

中華佛學學報第 13.2 期 (pp.97-155) : (民國 89 年),  
臺北 : 中華佛學研究所, <http://www.chibs.edu.tw>  
Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, No. 13.2, (2000)  
Taipei: Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies  
ISSN: 1017-7132

## On the Earliest Path to the Tathāgatahood: A Study in Nikāya Traditions

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### Summary

The Buddhist traditions assert that Gotama was the first historical person in the world to become the Buddha, the Tathāgata. Non-buddhist traditions confirm this in an indirect way, for in their literature none of the non-buddhist teachers was given the epithet of “Buddha.” Gotama became the Buddha, for he realised the “bodhi,” the truly objective knowledge concerning the destruction of the asravas or dukkha. In a wider sense the bodhi can be interpreted as the objective knowledge of the Conditioned. The realisation of bodhi provided Gotama with the only valid premise for really ascertaining the existence of the Nibbāna, the unconditioned reality. The existence of the Nibbāna was no longer a matter of faith with him.

This achievement of Gotama revolutionised the spiritual world of the Śramaṇas. The pre-Buddhist Śramaṇas had not evinced any real interest for understanding the true nature of the Conditioned; they were all for attaining a mental state which offered the closest approximation to the calmness of the Unconditioned. Their spiritual endeavour was directed towards the suppression of mental agitations caused by unwholesome elements like greed, dukkha etc. but never towards the utter destruction of such evil elements.

The pre-Buddhists Śramaṇas mainly practised either of the following two systems of meditation: one was practised for attaining freedom from the influence of the feelings; the other aimed at the

p. 98 ↴

cessation of perception and feeling through the gradual elimination of the perceptions of form, space etc. The first system was suitable for the realisation of bodhi, for it left the field of perception intact but showed the way to overcome the influence of the perceptibles; the other system was necessary for experiencing the Nibbāna-in-this-world for it gradually obliterates almost all the traces of the Conditioned.

Gotama was the first historical person who practised both the systems, improved upon them, combined them into one system and realised the ultimate spiritual goal. The present article attempts a detailed and critical account of the entire path Gotama traversed to become the Buddha, the Tathāgata.

**Keywords:** 1.Four Jhānas 2.bodhi 3.Nibbāna-in-this-World

p. 99

The available Buddhist traditions suggest that the Śākya Gotama was the first historical person to become the Buddha, the Tathāgata. An account of the spiritual journey of Gotama would thus provide us with the description of the earliest path to the Tathāgatahood.

The entire spiritual path traversed by Gotama can be reconstructed in detail mainly from the following four pieces of traditions:

- i) The account of the Parama-ditṭhadhamma-nibbānavādins in the Brahmajāla-sutta[1] of the Dīgha Nikāya which records the four jhāna formulas as known to the Nibbānavādins with some explanatory notes.
- ii) The first part of the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta[2] which precedes the account of the four jhānas followed by Gotama. This account enunciates the why and how of the Śramaṇa meditation as developed by Gotama.
- iii) A stock piece of narrative found in different Suttas[3] depicting the spiritual life of Gotama from the attainment of the first of the four jhānas to the realisation of the third vijjā, and the bodhi. This tradition also sheds light on the spiritual strivings of Gotama before the attainment of the first jhāna.
- iv) The end part of the Ariyapariyesanā-sutta[4] that records the attainment of the Tathāgatahood by Gotama.

## First Source

We may now briefly discuss the authenticity, antiquity and the importance of these traditions as sources for the reconstruction of the spiritual life of Gotama. On the basis of the Brahmajāla-sutta we may conclude that the pre-Buddhist sect of the Nibbānavādins

p. 100

was well known at the time of the Buddha. They appear to be the earliest of the pre-Buddhist sects to follow the system of the four jhānas or states of meditation.[5] They had their own formulas of these jhānas. In the absence of any tradition to the contrary we may hold that this sect was the originator of the system of the four jhānas.

Why should this account of the Nibbānavādins be accepted as a source of materials relevant for the reconstruction of the spiritual life of Gotama? The unanimous

testimony of the different Suttas suggest that Gotama while wayfaring towards the goal of nibbāna practised the system of four jhānas created by the Nibbānavādins. This tradition can be accepted as authentic due to the following reasons:

i) The Suttas have preserved two versions of the system of the four jhānas, one followed by the Nibbānavādins and the other by Gotama.[6] The Nibbānavādin version identifies each of these four jhānas with the Nibbāna-in-this-world while the version followed by Gotama omits this identification. Otherwise the two versions are identical. The significance of the similarity between these two versions becomes clear when we pay attention to the structure of the jhāna formulas which can be conveniently divided into three parts. The Part 1 informs us about the abandoning of a mental element in consequence of which a particular jhāna is attained. The Part 2 provides us with some important details about the jhāna thus attained while the Part 3 identifies the jhāna with the Nibbāna-in-this-world. Thus it is obvious that an understanding of the Nibbānavādin tradition would go a long way in understanding the meditative

p. 101

techniques practised by Gotama as well as the purpose for which Gotama was following this system of meditation.

ii) All the Suttas dealing with the attainment of enlightenment by Gotama invariably states that Gotama practised the four jhānas and realised bodhi after attaining the fourth jhāna.

iii) The early Buddhists surely knew that the Nibbānavādins were the originators of this system of meditation, and yet they did not hesitate to record that Gotama followed the same system.

iv) The Buddha often spoke of the four jhānas to the monks and the lay disciples. His direct disciples are known to have practised this system of meditation.

v) The Buddha rejected the identification of the four jhānas with the Nibbāna-in-this-world but accepted them as the means to the realisation of Nibbāna.[7]

vi) A study of the four jhāna formulas of the Nibbānavādins makes it clear that those Nibbānavādins who attained the fourth jhāna must have also rejected the identification of the first three jhānas with the Nibbāna-in-this-world.[8] So it appears that Gotama accepted the first, second, and third jhāna formulas of the Nibbānavādins in toto. In case of the fourth jhāna formula he accepted everything except its identification with the Nibbāna.

The Brahmajāla-sutta informs us that the Nibbānavādins wanted to ascend from the mental state of a householder to the calmest mental state of the fourth jhāna. The meditative techniques involved in this process was to give up the gross (olārika) i.e. agitative, mental elements one after another. But the method they

p.102

followed to be free from the agitative elements is not given here. This account also explains the meanings of such technical terms as kāma and akusala-dhamma used in the first jhāna formula.

The importance of the Nibbānavāda tradition as a source for the reconstruction of the spiritual path followed by Gotama lies in the fact that Gotama not only followed their version of the first three jhāna formulas together with the explanatory notes in toto but also accepted the entire fourth jhāna formula except the identification of this mental state with Nibbāna.

## Second Source

The first part of the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta is an autobiographical account in which the Buddha narrates to his disciples how he, as a Bodhisatva, gained the knowledge of dhamma as dhamma. In this part of the Sutta he speaks of the spiritual practices he followed in order to realise enlightenment.

This part of the Sutta which most probably constituted the original Dvedhāvitakka-sutta, confirms, supplements and elucidates the meditative techniques taught in the Brahmajāla-sutta, but never contradicts them. This account also mentions the important technique of being merely mindful of an object. This technique which is indispensable for gaining true knowledge of any object is not mentioned in the Brahmajāla-sutta account of the Nibbānavādins. This shows that the Nibbānavādins did not know of this technique, nor had they any idea of the objective knowledge. As Gotama could acquire the three vijjās or bodhi, the objective knowledge, the tradition that Gotama practised the technique of mere mindfulness is surely authentic. This technique may be considered as Gotama's main contribution to the Śramaṇa meditative practices.

Information on other meditative techniques employed by Gotama and given in the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta can also be regarded as reliable. The same techniques are also mentioned in the

p.103

account of the Brahmajāla-sutta whose antiquity and authenticity cannot be reasonably questioned.

The process of meditation recorded in the first part of the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta may be summarised as follows:

- 1) Gotama noticed that he had two types of thoughts (vitakka): unwholesome thoughts of kāma (desire), byāpāda (malevolence), and vihimśā (violence), and wholesome thoughts of nekkhamma (skt. naiṣkāmya / non-desire or renunciation), abyāpāda (benevolence) and avihimśā (compassion).<sup>[9]</sup>
- 2) Gotama became conscious of each of these unwholesome thoughts separately whenever such a thought had arisen.
- 3) Gotama adversely criticised each of these thoughts separately and thus generated aversion for such thoughts.
- 4) Consequently the unwholesome thoughts did not arise anymore. The adverse criticism naturally came to an end.

5) Gotama also paid attention to each of the wholesome thoughts whenever it arose and cultivated it by continuously appreciating it.

6) Gotama stopped the continuous appreciation of each of the wholesome thoughts as it made him tired and impaired his concentration. This also shows that further cultivation of wholesome thoughts was no longer necessary.

7) It is to be noted that Gotama did not take any step against the spontaneous arising of the wholesome thoughts. The Bāhitika-sutta (M II, p.116) states that the Tathāgata has abandoned all unwholesome states and possesses wholesome states. This explains why Gotama later as the Buddha would preach the dhamma out of compassion for others. No pleading by any god to do so was necessary.

8) Next Gotama became mindful of dhamma as dhamma. He did

p.104

not pay attention to the goodness of the dhamma. Such mindfulness leads to bodhi and nibbāna as it has been stated in the Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta.[\[10\]](#)

## Third Source

The third source deals with the attainment of the four jhānas and the three vijjās by Gotama. We have already discussed why the tradition about the attainment of the jhānas and the vijjās should be regarded as authentic. This conclusion is strengthened when we consider that the mental state which Gotama attained in the Buddhist fourth jhāna is indispensable for realising bodhi or any other objective knowledge.[\[11\]](#)

The importance of this tradition lies in the fact that it gives a connected account of gradually ascending spiritual states culminating in the realisation of bodhi. This appears to be the earliest attempt to present a continuous account of the spiritual life of Gotama beginning with an indirect reference to his renunciation of the household life and ending with the attainment of enlightenment. This account depicts in bare outline only the spiritual achievements of Gotama bereft of all supernatural and other embellishments that burden later accounts. There is no mention of the legend of the four sightings of an old man, a dead man etc., or of the legend of Kaṇṭhaka, or that of Māra attacking Gotama. It is even more remarkable that neither the term bodhi occurs in this tradition nor has the attainment of enlightenment been brought into association with any tree that came to be known as the Bodhi tree or a river or a full-moon night.

## Fourth Source

The Ariyapariyesanā-sutta tells us about the last part of the

p.105

spiritual journey of Gotama. Gotama practised different Ārūpya-samāpattis under different teachers, and gradually attained the neva-saññā-nāsaññāyatana (the sphere of neither-perception-nor-not-perception). Gotama went beyond this state and realised the saññā-vedayita-nirodha, i.e the nibbāna-in-this-world. He became the Tathāgata.

This account is realistic and free from all legendary elements. The authenticity of this account is beyond any reasonable doubt.

The name of the other suttas which have helped us to elucidate and supplement the informations given in the above mentioned sources will be mentioned in course of our discussion.

## **Spiritual Activities of Gotama Before Attaining the First Jhāna**

The main aim of the Nibbānavādins as well as of Gotama the Bodhisatva was to experience Nibbāna-in-this-world. The meaning of Nibbāna as understood in the pre-Buddhist age has not been expressly stated in the account of the Nibbānavāda as given in the Brahmajāla-sutta. An analysis of this account will, however, show that Nibbāna in this world stood for the experience of utter mental calmness.<sup>[12]</sup> Negatively speaking Nibbāna would, therefore, signify freedom all agitative mental elements. Which are called gross (olārika). All spiritual activities undertaken by Gotama were attuned to this goal. It is necessary to constantly bear this fact in mind in order to reconstruct and comprehend the entire spiritual path traversed by Gotama.

p. 106

It is certain that Gotama did not practise the four jhānas immediately after becoming a Śramaṇa. The first jhāna formula followed by Gotama tells us about his initial spiritual practices. This formula starts with the phrase ‘kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi vivicca’ (having separated from kāma and unwholesome mental states). It goes on to state that Gotama attained the first jhāna. So the jhāna formula shows that Gotama first had to get separated (vivicca) from kāma and akusaladhamma in order to attain the first jhāna. But this formula does not explicitly state what is exactly meant by kāma and akusaladhamma, nor does it explain how Gotama got separated from kāma and akusaladhamma.

We can throw some light on these problems with the help of the other two sources mentioned above, viz. i) the Brahmajāla-sutta account of the Nibbānavādins that describes the mental state of a person before the attainment of the first jhāna; ii) the first part of the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta which precedes the recording of the first jhāna formula.

According to the Nibbānavāda tradition as recorded in the Brahmajāla-sutta, kāma means five types of desirable sensual objects to which one gets attached, and akusaladhammas indicate the unwholesome mental elements of grief, lamentation, pain, melancholy and despair (soka-parideva-dukkha-domanassa-upāyāsā) which arise due to loss of kāma.<sup>[13]</sup> But interpreted in the light of the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta kāma should mean desire and akusaladhammas should stand for the thoughts of desire (kāma-vitakka), malevolence (byāpāda-vitakka) and violence (vihimsā-vitakka). Which of these two traditions is applicable to the first jhāna formula?

The phrase 'having separated from kāma and having separated from akusaladhammas' shows that kāma and akusaladhammas belong to two different categories. In the Brahmajāla-sutta account

p.107

also kāma and akusaladhammas belong to different categories. But in the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta kāma means desire, and kāma together with byāpāda and vihimsā belong to one category. Moreover it will be shown later that the term kāma in the first jhāna formula as well as in the Brahmajāla-sutta account of the Nibbānavādins has been used in a restrictive sense. The Dvedhāvitakka-sutta, on the other hand, appears to have used the term kāma in a general sense; at least it does not explicitly impose any limitation on it. So the terms kāma and akusaladhamma as used in the first jhāna formula should be interpreted according to the Brahmajāla-sutta tradition.

We can, therefore, conclude that Gotama also accepted the original meanings of these terms namely, kāma means five types of desirable objects and akusaladhammas indicate unwholesome mental elements like soka, parideva etc. which belong to the category of dukkha. This conclusion also supports the idea that Gotama accepted the earlier tradition that the loss of kāma is the cause of the unwholesome mental elements of grief, pain etc. This shows that the terms like kāma, dukkha etc. have been used in the formula in a relative, restrictive sense, and not in a general sense.

He had to give up kāma in order to be free from the feeling of dukkha. The fact that Gotama felt pain at the loss of kāma (desirable object) shows that he was attached to kāma.<sup>[14]</sup> So the giving up of kāma indicates both physical separation and mental detachment from it. With the freedom from the attachment to kāma one also becomes free from the akusaladhammas.

It should be noted that Gotama could not act directly against the arising of the feeling of dukkha. Dukkha is caused by attachment to kāma. He had first to give up the attachment to kāma in order to be free from the feeling of dukkha. It is only in a state of jhāna that one can act directly against an agitative mental element.

p. 108

But how could Gotama give up kāma? The Brahmajāla-sutta only states that the unwholesome mental elements arise due to the loss of kāma, but is silent about criticising kāma on this account. The Dvedhāvitakka-sutta, on the other hand, suggests that Gotama must have exercised some such criticism of kāma in order to get rid of it. In this sutta the Buddha tells that he, as a bodhisatva, stopped the arising of the thoughts of desire for any object by adversely criticising such a thought everytime it arose in mind. Next he cultivated the opposite thought of desirelessness (nekkhamma-vitakka) for such objects by repeatedly thinking of the advantages of being without such desires. This he did to ensure that he always remains free from such desires, and reacts to the desirable objects with thoughts of desirelessness. Gotama must have resorted to such a method to get rid of kāma before attaining the first jhāna. One may object to this opinion by pointing out that kāma in the first jhāna

formula means desirable objects and not desire. So the method taught in this Sutta should not be applied to the first jhāna. But this objection is not tenable, for we have seen, the painful reactions to the loss of desirable objects implies the presence of desire for such objects. The fact is that even after the physical separation from desirable objects desire for such objects may still linger in mind. Real separation from an object, as we have already pointed out, means both physical separation and mental detachment.

We may be, therefore, justified in surmising that Gotama first adversely criticised the possession of and attachment to the five types of desirable objects on the ground that they invariably lead to pain and suffering. Later when the thoughts of desire ceased to arise in mind, he practised appreciative deliberations regarding the advantages of having no desire for such objects. We will see later that this interpretation will help us to understand the presence of vitakka and vicāra in the first jhāna formula.

We have already noted that being separated from kāma, dukkha  
p.109

etc. Gotama attained the first jhāna. We have to understand that the formula does not make any categorical statement. We know that dukkha which is due to the loss of kāma, is present in the first jhāna.[15] This shows that the meditator is still attached to kāma to some extent, though the attachment cannot be as intense as in the pre-jhanic mind. Moreover the worldly mind that feels pain changes considerably after the attainment of the first jhāna which is beyond the worldly mind and is called adhicitta (higher mind).[16] So the phrase “kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi vivicca” does not mean that Gotama has got absolutely separated from kāma etc.; it means that he separated himself from kāma etc. only to the extent they are related to the worldly mind. We will see later that the Vatthupama-sutta refers to such limitations by using the term “yatodhi” (to that extent).[17]

The pre-jhanic mental state is fraught with pain while the first jhāna is characterised by pīti (joy) and sukha (happiness). But it would be wrong to assume that Gotama gave up the painful, worldly mental state for the sake of the delightful first jhāna. Gotama’s immediate aim was only to be free from the intense mental agitation caused by dukkha etc. Moreover we will show later that Gotama did not intentionally develop pīti and sukha. On the basis of the Brahmajāla-sutta we can hold that Gotama did not directly try for the removal of dukkha. The unwholesome mental elements of dukkha etc. are caused by the attachment to kāma. So Gotama actually exerted himself to be separated from kāma both physically and mentally. As Gotama was successful in separating himself from kāma, the akusaladhammas like dukkha etc. naturally ceased to some extent to arise in mind. This freedom from kāma, dukkha

p.110

etc. started a mental process that gradually led to the arising of different mental elements the collective and conventional name for which was the first jhāna.



## First Jhāna

On the basis of what has been discussed above we can hold that Gotama got relatively separated from kāma and akusaladhammas, and consequently attained the first jhāna. This jhāna is accompanied by vitakka and vicāra (initial and developed appreciative deliberations regarding desirelessness with reference to kāma),<sup>[18]</sup> born of separation (vivekajam) and characterised by pīti and sukha. Gotama abided in this jhāna.

### ◆ Vitakka and Vicāra

Gotama adversely criticised kāma and akusaladhammas in order to give them up. The contents of the adverse criticism surely dealt with the grossness and impermanency of kāma. This criticism falls within the mental range of an ordinary person, and it comes to an end when one gets separated from kāma. But the mental state of first jhāna which is called adhicitta (higher mind) comes into existence only after relative separation from kāma etc. has taken place; it, therefore, cannot be the mental state of an ordinary person. The vitakka and vicāra cannot be the same as the adverse criticism made by an ordinary person against kāma. What then could be the contents of vitakka and vicāra in the first jhāna?

We know from the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta that when the thoughts of desire (kāmavitakka) ceased to arise, Gotama cultivated the opposite thoughts of desirelessness (nekkhamavitakka) regarding the desirable objects by deliberating upon its advantages. The vitakka and vicāra should refer to such appreciative deliberations concerning desirelessness.

p. 111

The contents of vitakka and vicāra can also be surmised. Gotama like the Śramaṇas of his time, was trying to realise the nibbāna-in-this-world, as it has been stated in the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta. So his deliberations should also have been connected with nibbāna. But unlike the tradition preserved in this Sutta, his deliberations were most probably not connected with paññā, for in those days the Śramaṇas were not interested in paññā (wisdom) and Gotama had not yet realised the importance of bodhi for the realisation of nibbāna. The tradition preserved in the Dvedhā-vitakka-sutta is an amalgamation of two different traditions—that of Gotama’s experience as a bodhisatva and that of the Buddha’s teachings to his disciples.

Vasubandhu<sup>[19]</sup> pointed out that vitakka and vicāra cannot occur simultaneously, but must occur successively. One may surmise that the first jhāna formula originally had either vitakka and vicāra. But the Nikāyas always record this formula including both vitakka and vicāra. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of this tradition. This helps us to understand the concept of jhāna in that early period. The mental elements constituting a jhāna occur in a sequence. Thus the jhāna formula is not a description of a mental state at a given moment, or in concentration on a given object; it is a record of a series of reactions that takes place whenever a mental state that is free from kāma and akusaladhammas comes into contact with a desirable object.

We have to note that the vitakka and vicāra started in the pre-jhanic worldly mind and continued in the first jhāna. Of these two the vitakka, the initial deliberations, precedes the vicāra, the developed deliberations. Of all the mental elements constituting the first jhāna the vitakka would be, therefore, first perceived. Accordingly in the jhāna formula the vitakka heads the list of the characteristics of the first jhāna.

p. 112

## ◆ Vivekaja

We have seen that the vitakka and vicāra were connected with the process of separation from kāma. As the appreciative deliberations regarding the merits of desirelessness (i.e. vitakka and vicāra) continues in the first jhāna, the thoughts of adverse criticism of the desire for kāma continues to be absent from the mind. The absence of adverse criticism indicates the absence of the desire for kāma and the akusala-dhammas. We may hold that this separation from dicer etc. has been termed “viveka” in the first jhāna formula. This conclusion is supported by the Vatthupama-sutta quoted later. (S.P. 18)

The vitakka and vicāra, on the other hand, refers only to the appreciative deliberations regarding the merits of being without any desire for kāma.

The term that we have in the formula is “vivekajam” instead of viveka. Which mental element is born of viveka that is referred to here? In the formula the compound “pītisukham” comes immediately after “vivekajam.” Some scholars thought that “vivekajam” qualifies “pītisukham” and therefore translated the phrase as “pīti and sukha born of separation.” Next they took the entire phrase as characterising the first jhāna. But this translation to be correct there should have been a single compound made of “vivekaja” or “viveka” and “pītisukha.” (cf. the compound “pavivekapiti” in the Pañcattaya-sutta).<sup>[20]</sup> Even a cursory glance at the formula shows that like “savittakkam” and “savicāram” each of the terms “vivekajam” and “pītisukham” also should separately characterise the “paṭhamajhānam” (first state of meditation). Again if we following other scholars translate the second jhāna formula in the same way, we find that pīti and sukha are born of concentration (samādhi). But this is not possible. The same type of pīti and sukha cannot be born of two different causes. This shows that

p.113

neither viveka nor samādhi can be the cause of “pīti” and “sukha”. Moreover no single factor (either viveka or samādhi) can cause both pīti and sukha.

We have also to remember that “vivekajam” cannot really characterise paṭhamajhānam. It is only grammatically that “paṭhamajhānam” appears to be characterised by the term “vivekajam.” This point has been further discussed later.

As “viveka” cannot be the cause of “pītisukha” or “paṭhamajhānam,” we have to admit that the mental element born of viveka has not been mentioned in the first jhāna formula.

The Buddha surely knew that there is no paṭhamajhānam to be born of viveka. And yet he did not change the first jhāna formula. How can we account for this fact? Of all the mental elements which were given the name of paṭhamajhāna those of vitakka and vicāra came into existence in the pre-jhanic state, and continued in the first jhāna. Vitakka and vicāra in themselves were unable to start the process that led to the development of the other elements constituting the paṭhamajhāna. He later became sure that he had really become separated from the adverse criticism of kāma and hence from the desire for kāma etc. which would not arise anymore. This awareness of separation is the element of viveka. This started the chain reaction that came to a natural end with the arising of samādhi,[\[21\]](#) and included the other elements necessary for the constitution of the paṭhamajhāna. Therefore the first jhāna is called vivekajam or born of viveka.

We find that the formula taken literally appears to be highly confusing and inaccurate. From our discussion on the term vivekajam we know that there is a gap in the formula. Moreover the formula appears to give two different causes for the arising of the first jhāna: one, the act of separation from kāma (desirable object) etc. and the other, the awareness of the separation (viveka)

p.114

from kāma (desire) and akusaladhammas. Secondly there is no paṭhamajhāna in reality. The term paṭhamajhāna is merely a conventional name given to the mental elements enumerated in the formula. If we ignore the imaginary term paṭhamajhāna, how are we going to explain the rise of pīti and sukha, or the relationship existing between them. Or what happens due to the separation from kāma as there is no paṭhamajhāna? A tradition preserved in the Vatthupama-sutta can help us to find a way out of all these riddles. The relevant passage of the Sutta runs as follows:

When he has given up...the imperfections of the mind (upakilesa) in part (yatodhi) he considers thus: “I am possessed of initial confidence (aveccapasāda) in the Buddha...gains gladness (pāmojja) connected with the dhamma.” When he is glad, rapture (pīti) is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil (passaddhi), feels pleasure (sukha); in one who feels pleasure, mind becomes concentrated (samādhi). [\[22\]](#)

Here we have a more detailed description of what is generally known as the first jhāna. The passage in question gives a realistic account of mental elements that arise one after another in sequence, without imagining that they constitute a mental state called “paṭhamajhānam.” In this list two elements, viz. vitakka and vicāra of the first jhāna formula are missing. But this does not make any real difference; these elements are implied in the larger list of the Vatthupama-sutta, for no unethical mental element can be removed

without vitakka and vicāra. Such lists are seldom exhaustive. A comparison between these two lists will show that a number of elements likewise found no mention in the first jhāna formula. It appears that only those mental elements which were thought to be indispensable from the point of view of a particular philosophy or spiritual practice were included in such a list.

In the light of the Vatthupama-sutta we can understand better the message of the first jhāna formula. The separation from the akusaladhammas creates a condition identical with what follows the giving up of the mental imperfections (upakilesa). We may be, therefore, justified in holding that Gotama gained in confidence (pasāda) in the path he was following when he by spiritual exertions was able to attain a relative separation from kāma and akusaladhammas. Pasāda gives rise to the gladness (pāmojja) without any intentional effort on the part of Gotama. In the same way the elements of pīti (joy), passaddhi (tranquillity) and sukha (happiness) sequentially arose in mind. Here each preceding element gives rise to the following element automatically. Samādhi which arose due to sukha has not been mentioned here.

We are now in a position to point out the following features of the first jhāna formula which will improve our understanding of the entire system of meditation of the four jhānas:

- i) The first jhāna formula represents a selection from mental elements that arose in sequence. The formula being a selection is not concerned with the original sequence, but while recording the mental elements has maintained the order in which they actually occur in mind.
- ii) The separation from kāma results in the separation from the unwholesome mental states which in its turn leads to the arising of confidence (pasāda), and not to any imaginary mental state.
- iii) Neither pīti nor sukha is born of viveka. The existence of pīti is due to pāmojja while the arising of sukha results from

passaddhi (physical tranquillity).

- iv) The first jhāna formula should not be taken in a categorical sense. We have seen that the expression “vivicca kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi” has been used in a relative sense. Viveka likewise implies only that awareness of separation from some unwholesome mental elements. The other terms used in this formula are also to be understood in a relative sense.

## ◆ Pīti and Sukha

The jhāna formula next mentions the elements of pīti and sukha of which Gotama became aware. We know that a partial separation from akusaladhammas starts a chain reaction in course of which pīti and sukha appear. The element which directly causes

pīti to appear is, however, pāmojja while sukha is due to the physical tranquillity (passaddhi).

Pīti (joy) does not appear to be agitative and undesirable in the first jhāna. The very fact that this element is called pīti which is the same as somanassa, reflects the feeling of the meditator towards it in the first jhāna. That the meditator mainly feels delighted due to pīti without being particularly aware of the agitative aspect of this element appears to be due to two reasons: First, the disappearance of the akusaladhammas which represent the painful feelings peculiar to the pre-jhanic worldly mind. In consequence of this he, due to pasāda, feels glad (pāmojja) which develops into pīti. In the Culavedalla-sutta one reads:[23]

**Painful feeling is painful when it persists and pleasant when it changes.**

Secondly, in the first jhāna, as we shall see later, the meditator remains preoccupied with the vitakka and vicāra, the most agitative of all the elements, and does not concentrate on pīti. His reaction

p.117

to pīti in the first jhāna is quite different from what he feels about pīti while abiding in the second jhāna. This point will be discussed later.

Pīti gives rise to mainly physical tranquillity (passaddhi) which in its turn leads to the feeling of sukha (happiness). His entire body is suffused with pīti and sukha[24] which are much less agitative than domanassa, dukkha etc. It should be noted here that the early Buddhist sources pay more attention to the physical aspect of sukha whereas the Nibbānavāda mainly deals with the mental aspect.

With the arising of the sukha, Gotama's mind became concentrated (samādhi), and the chain reaction that started with the separation from kāma now came to a natural end. Gotama attained the first jhāna.

## ◆ Gotama Abides in the First Jhāna

The traditional jhāna formula states that Gotama abided in the mental state of the first jhāna. Immediately after this the Mahāsaccaka-sutta[25] adds the following statement:

**The pleasant feeling remains without influencing the mind.**

The Sutta repeats the statement again and again with all the new mental states that arose after the first jhāna, viz. the three higher jhānas and the mental states connected with the three vijjās (knowledge). Does this indicate that it was necessary to remain uninfluenced by the pleasant feeling in order to abide in a mental state? Conversely, does it imply that one falls down from a mental state if he gets influenced by the pleasant feeling? And how does one remain uninfluenced?

p. 118

The tradition preserved in the Pañcattaya-sutta[26] offers solution to all these problems. According to this Sutta some śramaṇa or brahmin through lack of sensual pleasures enters upon and abides in the mental state characterised by joy (pīti) due to separation from kāma etc. (paviveka-pīti). He thinks that “this is the peaceful, this is the perfect, that I enter and abide in the joy due to separation.” Then that joy due to separation ceases in him and grief arises; and with the cessation of grief, joy due to separation arises.

It is clear from the above account that a śramaṇa or a brahmin mistakenly announces the first jhāna to be peaceful, the perfect. Such a description is given of the nibbāna. It appears that compared to the worldly mental state characterised by grief, pain etc. the higher mind (adhicitta) of first jhāna characterised by pīti is felt to be peaceful, and so he thinks this state to be peaceful and perfect. As he thinks like this he clings to this state. We know that clinging causes agitation in mind.[27] He thus becomes more agitated and he falls down to the lower and worldly mental state characterised by dukkha etc. Thus he gets influenced by the awareness of comparative peacefulness generated by pīti which is less agitative than dukkha, soka etc.

It should be noted that though the description of the mental state is that of the first jhāna, only pīti is mentioned here and not sukha. For of these two elements pīti is more agitative and exercises greater influence on mind. Pīti is the sukhā vedanā to which the Mahāsaccaka-sutta refers in connection with the first jhāna. Pīti at this stage is relatively both peaceful and pleasant. We may even say that it is peaceful and so it is pleasant (cf. the Vatthupama-sutta account states that sukha arises after passaddhi). The pleasant aspect of pīti is not a source of danger,

p.119

for a monk is trained to be wary of a pleasant feeling. But the relative sense of peacefulness created by the less agitative nature of a pleasant feeling can be the cause of his downfall. It is able to create an illusion of nibbanic peacefulness in his mind, for he is aspiring after nibbāna, and is too eager to realise it. So only the aspect of peacefulness (santam), and not that of pleasantness, is taken note of in the Pañcattaya-sutta passage noted above.

But Gotama was not influenced by such peacefulness, and so he could abide in the first jhāna. The statement of the Mahāsaccaka-sutta that Gotama was not influenced by the pleasant feeling actually implies that Gotama was not influenced by the less agitative nature of the pleasant feeling. One may think that Gotama was familiar with the Nibbānavādin tradition which rejects the identification of the first jhāna with the Nibbāna, the perfectly peaceful. Gotama therefore, could remain uninfluenced by the peacefulness of the feeling. In this case we could have expected some adverse criticism of the pleasant feeling on this ground. But there is not even a hint of such a criticism. There is a more cogent explanation. From the second formula we know that Gotama after attaining the first jhāna became preoccupied with the removal of the

most agitative elements of the vitakka and vicāra. So he could remain uninfluenced by the pleasant feeling which compared to the vitakka and vicāra is less agitative.

## ◆ Calming of the Vitakka and Vicāra

While abiding in the first jhāna Gotama surveyed the entire mental state. Of all the mental elements he found the vitakka and vicāra to be most agitative. He aspired for perfect calmness, so he naturally took steps to calm down the vitakka and vicāra.

Gotama undertook such activities while abiding in the first jhāna, but the first jhāna formula does not even hint at these activities. The relevant informations can be deduced from the second jhāna formula.

p. 120

The second jhāna formula states that Gotama calmed down vitakka and vicāra, and consequently attained the second jhāna. The vitakka and vicāra, as we have already stated, refer to the appreciative deliberations on the merits of desirelessness regarding the objects which appear to be desirable to the worldly mind. Such deliberations according to the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta prevent the recurrence of the opposite thoughts of desire, and are conducive to the realisation of the nibbāna. Why then Gotama had to calm down the vitakka and vicāra? The Brahmajāla-sutta indicates that the vitakka and vicāra were the most agitative elements; so within all the agitative elements in the first jhāna only the vitakka and vicāra are called gross (olārika), and the Nibbānavādins calmed them first. Likewise Gotama also, due to the same reason, calmed these elements first. But the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta is not explicit on this point. The first part of this sutta tells us that the continued cultivation of such appreciative deliberations was stopped for it tired the mind and impaired the concentration. There is, however, no contradiction between the accounts of these two Suttas, for when the mind is agitated it becomes tired, and the concentration suffers. But the shift in the emphasis should be noted. While concentration is specially valued for gaining knowledge, lack of agitation is associated with nibbāna. It is reasonable to surmise that in the beginning of his spiritual journey Gotama followed the earlier śramaṇa tradition whose ultimate goal was calmness, and not knowledge. The emphasis on concentration, on the other hand, reflects the teachings of the Buddha to his disciples concerning the attainment of truly objective knowledge.

We can, therefore, following the Brahmajāla-sutta tradition conclude that Gotama stopped the vitakka and vicāra for the immediate reduction of mental agitation. This Sutta also indicates that Gotama stopped the recurrence of an undesirable mental element by adversely criticising it. So Gotama must have calmed the vitakka and vicāra by adversely criticising them on the ground

p.121

that such deliberations were gross, for they agitated the mind. Only to a certain extent the cultivation of the vitakka and vicāra is conducive to the realisation of nibbāna. When that limit is reached, it must be stopped. It should be noted that only further

cultivation of nekkhamma-vitakka was stopped, but Gotama did not take any step against the spontaneous arising of the thoughts of desirelessness.

## The Second Jhāna

The calming down of the vitakka and vicāra through adverse criticism led to a radical change in the mental state of Gotama. This new mental state was given the name of “dutiya<sup>2</sup>jjhānam” (second jhāna) which was described as internal (ajjhattam), characterised by perfect clarity or confidence (sampasādanam) and unidirectional thought (cetaso ekodibhāvam), without vitakka and vicāra (avitakkam avicāram) born of concentration (samādhijam), and possessing joy and happiness (pītisukham). Gotama abided in this mental state.

### ◆ Ajjhattam Sampasādanam...Dutiya<sup>2</sup>jjhānam

Scholars have generally taken these two adjectival words viz. ajjhattam and sampasādanam as forming one unit, and have translated it as “internal calmness.” It is this unit that, according to them, characterises the second jhāna, i.e. the second jhāna characterised by internal calmness. But this translation cannot be accepted. In order to be a unit these two words should have formed such a compound as “ajjhatta-sampasādanam” (cf. ajjhatta-santim, Sutta Nipata, verse 837). We will also see later that the term “sampasādanam” should be taken in the sense of clarity or confidence. Moreover in the jhāna formula these two forms clearly occur as two separate words. The word ajjhattam thus characterises the second jhāna independently, and the phrase should be translated as:

p. 122

the second jhāna is internal and possesses perfect confidence or clarity.

We will discuss later the exact meaning of “sampasādanam.” It may be noted in this connection that the Vibhaṅga<sup>[28]</sup> also appears to take the term as an independent characteristic of the first jhāna.

What does the word “internal” (ajjhattam) signify in the present context? Why this characteristic has not been mentioned in case of the first jhāna? The reason may be that the vitakka and vicāra are still there in the first jhāna, and these two elements are connected with the five types of external desirable objects. The mental state in the second jhāna is free from the vitakka and vicāra, i.e. the mind is no longer preoccupied with the external desirable objects. The meditator in this state becomes preoccupied more with internal elements than with external objects. It is to indicate this fact that the modifying word “ajjhattam” has been used.

### ◆ Sampasādanam

Another characteristic of the second jhāna is sampasādana. From the Vartthupama-sutta tradition we know that this characteristic of pasāda (confidence) is also present in the first jhāna due to the separation from kāma and akusaladhammas. But it was not mentioned in the first jhāna formula. It is for the first time mentioned in connection



with the second jhāna, This suggests that this element becomes sufficiently developed only in the second jhāna to deserve explicit mention. The verbal root connected with the term sampasādana is “sad” which can mean “to become calm,” “to become clear.”

Due to the calming down of the vitakka and vicāra the mind has certainly become calmer than before. But the second jhāna still contains other strong agitative elements and therefore it seems

p.123

unlikely that the sense of calmness is prominent enough to arrest attention. We will see later that it is the element of pīti that as the strongest agitative element becomes the object of concentration in this state. Moreover the third and fourth jhānas which are calmer than the second jhāna, are not characterised by any special term that signifies calmness. It should also be noted that the four original jhāna formulas formulated by the Nibbānavādins contained the term nibbāna which indicated utter mental calmness. So there was no need to include another term in the jhāna formula signifying calmness. Again the word used to mean calmness or peace in the Nikāyas is “santi” while the word “santo” means calm. Thus it does not stand to reason that the term sampasādana should be taken in the sense of calmness in the present context.

It is probable that this term here means clarity or clear. The verbal root “sad,” if used together with the prefix “pra” (Pali, “pa” ) generally means clear, bright (cf. the term prasanna). But mental clarity generates confidence. Therefore this term is also used in the sense of confidence. The vibhaṅga[29] has glossed the term as saddhā i.e. confidence.

Following this early tradition I have translated sampasādana as perfect confidence. The second jhāna is characterised by perfect confidence.

### ◆ Ekodibhāva...Samādhi ja

Immediately after sampasādanam the formula mentions four other characteristics of the second jhāna, viz. ekodibhāvam, avitakkam, avicāram, and samādhijam.

The term ekodibhāva requires some explanation. The udi of ekodi is the same as the uti in Sanskrit.[30] Uti means movement

p.124

(gati). The phrase cetaso ekodibhāvam refers to a state which is characterised by unidirectional movement of thoughts. The mind possess the quality of being unidirectional in thoughts. This means that the thoughts move towards one object only. The presence of this mental element shows that the meditator is now able to think of only one object to the exclusion of all other objects. With the arising of this element the meditator notices that the mind is now really free from the elements of vicāra and vitakka (avitakkam avicāram). The continuous flow of thoughts remains unbroken, and he is able to concentrate (samādhi) on an object. The element of samādhi is now developed enough to deserve mention in the formula. The elements of ekodibhāva, avitakka, avicāra and samādhi should be taken as one unit.

This unit of the four mental elements is preceded by sampasādanam and followed by pītisukha. Our analysis of the art of formulation of the meditative experiences so far shows that the formula records the mental elements in the order they arise in the mind, but it does not attempt to present the elements in a sequence. So the formula only shows that the element of sampasādana arose before that of the ekodibhāva while pītisukha were experienced after the arising the faculty of concentration. But on the basis of the Vatthupama-sutta we know that pasāda cannot give rise to ekodibhāva directly. The list moreover shows that pīti and sukha precede samādhi. Actually sukha leads to samādhi. According to the Vatthupama-sutta tradition there should be four elements between pasāda and samādhi, viz. pāmojja, pīti, passaddhi and sukha. On the other hand we have seen from our study of the second jhāna formula that ekodibhāva, avitakka, avicāra and samādhi form a unit. They just represent different stages in the mental process that starts with ekodibhāva and culminates in the samādhi. So the reconstructed second jhāna should refer to the following mental elements arranged as follows:

p. 125

Ajjhattam——sampasādana——pāmojja——pīti——passaddhi——sukha——ekodi  
bhāva——avitakkam——avicāram——samādhi——pīti and sukha.

Sati (mindfulness) is not mentioned in the list for it is not yet sufficiently developed. It finds mention only in the fourth jhāna for in this stage of spiritual development the mindfulness has become purified.

This more detailed account of the mental elements of the second jhāna when compared with the traditional second jhāna formula raises certain problems. For example, one may ask why the four mental elements between sampasādanam and ekodibhāva (i.e. pāmojja, pīti, passaddhi and sukha) are not mentioned in the first jhāna formula, or why this formula records the elements of pīti and sukha after samādhi, and not before it.

We have yet to explain the absence of pāmojja and passaddhi in the second jhāna formula. We have to note that a feeling always found mention at least once in the formulas due to their pivotal role in this system of meditation. Actually the entire system of four meditations centers round the manipulation of feelings, specially the pleasant feelings. The feelings are mentioned either as the elements to be eliminated, or merely as a characteristic of a jhāna, or as an object of concentration. But such is not the case with other elements. If the omission of such elements does not hamper the understanding of the system of meditation, or if their presence can be logically ascertained, they are not mentioned in the formula. It is for such reasons that pāmojja and passaddhi never found explicit mention in the formulas, or the vitakka and vicāra were not mentioned as objects of observation in the first jhāna formula. Even the painful feelings only find mention as elements that were eliminated before the attainment of the first jhāna, for their elimination is vital to this system of meditation. But their continuation in the first jhāna goes unnoticed, for they have become

p.126

greatly reduced in strength, and no longer play an active role in this system. This exercise in the strict economy of expression is a peculiarity of the jhāna formulations. The problem of pīti and sukha will be discussed later.

### ◆ Samādhijam Pītisukham

This phrase has been translated by some scholars as “pīti and sukha born of concentration.” This translation is unacceptable. In our discussion of the term vivekajam we have seen that neither viveka nor samādhi can be the cause of pīti and sukha. It would be shown later that these two elements, as recorded in the second jhāna formula, are only objects of concentration (samādhi), and not born of concentration. We also know from the Vatthupama-sutta list pīti develops out of pāmojja while passaddhi leads to sukha.

Grammatically the term samādhijam has to be taken as a modifier of dutiyajjhānam or the second jhāna. So the second jhāna should be regarded as being born of concentration (samādhi). On the other hand the second jhāna formula clearly indicates that this jhāna gradually came into existence due to the calming of the vitakka and vicāra. How could we reconcile these two contradictory statements?

We should keep the fact in mind that the second jhāna is nothing but a collective and conventional name for all the mental elements that one experiences in this state. And these elements gradually came into existence. The anomaly between the two statements mentioned above disappears if we understand that the calming of the vitakka and vicāra starts the process that led to the gradual emergence of the elements constituting the so called second jhāna while the element of samādhi marks the end of the same process. With the arising of the element of samādhi the second jhāna is thought to have come into existence. So the second jhāna is conveniently called samādhijam. In reality there is neither any second jhāna nor any element born of samādhi. Thus there is

p.127

really no contradiction in the jhāna formula. We should also note here that the calming of the vitakka and vicāra actually takes place while the meditator is still in the first jhāna.

### ◆ Pīti and Sukha

The pīti and sukha of the second jhāna are more developed than those of the first jhāna. According to the tradition, domanassa and dukkha of the pre-jhanic state disappear at the time of the attainment of the first jhāna and the second jhāna<sup>[31]</sup> respectively. Consequently the initial confidence (aveccapasāda) of the first jhāna develops into the perfect confidence (sampasādana) of the second jhāna. This results in greater pāmojja, and hence to greater pīti. The developed pīti results in greater physical tranquillity (passaddhi) which in its turn leads to greater happiness (sukha). Asaṅga has also pointed out that the sukha of the first jhāna is mild while that of the second jhāna is of middle intensity.<sup>[32]</sup>

The point to be noted is that the elements of *pīti* and *sukha* are mentioned after *samādhi*. This means that Gotama experienced *pīti* and *sukha* after the arising of the mental element of *samādhi*. This poses a problem for we know that the elements of *pīti* and *sukha* actually emerge before the arising of the element of *samādhi*. Why then does the second *jhāna* formula mentions *pīti* and *sukha* after *samādhi*? We have shown that after the attainment of the first *jhāna* Gotama surveyed the entire mental state and concentrated on the strongest mental elements of the *vitakka* and *vicāra*. These two elements thus became objects of concentration (*samādhi*) and were experienced again after the arising of the element of *samādhi*. Similarly Gotama while abiding in the second *jhāna* found out that the elements of *pīti* and *sukha* are more agitative than the other

p.128

mental elements, and consequently concentrated on these two elements. The role of *pīti* and *sukha* as objects of concentration is indicated by their placement after *samādhi*. But how is it that the *vitakka* and *vicāra* do not find mention as objects of concentration in the first *jhāna* formula? Compared to the pivotal role played by pleasant feelings (in this case *pīti* and *sukha*) in this system, the role played by the *vitakka* and *vicāra* is of lesser importance. This appears to be the reason why the *vitakka* and *vicāra* are not mentioned as objects of concentration in the first *jhāna* formula. The elimination of the *vitakka* and *vicāra* is presented as an accomplished fact in the second *jhāna* formula, though nothing is said about the process of elimination. In case of the feelings of *pīti* and *sukha*, on the other hand, not only their elimination as accomplished facts are noted (cf. *pītiyā virāgā* in the third *jhāna* formula, or *sukhassa pahānā* in the fourth *jhāna* formula) but also the process of elimination is indicated by pointing them out as objects of concentration. This makes the concept of *jhāna* quite explicit. The term *jhāna* not only notes the mental elements as they arise but also indicates those elements which later become objects of concentration. This concept of *jhāna* is in conformity with the meaning of the verbal root *dhyā* or *jhe* (i.e. to think) out of which the terms *dhyāna* or *jhāna* were derived.

### ◆ Abiding in the Second Jhāna

From different Suttas we know that Gotama was able to abide in the second *jhāna* for he was not influenced by the pleasant feeling (*sukhā vedanā*) inherent in this state. The problem is whether the *sukhā vedanā* in this case should be identified with *pīti* or *sukha*. Either of these two elements can be taken as a *sukhā vedanā*. Each of them can create an impression of less agitation and deeper peace seen against the background of the stronger agitation caused by the *vitakka* and *vicāra*. We have, however, to remember that *pīti* being more agitative than *sukha* succeeds in arresting the attention of the

p.129

meditator who consequently feels the relative peacefulness of *pīti*. Seen in the light of the *Pañcattaya-sutta* this means that Gotama did not mistake the comparative calmness of *pīti* as *nibbāna*, did not take delight in it, did not cling to it, and so he could abide in this state. Moreover, as we shall see, that during his stay in the second *jhāna* the element of *pīti* became the object of concentration, and he found the same

pīti to be agitative and unpleasant; so he became preoccupied with the process of detachment from pīti. Thus he could remain uninfluenced by the pleasant feeling, and abide in the second jhāna.

### ◆ Detachment from Pīti

We have already pointed out that Gotama while abiding in the second jhāna concentrated on the two elements of pīti and sukha. Consequently he found out that pīti was the more agitative of these two elements. He strove to get rid of it.

From The Second jhāna formula we know that Gotama due to his detachment from pīti (pītiyā virāgā) could go beyond the second jhāna and gradually attain the third jhāna. On the basis of the Brahmajāla-sutta we can conclude that Gotama became averse to pīti for it was gross (olārika). But wherein lies the grossness of pīti? We know that pīti is associated with strong physical sensations, and intense mental agitation (cetaso ubbilāvitattam). Pīti causes great physical and mental agitation; it is, therefore, called gross.

As the agitative influence of pīti ran counter to his avowed goal of mental calmness, Gotama became free of its influence by developing aversion to it through adverse criticism, the contents of which must have dealt with pīti's grossness as well as its contrariness to nibbāna. This we can surmise on the basis of the traditions recorded in the Brahmajāla-sutta and the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta.

p. 130

## Third Jhāna

The third jhāna formula states that Gotama became detached from “pīti,” and this detachment generated a process that gradually led to the appearance of different mental elements. Gotama became upekkhako, sato (mindful) and sampajāno (properly knowing). Next he experienced happiness through the body (kāyena sukham paṭisamvedeti). All these elements contribute to the constitution of the third jhāna. It is needless to point out that the formula is not an exhaustive list of all the mental elements he experienced in this state. It is a selective list of mental elements the recording of which facilitates the practice and enunciation of this system.

The first two jhāna formulas and even the larger Vatthupama-sutta, as shown before, are only selections from the mental elements which actually arise in sequence, the preceding element being directly responsible for the arising of the subsequent element. Being a selection such an account does not maintain the original sequence; but the compilers of the formulas were careful enough to record them in the same order they are actually experienced. We have seen in case of the second jhāna that such a record of experience not only notes the mental elements as they arise but also those elements which later become objects of concentration. The third jhāna formula also follows the same pattern.

The formula indicates that the new mental element to be recorded first is upekkhā and that its appearance is due to the meditator's detachment from pīti. The meditator is

now called upekkhako. Upekkhā results in the further development of the faculties of mindfulness and cognition. The formula also mentions sukha as an object of concentration, and points out that the experience of sukha is due to the body. In order to understand the message of the jhāna formula we have to determine first what is exactly meant by the technical term upekkhā in the present context.

p. 131

### ◆ Upekkhā

The term upekkhā is generally translated as “equanimity” or “indifference.” Upekkhako can be likewise translated as “equanimous” or “indifferent.” We have already seen in our discussion of sampasādana that no technical term over and above the term nibbāna was used in the jhāna formulas to indicate mental calmness. Moreover the presence of the fully developed element of sukha which is the most agitative element in this state does not warrant the assumption that a meditator feels the third jhāna to be calm. We know that Gotama was acutely aware of sukha in the third jhāna (sukham paṭisamvedeti). How can Gotama be said to experience calmness when he is acutely aware of the agitation caused by sukha. The interpretation of “upekkhā” as “equanimity” should be rejected.

The other translation of upekkhā as “indifference” and of upekkhako as “indifferent” also cannot be accepted. Indifference means complete lack of interest in something or someone, and shows that one does not care at all for it. But the translators never took the trouble to indicate the object of such indifference. If we take upekkhā in the sense of indifference, we have to assume that in the third jhāna sukha is the only agitative element towards which it would be necessary to exercise indifference; or, to be more precise, we can, in the light of the Pañcattaya-sutta, assert that it would be necessary to be indifferent to the awareness of relative calmness generated by the comparatively less agitative element of sukha. This calmness may affect the mind, and create the illusion of nibbāna. But we know from the Mahāsaccaka-sutta that Gotama was not influenced by it. Even before Gotama the Śramaṇas and the Brahmins who had attained the fourth jhāna knew that the third jhāna does not represent the nibbanic calmness. As Gotama was following the system of four jhānas one may reasonably assume that Gotama was familiar with the tradition that rejected the identification of the third jhāna with the nibbāna.

p. 132

But the mere knowledge of this tradition is not enough to make one indifferent to the influence of the pleasant feeling. Moreover it was neither possible nor judicious to try to be indifferent to sukha. Sukha was the only agitative element in the third jhāna of which Gotama was acutely aware of (cf. kāyena sukham paṭisamvedeti). He could see that sukha was agitative and its presence in the mind was an impediment to the realisation of nibbāna. The Buddha later pointed out that one should be afraid of vedanā.<sup>[33]</sup> So instead of being indifferent to sukha Gotama would rather try hard to get rid of it. We will see later that Gotama actually gave up sukha. So the rendering of upekkhā as “indifference” cannot be accepted.

The term “upekkhā” is a combination of the prefix “upa” and the noun “ikkhā” (skt. īkṣā). All the scholars agree on this point. But the significance of the prefix “upa” and the noun īkṣā or ikkhā has been misunderstood. One of the meanings of the prefix “upa” is end, extinction. Its use in this sense can be seen in case of words derived from the verbal root “ram” with the prefix “upa.” For example, “uparati” means desisting from enjoyment, cessation, stopping; again “uparata” means disengaged, ceased.[34] Moreover the word “upamaṇa” has been used in the Abhidharmakośa[35] in the sense of dying. īkṣā or ikkhā is derived from the verbal root “īkṣ” or “ikkh” which can mean “to think” or “to perceive.” So the word upekṣā or upekkhā can mean “without thought” or “without perception.” In the present article the term has been translated as “without thought,” for the early Chinese translation in the āgama interprets the term as ch’u nien (除念) that is, “to give up thoughts.”[36] We have to accept this interpretation for in the system of four jhānas the perception remains intact. But the mere

p.133

linguistic analysis of the term does not tell us about the contents of such thoughts. Both Paramārtha and Hsuan Chwan have rendered “upekṣā” in their translations of the Abhidharmakośa as “she shou” (捨受)[37] which means “giving up vedanā (feeling).” So “upekkhā” should mean “giving up the thoughts (of feeling).”

But in the third jhāna the feeling of sukha is still present, and the meditator is well aware of it. So the term upekkhā in the third jhāna should mean the absence of thoughts of only those feelings already surmounted. So upekkhā in this case should signify the absence of the thoughts of domanassa, dukkha and somanassa. This is the reason why “upekkhā” has been mentioned twice in the jhāna formulas, once in the expression “upekkhako” in the third jhāna formula, and another time in the phrase “upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi” in the fourth jhāna formula. The term upekkhā in the fourth jhāna includes the feeling of sukha and means without any thought of sukha. Our interpretation is supported by the tradition of the gradual disappearance of the agitative mental elements, for example, domanassa disappears at the time of attainment of the first jhāna while dukkha, somanassa, and sukha disappear at the time of attaining the second jhāna, third jhāna, and fourth jhāna respectively. [38] It is to be noted that “somanassa” is the same as “pīti.”[39]

The negative aspect of the term “upekkhā” is expressed by the use of the prefix “upa” in Sanskrit and Pāli. In Chinese translations this is indicated by the use of the verbs “ch’u or she” (除，捨) meaning to exclude, to give up. Such a translation shows that the absence of thoughts is due to intentional act on the part of the meditator.

p. 134

◆ Upekkhako, Sato, Sampa jāno

We have already stated that the detachment from pīti sets in motion a mental process which leads to the arising of different mental elements. Gotama first notices the element of upekkhā, i.e. the absence of thoughts about domanassa, dukkha and somanassa.

We have seen that pīti strongly agitates both body and mind. When Gotama became detached from pīti, he became free from the overwhelming influence of pīti. Consequently his body (and mind) became calmer. This relative calmness led to greater happiness and thus helped the development of the instruments of knowledge, and his ability of being mindful of an object proportionately increased. A meditator in this state is, therefore, called mindful (sato). As a result he has now acquired the ability to be perfectly aware of an object (sampajāno). The element of samādhi (concentration) is not mentioned by name here, but its presence in the mind can be ascertained due to the mention of sukha in the third jhāna formula.

### ◆ Arising of Greater Happiness

The first jhāna formula read in the light of the Vatthupama-sutta and the Sāmaññaphala-sutta shows that physical tranquillity (passaddhi) increases due to the influence of pīti, and consequently one feels happy (sukha). The third jhāna, on the other hand, clearly implies that the physical tranquillity which causes happiness is due to the detachment from pīti, and the overcoming of its influence. Moreover sukha in the third jhāna is more developed than that in the first jhāna. Both these formulas have been recorded in numerous Suttas of the Nikāyas. It is obvious that neither the Buddha nor his disciples consider these two traditions contradictory. This apparent contradiction between the two jhāna formulas can be resolved if we remember that sukha is due to passaddhi (physical tranquillity) and not directly due to pīti. On the evidence of the Vatthupama-sutta we can hold that pīti is not

p.135

even directly causing passaddhi. Pīti is really creating relatively less physical agitation. It means that passaddhi, irrespective of its cause, will always cause happiness (sukha). Thus there is no real contradiction between these two traditions. Actually these two traditions can be shown to belong to two different stages of spiritual development and thus to refer to the different degrees of physical tranquillity and happiness. In case of the first jhāna Gotama due to the separation from kāma and painful mental elements (akusaladhammas) felt relieved and pīti arose. Pīti also agitates the body and mind, but compared to dukkha (pain) etc. it agitates in a much lesser degree. So Gotama felt to a certain extent physical tranquillity which generated happiness. This is the happiness mentioned in the first jhāna. But after attaining the spiritually advanced state of the second jhāna which is free from the stronger agitative elements of kāma and dukkha etc. Gotama must have been acutely aware of the strong physical sensations and the resultant mental agitation (cetaso ubbilāvitattam) caused by pīti. So Gotama generated aversion to pīti through adverse criticism. As he did not take delight in pīti, his mind became free from its agitative influence. Consequently his body became appreciably calmer and this resulted in greater happiness. This is the happiness mentioned in the third jhāna formula.



The presence of sukha in the mind presupposes the existence of all the other elements from pasāda to samādhi. Pīti is also there, though not exclusively mentioned in the third jhāna formula. But its functioning as an active element is greatly reduced due to the meditator's detachment from it. We may hold that pīti, though regarded as a feeling, is not explicitly mentioned in this formula due to the following reasons: First, pīti has no influence on the mind of the meditator due to his detachment from it; and so does not play any important role in the third jhāna; secondly, the existence of pīti can be easily surmised.

p. 136

### ◆ Abiding in the Third Jhāna

On the basis of the Mahāsaccaka-sutta we know that Gotama could abide in the third jhāna for he was not influenced by the pleasant feeling (sukhā vedanā). In the first and second jhānas the elements of vitakka-vicāra and pīti are more agitative than the pleasant feeling. So he had to concentrate on them in order to get rid of them, and the pleasant feeling could not affect his mind. But in the third jhāna there is no element that is stronger than the feeling of happiness (sukha) which is the same as the pleasant feeling mentioned in the Mahāsaccaka-sutta. So it is not possible for him to be preoccupied with some element other than sukha and thereby remain unaffected by sukha. Being the strongest element present in the mind sukha becomes the object of concentration and Gotama could remain unaffected by it only by adversely criticising it and thus generating aversion for it. This point will be discussed in detail in the next section.

### ◆ Abandoning Sukha

It is evident from the fourth jhāna formula that Gotama gave up the mental element of sukha and attained the fourth jhāna. While abiding in the third jhāna Gotama surveyed all the mental elements, and found sukha to be most dominant. In this state sukha suffuses the body thoroughly so that no spot remains untouched.<sup>[40]</sup> We know that sukha is dependent on the physical tranquillity that also covers the whole body. The Brahmajāla-sutta points out that sukha is gross (olārika), i.e. the meditator finds this element to be agitative. How can sukha which is closely connected with the all pervasive physical tranquillity be regarded as agitative?

The Brahmajāla-sutta implies that sukha is considered gross because it is the “ābhoga” of mind. The term ābhoga is derived from the verbal root “bhuj” which means to bend or to enjoy. The

p.137

term ābhoga thus can mean either mental enjoyment or the bending (of mind).

In the present context the term ābhoga cannot mean enjoyment, for it would suggest that the mind is delighting in, and clinging to an object. This would cause an increase in mental agitation, and the meditator would not be able to abide in the third jhāna and would fall down to the second jhāna. But according to the jhāna formula Gotama was abiding in the third jhāna. So the term ābhoga should mean the bending of mind towards an object, paying attention to an object. Vasubandhu supports our conclusion. According to him ābhoga of mind means paying attention (manaskarāś cetaso ābhogo). But such mental activity would show that his mind was agitated. The term ābhoga indicates mental action which disturbs mental peace. Sukha is, therefore, gross. The Brahmajāla-sutta suggests that it is because of this grossness that Gotama gave up sukha.

This sutta, however, is not explicit about the method Gotama followed to give up sukha. On the basis of the Dvedhāvitakka-sutta we may surmise that he adversely criticised sukha constantly for its grossness, and became averse to it. As he aspired for nibbāna, we can reasonably suggest that he criticised the grossness of sukha for it was not conducive to the realisation of nibbāna which was utter calmness.

The thoughts of sukha ceased to arise in his mind due to this adverse criticism, and he attained the fourth jhāna.

## Fourth Jhāna

The fourth jhāna formula states that due to the giving up of sukha and dukkha, and due to the disappearance of somanassa and domanassa even before (pubbeva), Gotama attained and abided in the fourth jhāna characterised by the neither-painful-nor-happy feeling (adukkham-asukham) and the purification of mindfulness due to upekkhā (upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi).

p. 138

The expression “pubbeva” indicates that somanassa and domanassa disappeared even before the giving up of sukha and dukkha respectively. We know that somanassa is given up at the time of the attainment of the third jhāna. So the last act he performed while abiding in the third jhāna was the giving up of sukha only. Consequently this action led to the arising of a series of mental elements whose conventional name was the fourth jhāna. Only two of these elements find mention in the jhāna formula due to their novelty and importance, namely, the feeling of adukkham-asukham and upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi.

### ◆ Adukkham-Asukham

The system of four jhānas apparently follows the tradition of five types of feelings, namely, domanassa, dukkha, somanassa (=pīti), sukha and adukkham-asukham.[41] The presence of the feeling of adukkham-asukham indicates the absence of the other four feelings,[42] e.g. the absence of dukkha indicates the absence of domanassa while the absence of sukha signifies that of somanassa. The long list of the feelings

absent from the mind has been uncharacteristically enumerated in the beginning of the formula. It is possible that the original formula only contained the phrase “sukhassa pahānā” (due to the giving up of sukha) to which the other feelings were added later.

As the name adukkham-asukham suggests this feeling is free from the characteristics of dukkha and sukha. This feeling in itself should not be agitative. So far the question of feeling is concerned,

p.139

one cannot go beyond it. There is no other feeling which is subtler than this. The range of feeling ends with this feeling. It remains in higher states also. This feeling should be identical with the sukhā vedanā which Gotama experienced while abiding in the fourth jhāna.

### ◆ Upekkhā-Sati-Pārisuddhi

The attainment of the feeling of adukkham-asukham shows that his mind has become free from the thoughts of dukkha and sukha. This, in its turn, indicates that his mind is also free of the thoughts of domanassa and somanassa. The term upekkhā in the expression “upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi” suggests the absence of thoughts of all these feelings, but it specially indicates the absence of sukha. The agitations previously created by these feelings no longer disturb his mindfulness which thus becomes perfect. The mindfulness which has thus become properly purified due to upekkhā is indicated by the term upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi, or the complete purification of mindfulness due to upekkhā.

### ◆ Non-mention of an Object of Concentration

We know that the elimination of an agitative mental element starts a chain reaction as a result of which a series of mental elements arise in sequence. This process comes to a natural end with the arising of the element of samādhi (concentration). If the jhāna formula mentions an object of concentration, it is always placed after samādhi. The fourth jhāna formula mentions the element of “upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi” which should be placed after “ekodibhāva” and before “samādhi.” The feeling of adukkham-asukham has been mentioned before the expression of “upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi”; this means it has been mentioned before “samādhi.” Thus the fourth jhāna formula notes only the experiencing of the feeling as it arises, but does not mention an object of concentration.

p. 140

### ◆ Abiding in the Fourth Jhāna

The Mahāsaccaka-sutta states that the pleasant feeling (sukhā vedanā) remained in the fourth jhāna without affecting the mind of Gotama. Why the feeling of adukkham-asukham is called sukhā vedanā? According to the Culavedalla-sutta[43] the feeling

of adukkham-asukham is pleasant when there is knowledge of it, and painful if there is no knowledge of it. It appears that the statement that there is no knowledge of it means that the meditator has lost the feeling of adukkham-asukham and fallen back to the third jhāna which is characterised by sukha. Against the background of his previous experience of adukkham-asukham the feeling of sukha appears to be agitative and unpleasant. Consequently he adversely criticises sukha, gets rid of it, and again attains the fourth jhāna. In the Pañcattaya-sutta<sup>[44]</sup> we read that some recluse or brahmin enters upon and abides in the neither-painful-nor-happy feeling and thinks: “This is peaceful (santam), this is perfect (panitam) that I enter upon and abide in the neither-painful-nor-happy feeling”. When he thinks like this the feeling ceases in him.

With the cessation of neither-painful-nor-happy feeling the unworldly happiness (nirāmisam sukham) arises in him, and with the cessation of unworldly happiness, neither-painful-nor-happy feeling arises in him. That the meditator thinks this feeling to be calm (santam) and perfect (panitam) shows that he mistook this feeling to be nibbāna. But Gotama was not affected by the relative calmness associated with this feeling, and so he could abide in the fourth jhāna.

Why was not Gotama affected by this feeling? We have pointed out that there is no question of adversely criticising and getting rid of it. Normally this feeling of adukkham-asukham cannot be the object of concentration, for it is not agitative at all.

p. 141

If a meditator mistakes this state for nibbāna, this non-agitative feeling is replaced by the agitative feeling of sukha, and he falls down to the third jhāna. Gotama did not make this mistake. The reason may be that immediately after attaining the fourth jhāna he became pre-occupied with the attainment of the vijjās, and consequently the awareness of relative peacefulness could not affect his mind.

Here ends the traditional description of the fourth jhāna. We will see later that Gotama added an extra description of the same jhāna in order to emphasise certain other mental qualities which one also attains in this state. The significance of this description will be discussed later. At present we may make the following observations on the traditional system of four jhānas.

## Observations on the System of Four Jhānas

We may draw attention to the following salient features common to the four jhānas in order to understand clearly how this system of meditation functions:

1) Gotama was not practising this system in order to enjoy the pleasant feelings. He adversely criticised the pleasant feelings of pīti and sukha, and got rid of them. He was not affected by the pleasant effect of adukkham-asukham for he was paying attention to other objects.

2) The development of utter mental calmness was the ultimate goal but his immediate goal was to get rid of the agitative elements. But while pursuing the immediate goal he neither paid the slightest attention to the ultimate goal nor to the immediately higher mental state that would follow the elimination of the agitative element. Therefore the only intentional act of Gotama that is recorded in the jhāna formulas is the rejection of the agitative element. The meditative technique was that the mind would be fully occupied with the task in hand, viz. the elimination of the agitative element. This point is brought into

p.142

clear relief with reference to the cessation of perception and feeling in the Cūlavedalla-sutta.<sup>[45]</sup> Here the bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā states that:

when a bhikkhu is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, it does not occur to him: “I shall attain the cessation of perception and feeling,” or “I am attaining the cessation of perception and feeling,” or “I have attained the cessation of perception and feeling”; but rather his mind has previously developed in such a way that it leads him to that state.

3) His efforts were not directed towards the development of concentration (samādhi) and mindfulness (sati). While practising the four jhānas Gotama did not take a single step that directly led to the development of these mental elements. They got incidentally developed with the intentional gradual elimination of agitative mental elements and the resultant development of mental calmness.

4) None of the mental elements constituting a jhāna was intentionally brought into existence by the meditator. The only step he intentionally took was to eliminate an agitative element in the preceding mental state. Even the appearance of such elements which were the direct result of the elimination of an agitative element, was not intended. They are not there to fulfil any subjective expectation. To this extent the four jhānas are objective.

5) While composing the jhāna formulas the Buddhists, like the Nibbānavādins, did not enumerate all the mental elements in sequence in the sense that the preceding element is the direct cause of the following element. They moreover did not record all the mental elements that were experienced in a jhanic state. They presented only a selection of such elements. Such a

p.143

selection only shows which elements arise before and which later.

6) All agitative elements such as vitakka-vicāra, pīti and sukha were treated as objects of concentration so that they can be adversely criticised, and the mind can be free from their thoughts.

7) Each jhanic state, except that of the fourth jhāna, in its origin, continuation and transformation for the better is indebted to three different factors. Its origin is due to the aversion to and elimination of the thoughts of the strongest agitative element in the preceding mental state. Its continuation is dependent on the time one takes to give up the thoughts of the strongest agitative mental element in the present mental state. Its transformation to a higher mental state is due to the elimination of the same

agitative element in the present mental state. The mental state can also get transformed for the worse if the meditator develops clinging for a pleasant feeling; in this case he reverts to the preceding, lower mental state. The reason for such transformations of a mental state is change in the degree of mental agitation. When one has aversion to a mental element, that element disappears, and the adverse criticism of that element naturally comes to an end. The mind being free from such disturbing influences naturally grows calmer. Consequently a higher mental state is attained. But if the meditator takes delight in and clings to an element, his mental agitation increases. He therefore, reverts to the preceding, lower mental state. So long the degree of mental agitation remains the same or within a certain limit, the meditator continues to remain in the same mental state.

8) An agitative, pleasant element causes downfall neither because of its agitative nature, nor because of its pleasantness; it causes downfall due to its association with calmness which creates the illusion of nibbāna-in-this-world.

p. 144

9) A pleasant element (sukhā vedanā) is pleasant and comparatively peaceful only so long it is less agitative than other elements in the jhāna. When with the disappearance of other stronger elements, it becomes the most agitative of the elements present in the mental state, and hence the object of concentration, it is found to be both agitative and unpleasant. For example, pīti is pleasant in the first jhāna and also as an arising element in the second jhāna, but later as an object of concentration in the same second jhāna it is felt to be agitative and unpleasant.

## Special Aspects of the Fourth Jhāna

Immediately after recording the traditional description of the fourth jhāna formula the different Suttas describe a mental state with which Gotama acquired the three vijjās. The description runs as follows:

So evam samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgane vigatupakilese mudubhūte kammaniye thite āneñjapatte pubbe-nivāsānussati-jñānāya cittam abhininnāmesim.[46]

When the mind was thus (evam) concentrated, purified, rendered clean, without blemish and afflictions, workable, has become pliant, steady and immovable, he (i.e. Gotama) bent his mind for the knowledge based on recollection of past lives.

How was this mental state related to the fourth jhāna? The word “evam” in the beginning of the description of the mental state may indicate cause-effect relationship between them or it may signify the identity of the fourth jhāna with this mental state. In support of the first possibility we may point out that the description of this mental state does not include the feeling of adukkham-asukham or

p.145

any other feeling, but the traditional fourth jhāna formula, on the other hand, is characterized by the feeling of adukkham-asukham. Moreover, this additional mental

state is not recorded in the formula followed by the Nibbānavādins who also attained the fourth jhāna. Finally, the expressions used and the concepts contained in the description of this mental state are not found in the traditional fourth jhāna formula. It thus appears that here we are dealing with a mental state different from the fourth jhāna.

But there is no evidence at all to show that one mental state follows from the other. There is no tradition that Gotama got rid of the feeling of *adukkham-asukham* or changed the mental state of the fourth jhāna in any other way, and consequently attained the additional mental state. This suggests that both the fourth jhāna formula and this additional description of a mental state refer to the same mental state which Gotama experienced when he was abiding in the fourth jhāna.

We may point out a number of facts which would show that this additional description of a mental state does not indicate a new mental state but refers to the fourth jhāna itself.

a) A new mental state arises if an element from the existing mental state disappears (vide four jhāna formulas) or a new mental element is added to it (e. g. the acquisition of the three *vijjās*). And if a new mental state arises, it is described including either a feeling or *vijjā*. But the additional mental state recorded immediately after the fourth jhāna does not fulfil any of these conditions. It neither states that a mental element has been given up nor does it mention the acquisition of a new mental element. It is clear that here we do not have a new mental state different from the fourth jhāna. The mental elements mentioned in this additional description should be regarded as belonging to the mental state of the fourth jhāna.

b) This conclusion is strengthened by the account of the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*. This *sutta* describes all the mental states

p.146

from the first jhāna to the third *vijjā* attained by Gotama, and states that each of these mental states included a pleasant feeling (*sukhā vedanā*) But the additional description of the mental state recorded just after the traditional fourth jhāna formula does not speak of a pleasant feeling. It is obvious that the *sutta* does not regard this state as a new mental state distinct from the fourth jhāna.

This conclusion is also borne out if we make a more thorough and critical comparison between the traditional fourth jhāna and the additional description of the mental state given immediately after the fourth jhāna. The term “*parisuddhe*” of the additional description refers to the same purified mindfulness as indicated by the phrase “*upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi*” of the jhāna formula. Again this mindfulness should be identical with the mindfulness referred to in the phrase “*anuttaram upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhim*” of the *Sekha-sutta*.<sup>[47]</sup> For in both the cases this developed mindfulness comes into existence with the attainment of the fourth jhāna and before the acquisition of the three *vijjās*. The other terms qualifying the mind, viz. *Pariyodāte* (clean), *anaṅgane* and *vigatupakkilese* (without blemish and defilement) only express the idea of mental purity more elaborately. Again the expression “*mudubhūte*” in the additional description indirectly refers to the element of *upekkhā*. The pliability of

mind indicates that the meditator, if necessary, can move from one object to another freely. This is due to perfect “upekkhā” which frees the mind from liking and disliking. Moreover the element of concentration (samādhi) though not explicitly mentioned in the jhāna formula, is certainly present in this mental state, for the sequence of the arising of different mental elements always ends with “samādhi.” The presence of the pleasant feeling in the jhāna formula also shows the presence of samādhi, for this feeling results in concentration.

p. 147

These two descriptions, thus, refer to the same mental state attainable in the fourth jhāna. They represent only two different selections from a longer series of mental elements experienced by the meditator. This difference is due to the difference in emphasis. The Nibbānavādins wanted to emphasise the mental calmness and therefore did not elaborate the mental elements that serve as instruments of knowledge while Gotama in the additional formulation wanted to draw attention only to the instruments of knowledge necessary for the realisation of the three vijjās.

## **Suitability of the Fourth Jhāna as a Means of True Knowledge**

The fourth jhāna not only came into existence objectively but also was absolutely objective in its functioning. This is the reason why Gotama was able to realise the three types of knowledges (vijjā) and bodhi with the help of this mental state.

Let us try to understand why this mental state could function objectively. The awareness of “I” as an agent was still there, for Gotama had not yet achieved “bodhi.” But Gotama had now become free from the influence of all types of feelings. He freed himself from the feelings of domanassa, dukkha, pīti (=somanassa) and sukha and thereby attained the fourth jhāna. He remained uninfluenced by the feeling of adukkham-asukham, and so he could abide in the fourth jhāna. Consequently the awareness of “I” did not give rise to the attitudes of liking and disliking. The mind of Gotama was not tainted by any subjective reaction and was capable of making truly objective observation. In fact the mind in this state is incapable of distorting the reality of what is observed. The mind is only capable of seeing an object as it really is (yathābhutam). This mental state is unique for it is ignorant of the unreality of “I,” and yet does not distort the objectivity of observation. Thus this mental state is ideally suitable for gaining truly objective knowledges, including “bodhi.” “Whilst part of what we perceive

p.148

comes through our senses from the object before us, another part (and it may be the larger part) always comes out of our mind” (William James, *The Principles of Psychology*). Gotama found out that the subjective part of our perception (i.e. what comes out of our own mind) is due to the influence of vedanā (feeling). He also showed the way to be free from this influence. Consequently Gotama’s perception of



an object was free from all subjective colourings and was thus completely objective. In this respect the observation made by a śramaṇa while abiding in this state is superior to the result of any scientific observation which is inevitably and inextricably mixed up. Any scientific observation made by a scientist who is influenced by dukkha and sukha is bound to be mixed up with subjective reactions to what is observed. The scientific observation, thus, can never be truly objective.

It should be noted that the absence of influence of all feelings and the resultant non-clinging to any object are not due to knowledge but due to the constant cultivation of particular types of thoughts. The clinging was suppressed but not uprooted. The possibility that the clinging may surface again is still there.

## Realisation of the Three Knowledges (Vijjā)

The mental faculties in the fourth jhāna were such that Gotama by being merely mindful could gain three types of true knowledge and “bodhi,” the absolutely objective knowledge of the Conditioned.

The first knowledge was due to the recollection of his own past lives in all details (pubbenivāsānussati-jñāna). This knowledge is not knowing what was not known before. It is a case of recollection, anussati i.e. regaining the knowledge of something that was forgotten.

The first vijjā was gained with the mental state that was attained in the fourth jhāna. With the acquisition of the first vijjā a new mental state comes into existence. This is clear from the account of the Mahāsaccaka-sutta. But the mental instruments of knowledge

p. 149

must have remained fundamentally the same, for the stock description of the cognitive faculties of mind has been repeated verbatim while relating the acquisition of the second and third vijjās.

The other two knowledges (vijjā) deal with knowing what was not known to him before. The second knowledge was about the ever-recurring phenomenon of death and rebirth of living beings (cutupapāta-jñānam) following the consequences of their actions. This knowledge he acquired directly through divine vision.

The first two knowledges brought Gotama face to face with the endless recurrence of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth that is the ineluctable destiny of the unenlightened beings. This spurred him on to discover the wisdom that would lead him out of this cycle.

The liberating wisdom which he gained through direct vision found its first expression with reference to āsava (defilement) which is responsible for our bondage in the saṃsāra. He had the truly objective knowledge (yathabhūtam) of the existence, origin, destruction, and the path leading to the destruction of āsavas.[48] The knowledge regarding āsava involves the law of paticca-samuppāda. This is bodhi or

enlightenment that destroyed all attractions for an individual existence, and uprooted the illusory ‘I’ and all clingings.

After the attainment of the third vijjā which assured Gotama of his final liberation, he declared thus:

When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the taint of sensual desire (kā mā sāva), from the taints of being (bhavā sāva) and the taint of ignorance (avijjā sāva). I directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what has to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being”. This was the third knowledge attained by me in the third watch of the night.

p. 150

This knowledge is called born of bodhi. The declaration of Gotama is a testimony to the fact that the final liberation was attained. There is no more birth for Gotama. This shows that even if one has attained only bodhi, and not nibbāna in this world, he is still assured of nibbāna after the dissolution of the body.

## Implications of Bodhi

The Mahāvedalla-sutta[49] states that an unshakeable deliverance of mind is attained after the realisation of bodhi. Again it is only after the attainment of bodhi that Gotama could really know that the nibbāna, the Unconditioned really exists. With him nibbāna was no longer a matter of faith. But the knowledge he had of the existence of nibbāna and its characteristics was the result of logical deductions. Bodhi not only revealed the true nature of the Conditioned but also showed that it was possible to go beyond and attain the nibbāna, the Unconditioned. Being unconditioned, the nibbāna must be permanent. As it is permanent, it must be changeless. Being changeless it is completely devoid of all actions and, therefore, utterly calm. And what is calm should be free from all clingings, for clinging causes agitation. All these logical conclusions are valid being based on absolutely objective knowledge. Accordingly the Suttas describe nibbāna as the cessation of all formative actions (sabba-saṃkhāra-samatha) and as supreme state of excellent peace (anuttaram santivarapadam).[50] It is because of such a characterisation of nibbāna that a śramaṇa or brahmin, whenever he attained a comparatively peaceful state, he mistook it for nibbāna, and declared:

I am calm, I have attained nibbāna, I am without any attachment (santo’ham asmi, nibbuto’ham asmi, anupādāno’ham asmi).[51]

p. 151

Such a brahmin or Śramaṇa was wrong, for, as the Buddha pointed out, such a statement made by a person who is without wisdom (bodhi) showed that he took delight in this state, clung to it, and, therefore, his mind was not perfectly calm. The Buddha was not objecting to the characterisation of nibbāna as calm and non-clinging. He was only pointing out that such a śamaṇa or brahmin had not yet experienced these characteristics of nibbāna.

## A Particular Mental State Necessary for Attaining Bodhi

Gotama also attained this mental state but, as already pointed out, remained unaffected by it. Instead of trying to attain still calmer mental state and realise nibbāna, he strove for the realisation of bodhi. The spiritual goal of Gotama was nibbāna. So this striving for the realisation of bodhi may appear to be enigmatic, especially because this step taken by Gotama did not conform to the general spiritual practice of the śramaṇas who were not interested in gaining knowledge; they were all for attaining an utterly peaceful mental state. Moreover the mind of one who has only realised “bodhi” is not utterly calm. It is not bereft of all formative actions (saṅkhāra). Thus it appears Gotama revolutionised the spiritual world of the śramaṇas by striving for and realising bodhi. What is the reason for such an action?

In the Samyutta Nikāya Gotama tells Susimaparibbājaka that nibbāna is to be realised after “bodhi.” In the Rathaviniita-sutta[52] the same message has been given more clearly and elaborately. The Sutta mentions a series of spiritual achievements in an ascending order at the apex of which stands nibbāna, immediately preceded by the mental state of purification of knowledge and vision, i.e. bodhi. The sutta states that it is for the sake of nibbāna, and not for other spiritual achievements, that the bhikkhus follow the teaching of the Tathāgata. But nibbāna

p.152

cannot be experienced without first attaining bodhi and other spiritual states. Thus bodhi had to be attained first and only then the nibbāna in this world could be experienced. The implication of this passage should not be literally taken. What the text here actually means is that nibbāna cannot be realised without first attaining the mental state necessary for the realisation of bodhi, i.e. the mental state Gotama experienced in the fourth jhāna. We have to remember that all these passages speak of the nibbāna in this world, and not of the nibbāna which is unconditioned.

## Realization of Nibbāna

A person who has realized bodhi can automatically attain nibbāna after the dissolution of the body. So why was nibbāna declared to be the ultimate spiritual goal to be attained in this world? What does the realization of nibbāna-in-this-world precisely mean? Or how can one attain this nibbāna?

All these problems can be solved if we pay closer attention to the nature of nibbāna. We have seen that all the characteristics attributed to nibbāna are logically deduced. The main characteristics of nibbāna, namely, the unconditionedness, and permanency can never be experienced by mind, for the mind is conditioned and impermanent. So these two characteristics never came to be associated with the nibbāna in this world.

The other characteristics such as absence of all activities, utter calmness and complete non-clinging follow from the two main characteristics, and they characterize the nibbāna-in-this-world. So the chief signs of the attainment of nibbāna-in-this-world

are the cessation of all formative actions and the utter mental peacefulness. This mental state as we shall see is not the bodhi mind, but the cessation of perception and feeling which also stands for the cessation of all formative actions (sabba-saṅkhāra-samatha). We can even say that as nibbāna marks the cessation of all saṅkhāras, it is perfectly calm. In bodhi all the saṅkhāras are not perfectly destroyed. Before

p.153

the attainment of bodhi the verbal saṅkhāras (vicāra and vitakka) and the bodily saṅkhāras (that is, the in-breathing and the out-breathing) are temporarily suppressed in the second jhāna and the fourth jhāna respectively. But in the state of saññā-vedayita-nirodha (cessation of perception and feeling) even the mental saṅkhāras of perception and feeling, are relatively absent from mind.

It is obvious that to attain such a state another object of meditation was necessary. Gotama now followed the pre-Buddhist system of formless meditations which deals with different types of perception. Gotama gradually went beyond the perceptions of form, infinite space, nothingness, infinite consciousness, and obtained the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Then he made an end of perception in this state and attained the cessation of perception and feeling.

The cessation, however, does not mean complete cessation of perception. The Buddha uses the term in a relative sense. According to the Cūlasuññatā-sutta[53] the saññā-vedayita-nirodha state is created, impermanent, and a source of disturbance. The meditator finds it disturbing, for there is still the perception of signless concentration of mind (animittā cetosamādhi) in this state. As there is perception and feeling, there should be also an awareness of “I.” Not to speak of this state which Gotama attained after the realisation of “bodhi,” even while abiding in the mental state of the fourth jhāna Gotama remained unaffected by any feeling or the awareness of “I.” Moreover the perception in this state is even more reduced than the perception in the neither-perception-nor-not-perception state. This is the calmest mental state that one can experience in this world. This state is the closest possible approximation to the nibbanic calmness. Therefore the experience of this state is considered to be identical with the experience of the nibbāna-in-this-world.

p. 154

There are several Suttas which confirm that the state of saññā-vedayita-nirodha is attained after the neither-perception-nor-not-perception. The Ariyapariyesanā-sutta[54] confirms this tradition; moreover this Sutta also states that Gotama experienced the nibbāna in this world after the attainment of the neither-perception-nor-not-perception. It is obvious that the cessation of perception and feeling is the same as the nibbāna-in-this world. This is also proved by the description of the nibbāna-in-this-world as the cessation of all formations and as the state of utter peacefulness, for we know that the state of saññā-vedayita-nirodha also relatively marks the end of all formative actions and is, therefore, utterly calm. With the attainment of this state Gotama’s spiritual journey came to an end. He declared himself to be the Tathāgata, the Sammāsambuddha.

p. 155

# 在最早的成佛之道上——對南傳藏經傳統的研究

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## 提要

佛教傳統認為喬達摩是歷史上第一位在這個世界成佛的人，亦即如來。非佛教傳統間接證實這種說法，因為在他們的文獻中沒有一位佛教以外的老師被稱為「佛陀」。喬達摩之所以成佛，在於他了解了漏盡或苦滅的真實知識，那就是「菩提」。廣義來說，菩提可以說是處理有為法的客觀知識。了悟菩提使喬達摩確證涅槃的存在，那是無為的真相。從此，涅槃的存在，也不再僅僅是他個人的信仰。

喬達摩的成就顛覆了傳統沙門的精神世界。佛教之前的沙門，對於有為法的真相顯然並不是真的感興趣；他們汲汲於接近無為寂滅的心靈狀態。他們努力壓抑由貪或苦等不善念頭所引起的心靈擾動，但卻不設法根除這些惡念。

佛教之前的沙門主要修習兩種禪法：一種是努力達到不被感受影響的自在；另一種則是通過漸次消除形相與空間等知覺，最終達到滅除受與想的狀態。第一種禪法能導向菩提的覺悟，因為它完整保留了想，因此而有克服知障的可能空間；第二種禪法則為體驗現法涅槃所必要，因為它能逐步去除一切有為法的痕跡。

喬達摩是歷史上第一位同時修習這兩種禪法的人，他不僅改善這些禪法，並且還將它們結合為唯一的禪法，終而了悟最終的精神目標。本文嘗試對喬達摩成佛——如來——的過程作一詳細而嚴謹的探討。

**關鍵詞：**1.四禪 2.菩提 3.現法涅槃

- [1] Dīgha Nikāya (abbrev. D), I, pp.36-38. (PTS ed.)
- [2] Majjhima Nikāya (abbrev. M) I, pp.115-17. (Ed. V. Trenckner, PTS)
- [3] M I, pp.21-23; pp.117; 247-49, etc.
- [4] M I, pp.164-67.
- [5] See, B. Mukherjee, “A pre-Buddhist Meditation System and its Early Modifications by Gotama the Bodhisattva,” *Chung Hwa Buddhist Journal*, July, 1995, p.457; for further reference, see note no.1.
- [6] For the original version of the jhāna formulas, see, D.I, p.36; for the modified version of the same, see, M. I, pp.21, 117 etc.
- [7] Dīghanakha-sutta, M. I, pp.500-01; here the Buddha states that one can attain liberation if he is not attracted by the feelings; also see, the Pañcattaya-sutta. (M. II, p.237)
- [8] For the English translation of the relevant passages of the Brahmajāla-sutta, see, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, July, 1995, pp.460-63.
- [9] For the meanings of abyāpāda and avihimsā, see, Mukherjee, PDM, Pt.II, p.313, note no.7. (*Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, 1996)
- [10] M I, pp.62-63.
- [11] See, the present article, pp.147-148.
- [12] Though not expressly stated there are several clear indications in the traditions preserved that the Nibbānavādins were striving for mental calmness. This is evident from the fact that they rejected any mental element which found to be most agitative (olārika). It is clear from the identification of any relatively calmer mental state with nibbāna. Moreover some non-Buddhist Śramaṇas, and brahmins who attained the fourth jhāna expressed their appreciation for this mental state in the following way: “It is calm (santam), it is perfect (panitam), it is nibbāna.” As they felt this state to be very peaceful they identified it with nibbāna.
- [13] See also, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* (1996), pp.460, 468.
- [14] Māgandiya-sutta, M I, pp. 504ff; Devadaha-sutta, M II, p.22.
- [15] Dukkhas disappears at the time of attainment of the second jhāna, see, Śrāvaka bhūmi of Acarya Asaṅga, p.454 (Ed. Dr. K. Sukla, Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series, Vol. XIV, K. P. Jayaswal Institute, Patna, 1973.
- [16] Sekha-sutta, M I. p.356. Here all the four jhānas are called ‘adhicitta’.
- [17] See the present article, p.114.

[18] For the translation of vitakka-vicāra, see, Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, 1995, p.470.

[19] Ibid.

[20] M II, p.235.

[21] See the Vatthupama-sutta account given later.

[22] I have followed the translation given in the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, p.119 (Bhikkhu Nanamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publication, Boston, 1995) except that I have not accepted the translation of “aveccapasāda” as perfect confidence. We know that this account corresponds to the first jhāna. I have translated “aveccapasāda” of the first jhāna as initial confidence which develops into perfect confidence (sampasādana) in the second jhāna.

[23] M I, p.303.

[24] D I, p.74.

[25] M I, pp.247-49.

[26] M II, p.235.

[27] Culatanhasamkhaya-sutta, M I, p.251.

[28] Vibhaṅga, p.27.

[29] Ibid.

[30] The term “ekotībhāva” occurs in Śrāvakabhūmi, p.451. For a detailed analysis of the term, see Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal (1995) p.462, note no.10.

[31] Śrāvakabhūmi, p.454.

[32] See also, ibid. p.453 where the sukha of the third jhāna is indicated to be most developed.

[33] D.I, p.40.

[34] See under ‘upa’ and ‘īkṣā’ in Sanskrit-English Dictionary by M. Monier Williams and V. S. Apte.

[35] 《阿毗達磨俱舍論本頌 研究——界品・根品・世間品——》, supervised by 福原亮嚴, 京都：永田文昌堂, 1977, p.200, Section 3, verse 15.

[36] Taisho Tripiṭaka, Vol.1, p.93b29.

[37] 《阿毗達磨俱舍論本頌 研究——界品·根品·世間品——》, supervised by 福原亮巖, 京都: 永田文昌堂, 1977, p.400, Section 3, verse 42.

[38] Śrāvakabhūmi, p.454.

[39] Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya (Ed. P. Pradhan, K. P. Jayaswal Research institute, Patna, 1967) p.42.

[40] D. I, p.75.

[41] A number of Suttas speak of only three types of feelings, e.g. Cūlavedalla-sutta etc. while others deal with five feelings. It appears that the Buddhists recognised five different feelings which they arranged into three categories, viz. dukkha, sukha, and adukkham-asukham. Domanassa belongs to the category of dukkha while somanassa to that of sukha.

[42] There can be only one feeling at a time; see, Dīghanakha-sutta (M I, p.500).

[43] M I, p.303.

[44] M II, p.237.

[45] M I, p.301.

[46] For example Dvedhāvitakka-sutta, Bhayabherava-sutta etc.

[47] M I, p.358.

[48] M I, pp.175, 265 suggest that the enlightenment Gotama gained through direct vision found its first expression with reference to āsava.

[49] M I, p.298; I, p.167 etc.

[50] M II, pp.234-38.

[51] Samyutta Nikāya II, pp.148-9.

[52] M I, pp.148-9.

[53] M III, p.107. I am indebted to Venerable Dhammadīpa for this reference.

[54] M I, pp.167-68.