literally 'one who recites'—a reciter or oral transmitter of Dhamma texts.

³ 'Sutta' (P.); 'sūtra' (Skt.) literally means 'thread' and in Buddhism refers to a discourse given by the Buddha or by his enlightened disciples.

The suttas form the heart of the early Buddhist scriptures, compiled in the Sutta Piṭaka of the Pāli Canon.

⁴ 'Vinaya' (P. & Skt.) means 'discipline' or 'restraint', and refers to the complete set of behavioral rules for monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunis*) in the Buddhist tradition.

Along with the suttas and the *abhidhamma*, it constitutes one of the three divisions of the Pāli Canon (*Tipiṭaka*), emphasizing ethics, mindfulness, and inner purity as the foundation for practice.

⁵ 'Abhidhamma' (P. & Skt.) literally means 'about the Dhamma' or 'higher teaching'. It is the third part of the Pāli Canon (*Tipiṭaka*) and contains systematic and in-depth analyses of mental and physical processes. In contrast to the narrative style of the suttas, the *Abhidhamma* offers a philosophically and psychologically structured exposition of how reality can be understood from within.

⁶ By 'passed on as something living', I mean: not as dry theory, but as an oral teaching, rhythmically structured and passed on from teacher to student through repetition, sound, and devotion.

⁷ The Pāli verb 'paccanubhoti' literally means 'to directly experience' or 'to experience from within', in the sense of a profound awareness or existential realization. It derives from the root 'anu-bhavati' ('to experience'), preceded by the prefix 'pacca', which adds a personal, inward dimension.

In Sanskrit, the related form is 'praty-anubhūti', which comes from the root 'budh' ('to awaken' or 'to become aware') with the prefix 'prati' ('directed toward' or 'in response to').

Both terms express a kind of conscious awakening or deep insight—not merely on a mental level, but as a transformative, inner realization.

⁸ While the *jhānaṅgāni* are often described as opposing the hindrances, they are not strict opposites. More precisely, these meditative factors cultivate wholesome mental states that neutralize, pacify, or transcend the activity of specific hindrances.

⁹ 'Dhyānāṅga' (Skt.) is composed of 'dhyāna' (meditation, Pāli: *jhāna*) and 'aṅga' (factor or part). Thus, 'dhyānāṅga' in Sanskrit corresponds to 'jhānanga' in Pāli, meaning a factor of *jhāna*—meditative absorption.

¹⁰ Although some descriptions of the first *jhāna* do not always explicitly mention *ekaggatā*, it is nevertheless a crucial factor that contributes to the deeper concentration and stability of mind in this meditative state.

It forms the foundation for the further deepening of meditation into the higher *jhānas*, in which the factors *vitakka* and *vicāra* are left behind, while *ekaggatā* becomes increasingly prominent.

¹¹ 'Pariyatti' (P); 'paryāpti' (Skt.) refers to the study and understanding of the Buddhist teachings, especially the scriptures. It encompasses the intellectual engagement and the formative phase of the spiritual journey within the context of Buddhism. I advocate for *pariyatti*: understanding the Dhamma is an essential prerequisite for entering the stream.

¹² 'Paṭipatti' (P); 'pratipatti' (Skt.) refers to the practical application of the Buddha's teachings. It involves putting the Dhamma into practice through ethical conduct, meditation, and the cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom. In the broader context of the Buddhist path, *paṭipatti* is the phase in which theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*) is transformed into lived experience, leading to the realization of the Dhamma (*pañvedha*).

¹³ 'Pañvedha' (P); 'prativedha' (Skt.) refers to the direct, experiential realization or penetration of the truth of the Buddha's teaching. It points to the attainment of deep insight and wisdom, often equated with enlightenment (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*). *Pañvedha* marks the culmination of the spiritual journey in Buddhism, where the practitioner comes to fully understand and embody the Dhamma (Dharma) through direct experience.

¹⁴ 'Phala' (P. & Skt.) refers, in a spiritual context, to the ultimate result or the fruits of practice—specifically, the attainment of the four distinct levels of awakening: stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*), non-returner (*anāgāmī*), and fully awakened one (*arahant*). At each of these stages, *phala* denotes the specific fruit or result associated with that level of spiritual development. These four levels of awakening are especially emphasized within the Theravāda tradition.

Other Buddhist traditions place their emphasis differently, though the notion of progressive stages on the path to awakening remains a shared theme.

In the Mahāyāna tradition, for example, the focus lies on the bodhisattva ideal, where the aspiration toward enlightenment is not solely for one's own liberation, but for the liberation of all sentient beings. Rather than attaining enlightenment and leaving *samsāra*—the cycle of birth and death—the bodhisattva vows to remain within it, working tirelessly until all beings are free.

In Vajrayāna, too, there are various stages of meditation and realization, though these are described and structured differently than in the Theravāda tradition. Vajrayāna emphasizes the direct realization of the true nature of mind (*rigpa*), rather than a gradual unfolding of insight and wisdom. This direct path is supported by means of initiations, each of which corresponds to particular aspects of awakened mind along the spiritual journey.

¹⁵ 'Samyojana' (P. & Skt.) refers to the 'fetters' or 'chains' that, according to the Buddhist teachings, bind individuals to the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra). These mental shackles obscure clarity and freedom, keeping the mind entangled in delusion and becoming. The ten fetters are:

- Sakkāya-diṭṭhi—the belief in a permanent self or identity.
- Vicikicchā—scepticism or doubt regarding Buddha's teaching.
- Sīlabbata-parāmāsa—clinging to rituals and external forms of practice without insight into their deeper meaning.
- Kāma-rāga—sensual desire.
- Vyāpāda—ill-will, hatred, or hostility.
- Rūpa-rāga—craving for the realms of form, including refined meditative states.
- Arūpa-rāga—craving for the formless realms of existence.
- Māna—conceit, pride, or subtle comparisons with others.
- Uddhacca—restlessness or mental agitation.
- Avijjā—ignorance of the true nature of reality, which underlies and supports all the other fetters.

¹⁶ 'Apāya' (P. & Skt.) literally means 'downfall' or 'descent' and refers in Buddhism to the four lower realms of existence: the hell realms (niraya), the realm of hungry ghosts (peta; preta), the animal realm (tiracchāna-yoni; tiryag-yoni), and the realm of hostile beings (asura; id.).

¹⁷ The term 'bhava' (P. & Skt.) derives from the root bhū, meaning 'to be' or 'to become'. In a Buddhist context, 'bhava' refers to the process of existence or becoming: the karmically driven continuation of being that leads to a future birth (jāti).

In the teaching of dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda), 'bhava' is the tenth link. It does not merely point to a mode of existence (such as in the heavenly, human, or animal realms), but also to the inner urge to become—the subtle tendency of the mind to cling to existence, to identity, or to experience. In this way, 'bhava' is an existential force that keeps the wheel of saṃsāra turning. 'Bhava' is the mind's drive to become—to exist, to be something. It is this subtle will to be that fuels the cycle of saṃsāra. As long as this tendency is not fully seen through, the mind remains bound to life, and birth remains inevitable.

¹⁸ Although the terms 'nibbāna/nirvāṇa' and 'vimutti/vimukti' are often used interchangeably, they refer to two closely related but distinct aspects of liberation. 'Nibbāna/nirvāṇa' denotes the extinguishing of the three defilements—ignorance, craving and aversion—and is the unconditioned goal of the Buddhist path.

'Vimutti/vimukti' literally means 'liberation' and refers to the state of freedom that arises when these defilements have been completely abandoned.

In other words: 'nibbāna/nirvāṇa' is the goal; vimutti/vimukti' is its realization.

¹⁹ 'Puthujjana' (P.); *prthagjana* (Skt.) literally means 'the ordinary person' or 'one who is separated (from their true nature)'. The term refers to someone who has not yet gained insight into the true nature of existence and still lives from a place of ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*). A 'puthujjana' remains subject to the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*; *id.*), driven by craving, attachment, and mistaken views about the self.

In contrast to the *ariya-puggala* (Skt.: *ārya-pudgala*)—the noble disciple walking the path of liberation—the *puthujjana* (*prthagjana*) still stands outside the stream of awakening, as do most sentient beings. The term carries no moral judgment, but rather points to an existential condition of separation and seeking.

²⁰ 'Ariya-puggala' (P.); *ārya-pudgala* (Skt.) means 'noble person' or 'elevated individual'. It refers to one who has reached one of the four stages of realization on the path to liberation: *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer), *sakadāgāmī* (once-returner), *anāgāmī* (non-returner), and *arahant* (fully liberated one).

What makes these individuals 'ariyas' is not moral superiority or social status, but the breaking through of ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*) and the direct insight into the nature of reality (*yathābhūta*).

The 'ariya-puggala' has not merely understood the path to awakening on an intellectual level, but has directly experienced it. In this sense, they are not 'theorists of the Dhamma', but living expressions of liberating insight.

²¹ 'Rūpa' (P. & Skt.) means 'form'. 'Arūpa' means 'formless' or 'without form'.

²² The extinguishing of the defilements, known as the Three Poisons (*kilesa*; *kleśa*): ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*), craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), and aversion (*dosa*; *dveṣa*). These unwholesome roots are the driving forces behind suffering and cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*), and their complete cessation marks the attainment of liberation.

²³ 'Arūpa-samāpatti' (P. & Skt.) → *a + rūpa + sam-āpatti*: *a* = 'not', 'without'; *rūpa* = 'form', 'body'; *samāpatti* = 'coming together' or 'attainment'. 'Arūpa-samāpatti' are 'formless attainments'—meditative states in which even the most refined experiences of form have been relinquished.

²⁴ The bodhisattva ideal lies at the heart of Mahāyāna Buddhism and refers to the aspiration not to attain enlightenment solely for oneself, but to guide all sentient beings toward liberation.

Out of compassion, a bodhisattva postpones their own *nirvāṇa* and cultivates the six perfections *pāramitā*: generosity, ethical conduct, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom.

²⁵ Although Mahāyāna traditions such as Zen work less explicitly with the *jhāna* system as outlined in the Pāli Canon, meditative absorption (*saṃādhi*, *dhyāna*) is often strongly emphasized.

Examples include *zenjō* (Zen *saṃādhi*), *shikantaza* in Sōtō Zen, and the use of *kōans* in Rinzai Zen—all practices that require deep concentration.

²⁶ The experience of calm, clarity, one-pointedness, and even ecstasy—as in moments of *kenshō* or deep *saṃādhi*—shows clear parallels with the *jhānas*.

Yet the underlying intention may differ: in Zen, there is often a stronger emphasis on non-doing, direct realization, or open awareness, whereas in the Pāli Canon, the *jhānas* are explicitly employed as a preparation for *vipassanā/vipaśyanā*.

²⁷ 'Tonglen' (Tib.) literally means 'giving and taking' or 'sending and receiving'. It is a meditative practice rooted in the Tibetan vajrayāna tradition, characterized by a unique integration of breath, visualization, and the deliberate cultivation of compassion (karuṇā). This method invites the practitioner to come into intimate contact with the suffering of others—not to reject it, but rather to embrace it with love and to transform it from within.

At the heart of the tonglen practice lies the rhythm of the breath, intertwined with a deep inner visualization. With each inhalation, one imagines drawing in the suffering of others, often visualized as a thick, dark smoke or a heavy mist. This represents the pain, grief, fear, or negativity that sentient beings are entangled in. It may concern the suffering of someone close, of people one knows, or of entire communities facing collective hardship.

With each exhalation, one imagines sending back joy and well-being—a field of radiant, warm light that carries love, joy, and inner strength.

This light symbolizes the qualities of the heart: kindness, comfort, compassion, and the sincere wish that others may be free from pain. The out-breath is not a projection, but a natural unfolding of the heart—a gesture of deep connectedness with the well-being of others.

'Tonglen' often begins close to home: by working with one's own suffering, or with the pain of someone deeply cherished. From there, the practice expands in widening circles—to friends, to strangers, to those with whom one struggles, and finally to all living beings, without exception. In this way, 'tonglen' transcends the personal and becomes a universal practice of altruism.

'Tonglen' is not merely a meditative technique—it is a way of living: a training in courage, openness, and loving engagement. It strengthens our capacity for empathy and compassion by inviting us not to shield ourselves from suffering or turn away from it, but to consciously engage with it.

²⁸ 'Abhiṣeka' (Skt.) literally means 'consecration', 'initiation', or 'ritual sprinkling'. The term is used in various spiritual traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. While its meaning may vary depending on the context, it generally refers to a ritual initiation, blessing, or empowerment.

In the context of Vajrayāna Buddhism, 'abhiṣeka' refers to a formal initiation ceremony in which a qualified teacher (lama) grants the student access to specific tantric teachings and practices. This transmission is not merely symbolic, but is regarded as a direct communication of insight, energy, and permission—essential for safely and effectively engaging with these often secret or powerfully transformative methods.

In Buddhism more broadly, 'abhiṣeka' commonly denotes the ceremony through which a teacher or master initiates a practitioner into a particular form of spiritual practice—such as the meditation on a yidam (meditational deity) in Vajrayāna. During such a ceremony, the practitioner receives blessings, spiritual empowerment, and instructions necessary to carry out the practice.

In Hinduism, 'abhiṣeka' is often performed as a ritual 'bathing' or anointing of a sacred image or deity with substances such as water, milk, yogurt, honey, or ghee—as an expression of devotion and reverence.

²⁹ 'Wangkur' (Tib.); synonym: wangchö (Tib.). The term 'wangkur' derives from wang (initiation or empowerment) and kur (a series or sequence). A 'wangkur' is a structured series of empowerments and instructions given by a lama or master as part of a student's tantric training. These empowerments are meant to support the practitioner in developing a deeper understanding and experience of specific tantric practices and philosophies.

A 'wangkur' may focus on various aspects of tantric practice, including meditations on yidams (meditational deities), mantra recitation, visualization techniques, and other advanced spiritual methods. During the 'wangkur' the student receives not only the empowerments themselves but also the guidance and instructions necessary to engage in the practices correctly.

³⁰ This 'silent transmission' refers to a direct, non-conceptual transfer of insight, trust, or spiritual realization between teacher and student. It transcends words and ideas, taking place at the level of immediate awareness and inner knowing. Within the Vajrayāna tradition, such transmission is regarded as essential for the living activation of the practice.

³¹ *Mahāsaccaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 36* — Translation by Jan de Breet & Rob Janssen, *The Collection of Middle-Length Discourses, Volume 1 – Suttas 1–50*, p. 386 ff.

³² The following text is my free rendering of a passage from the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 36)*, in which the Buddha recalls a childlike state of inner stillness—a moment that would later prove to be the key to his awakening. This rendition remains faithful to the meaning of the original, but its language and tone are attuned to the inner experience it seeks to evoke. It is not intended as a literal translation, but as a living echo—a poetically worded silence in which the reader may allow the spirit of the original insight to resonate.

"I remembered how, as a child, I sat beneath the rose apple tree while my father worked the fields. My mind, as if by itself, slipped into a state of quiet attention—free from sensual desire, free from unwholesome thoughts.

There was joy, there was happiness. And I wondered: could this be the path to awakening? In that very moment I knew: this is the path.

My mind settled even more deeply. Thought and reflection fell away. A deep peace arose, born of pure one-pointedness, grounded in joy and happiness.

Then even that joy faded. What remained was a calm equanimity, clearly present, carried by a quiet contentment. And eventually, even that happiness dissolved.

There was no more suffering, no more joy, no resistance or craving. Only a silent, pure equanimity, illuminated by an open awareness that grasped at nothing. When my mind had thus become still—clear, pure, unmoving—I directed it toward the deep insight that liberates..."

³³ *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 28*

³⁴ 'Appanā-samādhi (P); apranihita-samādhi (Skt.)' refers to a profound level of meditative absorption in which the mind has become fully one-pointed and immovable. It is the concentrated state within which the *jhānas* unfold.

The word *appanā* literally means 'application' or 'full directing,' expressing the idea that attention rests uninterruptedly on the object of meditation.

Within the Buddhist tradition, *appanā-samādhi*; *apranihita-samādhi* points to the highest level of concentration (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*), essential for the arising of deep insight.

Classical Buddhist meditation theory distinguishes three successive stages of concentration (*samādhi*; *id.*): *parikamma-samādhi*, *upacāra-samādhi*, and *appanā-samādhi*.

Parikamma-samādhi ('preparatory concentration') is the initial stage in which the mind repeatedly turns toward the meditation object, yet remains subject to distraction. It is the phase in which one actively faces the Five Hindrances and begins to calm them.

Upacāra-samādhi ('neighborhood concentration') arises when the mind has gained a certain stability and comes close to full absorption. The hindrances are temporarily subdued, but awareness has not yet fully merged with the object.

Appanā-samādhi ('fully directed concentration') is the deepest stage, where the mind has become wholly one-pointed and merges with the object. This is the state in which the *jhānas* unfold.

This progression shows that *samādhi* is not a static condition, but a process of refinement. Each level prepares the ground for the next, until the mind becomes clear, still, and receptive to liberating insight.

³⁵ This passage is a contemplative rendering of the well-known Pāli formula “Dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opanayiko paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī,” which appears in several places throughout the Pāli Canon, including the Upavāṇasandiṭṭhika Sutta (Saṃyutta Nikāya 35.70).

This formula describes the essential qualities of the Dhamma: it is visible here and now (sandiṭṭhiko), timeless (akāliko), an invitation to personal inquiry (ehipassiko), oriented toward inner application and realization (opanayiko), and to be directly known by the wise (paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī).

The translation I use in the main text is not a literal rendering, but expresses the meaning of these qualities in a language that allows for inner resonance and contemplative depth.

³⁶ ‘Paññā-nivāraṇā’ is a compound of paññā (wisdom, insight) and nivāraṇa (obstruction, veil, hindrance). Literally translated, it means ‘obscurers of insight.’ The term highlights that the Five Hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇāni) not only obstruct meditative depth, but more fundamentally veil clear awareness of reality.

As long as the Five Hindrances remain active, the mind stays clouded—unable to directly perceive impermanence (anicca; anitya), the unsatisfactory nature of existence (dukkha; duḥkha), and the absence of a lasting self (anattā; anātman).

Overcoming these hindrances is therefore an essential condition for the arising of liberating insight (paññā; prajñā).

³⁷ The distinction between pañca nīvaraṇa and pañca nīvaraṇāni is purely grammatical: pañca nīvaraṇa is a shortened, simpler way to refer to the Five Hindrances; pañca nīvaraṇāni is the full, grammatically precise expression, using the plural form to clearly indicate that multiple hindrances are meant.

In practice, both terms are used interchangeably—they refer to the same Five Hindrances.

³⁸ Brahm, Ajahn (2006), *Mindfulness, Bliss, And Beyond, A Meditator’s Handbook*, p. 29 e.v.

³⁹ Brahm, Ajahn, *ibid*, *supra*

⁴⁰ 'Phala' (P. & Skt.) literally means 'fruit' or 'result.' In this context, it does not refer to the spiritual fruits of liberation (such as sotāpatti-phala or arahatta-phala), but to the natural outcome of karmic mental habit patterns.

Just as a seed eventually bears fruit, old reactions and inner structures manifest as mental hindrances. They are not a punishment or moral failure, but the natural consequence of how the mind has been shaped through its interaction with life.

⁴¹ 'Saṅkhāra' (P.); saṃskāra (Skt.) refers to mental formations, habitual tendencies, or conditionings that arise from past actions, experience, and karmic momentum. It is a central term in Buddhist psychology, pointing to the way the mind—both gross and subtle—creates forms and responds to the flow of impressions. These responses form the soil of ongoing becoming (bhava).

This shows that saṅkhāra is not merely an abstract psychological concept, but an existential dynamic—a fundamental force in the saṃsāric play. And perhaps, for those willing to look beyond the boundaries of Buddhist frameworks, even Līlā—the playful dance of form and desire from Kashmir Śhaivism—is never far away.

⁴² 'Kamma' (P.); 'karma' (Skt.) refers to the law of cause and effect that governs all actions, intentions, and behaviours. In the Buddhist teaching, kamma literally means 'action' or 'deed,' and it refers specifically to the moral and ethical consequences of one's actions.

The idea is that every act—whether wholesome or unwholesome—bears fruit, manifesting either in this life or in future lives. Wholesome actions lead to favourable outcomes, while unwholesome actions give rise to suffering and difficulty.

The ultimate aim is to break the cycle of kamma and suffering through ethical discipline (sīla; śīla), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā; prajñā), thereby realizing liberation (nibbāna; nirvāṇa).

⁴³ 'Intention lies at the root of kamma'—a free rendering of the Pāli phrase 'Cetanāhaṃ kammaṃ vadāmi' (Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.63).

With this statement, the Buddha makes clear that conscious will or intention (*cetanā*) is the decisive factor in the arising of *kamma*. Not every action is karmically significant—only those that arise from deliberate mental volition. These conscious intentions form the driving force behind mental conditioning and later become visible as habitual tendencies, reactive patterns, and lived experiences—including the Five Hindrances.

⁴⁴ In Buddhist psychology, rebirth (*punabbhava*; *punarbhava*) is understood not only as the transition from life to life, but also as a continuous process of arising within the mind, moment by moment.

In this sense, rebirth refers to the repeated arising of conditioned patterns, whereby the hindrances—as expressions of craving, aversion, inertia, restlessness, and doubt—once again occupy the mind and perpetuate the cycle of *dukkha*.

This view is supported by the *Abhidhamma* and by the contemplative experience of *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*), in which one directly sees how each mental moment can constitute a new birth within *samsāra*.

⁴⁵ 'Yoniso manasikāra; yukti-manaskāra' literally means 'thorough or wise consideration'. It refers to a mindful and penetrating mode of investigation, in which the yogi looks beyond superficial impressions and penetrates deeply into the causes, conditions, and consequences of mental processes.

It forms the essential foundation for the arising of wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) in Buddhist practice.

⁴⁶ 'Paññā; prajñā' means wisdom or insight, and in Buddhism refers to the direct seeing of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and non-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) in all phenomena.

It is this liberating wisdom that leads to the cessation of suffering.

⁴⁷ 'Passaddhi; praśrabdhi' literally means 'calm' or 'tranquility'. It refers to the physical and mental relaxation that arises when the mind is freed from the five hindrances. This inner stillness is not a passive state, but a refined sensitivity and openness that prepares the mind for deep concentration (samādhi; id.). 'Passaddhi; praśrabdhi' is one of the Seven Factors of Awakening (bojjhaṅgā; bodhyaṅga) and marks a crucial turning point in meditative practice, where restlessness gives way to silent, receptive clarity.

⁴⁸ 'Santi' (P.) and 'śānti' (Skt.) both refer to inner peace, stillness, and calm. In the context of meditation, the term points to the deep and peaceful state that arises when the mind is freed from disturbances and distracting tendencies.

⁴⁹ 'Paññā' (P.) and 'prajñā' (Skt.) both mean insight or wisdom. This does not refer to intellectual knowledge, but to a direct and liberating insight into the true nature of reality—namely impermanence (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha; duḥkha), and non-self (anattā; anātman).

⁵⁰ 'Kāmacchanda' (P. & Skt.) → kāma + chanda: kāma = sensual desire, pleasure; chanda = desire for.

⁵¹ 'Asaṅkhata Dhamma; asaṃskṛta dharma': the unconditioned —that which is not produced by causes (hetū; hetavaḥ) and conditions (paccayā; pratyayāḥ).

In Buddhist doctrine, asaṅkhata Dhamma; asaṃskṛta dharma is synonymous with nibbāna/nirvāṇa. It refers to the state of complete liberation beyond impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the illusion of self.

⁵² Alagaddūpama Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 22

⁵³ 'Bahusādhāraṇa' (Skt.) → bahu + sādharmaṇa: bahu = many, numerous; sādharmaṇa = common, general, shared, identical.

Bahusādhāraṇa refers to something that is widespread or commonly shared. In a broader context, it points to something that is used or experienced by many.

⁵⁴ 'Yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana' (P.); 'yathābhūta-jñānadarśana' (Skt.) → the seeing and knowing (understanding, realizing) of things as they truly are. The distinction between vipassanā and yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana is subtle, yet significant.

- Vipassanā (insight) refers to the process of clearly and non-reactively being aware of reality as it unfolds from moment to moment—a direct seeing of impermanence (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha; duḥkha), and non-self (anattā; anātman).

- Yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana literally means 'the seeing and knowing of things as they truly are' and points to the fruit or culmination of that process.

Where vipassanā is the path of insight, yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana is the moment in which insight truly penetrates—clear, direct, and transformative. Vipassanā is the process itself; yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana is the realization of that process.

⁵⁵ Sumana, Samanera (1995). *Going Forth: A Call to Buddhist Monkhhood*. [No pagination].

⁵⁶ Santideva, (1980), *De weg tot het inzicht*. Vertaald door Ria Kloppenborg, p. 88, Hoofdstuk 7, vers 64

⁵⁷ Kurpershoek-Scherft, (2002), *Ongrijpbaar is de Ganges. Wedergeboorte-verhalen (Jataka's) van de Boeddha* p. 243

The Jātakas are stories of the Buddha's past lives. In these tales, a previous existence of the Buddha takes center stage. The Buddha once said: "If all the plants and trees in the entire world were cut into tally sticks, they would still not suffice to count the number of my past lives."

These fables illustrate how the Buddha cultivated the perfections (pāramī; pāramitā), eventually enabling him to overcome Māra—the symbol of sensual temptation, but in truth a metaphor for a deeply personal psychological state.

Following the carefully detailed examples in the Jātakas naturally leads the practitioner toward the desired karmic result.

⁵⁸ The 'Four Assemblies' refer to the fourfold community of the Saṅgha—*catuparisā* (P.); *caturpariṣad* (Skt.). These four groups are:

- *Bhikkhū*—monks who take up the monastic life and devote themselves fully to the path of discipline, meditation, and insight.
- *Bhikkhunī*—nuns who undertake an equally rigorous training and walk the complete path of liberation.
- *Upāsaka*—dedicated laymen who practise the Dhamma through ethics, generosity, and meditation.
- *Upāsikā*—dedicated laywomen whose practice is oriented toward spiritual growth and inner freedom.

The term *catuparisā* embodies the fundamental equality of all practitioners on the path.

⁵⁹ 'Tathagata' – literally: 'he who has thus come, thus gone'. It is a metaphor for the Buddha: 'he who has reached perfection; he who has awakened'; 'he who has walked the path of all those awakened (all Buddhas) before him'; 'he who has arrived'. The deeper meaning is this: he who, within himself, has fully realized the Suchness (or Thusness) of all phenomena. 'Tathagata' is the title the Buddha used for himself. He did not see himself as a 'person' in the conventional sense, but rather as a process — a flow of mental and material phenomena that arise and pass away.

This reflects the Buddhist teaching of *anattā* (non-self), which holds that there is no permanent, unchanging self. As the 'Tathagata', the Buddha realized the true nature of all phenomena and attained *nibbāna*—the ultimate liberation from suffering. While the Buddha holds both historical and spiritual significance, Buddhist practice is ultimately about understanding and realizing his teachings. Such insight helps one find peace — enduring peace, inner peace: *nibbāna*.

Janssen, Rob, (2016), *Het Diamant-Sutra. Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita* p. 45, 17c — "Tathagata is another word for Ultimate Reality."

⁶⁰ *Mara*—literally 'the destroyer'—is a metaphor for the tempter, the ruler of the realm of sensual desire; craving; the passions that overwhelm human beings; evil; the devil; deception; the instability, unreliability, and randomness of existence; (the longing for) sexual pleasure; and the personification of death (in Tibet, often depicted as Yama). In short: Mara is a metaphor for the Great Illusion—the illusion that there is a 'self'.

It is this delusion that prevents us from letting go of attachment and from coming to realization. Mara represents the desperate longing for a 'self' or for a world that—in the eyes of the ignorant—appears understandable, manageable, and safe.

Mara can only be overcome through insight into the true nature of phenomena (*yathā-bhūta*, as it is). The practitioner who attains this insight—or better yet, who directly experiences it—knows that Mara (just like the Buddha, in fact) is ultimately nothing more than a concept. In the end, Mara and Buddha are one. As everything is one.

⁶¹ Rinpoche, Tenzin, Wangyal, (2003) *Leven en sterven als een droom*.

⁶² Pure awareness leads to selflessness because it is not attached to any specific object. Instead, there is an all-encompassing awareness of the whole. In this state of pure awareness, all duality dissolves, and you experience the unity of all phenomena. You are without ego—selfless and empty. This is the egolessness that is realised through *vipassanā*, in which wisdom arises through the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: mindfulness of the body, of sensations, of states of mind, and of the objects of the mind.

⁶³ Oosterbeek, Bertjan, (2014), *Boeddhistisch Dagblad*, dd. 09 november 2014 Sogenji desu: Hiroshima

⁶⁴ '*Ghāṇa-viññāṇa*' (P.); '*ghrāṇa-vijñāna*' (Skt.): the consciousness that arises dependent on the nose and a smell; one of the six sense-consciousnesses in Buddhist psychology.

⁶⁵ '*Mano-viññāṇa*' (P.); '*manovijñāna*' (Skt.): the mental consciousness that processes and interprets sense impressions and thoughts; distinct from the five sense-consciousnesses.

⁶⁶ In that subtle moment of *saññā* (perception), the very core of conditioning reveals itself: the transition from direct experience to mental construction (*saṅkhāra*; *saṃskāra*). It is here that raw sensory contact is not only recognized, but also interpreted—imbued with meaning, coloured by memory, expectation, and habitual patterns.

Precisely in this moment, the seed of craving (*taṇhā*; *trṣṇā*) or aversion (*paṭigha*; *pratigha*) is planted, depending on how the experience is interpreted.

Insight into this process lies at the heart of *vipassanā*/*vipaśyanā*: the clear seeing of the conditioned nature of experience. Whoever recognizes this, sees that this chain is not inevitable—and that liberation becomes possible precisely at the intersection between interpretation and choice.

⁶⁷ Oliver, Mary, (2004) *New and Selected Poems, Volume One - The Journey* p. 114

⁶⁸ Sayadaw U. Pandita, (1992), *In This Very Life. The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* p. 81

⁶⁹ *Girimananda-Sutta*, *Āṅuttara Nikāya*, 10.60

⁷⁰ ‘*Paccakkha ñāṇa*’ (P.)/‘*pratyakṣa jñāna*’ (Skt.) refers to direct insight or experiential knowledge—wisdom that arises not through reasoning or instruction, but through personal, immediate perception.

It is not conceptual or secondhand, but a knowing that is self-evident, intimate, and transformative, emerging from direct meditative observation of reality as it is.

⁷¹ What is often referred to as 'concentrated attention' arises from the integration of *samatha* and *vipassanā*. *Samatha* (the calming of the mind, concentration) and *vipassanā* (insight) are two interwoven approaches to meditation that together lead to deep clarity and liberating wisdom.

They are not opposites, but rather support one another—like the wings of the same bird. Samatha quiets the mind, while vipassanā cultivates the ability to observe clearly and without grasping. When these qualities mature together, a form of attention arises that is both still and sharp—rooted in calm, yet illuminated by insight.

In practice, this means that the mind is first quieted and centred (samatha; śamatha), so that it becomes free from distraction and inner noise. This refined, stable mind is then used as a tool of insight (vipassanā; vipaśyanā), with which the practitioner observes—clearly and directly—what arises and passes away in the present moment. Through this, a direct perception develops of impermanence (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha; duḥkha), and the absence of a lasting, stable self (anattā; anātman) in all phenomena.

Without this grounding in calm, insight would remain superficial; without insight, calm would offer only temporary relief. That is why the synergy of both leads to a transformative clarity that goes beyond intellectual understanding. It opens into a direct experience of the nature of mind and of reality as it truly is—not as we wish it to be, nor as we fear it might be. And precisely there lies the key to liberation: the falling away of misperception, of attachment, of illusion.

What remains is the unborn: nibbāna (nirvāṇa)—free from construction, free from suffering.

⁷² Singh, Kathleen, Dowling, (2014), *The Grace in Aging: Awaken as You Grow Older* p. 97-98

⁷³ Coleman, Daniel, (2008) *The Buddha on Meditation and Higher States of Consciousness*, p. 5

⁷⁴ 'Choiceless *sīla*' refers to a spontaneous, natural moral purity that arises when the mind has been fully purified. In this state, there is no longer any inner conflict or conscious decision required to act rightly—unwholesome tendencies simply no longer arise. Moral conduct flows effortlessly from a liberated mind, one that is free from craving and aversion. It is not the suppression of the unwholesome, but the disappearance of its roots (*mūla*).

This state of effortless ethics is also called *virāga*: dispassion or the cooling of desire and aversion.

Virāga is a central term in Buddhism, referring to the fading away of attachment and passion, especially in the sense of *rāga* (desire, sensuality, clinging).

In this context, *virāga* does not imply numbness or indifference, but rather the extinguishing of the fire of craving and aversion—the forces that ordinarily cloud ethical action.

⁷⁵ The simile of the gatekeeper appears in the *Visuddhimagga*, VIII:200, evoking the silent vigilance of mindful awareness.

⁷⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya* 2.185

⁷⁷ Wei Wu Wei, (1963) *Ask The Awakened; The Negative Way - 'Why are you unhappy?' 'Because 99 percent of everything you think, and of everything you do, is for yourself—and there isn't one.'*

⁷⁸ '*Nibbidā*' (P.); '*nirvidā*' (Skt.) refers to a deeply felt, insight-born disenchantment with the transient nature of conditioned existence (*saṃsāra*). It is not a cynical aversion, but a quiet, lucid sense of inner saturation—a letting go of attachment to that which is inherently unsatisfactory (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*). '*Nibbidā*/*nirvidā*' arises through direct seeing: when it becomes evident that all phenomena are impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), incapable of providing lasting satisfaction (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and devoid of any enduring self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

This state marks a turning point on the path to liberation: '*nibbidā*/*nirvidā*' gives rise to dispassion (*virāga*; *id.*), to calm (*upasama*; *id.*), and ultimately to release (*vimutti*; *vimukti*).

⁷⁹ 'Chandarāga' (P. & Skt.) → chanda + rāga: chanda meaning desire; rāga meaning passion or sensual craving.

⁸⁰ Realization is the process of recognizing, acknowledging, and inwardly uniting with what is. *Pariyatti*—study; *pañipatti*—practice; *pañivedha*—direct realization.

⁸¹ 'Vyāpāda' (P. & Skt.) → vi = intensive, in a particular or distinct way, but also 'apart' or 'separated'; āpāda = 'falling apart,' a state of division.

In the context of Buddhism, the term refers specifically to negative mental states such as anger, hatred, or hostility.

It points to a state of ill will or resentment, and to those unwholesome tendencies that cause fragmentation within the mind—such as hatred and aversion.

⁸² Levine, Stephen, (1989), *A Gradual Awakening* p. 100-101 — 'We almost never directly experience what pain is, because our reaction to it is so immediate that most of what we call pain, is actually our experience of resistance to that phenomenon. And the resistance is usually a good deal more painful than the original sensation.

In the same way, we don't experience our tiredness; our boredom; our fear. We experience instead our resistance to them.

Our experience of these states of mind becomes coated with our conditioning. We never quite taste the things themselves because our conditioned resistance to them interposes itself and intensifies the aversion with yet greater distaste.

Therefore, these states of mind are seldom incorporated into our wholeness and become constant interruptions in the flow.'

⁸³ *Vyāpāda* and *kodha* can be regarded as synonyms. However, there is a subtle difference:

- *Vyāpāda* refers to malevolence, hostility, or ill will. It is a mental state characterized by intentions to cause harm or by the nurturing of hostile feelings toward others.

- *Kodha* means anger or rage. It refers to an emotional state of intense indignation or resentment. *Kodha* is seen as an emotional outburst of anger.

Although both terms refer to negative mental states that are harmful to the individual and their spiritual path, the difference lies mainly in their expression: *vyāpāda* is the intention of hostility, while *kodha* is its manifestation— the emotional explosion.

⁸⁴ When ill will (*vyāpāda*) arises in the mind, consciousness is no longer simply present with what is unfolding now. The mind is pulled into resistance—into rejection of what is, or into a compulsion to destroy, control, or deny what feels unacceptable.

This 'being drawn away' is not a physical departure, but a subtle disconnection from direct presence. The mind becomes pre-occupied with how things should be, how events should have unfolded, or who is to blame. In this way, the present moment is distorted into a problem, and consciousness becomes entangled in judgments, memories, or expectations.

In meditative experience, this is recognized as a loss of clarity: the body remains here, but the mind is elsewhere—in conflict, in contraction. Rather than being open and aware, the mind closes in on itself. It moves against the Now.

As a result, it is cut off from the spontaneous joy, the stillness, and the trust that naturally arise from unguarded presence. Ill will is not merely a negative thought, but a force that robs us of the simplicity of being.

⁸⁵ Levine, Stephen (1989), *A Gradual Awakening*, p. 60 — '[*Vyāpāda*] blocks the freely flowing mind that sees things as they are, moment to moment, without wanting them to be otherwise.'

⁸⁶ 'Kilesa' (P.); 'kleśa' (Skt.) are the clouds that veil the radiant light of consciousness. They are the subtle tendencies of craving, aversion, and ignorance that cast a veil over the mind, obscuring its natural openness.

Craving (lobha), hatred (dosa), and ignorance (moha) form the roots of these defilements and are the source of inner suffering and restlessness. In Buddhism, the aim is not to battle these forces with aggression, but to quietly see through them, allowing their power to dissolve naturally.

When the kilesas fade away like mist in the morning sun, what remains is the open expanse of original awareness—boundless, luminous, untouched by craving or fear.

The path to liberation is not a fight against the defilements, but an awakening to what has always been clear, though hidden beneath veils.

⁸⁷ 'Brahmavihāras' (P. & Skt.): literally 'sublime abidings' or 'divine abodes.' The brahmavihāras comprise four 'qualities of the heart': loving-kindness (mettā; maitrī), compassion (karuṇā; id.), sympathetic joy (muditā; id.), and equanimity (upekkhā; upekṣā).

When the practitioner uses the brahmavihāras as a form of meditation, this approach is known as 'generative meditation.' In 'generative meditation', the yogi deliberately evokes a particular state of mind or intentional feeling.

In the suttas (e.g., Cūḷa-gosiṅga Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 31, and Tevijja Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 13), the Buddha recommends developing these 'four immeasurable emotions.' In his time, this was done by systematically radiating these four feelings in all directions.

Nowadays, practitioners often begin by directing the qualities first toward themselves, then toward loved ones, then toward neutral persons, then toward those who evoke aversion, and finally toward all beings. In doing so, the full spectrum of relationship is encompassed.

⁸⁸ 'Mettā' (P.); 'maitrī' (Skt.), or loving-kindness, is the expression and cultivation of the wish that all beings may be happy.

From the perspective of the Buddha's teaching, this happiness is most profoundly realized by guiding others toward buddhahood. To bring this about, both knowledge of the Dhamma and personal awakening are necessary.

This aspiration is ultimately what the bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna tradition embodies. It is called bodhicitta—the mind of awakening, or the heartfelt wish for self-realization in order to liberate all sentient beings.

The awakening mind arises from compassion (karuṇā; id.); it is the natural result of an experiential realization of wisdom (paññā; prajñā) into the nature of emptiness (suññatā; śūnyatā).

This gives rise to the following progression: paññā → suññatā → karuṇā → bodhicitta.

See also: Dalai Lama (2015), Essence of the Heart Sutra: The Dalai Lama's Heart of Wisdom Teachings, pp. 142–144.

⁸⁹ 'Karuṇā' (P. & Skt.), or compassion, is the expression and realization of the wish that all living beings may be free from suffering. It arises naturally when one feels a deep sense of connection with all other living beings. Compassion is not the same as pity. Compassion is rooted in equality, whereas pity stems from a sense of superiority, where one looks down upon those (wrongly) perceived as inferior.

Stephen Levine captures the distinction beautifully: 'When someone's pain evokes fear, it becomes pity; when someone's pain evokes love, it becomes compassion.'

In connection with anger, equanimity (upekkhā) also plays an essential role. Equanimity is the inner spaciousness in which anger can be seen without being swept away by it.

Where anger tightens and provokes resistance, equanimity opens the heart to the impermanence of every experience. It enables one to remain present with pain or conflict without judgment, sustained by a quiet strength rooted in loving wisdom.

⁹⁰ 'Kusala Dhamma (P.); kuśala Dharma (Skt.)' literally means 'wholesome phenomena' or 'skilful qualities.' It refers to mental and moral states conducive to liberation, such as mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), concentration (*saṃādhi*; *id.*), wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*), and compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*). These stand in contrast to *akusala dhamma*—unwholesome or obstructive qualities such as craving (*taṇhā*; *trṣṇā*), ill will (*vyāpāda*; *id.*), and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

⁹¹ Eelco (2014), *The Tree of Liberation*, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, November 21, 2014 — "It is not helpful to use the word 'pity' or 'too bad'. 'Too bad' implies guilt and penance. The word binds your soul to regret. You did something wrong, and it can no longer be undone. But undoing is not helpful. What happens, happens. That alone is reason enough not to want to undo it. Moreover, you wish to do something that is not possible. And it is not helpful to try to do the impossible. For in doing so, you deprive possibility of its intrinsic value and its monopoly on reality. But having a monopoly on reality is not helpful. Reality must be allowed to unfold in its unpredictability. If it cannot do that, all comes to a halt."

⁹² Brahm, Ajahn, (2009) *Helder Inzicht, Diepe Verstillig* p. 94

⁹³ *Hatred finds its roots in both the past and the future: either someone has wronged us in the past, or we fear that someone might harm us in the future. But hatred cannot exist in the here and now. Try it—without thinking of the past or the future, we cannot hate. It simply doesn't work. Love, on the other hand, has no past and no future. Love is present—here and now.*

⁹⁴ *Bodhicitta exists on two levels.*

First, there is absolute bodhicitta—an immediate experience that is free from concepts and thought. It is something profoundly 'good,' beyond naming or grasping, like a deep inner knowing that you have absolutely nothing to lose.

Second, there is relative bodhicitta—our capacity to keep the heart and mind open in the face of suffering, without shutting down, with open eyes.

⁹⁵ Chödrön, Pema (2010), *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times* — This book offers a profound insight into the nature of bodhicitta.

⁹⁶ 'Thīna-middha' (Pāli); 'styāna-middha' (Sanskrit) → thīna: laziness (not so much in the sense of moral weakness, but rather as an inner sluggishness or a lack of mental energy); middha: drowsiness, heaviness, or mental dullness.

⁹⁷ 'The Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha' is a concise compendium of the Abhidhamma, composed by Ācariya Anuruddha in the 11th century CE.

It offers a systematic overview of mental factors, states of consciousness, and meditative processes as taught in Theravāda Buddhism.

Despite its brevity, the work has become a standard reference in both Buddhist scholasticism and meditative training, due to its clarity and well-structured presentation.

⁹⁸ 'Ānusaya' (Pāli); 'anuśaya' (Sanskrit) literally means 'that which lies dormant' or 'that which remains beneath the surface'.

In Buddhist psychology, it refers to latent tendencies or underlying dispositions which, though not always active, continue to influence the mind.

These deep-rooted conditionings can resurface unexpectedly and profoundly shape how we respond to the world—until they are uprooted through insight and liberating practice.

⁹⁹ Capala (Pacala) Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya 7.58

¹⁰⁰ In Buddhism, the ‘lion’s posture’ (*sīhaseyya*; *siṃhaśayyā*) refers to the reclining position adopted by the Buddha both during periods of rest and at the time of his passing (*parinibbāna*).

One lies on the right side of the body, with the right hand placed beneath the head for support, the left arm resting along the side, and the legs gently bent.

This posture symbolizes dignity, stability, and serene alertness—qualities associated with a lion at rest, fully present yet undisturbed.

In meditative practice, the lion’s posture is regarded as a way to rest, sleep, or even die with awareness, free from heedlessness. It expresses mindfulness and serenity even in surrender and relaxation.

Images of the Buddha’s *parinibbāna* often depict him in this posture, as a sign of his complete release into awareness and peace.

¹⁰¹ Brahm, Ajahn, (2009) *Helder Inzicht, Diepe Verstilling* p. 62

¹⁰² ‘*Paṭivedha*’ (*Pāli*); ‘*prativedha*’ (*Sanskrit*) means ‘penetration’ or ‘direct seeing’. It refers to liberating insight grounded in personal experience. The term derives from the verb *paṭivijjhati*, meaning ‘to penetrate’, ‘to see through’, or ‘to break through’. In the context of Buddhist teachings, penetration implies that insight does not remain at the surface but reaches the very heart of reality, breaking through the veil of ignorance. It is a profound inner seeing into the true nature of phenomena, by which the mind is freed from delusion and attachment.

As a noun, *paṭivedha* points to a transformative realization—an insight that is not merely conceptual or reflective (*paññātti-matta*), but existential and liberating. In the Buddhist path, it marks the culmination of *bhāvanā-maya paññā*; (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā*—wisdom born of meditation): the direct seeing of things as they are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñānadarśana*), leading to the realization of the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*), which is synonymous with extinguishing (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*).

¹⁰³ 'Brahma Muhurta' (Skt.) literally means 'the hour of Brahmā' and refers to a special time window in the early morning—traditionally regarded as the final muhūrta of the night, approximately one hour and thirty-six minutes before sunrise.

In the Indian spiritual tradition, this period is considered especially auspicious for meditation, study, and inner reflection, as nature rests in stillness and the mind remains undisturbed by the sensory busyness of the day.

According to classical texts, this is the hour in which sattvic qualities prevail: clarity, calm, receptivity—precisely the qualities that support vipassanā and pañivedha. At this time, the mind is naturally more open to mindfulness (sati; smṛti) and inner cultivation (bhāvanā; id.).

Brahma Muhurta is not understood merely in chronological terms, but also symbolically—as an inner space of stillness, before the world begins to move again.

¹⁰⁴ 'Adhitthāna' (P.); 'adhiṣṭhāna' (Skt.) literally means 'determination', 'resolution', or 'inner resolve'. It refers to a conscious and steady intention rooted in the heart.

In the teaching of the ten pāramīs (perfections or virtues of a bodhisatta), adhitthāna is regarded as the power of steadfastness—the capacity to remain faithful to the path, even in the face of difficulty.

This steadfastness is grounded in fourfold alignment: determination rooted in right view, in honesty, in renunciation, and in inner peace.

Adhitthāna / adhiṣṭhāna is not a rigid force of will, but a calm and lucid resolve, supported by wisdom and trust.

It is the inner posture of 'not running away, but staying'—not to force anything, but to remain present with what is, with courage, gentleness, and perseverance.

In this sense, adhitthāna/adhiṣṭhāna becomes the ground upon which liberating insight deepens and takes root.

¹⁰⁵ Nanarama, Matara, Mahathera, (1993), *The Seven Stages of Purification & The Insight Knowledges. A Guide To The Progressive Stages of Buddhist Meditation* p. 27 — ‘Uddhacca is the tendency of the mind to run toward the future. Very often this tendency takes the form of wishes and aspirations. When desire takes hold of the mind for a long while, it creates a certain mental tremor, and this too undermines concentration.’

¹⁰⁶ Catherine, Shaila, (2008) *Focused and Fearless. A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm, and Clarity* p. 61 — ‘Restlessness, a common obstacle to concentration, is often a cover for painful states that hide below the surface of busy, agitated energies.’

¹⁰⁷ Knibbe, Hans, (2014), *Zie, je bent al vrij! Schets van een non-duaal pad* p. 11 e.v. — “There is a given, unspoiled openness within us, present at every moment and under all conditions...I call this our original freedom—the natural state. It is possible to tap into this inner source of well-being. Not by adding anything, but by letting go of all forms and resting in the openness of Being. There, in that silent presence, freedom unfolds—along with sensitivity and unforced beauty. It gives our life depth and dignity. By regularly ‘resting in Being’, we are no longer swept away by feelings, thoughts, or reactive patterns. We discover a spacious, autonomous place within ourselves—untouched by the tides of experience. It is as if we step into a boundless space in which everything can appear, yet which itself remains at rest. Like a mirror that is never disturbed by what it reflects. Here, we are whole. Here, we are truly ourselves. We have come home. The restless energy subsides, and we experience calm and warm well-being. A quiet sense of contentment arises, which may blossom into bliss. Perception becomes vivid, colourful, and deep. And we know—not as a thought, but as direct knowing: this is how I am meant to be. This is my natural state. All that remains now is to stay with it.”

¹⁰⁸ If the nimitta does not remain steady—appearing and disappearing—it is usually an indication that the mind is still restless.

¹⁰⁹ *'Parikamma-nimitta'*: the preliminary sign is the vague or unstable mental image that arises through repeated concentration on the original meditation object—such as the breath in *ānāpānasati*. It marks the beginning of deepened attention.

¹¹⁰ *'Uggaha-nimitta'*: the acquired sign is a clearer, more defined inner image that arises spontaneously as the mind begins to settle into deeper one-pointedness. The experience is generally more stable, though not yet fully refined.

¹¹¹ *Paṭibhāga-nimitta'*: the counterpart sign is a bright, still, and stable inner light or image that becomes the new meditation object. It indicates matured concentration and marks the threshold of the first *jhāna*. See also *Visuddhimagga* VIII.173 ff.

¹¹² *Brahm, Ajahn, (2009) Helder Inzicht, Diepe Verstillung p. 68*

¹¹³ *'Hishiryo'* (Jap.) is a Zen Buddhist term often translated as 'non-thinking' or 'beyond thinking.' It refers to a state of awareness that does not arise from conceptual or dualistic thought, but operates from a direct and open presence. It is not a mental blankness or dullness, but rather a profoundly vivid form of awareness—free from identification with thoughts or judgments.

In the practice of zazen—the seated meditation at the heart of the Zen tradition—hishiryo points to a state of mind in which one no longer clings to thoughts, evaluations, or mental constructions, but simply allows the mind to rest in the immediacy of the present moment.

The term is often associated with Zen master Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō Zen school. In his work Shōbōgenzō, he describes 'hishiryo' as the natural functioning of mind that neither rejects nor clings to anything, and in which the true nature of reality reveals itself—without interference from thought and without suppressing the mind.

Hishiryo, then, is not a technique but a realization—a merging with being, in which the distinction between observer, observation, and observed begins to dissolve. It is the spontaneous activity of a mind no longer obstructing itself.

¹¹⁴ Nanarama, Matara, Mahathera, (1993), *The Seven Stages of Purification & The Insight Knowledges. A Guide To The Progressive Stages of Buddhist Meditation* — "And as this train of thought continues to run along the track of the meditation subject, now and then it runs into memories of certain past events in some way related to that subject. Before the meditator is aware of what is happening, the train of thought jumps off the track of meditation and adheres to those past events. It may take some time, even a long time, for the meditator to realize that his mind is no longer on the meditation subject. This tendency for the mind to deviate from the meditation subject greatly impairs the power of concentration, causing distraction."

¹¹⁵ This is the Buddha's AFL-formule: Acknowledge what you have done; Forgive yourself en Learn from your mistake—Acknowledge, Forgive, Learn.

¹¹⁶ In the Buddhist tradition, the unconditioned—*asaṅkhata* (P); *asaṃskṛta* (Skt.)—refers to that which is unborn, unconstructed, and therefore not subject to decay or death. It is not a 'thing' or a 'place', but rather a state of liberation beyond all mental and sensory formations (*saṅkhāra*).

When one speaks of unconditioned awareness, it points to a form of direct presence no longer dependent on identification, will, or concept. It is silence beyond control, openness without boundary, pure knowing without a knower—a state in which the mind comes to rest in itself.

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¹¹⁸ 'Pañca balāni' (P); 'pañca balāḥ' (Skt.), refers to the five spiritual faculties or powers that support the path to liberation: faith (saddhā; śraddhā), energy (virīya; vīrya), mindfulness (sati; smṛti), concentration (samādhi; id.), and wisdom (paññā; prajñā).

When these faculties are in balance and fully developed, they overcome the five hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇa; pañca nivāraṇāḥ) and bring clarity, stability, and insight to the yogi's mind.

¹¹⁹ The metaphor of the four horses and a charioteer is not a literal transmission from the Pāli Canon, but a modern, didactic image used to illustrate the dynamic interplay of the five spiritual faculties (saddhā, virīya, sati, samādhi, paññā).

It resonates with similar imagery found in the Katha Upaniṣad and in Western thought (such as Plato's Phaedrus), where the inner functioning of body, mind, and wisdom is represented through the metaphor of a chariot drawn by horses and guided by a charioteer.

¹²⁰ Koster, Frits, (2005) - *Het Web van Wijsheid*, p. 33 — 'Unwholesome consciousness, in the context of the Abhidhamma, could be expressed in two ways: (1) as consciousness that gives rise to human suffering, and (2) as consciousness that obstructs or delays liberation from suffering and the unfolding of deeper forms of happiness.'

Unwholesome is anything in which craving, aversion, and ignorance are present.

¹²¹ *Kalama-Sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 3.65

¹²² Lief, Judy, (2017), *Meditation is Not Enough Alone*, Tricycle, April 2017 — "Meditation is not merely a useful technique or mental gymnastic, but part of a balanced system designed to change the way we go about things at the most fundamental level."

¹²³ 'Saddhā' (P.); 'śraddhā' (Skt.) means 'trust', 'confidence', or 'devotional commitment'. 'Saddhā' does not refer to blind belief, but to a trust rooted in the heart and nourished by direct experience.

In the early Buddhist texts, saddhā is described as the first step on the path—but also as a quality that deepens as insight matures. It is the trust that arises when the yogi—through practice—begins to experience for themselves that the Dhamma works: that peace, clarity, and liberation are not distant promises, but living realities within reach. 'Saddhā' then ceases to be mere conviction and becomes a quiet certainty, carried by insight and grounded in lived experience.

¹²⁴ Brahm, Ajahn, (2009) *Helder Inzicht, Diepe Verstilling* p. 71 — 'If the thought—'Is this a jhāna?'—arises during meditation, then it cannot be a jhāna. Such thoughts simply cannot occur within those deep states of being. Only after the meditation has ended (...) can one look back and quietly recognize,—'Yes, that was a jhāna'.'

¹²⁵ 'Letting go and uprooting': In vipassanā, attachment to phenomena (upādāna), craving for existence (taṇhā), and ignorance (avijjā) are gradually uprooted and released.

¹²⁶ Snyder, Stephen, & Rasmussen, Tina, (2009) *Practising The Jhanas* p. 116

¹²⁷ 'Kalyāṇamitta' (P.); 'kalyāṇamitra' (Skt.): a spiritual friend, a companion on the path to insight.

In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa states that if no Buddha is available as a spiritual friend, one should turn to one of the eight great disciples. If that too is not possible, one should seek someone who has removed all mental hindrances, attained all the jhānas, and developed liberating insight. If such a person cannot be found, then one should look for someone who has attained at least one jhāna, or someone who knows the entire Tipiṭaka—the three collections of the Pāli Canon; or someone who knows two of them, or even one. If this too is not possible, one should seek out a person who knows at least a single chapter, together with its commentary, and lives with mindfulness. And if no spiritual friend can be found, the Buddha gives this advice in the Upakkilesa Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 128): "Then live alone, like a king who has renounced a conquered kingdom, like a tusker elephant in the wild. It is better to live alone—there is no companionship with a fool. Live alone, untroubled, doing no harm, like a tusker in the forest."

¹²⁸ Dhammapada, Gāthā 61

¹²⁹ Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna-Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 22

¹³⁰ 'Akusala' (P.); 'akuśala' (Skt.) refers to unwholesome, unvirtuous, or harmful thoughts, words, and actions that give rise to suffering and hinder spiritual development. The term is often used in contrast with 'kusala; kuśala', which denotes wholesome or virtuous thoughts, words, and actions that support the path of inner liberation.

¹³¹ Dr. Vickramabahu Karunaratne: Buddha the first to explain fundamental nature of reality — The Daily Mirror, May 22nd, 2013 — "The first to reveal the deepest nature of reality was the Buddha. He showed with great clarity: what is real is impermanent, in constant flux, subject to sudden collapse—and ultimately empty of any fixed essence. To truly comprehend this, it is not enough to approach reality solely through the intellect. One must leave behind positivism and lift the veil of alienation. For it is through craving, through attachment to the sensually perceptible, that human beings become estranged from what truly is."

¹³² Flickstein, Matthew, (2007), *The Meditator's Atlas. A Roadmap of the Inner World* p. 58 — "Through the lens provided by mindfulness, we are able to recognize the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of each hindrance. The result is that we transform a potential stumbling block into a stepping stone for achieving a greater clarity of mind."

¹³³ In the Buddhist teaching, the mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇāni*) are not regarded as fixed, independent entities attacking us from the outside, but rather as conditionally arisen processes (*saṅkhāra-dhamma*): temporary configurations of consciousness that come into being through specific causes and conditions, and that also cease when those causes fade away. This perspective is rooted in the teaching of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītyasamutpāda*).

By no longer viewing these hindrances as 'problems' or 'enemies', but as impermanent phenomena without inherent substance (*sabbe dhammā anattā*), space opens up for insight and release. The practitioner comes to see how aversion, craving, dullness, or doubt arise as conditions, come together—and also pass away when one no longer identifies with them.

This insight makes it possible to remain present with what is difficult, with gentleness and clarity, without needing to fight or flee. The hindrances then cease to be obstacles on the path and become objects of insight—gateways to liberation, when their transient and empty nature is truly seen.

¹³⁴ Brahm, Ajahn, (2009) *Helder Inzicht, Diepe Verstillung* p. 237 — "...the five hindrances function as the spin doctors of illusion. They prevent us from seeing things as they truly are and present to consciousness only that which is socially acceptable, pleasant, and unchallenging. What makes them particularly treacherous is that their workings take place behind the scenes. One is usually unaware of their subtle manipulations. That is why we speak of illusion, of deception. As long as the five hindrances are still at play, one cannot be certain whether the object of mindful attention is truly being seen as it is. That certainty can only arise when the Five Hindrances have been—if only temporarily—cleared from the path."

¹³⁵ 'Anusaya' (P); 'anuśaya' (Skt.) literally means 'that which lies beneath' or 'what remains dormant.' In Buddhist psychology, 'anusaya'/'anuśaya' refers to latent tendencies that are not always active, but persist beneath the surface of the mind, ready to re-emerge when the appropriate conditions arise.

These tendencies are deeply embedded traces of conditioning —habitual patterns that repeatedly lead to identification, reaction, and suffering. They form the subconscious reservoir of *rāga* (craving), *paṭigha* (aversion), and *avijjā* (ignorance), but also include more subtle forms such as *vicikicchā* (doubt) and *māna* (conceit).

In the *Abhidhamma*, seven types of *ānusayā* are traditionally distinguished:

- *Kāmarāgānusaya* – the latent tendency toward sensual craving
- *Paṭighānusaya* – the latent tendency toward aversion
- *Diṭṭhānusaya* – the latent tendency toward wrong views
- *Vicikicchānusaya* – the latent tendency toward doubt
- *Mānānusaya* – the latent tendency toward conceit
- *Bhavarāgānusaya* – the latent tendency toward craving for becoming
- *Avijjānusaya* – the latent tendency toward ignorance

These *ānusayā* remain operative as long as there is no clear insight into the true nature of phenomena. They are not uprooted through suppression or willpower, but by seeing through their illusory nature in the light of deep meditative clarity (*vipassanā ñāṇa*). Only when the yogi perceives things as they truly are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñānadarśana*), can there be a gradual fading of these latent patterns.

¹³⁶ 'Janāmi passāmi' (P); 'janāmi paśyāmi' (Skt.): *janāmi* is the first-person singular form of the verb *jānāti*, meaning 'to know.' It refers to knowing, understanding, or realizing something.

Paśyāmi is the first-person singular form of *paśyati*, meaning 'to see' It conveys the sense of perceiving, beholding, or directly experiencing.

The expression 'janāmi passāmi'/'janāmi paśyāmi' points to an inner knowing, seeing, or experiencing of truth—the awakening to a higher consciousness or the essence of existence. It suggests a deep insight, a direct perception, or a spiritual realization of reality beyond superficial appearances.

'Janāmi passāmi'/'janāmi paśyāmi' is associated with the experiential recognition of the 'true nature' of the Self, the Absolute, or Ultimate Reality.

¹³⁷ 'Bhāvanā-maya paññā' (P); 'bhāvanāmayī prajñā' (Skt.) is the wisdom that arises from meditation (*bhāvanā*; id.) and direct experience (*paccanubhoti*; *pratyanu-bhavati*), as distinct from wisdom gained through study and listening (*suta-mayā paññā*; *śruta-mayī prajñā*), or through reflection and contemplation (*cintā-mayā paññā*; *cintā-mayī prajñā*).

¹³⁸ 'Paccanubhoti' (P); 'pratyanu-bhavati' (Skt.) means 'to directly experience' or 'to perceive experientially.' It is a verb that refers to the act of immediate, firsthand knowing or direct perception. 'Paccanubhoti'/'pratyanu-bhavati' points to the process of direct experience—unmediated by conceptual thought—through which reality is intimately known and inwardly felt.

¹³⁹ Although 'yathābhūta-ñānadassana' and 'paccakkha ñāṇa' are closely related, they are not synonymous. Both terms describe essential aspects of Buddhist insight, with 'paccakkha ñāṇa' emphasizing the direct, experiential nature of insight, and 'yathābhūta-ñānadassana' pointing to the content and character of that insight—namely, the *tilakkhaṇa*/trilakṣaṇa, the three marks of existence.

¹⁴⁰ In Sanskrit, *bhaṅga* and *bheda* are synonyms.

¹⁴¹ Gunaratana, Bhante, Henepola, (2009) *Verdiep je mindfulness. Een stap verder op de weg van meditatie* p. 107

¹⁴² This is known as *udayabbaya ñāṇa* → *udaya* + *bbaya* + *ñāṇa*: *udaya* = arising, appearing; *bbaya* = passing away, disappearing; *ñāṇa* = insight. Thus, '*udayabbaya ñāṇa*' is the insight into the arising and passing away of phenomena—the clear seeing of their appearance and disappearance.

The essence of '*udayabbaya ñāṇa*' lies in the fact that the practitioner sees and knows—experiences—that all physical and mental phenomena are subject to change, instability, and decay. The yogi clearly perceives the entire process: the arising, the cause of arising, the passing away, and the cause of passing away. From this realization of *anicca* (impermanence), there gradually follows the deepening realization of *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) and *anattā* (non-self).

'*Udayabbaya-nupassana-ñāṇa*' is the insight that arises in the *dhammanuvatti*—the one who lives in harmony with the Dhamma—through sustained, intensive cultivation of perfect mindfulness (*sammā sati*; *samyak smṛti*) on the arising and passing away of all phenomena.

¹⁴³ *Dhammacakkappavātana Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56.11

¹⁴⁴ This relates to the understanding of the momentary nature of experience (*khaṇika*), as explained in the *Abhidhamma* and practically applied in meditation: each 'moment' of consciousness (*citta*) is a new and distinct phenomenon, arisen due to causes and conditions. There is no substantial continuity—only causal succession.

¹⁴⁵ This points to the letting go of desire (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), aversion (*dosa*; *dveṣa*), and ignorance (*moha*; *avidyā*)—the three unwholesome roots (*akusala-mūla*) that underlie suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*).

Letting go of these reactions is precisely what is brought about in insight meditation (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*), when one observes the arising and passing of all phenomena with clarity and equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*).

¹⁴⁶ This expression does not point to an enduring essence or metaphysical awareness, but to the dissolution of the illusion of a perceiver. In the context of Theravāda Buddhism, awareness is always momentary (*khaṇika*), arising and ceasing without an underlying self.

¹⁴⁷ This is not a rejection of the path or the teachings, but a recognition that liberation no longer depends on affirmation or ideological frameworks. Religious forms lose their binding force when direct insight arises.

¹⁴⁸ 'Vossagga' (P.); 'viśrarga' (Skt.): literally 'relinquishing', 'releasing', or 'letting go'. It refers to the profound inner release of attachment, craving, or self-clinging. In the context of meditation and insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*), it points to the liberating relinquishment of identification and grasping—a key aspect of liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*).

¹⁴⁹ 'Clearly seeing their nature and origin' refers to wise, attentive contemplation (*yoniso manasikāra*, *yukti-manaskāra*). This means carefully and consciously directing attention, allowing all phenomena to be examined in the light of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*, *pratītya-samutpāda*). In this way, one directly experiences how suffering arises—and how it comes to cessation.

¹⁵⁰ 'Mula' (P.); 'mūla' (Skt.) means 'root', both in a literal and a figurative sense. In Buddhist psychology, it refers to the deepest drives or foundations of intentional action.

The three *akusala-mūla*—craving (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*)—are regarded as the fundamental causes of mental defilements and the continued unfolding of *samsāra*.

¹⁵¹ 'Does not occur through willpower': this reflects the Buddhist understanding that liberation is not forced through personal effort (*attavāda*; *ātma-vāda*), but arises through wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*), born of direct experience and clear seeing (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*).

See, for example, *Majjhima Nikāya* 2 and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 10.61, where the Buddha emphasizes that mere desire for liberation does not lead to actual liberation.

¹⁵² Gunaratana, Bhante, Henepola, (2009) *Verdiep je mindfulness. Een stap verder op de weg van meditatie* p. 98-99

¹⁵³ 'Paṭipakkha' (P); 'pratipakṣa' (Skt.) literally means 'opposite side' or 'counteracting force.' In the context of Buddhist meditation, it refers to a wholesome mental quality that directly counterbalances an unwholesome tendency or hindrance. For instance, inner joy (pīti) serves as the paṭipakkha for sensual desire (kāmacchanda), and one-pointedness (ekaggatā) acts as an antidote to restlessness (uddhacca).

¹⁵⁴ The expression 'the fetters of the Further Shore' is an interpretative designation referring to the five higher saṃyojana that become active only in advanced practitioners.

These subtle mental bonds—such as attachment to refined meditative states or a subtle sense of self—keep the yogi bound within saṃsāra just before full liberation. They are therefore symbolically associated with the 'Further Shore'—a metaphor for nibbāna.

¹⁵⁵ Although 'moha' and 'avijjā' are often used interchangeably, they refer to different aspects of ignorance within the Buddhist teaching. Moha (confusion or delusion), in Buddhist psychology, denotes a fundamental form of ignorance (avijjā), but it often manifests in daily life as a more superficial and emotional state of mental bewilderment.

This may express itself in the misperception of impermanent phenomena as lasting, in taking what is unsatisfactory (dukkha) to be a source of happiness, or in clinging to a fixed and independent 'self' where in reality there is only a process of ever-changing, mutually dependent phenomena.

Moha is frequently listed as one of the three unwholesome roots (akusala-mūla): craving (lobha), aversion (dosa), and delusion (moha). While lobha and dosa are more active mental responses—respectively the pull toward or the push away from certain objects—moha is marked by passivity, ignorance, and distortion in relation to the true nature of reality. This mental obscuration obstructs clear seeing (paññā) and gives rise to destructive thoughts, emotions, and behaviours.

The antidote to moha is wisdom (paññā), developed through insight meditation (vipassanā) and the deep contemplation of impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and the absence of an independent self (anattā) in all phenomena.

Avijjā, by contrast, refers to a deeper, more fundamental form of ignorance—specifically the failure to understand the Four Noble Truths and the reality of anicca (impermanence), dukkha (dissatisfaction), and anattā (non-self).

Avijjā forms the very root of the wheel of dependent origination (paṭicca samuppāda). It is the most profound and pervasive form of ignorance, one that underlies and sustains all other fetters and unwholesome roots.

¹⁵⁶ The taproot is the central, dominant root that grows straight downward. It forms the foundation of the root system and is often thicker and stronger than the lateral roots.

¹⁵⁷ 'Saṅkhata' (P) and 'saṃskṛta' (Skt.) refer to 'conditioned' or 'composite' phenomena—things that arise dependent on causes and conditions (paṭicca-samuppāda; pratīyasamutpāda). They are marked by impermanence (anicca; anitya), suffering (dukkha; duḥkha), and the absence of a lasting self (anattā; anātman).

In contrast to the unconditioned (asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta)—such as nibbāna (nirvāṇa)—saṅkhata phenomena are subject to arising and passing away.

¹⁵⁸ 'Bare Insight' (Synonyms: Dry Insight, parikamma samādhī, suddha vipassanā). It is the 'direct path' to self-realization (nibbāna; nirvāṇa), without prior jhāna practice. It is pure, bare attention to the three characteristics (tilakkhaṇa; trilakṣaṇa) of all conditioned phenomena, as they present themselves moment by moment to the practitioner. All sense experiences appear to the yogi in complete purity—that is, free from mental chatter, free from the addition of imagined stories and dramas. They are seen just as they truly are. In this way, the yogi gains 'bare' insight: attention is limited to the process itself—'seeing' and 'form', 'hearing' and 'sound'—and not extended to an imaginary construct shaped by self-created, subjective, and imaginative narratives added to the naked object. Only through such pure attention do the objects appearing at the sense doors arise and pass away without giving rise to saṅkhāras of craving or saṅkhāras of aversion. In this way, objects, sensations, and feelings do not evoke desire or resistance. This is the yogi's pure awareness. And from this pure being-aware, wisdom naturally unfolds.

¹⁵⁹ 'Paccanubhoti' (P); 'praty-anubhūti' (Skt.) refers to direct, lived experience—the personal and immediate apprehension of a truth. It is not a matter of intellectual understanding, but an intimate and existential seeing-through of reality. These terms express that liberating insight does not arise through reasoning or belief, but only through direct experience.

Another frequently used Sanskrit term, 'pratibudhyate', means 'awakens' or 'becomes aware', but places more emphasis on the process of coming to insight than on the experience itself.

¹⁶⁰ The seven purifications (*satta visuddhiyo*) according to the *Visuddhimagga* are: purification of conduct (*sīla-visuddhi*), of mind (*citta-visuddhi*), of view (*diṭṭhi-visuddhi*), of the overcoming of doubt (*kaṅkhāvitaraṇa-visuddhi*), of knowing what is path and what is not (*maggāmagga-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*), of progress (*paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*), and of knowledge and vision of reality (*ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*).

Richard Shankman notes that the *Visuddhimagga* has had a profound influence on how the path to liberation is understood within Buddhism, and praises the text for its clarity, detail, and practical applicability.

See: Richard Shankman (2012), *The Experience of Samādhi: An In-Depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation*.

See also my own book: Guy, Eugène Dubois (2019), *Satta-Visuddhi - De Zeven Zuiveringen*.

¹⁶¹ ‘*Parikamma samādhi*’ is a preparatory form of concentration that provides a sufficient foundation for practising *vipassanā* effectively, without the need to first develop the deep meditative absorptions of the *jhānas*. It is a state of directed attention in which the mind remains relatively focused, yet still susceptible to distraction by arising thoughts or emotions. It represents a less stable and less refined level of concentration when compared to more advanced stages such as ‘*appanā samādhi*’ (full absorption).

¹⁶² ‘*Svabhāva*’ literally means ‘own nature’ or ‘inherent nature’. In a Buddhist context, it refers to the particular way in which a phenomenon manifests in a given moment. It can point to the impermanent, conditionally arisen nature of phenomena—devoid of any lasting or independent ‘self’.

In the *Madhyamaka* tradition, the existence of an intrinsic ‘*svabhāva*’ is explicitly refuted. Yet in other contexts—such as in *vipassanā* practice—the term ‘*svabhāva*’ may be used to indicate the distinctive behaviour or pattern of a phenomenon, as it reveals itself in direct experience.

¹⁶³ 'Nāma-rūpa'—'name and form'—refers to the coming together of mental processes (nāma) and the physical body (rūpa); together, they form the basis of the world as it is experienced.

¹⁶⁴ Sayadaw U. Pandita, (1992), *In This Very Life. The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* p. 51 e.v.

¹⁶⁵ Udayabbaya, in a meditative context, refers to the direct experience of the changing nature of phenomena—an insight that plays a vital role in seeing through the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhaṇa; trilakṣaṇa): impermanence (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha; duḥkha), and the absence of a fixed self (anattā; anātman), and in the unfolding of wisdom (paññā; prajñā).

¹⁶⁶ Mahāsaccaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 36

¹⁶⁷ Sāmañña-phala Sutta, Digha Nikāya 2

¹⁶⁸ Sāmañña-phala Sutta, Digha Nikāya 2

¹⁶⁹ In Theravāda Abhidhamma, cetasika refers to the specific mental factors that arise together with consciousness (citta) and condition or color it. A total of 52 cetasika are distinguished, encompassing functions such as sensation and feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā), and energy (virīya).

In Sanskrit, the term cittasaṃskāra—literally translated as 'formations of the mind'—is often used to refer to similar mental factors, although the terminology and classification may vary depending on the tradition.

¹⁷⁰ 'Intuitive familiarity' does not refer to a merely subjective hunch, but to an initial clarity or discernment that arises spontaneously within a deepened state of concentration.

It is a non-discursive, direct knowing of the nature of the object—an early stage of direct insight (vipassanā; vipaśyanā) that does not result from reasoning, but from direct, penetrative presence.

¹⁷¹ In classical Theravāda meditation manuals such as the *Visuddhimagga*, this stage is often preceded by the appearance of the *nimitta*—a clear mental sign that arises when the mind becomes quiet and concentrated.

While the *nimitta* is not the *jhāna* itself, it often marks the transition from preparatory concentration to full absorption (*apānā samādhi*).

¹⁷² 'Rāga' (P. & Skt.) means 'desire' or 'craving'; it refers to a mental tendency that draws the mind toward pleasant objects.

¹⁷³ 'Dosa' (P.) or 'dveṣa' (Skt.) means 'aversion' or 'ill will'. It refers to the mind's tendency to reject or resist what is unpleasant. Both 'rāga' and 'dosa' are hindering factors that cloud the mind and obstruct the unfolding of calm and insight.

¹⁷⁴ 'Suññatā' (P.); 'śūnyatā' (Skt.) literally means 'emptiness', and in Buddhism it refers to the insight that all phenomena arise in dependence on conditions (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītyasamutpāda*), and lack any lasting, independent core or self. It does not point to an absolute void, but to the absence of inherent, unchanging existence.

¹⁷⁵ 'Ākāśānañcāyatana' (P.); 'ākāśānantyāyatana' (Skt.). *Ākāśānañcāyatana* → *ākāśa* + *ananta* + *āyatana*: *ākāśa* = space; *ananta* = boundless, infinite; *āyatana* = sphere, domain, experience. Here, the mind turns toward the boundless dimension of space, which seems to open up beyond the limitations of form. This is no longer object-focused awareness, but an expansive attunement to boundlessness as such.

Consciousness no longer 'sees' things, but floats freely in the knowing that there are no more boundaries—no above or below, no inside or outside. It is a meditative sphere that feels like freedom from form, yet remains conditioned. Space becomes the object of meditation, but it must be noted: even though the object is 'infinite', it is still a conditioned projection of the mind.

¹⁷⁶ 'Viññāṇaṇcāyatana' (P); 'vijñānānantyāyatana' (Skr.). Viññāṇa-
ṇcāyatana → viññāṇa + ananta + āyatana: viññāṇa = conscious-
ness, awareness; ananta = boundless, infinite; āyatana = sphere,
domain, experience.

*In the sphere of viññāṇaṇcāyatana, the yogi releases the per-
ception of infinite space and turns the attention to that which
was aware of that space: consciousness itself. What then
unfolds is not thinking or perceiving in the ordinary sense, but a
direct knowing of consciousness as boundless luminosity. The
mind experiences itself as infinite awareness.*

¹⁷⁷ 'Ākiñcaññāyatana' (P); 'ākīṃcanyāyatana' (Skt.). Ākiñcañ-
ñāyatana → ā + kiñcañña + āyatana: ā = toward; kiñcañña =
nothingness; āyatana = sphere, domain of experience.

*In this absorption, the yogi releases even the perception of 'infi-
nite consciousness'. Attention turns toward 'nothing'—toward
the absence of objects. This state is not the same as the insight
into emptiness (suññatā; śūnyatā), but rather a formless and
exquisitely refined concentration, in which consciousness
comes to rest in complete, contentless stillness.*

¹⁷⁸ 'Naivasaññānāsaññāyatana' (P.); 'naivasamjñānāsaññāyatana' (Skt.). Naivasamjñānāsaññāyatana → na + eva + samjñā + na + asaññā + āyatana: na = not; eva = exactly, truly (often an intensifier); naiva = not exactly, not truly; samjñā (P.: saññā) = perception, recognition, conceptual awareness; na + asaññā = not without perception; āyatana = sphere, domain of experience.

This formless jhāna carries in its very name the mystery of its nature: perception is not entirely absent, yet not truly present. The yogi abides in an exquisitely refined state of awareness where perception hovers at the threshold of disappearance. The mind functions so minimally that one can no longer speak of ordinary perception (saññā), yet not of its complete cessation either.

This makes the term 'naivasamjñānāsaññāyatana' a pointer to an experience of near-cessation of cognitive activity—a meditative sphere between formless absorption and full cessation (nirodha).

It is a domain that escapes clarity, duality, and conceptual grasp. For this reason, it serves as a threshold of letting go, but not yet of liberating insight: the yogi dwells in silence, but does not yet 'see'. That seeing begins only when the mind turns toward the direct discernment of the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena.

¹⁷⁹ 'Saññā-vedayita-nirodha' (P.); 'saññā-vedanā-nirodha' (Skt.). Saññā-vedayita-nirodha → saññā = perception; vedayita = feeling, sensation; nirodha = cessation, extinction.

'Saññā-vedayita-nirodha' refers to the complete, temporary cessation of all conscious experience. There is no perception (saññā), no feeling (vedanā), no mental activity that experiences or labels anything. Yet this is not death, nor a biological loss of consciousness.

It is a temporary suspension of saṃsāra—not liberation in itself, but a foretaste of it. It silences suffering for a time, but only insight can bring about the lasting end of dukkha.

¹⁸⁰ 'Vikkhambhana' (P); 'vikṣepaṇa' (Skt.) literally means 'suppression.' It refers to the temporary inactivation of unwholesome mental factors—such as the Five Hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇa)—through the power of concentration (samādhi).

In the context of the jhānas, this suppression allows the mind to rest undisturbed and steadily upon its meditation object.

When the mind comes to rest through concentration, the Five Hindrances do not disappear for good; they fall silent for a time. They are not uprooted (samuccheda), but calmed—soothed by the light of steady attention.

One might compare this to mud settling in a bowl of water. The mud—symbolizing desire, aversion, restlessness, dullness, and doubt—initially floats through the water, clouding its clarity. But when the water becomes still, the mud sinks to the bottom. The water is not suddenly pure by nature, but the eye can now see clearly through it.

In the same way, the mind in jhāna is not permanently purified, but is temporarily free from turbidity—making insight possible.

'Vikkhambhana' thus stands for stilling, not eradication; for temporary clearing, not final liberation.

¹⁸¹ 'Tathāgatagarbha' (Skt.) → tathāgata + garbha: tathāgata means 'thus gone' or 'thus come,' referring to a Buddha—someone who has come to or gone into reality as it truly is, without illusion or distortion. It is a classical epithet for the Buddha, carrying the suggestion of a transcendent realization: someone who 'is as it is.' Garbha means 'core,' 'embryo,' or 'womb.' It serves as a metaphor pointing to the inner potential of every human being—the essential nature or svabhāva that has not yet fully matured.

In Mahāyāna texts, tathāgatagarbha refers to the presence of an original, pure awareness or Buddha-nature within all beings. The concept is understood metaphysically by some traditions, while others interpret it as a pedagogical tool—to inspire confidence and deepen commitment to practice.

In Buddhist psychology, it is sometimes equated with the emptiness (śūnyatā) of the mind that recognizes its own true nature.

¹⁸² ‘Intention’: *cetanā* (P. & Skt.). It does not merely refer to a conscious aim, but to the inner drive or volitional impulse that precedes all thought, speech, and action. In Buddhism, *cetanā* is regarded as the core of karma: “*Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi*” — “It is intention that I call karma.” With this, the Buddha makes it clear that liberation does not depend on outward actions, but on the purity and clarity of the inner impulse that gives rise to them.

¹⁸³ *Kasiṇas* are colored discs that are placed in view to be visually observed. After a period of observation, these discs can also be perceived with the eyes closed. They can be especially helpful for practitioners who naturally resonate with a particular color. Concentration arises when the color disc is perceived continuously, without interruption.

In the Pāli Canon, the *kasiṇas* are only mentioned in passing, without detailed explanation or methodological elaboration. It is only with the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa (5th century CE) that they are presented as a systematic set of ten concentration objects: the earth *kasiṇa*, water *kasiṇa*, fire *kasiṇa*, wind *kasiṇa*, blue *kasiṇa*, yellow *kasiṇa*, red *kasiṇa*, white *kasiṇa*, space *kasiṇa*, and consciousness *kasiṇa*.

It is important to understand that what Buddhaghosa systematized in the *Visuddhimagga* is not a direct transmission of the original sutta instructions, but rather a later scholastic interpretation of meditative practices, structured according to the doctrinal logic of his time. After all, nearly ten centuries separate the Buddha’s *parinibbāna* from the composition of the *Visuddhimagga*.

¹⁸⁴ ‘*Mettā*’ (P); ‘*maitrī*’ (Skt.) means loving-kindness or unconditional goodwill. It is one of the four *brahmavihāras*—the sublime abodes—and serves as a powerful meditation object that opens the heart and softens the mind. In meditation, *mettā* is typically developed by systematically cultivating kind intentions toward oneself, others, and ultimately all living beings.

¹⁸⁵ In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 118), a progressive path is outlined in which mindfulness of breathing gradually refines itself—from simply noticing the breath to the calming of both body and mind.

Richard Shankman (2012), *The Experience of Samādhi—An In-Depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation*, discusses this process in four distinct phases, each involving a deepening release of both bodily and mental activity. His interpretation parallels the preparatory stages leading toward *jhāna*, though it does not necessarily imply the actual attainment of *jhāna*.

The four tetrads of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* present a step-by-step refinement of attention and experience, progressing from the observation of the breath to the stilling of mental formations.

These sequential steps reflect how a yogi may gradually move into deeper meditative absorption. However, the *sutta* itself does not explicitly state that the practitioner enters *jhāna*. In other words, breath meditation as described in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* can lead to *jhāna*, but this is not presented as its sole or final aim. Rather, the emphasis lies on the calming and purification of the mind—a process that, in itself, carries a liberating potential.

¹⁸⁶ In the Buddhist tradition, there is no single fixed concept that exactly corresponds to what is referred to here. However, several terms come close to describing this phenomenon. In Pāli, the term *amanasikāra* is sometimes used—referring to the non-direction of the mind, the absence of deliberate attention or mental engagement. When this pertains to the subject itself, it points to the cessation of inner self-commentary or the cognitive positioning of a 'self.'

¹⁸⁷ 'Saddhā' (P.) and 'śraddhā' (Skt.) are often translated as 'faith' or 'trust,' but in a meditative context, they point more precisely to an inner confidence grounded in direct experience. It is not belief in a doctrine, but a trusting knowing that arises when the mind learns to rest in and rely on its own stillness. 'Saddhā/śraddhā' is the open, receptive trust that the path reveals itself through the practice itself.

¹⁸⁸ The Pāli term 'ariya tuṇḥibhāva' and its Sanskrit equivalent 'ārya tūṣṇibhāva' literally mean 'noble silence.' In the suttas, this refers to a profound inner stillness in which even subtle inner speech has come to rest—a state typically associated with the second jhāna. It is a silence not merely external, but the quieting of inner naming, verbalization, and self-commentary.

¹⁸⁹ 'Possibility of liberation' means that the jhānas are not liberation in themselves. They serve to calm, purify, and refine the mind, preparing it for deeper seeing.

But true liberation requires vipassanā (vipaśyanā): the penetrative insight into the three characteristics of existence. The jhānas offer the fertile ground in which this insight may arise with clarity.

¹⁹⁰ Note: this formulation does not refer to an ultimate metaphysical insight or the complete dissolution of duality, as in the realization of nibbāna, but rather to the experiential quality of the second jhāna. In this state, the subtle sense of an inner subject falls away. The mind no longer functions as commentator or observer, but merges with the immediate field of awareness (gocara), free from self-reflection or discursive thought.

¹⁹¹ 'Gocara' (P. & Skt.) literally means 'grazing ground' and is used in the Buddhist meditation tradition to refer to the field of attention: the open domain in which experience unfolds. In this context, it points to the pure sphere of perception that remains when the mind no longer relates to itself.

¹⁹² The Buddha consistently rejected metaphysical speculation whenever it did not serve the direct liberation from dukkha. In early discourses—such as the Cūḷamālukya Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 63), the Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 72), and the Brahmajāla Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya 1)—he emphasized that the path does not unfold through abstract reflections on existence, selfhood, or ultimate reality, but through direct knowledge of impermanence (anicca; anitya), suffering (dukkha; duḥkha), and not-self (anattā; anātman). What arises in meditative silence becomes liberating only when it leads to clear insight into the transient and selfless nature of all phenomena. Once it is grasped as a metaphysical truth or taken to be something absolute, it loses its liberating power and becomes a subtle form of clinging to a sense of 'I'.

¹⁹³ 'Yathābhūta-ñānadassana' (P.); 'yathābhūta-jñānadarśana' (Skt.) literally means 'knowledge and vision of things as they truly are.' It refers to a direct, non-conceptual recognition of reality in its impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*; *anātman*). This insight does not arise through analysis or reasoning, but through a mind that is quiet and clear enough to add nothing, to take nothing away. It is a key element on the path to liberation, as taught in the early Buddhist texts.

¹⁹⁴ The purity of this insight lies in the absence of appropriation. The mind sees impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*) without pausing to identify as observer or owner. There is no longer an 'I' that understands, possesses, or reacts. What arises is no longer interpreted or held onto, but simply seen in its impermanence. Precisely through the falling away of projection, craving, resistance, and self-reference, this insight is not conceived or constructed — it is effortlessly recognized: clear, pure, unfiltered.

In this way, it becomes a 'liberating knowing'—not as concept, but as direct evidence (*yathābhūta-ñānadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñāna-darśana*): the insight into phenomena as they truly are.

¹⁹⁵ This formulation refers to the Buddha's first discourse in Sarnath (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56.11), in which the insight 'whatever is subject to arising is also subject to cessation' opened the Dhamma eye in Koṇḍañña, the first listener. It marks the beginning of the path as taught by the Buddha: liberation not through belief, but through the direct seeing of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*).

¹⁹⁶ 'Dhammo sanantano' means 'the timeless Dhamma' or 'the eternal lawfulness of existence.' This expression, which recurs frequently in the Pāli Canon, underscores that the Dhamma is not a personal discovery of the Buddha, but a universal truth—one that remains eternally valid and is merely rediscovered when the mind becomes clear enough to see it directly.

¹⁹⁷ 'Dukkha' is not experienced here as tragedy, but as a liberating insight: the recognition that the search for lasting happiness in impermanent phenomena naturally falls away.

¹⁹⁸ *What I mean is that the true aim of practice is not to 'understand,' but to 'see'.*

¹⁹⁹ *This form of detachment falls entirely under nekkhamma (naiṣkramya), but in its purest and most deeply embodied expression.*

In early Buddhist texts, nekkhamma is often associated with the renunciation of sense pleasures (kāma) and the household life, but in meditative terms it is much broader: it is the letting go of craving (taṇhā; tṣṇā), of grasping, of the illusion that anything truly belongs to 'me'.

In the Nekkhamma Saṃyutta (Saṃyutta Nikāya 45.4 and following), which explores the theme of renunciation (nekkhamma; naiṣkramya) within the wider framework of the Noble Eightfold Path, renunciation is not portrayed as an ascetic act or external restraint, but as a natural expression of deep insight.

Insight into impermanence (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha; duḥkha), and non-self (anattā; anātman) gradually loosens the grip of attachment to sensory experiences. From this arises, spontaneously, a mental attitude of release—a quieting of desire and a settling of the mind in what the suttas describe as the 'bliss of renunciation' (nekkhammapīti).

Such renunciation is not a struggle or suppression, but a silent joy born of liberating clarity.

²⁰⁰ *This is the essence of what the Buddha means by nibbāna (nirvāṇa): the extinguishing of the thirst for becoming (bhava-taṇhā/bhava-tṣṇā). Specifically, bhava-taṇhā (bhava-tṣṇā) is the craving for becoming—the deep, often unconscious drive to exist, to continue, to be someone or something.*

In this context, 'thirst' is a powerful metaphor for this insatiable drive—it suggests an inner dryness or lack, a restlessness that constantly seeks satisfaction but never truly finds it. So the sentence 'the extinguishing of the thirst for becoming (bhava-taṇhā)', points to the cessation of this deep existential craving, which is at the heart of the Buddha's definition of nibbāna (nirvāṇa): not a nihilistic end, but a release from the burning drive to grasp at identity, continuity, and experience.

²⁰¹ This resonates with the 'sabba-saṅkhāresu aniccānupassī'-approach in vipassanā: the clear seeing that nothing is lasting — not even striving. (*) In the silence that flows from this, there is no longer any longing, not even for silence or insight. What remains is the absence of 'anything at all to be missing'—and in this absence, 'peace' appears.

(*) The insight that even the longing for liberation, silence, or insight is eventually relinquished, corresponds to what is referred to in the suttas as 'nippapañca' (Skt. nirprapañca)—the freeing from conceptual proliferation; the release from mental elaboration. It is the experience in which things are seen just as they are—simple, direct, and unprojected.

'Nippapañca/nirprapañca' does not merely refer to the absence of discursive thought, but more deeply to the absence of the egoic tendency to impose meaning, identity, or ownership onto experience. It is a state of inner stillness in which the 'self' is no longer the measure of what appears.

In early Buddhist literature, 'nippapañca/nirprapañca' is closely linked to liberation (*vimutti*; *vimukti*) and to the seeing of things as they truly are (*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*/*yathābhūta-jñāna-darśana*).

In the Mahāyāna tradition, the term 'nirprapañca' is often used to describe the nature of emptiness (*śūnyatā*): that reality in which all constructions and appropriations naturally dissolve.

²⁰² The term *ālambana* literally means 'support' or 'foundation,' and in Buddhist psychology it refers to the object upon which the mind rests or toward which it is directed.

²⁰³ 'Paṭigha' (P); 'pratigha' (Skt.) literally means 'collision' or 'friction'. In Buddhist psychology it refers to aversion, resistance, or hostility that arises in response to unpleasant impressions or experiences.

It is one of the roots of mental defilement (*kilesā*; *kleśa*) and stands in contrast to desire, attachment (*rāga*; *id.*). In the deep stillness of the fourth *jhāna*, 'paṭigha/pratigha' has entirely subsided—there is no longer any inner movement toward rejection or repulsion. Whatever appears is 'seen' without reaction.

²⁰⁴ With this statement, Nietzsche points to the distinction between the original spirit of Christ and the later institution that came to call itself 'Christian.' What was once pure, simple, and alive became veiled in dogma, rules, and power. In a similar movement, the yogi in the fourth jhāna releases even the most refined forms of happiness and spiritual fulfillment. What remains is not emptiness in a negative sense—but a quiet space of equanimity and clarity, in which wisdom (*paññā/prajñā*) can ripen naturally.

Nietzsche's remark can be read as a reminder that true spirituality cannot be confined to forms—it lives in simplicity and directness.

²⁰⁵ What I describe here is the transition from *rūpa* to *arūpa*—not as a goal to be pursued, but as the result of natural ripening.

²⁰⁶ '*Rūpa-loka*' literally means 'the realm of form.' In Buddhist cosmology and meditative psychology, it refers to the domain of existence in which material form (*rūpa*; *id.*) is still present, but the coarse sensory experiences of the realm of desire (*kāma-loka*) have been transcended.

The four *rūpa-jhānas* belong to this domain, which is characterized by subtle embodiment, refined perception, and inner stillness.

²⁰⁷ *Tatiyanibbāna Sutta*, *Udāna* 8.3

²⁰⁸ '*Acalaṃ sukhaṃ*' literally means 'unshakeable happiness' or 'stable peace'. In the Pāli Canon, it refers to the liberated state of *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*—free from change, disturbance, and attachment.

Although the term does not literally mean 'space', in this context it conveys an inner openness and imperturbable stillness in which phenomena arise and pass away without clinging. This metaphor points to the unconditioned freedom in which nothing needs to be held onto anymore.

²⁰⁹ 'Saṅkhata' means 'conditioned' or 'compounded': it refers to all things that arise through causes (*hetū; hetavaḥ*) and conditions (*paccayā; pratyayāḥ*)—all physical and mental phenomena that arise and cease. Whatever depends on causes and conditions bears the marks of impermanence (*anicca; anitya*), suffering (*dukkha; duḥkha*), and lack of control (*anattā; anātman*). 'Asaṅkhata', the unconditioned, by contrast, is unborn, uncreated, and free from decay. It refers to *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*: not a state or entity, but the cessation of attachment, craving, and becoming. Because it is not dependent on causes and conditions, it is free from impermanence and suffering. It is the only true liberation from the cycle of arising and passing away (*saṃsāra; id.*).

²¹⁰ 'Manasikāra' (P.); 'manaskāra' (Skt.): literally 'mental orientation.' This mental factor directs attention toward an object and connects the mind to it. In meditative development, 'manasikāra' plays a crucial role in initiating mindful awareness and sustaining contact with the object. Though subtle, it is the seed of both concentration (*samādhi; id.*) and insight (*vipassanā; vipaśyanā*).

²¹¹ *Dhammapada*, Verse 160

²¹² *Dhammapada*, Verse 12

²¹³ *Metaphysical speculations*—about the soul, the world, before or after death, or the eternity of consciousness—correspond to the *avyākata* questions the Buddha refused to answer, precisely because they do not lead to *nibbāna*, but to wrong views (*diṭṭhi; drṣṭi*) and doubt (*vicikicchā; vicikitsā*).

Avyākata-questions (*avyākata* = 'unanswered' in P. & Skt.) are metaphysical or speculative questions that the Buddha deliberately refused to answer. He considered them irrelevant to the goal of liberation (*nibbāna*) because they do not lead to insight into suffering and its cessation, but instead foster confusion, attachment to views and endless conceptual elaboration.

²¹⁴ 'Eclecticism' is an approach or style in which elements from different systems, traditions, or schools of thought are selectively combined into a new, coherent whole. Rather than adhering strictly to a single philosophy, religion, art form, or method, an eclectic thinker or practitioner chooses what seems useful, meaningful, or appropriate from diverse sources.

²¹⁵ 'Bodhicitta' literally means 'awakening mind' or 'the mind that aspires to awakening.' It refers to the deeply felt resolve to realize full enlightenment (bodhi), not merely for oneself, but in order to lead all sentient beings to liberation. Within the Mahāyāna tradition, 'bodhicitta' forms the very heart of the bodhisattva path: it is both a powerful intention and an inner attitude of boundless compassion, sustained by wise insight.

A distinction is traditionally made between relative bodhicitta—focused on the compassionate support of beings within dualistic existence—and ultimate bodhicitta, which is rooted in the direct realization of emptiness (śūnyatā).

²¹⁶ 'Mahāmudrā'—the 'Great Seal'—is especially known within the Kagyu tradition. It combines calming the mind (śamatha) with insight (vipaśyanā) in order to realize the profound nature of mind itself.

²¹⁷ 'Dzogchen'—the 'Great Perfection'—is primarily practiced within the Nyingma tradition. It points to the direct recognition of the mind's inherent nature, often referred to as rigpa.

This path transcends gradual methods and invites the practitioner to directly experience the non-dual nature of reality.

²¹⁸ The Dhamma is described in the early Buddhist texts as something to be 'seen for oneself' (ehipassiko; ehipaśyika) and 'to be directly realized by the wise' (paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī; pratyātman vedanīyaḥ vijñānibhiḥ).

This points to the fact that liberating insight does not arise through belief, tradition, or reasoning, but through direct, lived experience.

The expression 'the fire of direct experience' refers to this inner touchstone: whatever does not hold up in the immediate clarity of awareness naturally falls away; what is true and pure remains standing on its own.

²¹⁹ 'Cetovimutti' (P); 'cittavimukti' (Skt.): literally 'liberation of the mind' or 'liberation of the heart.' This term refers to the inner freedom that arises when the mind is freed from defilements (*kilesā*; *kleśā*) such as craving, aversion, and ignorance. In the Pāli canon, 'cetovimutti' is often mentioned alongside 'paññāvimutti' (liberation through wisdom), with 'cetovimutti' emphasizing liberation through meditative purification and calm, and 'paññāvimutti' referring to liberation through insight. On the deepest level, both coincide in the realization of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*).

²²⁰ *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 22

²²¹ 'Vipallāsa' (P); 'viparyāsa' (Skt.): mental distortions or delusions in perception, thought, and understanding. In the teachings, this refers to four fundamental misperceptions that distort reality: seeing the impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*) as permanent, the unsatisfactory (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*) as pleasurable, the selfless (*anattā*; *anātman*) as a self, and the impure (*asubha*; *aśubha*) as attractive. These distortions undermine clear insight and perpetuate ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

²²² *Atta-saññā* (P); 'ātma-saṃjñā' (Skt.): → 'the perception of a self' or 'the belief in a permanent, independent 'I''. Within the Theravāda tradition, this perception is regarded as a deeply rooted illusion—one that underlies attachment (*upādāna*; *id.*), suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*). Letting go of *atta-saññā* does not mean that the functional sense of personhood disappears, but that the deep identification with body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness (the five *khandhas*) as a truly existing 'self' is seen through as empty and impermanent. Insight into *anattā*—the selfless nature of all phenomena—breaks open this illusion and is the key to liberation.

²²³ 'Micchā-diṭṭhi' (P); 'mithyā drṣṭi' (Skt.): wrong view or deluded perception. In the Buddhist teachings, this refers to holding views that are not in accordance with reality—such as belief in a permanent self, denial of karma and rebirth, or rejection of moral causality. 'Micchā-diṭṭhi' is a major obstacle to insight and stands in contrast to 'sammā-diṭṭhi' (right view), the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

²²⁴ Within the Theravāda tradition, personal gods (*issara*; *īśvara*) or creator beings are not regarded as a fundamental part of the teaching. However, belief in such entities is recognized as a form of wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*; *mithyā drṣṭi*) when it is tied to notions of eternalism or divine creation. The Buddha rejected the idea of '*issara/īśvara*' in the context of an almighty or creator deity, and instead taught the principle of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītyasamutpāda*) as the explanation for the arising of phenomena.

²²⁵ This is clearly expressed in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya* 1, where the Buddha outlines and refutes various speculative views, including those involving a supreme creator god.

²²⁶ *Udayabbaya-ñāṇa* (P); '*udayavyaya-jñāna*' (Skt.) → 'the knowledge of arising and passing away.' This is an early, yet essential stage in the unfolding of *vipassanā*, in which the yogi begins to see clearly how all phenomena—physical, emotional, and mental—are continuously arising and ceasing. This insight arises spontaneously (not intellectually) when the mind has settled and remains quietly attentive to whatever appears.

'*Udayabbaya-ñāṇa*/'*udayavyaya-jñāna*' marks the beginning of true letting go, for it reveals that nothing is lasting, and that attachment offers no ground to stand on.

²²⁷ 'But still movement' refers to the ongoing process of arising and passing away (*udaya-vaya*) of phenomena. It points to an insight into impermanence that is indeed clear, yet still situated within the dynamics of *saṃsāra*—a recognition within the stream, but not yet the stilling of the stream itself, which only occurs with the realization of *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*.

²²⁸ *Anattālakkaṇa Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22.59

²²⁹ In *vipassanā*, the sense of identity (*atta-saññā*) is not conceptually rejected, but rendered transparent—as if translucent. The yogi begins to see how the sense of self arises from impermanent, conditioned processes—physical, emotional, and mental—without any enduring essence. Thus, the 'I' is not destroyed, but seen through as illusion: not as something that objectively exists, but as a habitual pattern of identification.

²³⁰ *Paṭivedha-nāṇa* (P.); 'prativedha-jñāna' (Skt.): within the Theravāda tradition, three levels of insight are distinguished: *pariyatti* (theoretical understanding), *paṭipatti* (applied practice), and *paṭivedha* (direct realization).

Paṭivedha-nāṇa refers to this final level: a direct and liberating insight into the true nature of phenomena—such as impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), suffering (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*; *anātman*). It is not knowledge about something, but an immediate and transformative recognition—an insight that frees.

²³¹ *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 10

²³² 'Seeing' is the doorway; 'knowing' is the space that opens.

- Seeing refers to the intuitive, direct, and immediate noticing of what arises and passes away—it is attention without interference.
- Knowing refers to the discernment that comes with insight—not intellectual, but existential: 'this is impermanent, unsatisfactory, without a core.'

²³³ *Intention* (*cetana*; *cetanā*) is a central mental factor in Buddhist psychology. It is described as the driving force behind action, speech, and thought—the inner orientation through which the mind turns toward an object.

In the *Abhidhamma*, *cetana* is a universal mental factor present in every moment of consciousness. However, in the context of deep meditation and liberating insight, one begins to see how the current of intention gradually comes to rest.

What remains is a clear knowing that does not arise from will or effort, but from a direct seeing of what is.

²³⁴ 'Sampajañña' (P.); 'sāmpajāñña' (Skt.): → sam + pajañña: sam = fully, thoroughly; pajañña, derived from pañña (Skt.: prajñā) = wisdom, insight. The term 'sāmpajāñña' carries a specific significance that goes beyond mere intellectual understanding. It refers to a deeper form of knowing that penetrates the present moment fully and directly. It is a state of clear, alert awareness that enables the practitioner not only to comprehend objects or events, but to see through them as they truly are—free from distortions of personal preference or unconscious reaction. In 'sāmpajāñña,' the emphasis lies on the process of 'seeing'—not as abstract observation, but as something lived: direct, immediate, and consciously present, imbued with deep insight.

²³⁵ 'Udayabbaya-ñāṇa' (P.); 'udayavyaya-jñāna' (Skt.): literally 'insight into arising and passing away.' This is one of the classical insight knowledges (vipassanā-ñāṇa) described in the meditative development of the Theravāda tradition.

When the mind has become still and clear, the yogi begins to directly experience the impermanence of all phenomena: how they arise, briefly persist, and then pass away.

This intuitive penetration of conditioned existence marks a fundamental turning point on the path to liberation.

²³⁶ The sixteen stages of insight (vipassanā-ñāṇa, vipaśyanā-jñāna) form a progressive path of direct experience, as transmitted in the Theravāda tradition. They include: (1) insight into the distinction between body and mind; (2) insight into the arising of conditions; (3) insight into causality; (4) insight into arising and passing away (udayabbaya); (5) insight into dissolution (bhaṅga); (6) insight into the frightening nature (bhaya); (7) insight into danger (ādīnava); (8) insight into dissatisfaction (nibbidā); (9) desire for liberation (muñcitukamyatā); (10) reconsideration (paṭi-saṅkhā); (11) equanimity toward all conditioned processes (saṅkhārupekkhā); (12) adaptation (anuloma); (13) knowledge of the path (maggā); (14) knowledge of the fruit (phala); (15) review (paccavekkhaṇa); and (16) the determination of completeness. The insights described in this chapter correspond to stages four through eleven.

See my book: Dubois, Guy, Eugène, (2019), *Satta-Visuddhi - The Seven Purifications*, p. 217 and following.

²³⁷ *'Bhanga-ñāṇa': mental movements cease or reduce in intensity.*

²³⁸ *The terms used here for nibbāna refer to aspects of the ultimate insight of liberation:*

- *'ajāta' means 'unborn,' referring to the absence of birth or arising.*
- *'abhūta' means 'uncreated,' referring to the 'non-becoming' aspect of the ultimate.*
- *'asaṅkhata' means 'unconditioned,' indicating that nibbāna has no cause or conditions that bring it about.*
- *'anidassana' means 'invisible,' referring to the unknowable—that which cannot be perceived by the senses.*

²³⁹ *'Nothing' means the absence of attachment and the letting go of all conditioning. 'Nothing' captures the receptive and unattached nature of liberation.*

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This book arose from meditation. From direct experience. Every chapter breathes contemplation, presence, sensitivity, and freedom.

The *jhānas* are not approached here as a goal in themselves, but as a quiet ground in which all things come to rest and gently open in clarity.

In this receptive meditative space, the mind becomes still, and a field of cultivation (*gocara*) unfolds—a fertile ground where wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) can ripen. It becomes the soil for the direct seeing (*vipassanā*; *vipāśyanā*) of the impermanence of all phenomena (*anicca*; *anitya*); for the deep understanding that nothing brings lasting fulfillment (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*); and for the insight into the absence of a permanent self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Whoever enters this field of cultivation need not attain anything—only dwell in what presents itself. Acting through non-doing.

In this awareness, seeing begins. What once seemed closed may unfold. What was silently present is now recognized.

This book is an invitation to use the *jhānas* as a compass of recognition—for those who do not fear silence, but trust it; for those who are willing to rest in what opens inwardly through meditation.