

Early Buddhist Meditation

A Philosophical Investigation

Lecture 4

Jhāna

Oriental Institute, Oxford, 19.02.18

Piṅgiya's testament

Sn 1137

I will recite the Pārāyana, (so said venerable Piṅgiya):

As he saw it, so he explained it,
the spotless one who abounds in wisdom.

Without sensual pleasure, free from thirst,
why would the Nāga speak falsely?

Sn 1148

I see him in my mind, as if with my eyes,
day and night, Brāhmaṇa, being diligent,
I spend the night honouring him,
therefore I think there is no separation from him.

My faith, joy, mind and mindfulness
do not deviate from Gotama's dispensation,

Wherever the one abounding in wisdom goes, I bow down in that direction.

The Buddha and Ajita

Ajita, Sn 1040

Streams flow everywhere, (so said venerable Ajita),
what holds them back?

Proclaim the restraint of streams:
by what might streams be blocked?

The Buddha, Sn 1042

The streams which (are found) in the world, (O Ajita, said the Blessed One),
mindfulness holds them back;

I will proclaim the restrain of streams:
by understanding they might be blocked.

The Buddha and Mettagu

Mettagu, Sn 1058: ‘How do the wise cross over the flood?’

The Buddha, Sn 1061-62

Whatever you discern, (O Mettagu, said the Blessed One),

above, below, or all around in the middle,

Warding off delight and attachment to these,

let not your consciousness linger in being.

Living thus, mindful and diligent,

the wandering *bhikkhu*, abandoning things ‘made mine’,

Birth, decrepitude, sorrow and lamentation,

the wise one, right here, might abandon suffering.

The Buddha and Dhotaka

Sn 1072,

I will proclaim that peace to you (O Dhotaka, said the Blessed One),
which is without hearsay in witnessed phenomena;
Knowing which, the one who practices mindfully
might cross over 'attachment' to the world.

Sn 1074

Whatever you discern,
above, below, or all around in the middle,
Understanding this as attachment to the world,
do not form desire for being or non-being.

The Buddha and Todeyya

Sn 1094, Todeyya

In whom sensual pleasures do not abide, (thus said venerable Todeyya),
for whom thirst is not found,
The one who has crossed over doubt,
what is his liberation like?

Sn 1095, the Buddha

In whom sensual pleasures do not abide, (O Todeyya, said the Blessed One),
for whom thirst is not found,
The one who has crossed over doubt,
his liberation is not otherwise.

A meditator without a teaching on meditation?

Tuvaṭṭaka Sutta, Sn 927

The one with open vision, an eyewitness, explained the Dhamma which wards off danger; proclaim the conduct, good sir, the precepts and **absorption** (*samādhim*)

Pārāyana, Vatthugāthā, Sn 1015

All (of the Brāhmaṇas) had their own following, famed throughout the whole world, **meditators** who delight in **meditation**, and wise, perfumed by their past impressions.

Sn 1111

To the **meditator** seated, free from defilement, (so said ven. Udaya), who has done what had to be done, and is without defilement, who has gone to the far shore of all phenomena, seeking, I have come with a question.

The Buddha and Upasīva I

Sn 1075, Upasīva

Alone, Sakka, and without support, (so said ven. Upasīva)

I am unable to cross over the great flood;

Tell me the support, all-seeing one,

dependent on which might I cross this flood.

Sn 1076, the Buddha

Observing nothingness, mindful, (O Upasīva, said the Blessed One)

dependent (on the idea) '(it) is not', you might cross over the flood.

Abandoning sensual pleasures, abstaining from conversation,

observe the destruction of thirst night and day.

The Buddha and Upasīva II

Sn 1077, Upasīva

Without passion for all sensual pleasures, (so said ven. Upasīva)
dependent on nothingness, having abandoned (other objects),
Released in the highest release of perception,
would he remain there, without following (other states)?

Sn 1078, the Buddha

Without passion for all sensual pleasures, (O Upasīva, said the Blessed One),
dependent on nothingness, having abandoned (other objects),
Released in the highest release of perception,
he would remain there, without following (other states)

Absorption in the Aṭṭhaka- and Pārāyana-vaggas

The Buddha to Udaya, Sn 1113

Purified by equanimity and mindfulness,
preceded by reflecting on the Dhamma,
I declare the release through understanding,
the destruction of ignorance.

The Buddha to Sāriputta, Sn 978

With eyes downcast, and not footloose,
committed to *jhāna*, he should be ever wakeful.
Absorbed within, supported by equanimity,
he should eradicate worry, which depends on thought.

The path in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*

Virtue - **sense-restraint** - **mindfulness/wakefulness** - withdrawal - sitting cross-legged - abandoning the 5 hindrances - the 4 jhānas - liberating insight

Sense-restraint

The *bhikkhu*, seeing a form with eye, does not grasp at its general appearance or features. He conducts himself for the restraint of that from which greed and unhappiness - bad, unskilful, phenomena - would overwhelm him, were he to live without restraining the faculty of vision ... endowed with this noble restraint of the faculties, he experiences pure happiness within.

Mindfulness/wakefulness

The *bhikkhu* is fully attentive when going forward or back, when looking forward or backwards, when bending or stretching, when holding his outer robe, bowl and robe, when eating, drinking, chewing or tasting, when defecating or urinating, when going, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking or being quiet.

Interpreting the lack of meditative object I

The main difference between the four absorptions and the four immaterial spheres is related to their respective objects. The four absorptions can be cultivated with a variety of objects, hence no specific object is mentioned when these are described. The immaterial spheres involve a transcending of whatever object has been used for attaining the fourth absorption, consequently the descriptions refer to such transcendence.

Anālayo, *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*, pp.151-52.

Just what the would-be meditator has to do to get from sitting down cross-legged to the *jhānas* and beyond is not at all clear. To put it another way, if one set off into the forest with only a copy of the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* as one's guide, it is doubtful that one would make very much progress in one's meditation practice.

Rupert Gethin, 'On the Practice of Buddhist Meditation. According to the Pali Nikāyas and Exegetical Sources'. *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 9 (2004), p.202.

Interpreting the lack of meditative object II

...the relative absence of specific instruction in the earlier texts perhaps should be understood **in the light of something that is clear in the later texts**: namely a view that the effective practice of meditation requires the personal instruction of a teacher. Thus **the reason why the earlier texts fail to reveal very much about just how to practice meditation** is not because they are uninterested in such matters, or think they are unimportant, but rather precisely the opposite: **they are too important to write down, to be imparted in this way, i.e. textually. This is, after all, a typical ancient Indian attitude to learning**: it should be imparted orally, directly from teacher to pupil.

Thus we should understand the earliest texts as indicating the general framework and outlining basic guidelines for the practice of meditation, but **the specific details of technique and the actual procedures are matters for the teacher and his pupils. It is only later that some of these get committed to writing**, and even then, still in somewhat general terms. **So strictly as historians of religion we must conclude that the earliest techniques of Buddhist meditation are lost to us.**

Rupert Gethin, 'On the Practice of Buddhist Meditation. According to the Pali Nikāyas and Exegetical Sources', p.202-03.



Grzegorz Polak,
*Reexamining Jhāna: Towards a Critical
Reconstruction of Early Buddhist
Soteriology.*

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Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-skłodowskiej

Jhāna as a natural attainment I

Bhaya-bharava Sutta (MN 4), Dvedhā-vitakka Sutta (MN 19)

Vigour was aroused within me, Brāhmaṇa, unsluggish; mindfulness was established, unconfused; my body was tranquil and not excited, my mind was absorbed and one-pointed.

Sāmaññaphala Sutta (DN 2)

For that (*bhikkhu*), observing the abandoning of the five hindrances within, gladness arises; being glad, joy arises; joyful in mind, his body becomes tranquil; with his body tranquil, he experiences bliss; experiencing bliss, his mind becomes absorbed.

Jhāna as a natural attainment II

Mahāsaccaka Sutta (MN 36)

This occurred to me, Aggivesana: ‘Whatever ascetics and Brāhmaṇas in the past ... or in the future .. or at present experience racking, painful, sharp, harsh, severe sensations, (it is only) to this limit, not more than this. But through these severe, difficult, practices, I did not attain a distinction in knowing and seeing, suitable for the noble, beyond human phenomena. Perhaps there is another way to awakening?’

This occurred to me, Aggivesana: ‘But I recall, in the cool shade of a Jambu tree, while my father, the Sakka, was working, sitting down separated from sensual pleasures and unskilful states, passing my time have attained the first *jhāna*, (a state of) joy and bliss born from seclusion, endowed with reasoning and reflection; perhaps this is the way to awakening?’

The first *jhāna*

Separated from sensual pleasures and unskilful states, he abides having attained the first *jhāna*, (a state of) joy and bliss born from seclusion, with reasoning and reflection. He floods, inundates, fills and pervades this very body with joy and bliss born from seclusion. There is no (part) of his entire body unpervaded by that joy and bliss born from seclusion.

Just as a skilled bathman or his apprentice would scatter soap powder on a bronze plate, and then knead it as he sprinkles water, so that the ball of soap, unctuous and viscous, is pervaded with moisture within and without, not dripping - thus the *bhikkhu* floods ... this very body with joy and bliss born from seclusion...

The second jhāna

With the calming of reasoning and reflection, the *bhikkhu* abides having attained the second *jhāna*, (a state of) internal tranquillity, oneness of mind, a joy and bliss born from absorption, without reasoning and reflection. He floods, inundates, fills and pervades this very body with the joy and bliss born from absorption. There is no (part) of his entire body unpervaded by that joy and bliss born from absorption.

Just as a deep pool in which water wells up, without an inlet to the East, South, West or North, and without raining pouring down (on it) from time to time, but with cool currents of water rising up from within, which would flood, inundate, fill and pervade it with cool water, so that there would be no (part) of the whole pool unpervaded by cool water - thus the *bhikkhu* floods ... this very body with joy and bliss born from absorption...

The third jhāna

With the fading away of joy, the *bhikkhu* abides equanimously, mindful and fully aware, and experiences bliss with his body; he abides having attained the third *jhāna*, about which the noble ones say 'equanimous, mindful, abiding in bliss'. He floods, inundates, fills and pervades this very body with the bliss devoid of joy. There is (no part) of his entire body unpervaded by that bliss devoid of joy.

Just as, in a pond of blue, red or white lotuses, some lotuses, born in water, grown in water, immersed in water, nourished from being plunged deep within (the water), are flooded, inundated, filled and pervaded by cool water, from root to tip, so that no (part) of those lotuses would not be flooded, inundated, filled and pervaded by cool water - thus the *bhikkhu* floods ... this very body with bliss devoid of joy ...

The fourth jhāna

With the abandoning of bliss and suffering, and the fading away of all past states of happiness and unhappiness, the *bhikkhu* abides having attained the fourth *jhāna*, the complete purification of equanimity and mindfulness, devoid of pleasure and pain. He remains seated, pervading this very body with a purified, cleansed, mind, so that no (part) of his entire body is not pervaded by a purified, cleansed, mind.

Just as a man would be seated, covering (himself) with a white cloth, including his head, so that no (part) of his body would not be touched by the cloth, even so the *bhikkhu* remains seated having pervaded this very body with a purified, cleansed, mind...

The 2nd *satipaṭṭhāna*

II. CONTEMPLATION OF FEELINGS

	Pali	Ch.1	Ch.2
understanding: “I feel a pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling” when feeling a pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling	✓	✓	✓
understanding: “I feel a worldly ¹ pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling” when feeling a worldly pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling	✓	✓	✓
understanding: “I feel an unworldly ² pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling” when feeling an unworldly pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling	✓	✓	✓
understanding: “I feel a pleasant feeling”			
when feeling a pleasant feeling, not feeling a painful feeling			✓
understanding: “I feel a painful feeling” when feeling a painful feeling, not feeling a pleasant feeling			✓
understanding: “I feel a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling” when feeling a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, without pain and happiness			✓
feeling a pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) [feeling of] body		✓	
feeling a pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) [feeling of] mind		✓	
feeling a pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) [feeling with] desire		✓	
feeling a pleasant (painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant) feeling without desire		✓	

The 3rd *satipaṭṭhāna*

III. CONTEMPLATION OF MIND

	Pali	Ch.1	Ch.2
understanding mind with (without) lust as mind with (without) lust	✓	✓	✓
understanding mind with (without) hate as mind with (without) hate	✓	✓	✓
understanding mind with (without) delusion as mind with (without) delusion	✓	✓	✓
understanding contracted (distracted) mind as contracted (distracted) mind	✓	✓	✓
understanding exalted (unexalted) mind as exalted (unexalted) mind	✓	✓	✓
understanding surpassed (unsurpassed) mind as surpassed (unsurpassed) mind	✓	✓	✓
understanding concentrated (unconcentrated) mind as concentrated (unconcentrated) mind	✓	✓	✓
understanding liberated (unliberated) mind as liberated (unliberated) mind	✓	✓	✓
understanding defiled (undefiled) [mind] as defiled (undefiled) [mind]		✓	
understanding cultivated (uncultivated) [mind] as cultivated (uncultivated) [mind]		✓	
understanding having a (having no) passionate mind as having a (having no) passionate mind			✓
understanding having a (having no) disturbed mind as having a (having no) disturbed mind			✓
understanding having a (having no) pervaded mind as having a (having no) pervaded mind			✓
understanding having an (having no) immeasurable mind as having an (having no) immeasurable mind			✓

kāyānupassanā

The *bhikkhu* breathes in and out mindfully: *so sato va assasati, sato va passasati.*

When the in or out-breath is long, the *bhikkhu* knows it is long

dīghaṃ vā assasanto, dīghaṃ assasāmī ti pajānāti, dīghaṃ vā passasanto, dīghaṃ passasāmī ti pajānāti.

When the in or out-breath is short, the *bhikkhu* knows it is short

rassaṃ vā assasanto, rassaṃ assasāmī ti pajānāti, rassaṃ vā passasanto, rassaṃ passasāmī ti pajānāti.

Just as a skilled turner or his apprentice, when he makes a long pull he knows ‘I am making a long pull’, or when he makes a short pull he knows ‘I am making a short pull’, even so, when the *bhikkhu* breathes in long, he knows ‘I breath in long’, or when he breathes in short, he knows ‘I am breathing in short’ ...

Sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī

... (the bhikkhu) trains (thinking) 'I will breath in experiencing the entire body', (or) he trains (thinking) 'I will breath out experiencing the entire body', (or) trains (thinking) 'I will breath in pacifying volition of the body', (or) trains (thinking) 'I will breath out pacifying volition of the body'...

- 'experiencing the entire body': similar to jhānic ideas
- This leads to a state of bodily non-volition
- There is no correspondence with any particular jhāna
- Discipline of breathing is a kind of 'simple cognition' that might enable *jhāna*.

Anālayo's interpretation of the 3rd *jhāna*

... the circumstance that the lotus is fully submerged in water conveys a further progression when compared to the water welling up in a spring or lake and the water used to form a soap ball. Here the image depicts a total immersion in water. This at the same time is then a condition of total immersion in happiness; **the whole mind** is engulfed by the uninterrupted and all-pervading experience of happiness.

Early Buddhist Meditation Studies, p.59.

Discarding joy, they dwell in equipoise and with mindfulness that is not confused. **With their whole being experiencing** acute happiness they enter the third absorption, which is spoken of by noble ones as a [condition of] equipoise, mindfulness, and happiness. Their body is completely pervaded, filled, and drenched by happiness that is without joy, with no [part] that is not permeated.

Early Buddhist Meditation Studies, p.77.

The meaning of enigmatic statements of the Buddha

I declare that the world, its arising, cessation and the way thereto occurs in this very fathom-long ‘cadaver’ (*kaḷevare*), endowed with perception and mind.

SN I.62: *na kho panāhaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. api ca khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmim̐ yeva byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokañ ca paññapemi lokasamudayañ ca lokanirodhañ ca lokanirodhagāminiñ ca paṭipadan ti.*

The body of the Tathāgatha remains, *bhikkhus*, but its connection with ‘being’ (*bhava-*) has been severed. As long as his body remains gods and men see him; when the body breaks up, after life has been exhausted, gods and men do not see him.

D I.46: *ucchinnabhavanettiko, bhikkhave, tathāgatassa kāyo tiṭṭhati. yāv’ assa kāyo ṭhassati, tāva naṃ dakkhanti devamanussā. kāyassa bhedaṃ uddhaṃ jīvitapariyādānā na naṃ dakkhanti devamanussā.*