

Samadhi & Jhana in Pali Buddhism

Sati Center for Buddhist Studies Saturday Class

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“I considered . . . could jhana be the path to enlightenment? Then came the realization: ‘That is the path to enlightenment.’”

The Buddha
Mahasaccaka Sutta

“There are five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the true Dhamma. What are the five? Here the bhikkhus [monks], the bhikkhunis [nuns], the male lay followers, and the female lay followers dwell without reverence and deference towards the Teacher . . . towards the Dhamma . . . towards the Sangha . . . towards the training . . . without reverence and deference towards samadhi. These are the five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the true Dhamma.”

The Buddha
Kassapasamyutta (SN16.13)

Goals for the Class:

- 1) Understand the range of teachings on samadhi in the Pali tradition.
- 2) Understand the relationship between samadhi and insight meditation.
- 3) Understand the nature of jhana.
- 4) Understand the main controversies and disagreements about samadhi and its place in meditation practice.

And Most Important of All:

- 5) Inform and Support Your Practice

Samdhi in the Pali Suttas

Samadhi is usually translated as concentration.

It more accurately means “undistracted”.

Two ways *samadhi* is understood:

- 1) One-pointed on a single object. Ultimately, experience of change is lost because only aware of a single point. “Exclusive”.
- 2) Mind becomes unmoving, but not on a single object. Aware of a broad range of experience. “Inclusive”.

1. Right Samadhi

The suttas say explicitly that right *Samadhi* is a condition for seeing directly and clearly into the true nature of things:

“Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated understands things as they really are. And what does he understand as they really are? He understands as it really is [all formations] are impermanent.’
Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated understands things as they really are.”
SN35.99

“Right *Samadhi*” is the eighth element of the Eightfold Path.

Right *Samadhi* incorporates many factors, including mindfulness.

Right *Samadhi* is always defined in the suttas as the four *jhanas*.

Although unification of mind is a principal facet of right concentration, it is not the sole defining feature.

Right concentration integrates and synthesizes a range of numerous qualities, which support and strengthen each other.

2. Samadhi in Important Buddhist Lists

In addition to its place as the last factor in the Noble Eightfold Path, *samadhi* appears prominently throughout the suttas dealing with mental cultivation.

In several places the suttas state that the entire Buddhist path fundamentally entails abandoning the Five Hindrances, developing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and realizing the Seven Factors of Enlightenment so as to gain true knowledge and release.

Samadhi in Seven Factors of Enlightenment

“Just as all the rafters of a peaked house slant, slope, and incline towards the roof peak, so too, when [one] develops and cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment, he slants, slopes, and inclines toward Nibbana.”

“What is the path and the way that leads to the cessation of craving? It is: the seven factors of enlightenment.”

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment is one of the most important lists in Buddhist teaching.

The seven factors of enlightenment are 1) mindfulness, 2) investigation or discrimination of dhammas, or discernment of dhamma, 3) energy, 4) rapture, 5) tranquility, 6) concentration, and 7) equanimity.

Seven Factors as Path to Jhana:

Though there is no explicit reference to jhana in the list, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment can be viewed as a condensed summary of the step-by-step path leading up through the cultivation of right concentration and the four jhanas.

The seven enlightenment factors, in their stepwise successive form, **correlate directly to the progressive development of jhana** and right concentration, as seen in this passage from the Samannaphala (Fruits of the Homeless Life) Sutta:

“And when he **knows** (Pali: *passati*) that these five hindrances have left him, gladness arises in him, from gladness comes **rapture**, from the rapture in his mind his **body is tranquilized**, with a tranquil body he feels happiness (*sukha*, also translated as pleasure in jhana definition), and with happiness **his mind is concentrated**. Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a he enters and abides in the first jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, and accompanied by thought and examination.” DN2.75

Continuing from the formula in the jhana definition, the second jhana is characterized by **rapture** and pleasure, born of **concentration**. With attainment of the third jhana one abides in **equanimity, mindful** and clearly aware. And the fourth jhana is characterized by **purity of mindfulness** and **equanimity**.

In the following passage, the Buddha recounts his period of meditation practice before his enlightenment:

“Tireless **energy** was aroused in me and unrelenting **mindfulness** was established, my body was **tranquil** and untroubled, my mind **concentrated** and unified. Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first jhana . . . the second jhana . . . the third jhana . . . the fourth jhana.” MN4.22-26

Six of the seven enlightenment factors appear directly in these introductory passages to the jhana formulation or in the jhana formula itself.

Though discernment or discrimination of the dharma is not explicitly mentioned in these examples, a correspondence with the above passages can be seen. The Pali term *passati*, from “And when he **knows** that these five hindrances have left him”, means ‘to see’.

Samadhi in the Satipatthana (Foundations of Mindfulness Sutta)

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness fulfills the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

So the Seven Factors of Enlightenment can be considered to be the culmination of practice and the foundations of mindfulness the method of practice leading to that culmination.

Samadhi in the Satipathana Sutta

When engaged in the satipathana contemplations, **if the mind does not become concentrated** the defilements are not abandoned, the mind does not pick up the sign of concentration, and the meditator “does not gain pleasant dwelling in the present life, **nor does one gain mindfulness and clear comprehension.**” SN47.8

So the suttas expect the meditator to develop a strong degree of concentration and tranquility.

If we interpret the Seven Factors of Enlightenment as a condensed outline of the path for jhana development, then the Satipatthana Sutta describes the method for developing jhana.

“What is concentration? What is the basis of concentration? . . . Unification of mind is concentration; the four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of concentration.” MN44.12

“In one of right view, right intention comes into being; in one of right intention, right speech comes into being; . . . in one of right mindfulness, right concentration comes into being.” MN117.34

Samadhi is directly mentioned in the Satipatthana Sutta in only three places.

- 1) In the third foundation, of mind, one understands “concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind.”
- 2) The second place where samadhi is mentioned is in the fourth foundation, in the section on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. “If the concentration enlightenment factor is present in him, he knows ‘there is the concentration enlightenment factor in me’”.
- 3) The third place where samadhi is discussed is in the expanded section of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta detailing the Eightfold Path, which restates that right samadhi is jhana.

Samadhi in the Anapanasati Sutta

Breath meditation is often taught merely as a preparatory practice, since it is the initial practice in the first of the four foundations of mindfulness practices.

But the Anapanasati Sutta declares that, when developed and cultivated, mindfulness of breathing alone fulfills the entire four foundations of mindfulness, which, in turn, fulfill the seven factors of enlightenment:

Anapanasati should be viewed, not as a preliminary practice, but as a complete method to develop right concentration and insight necessary for enlightenment.

The meditator proceeds through sixteen steps of mindful breathing, the initial four steps of breath meditation in the Satipatthana Sutta followed by an additional twelve steps introduced in this sutta.

This sutta is open to a variety of interpretations and opinions regarding how the system should be practiced and what degree of samadhi the meditator should develop at each step.

Jhana in the Pali Suttas

“Jhana is called the pleasure of renunciation, the pleasure of seclusion, the pleasure of peace, the pleasure of enlightenment. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should be pursued, that it should be developed, that it should be cultivated, that it should not be feared”

The Buddha
Latukikopama Sutta

“Just as the river Ganges slants, slopes, and inclines towards the east, so too one who develops and cultivates the four jhanas slants, slopes, and inclines towards Nibbana.”

The Buddha
Jhanasamyutta (SN53.1)

Jhana Definition:

“Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and abides in the first jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, and accompanied by thought and examination.

With the stilling of thought and examination, he enters and abides in the second jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, and accompanied by inner composure and singleness of mind, without thought and examination.

With the fading away of rapture, he abides in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware, feeling pleasure with the body, he enters and abides in the third jhana, of which the noble ones declare: ‘Equanimous and mindful he abides in pleasure.’

With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters and abides in the fourth jhana, [which has] neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness and equanimity.”

The Mahavedalla Sutta specifies certain elements from the definition as *jhana factors*:

“How many factors does the first jhana have? The first jhana has five factors . . . there occur thought, examination, rapture, pleasure, and unification of mind. That is how the first jhana has five factors.” MN43.19

This is regarded as the standard list for the five jhana factors.

The first four, thought, examination, rapture and pleasure (Pali: vitakka, vicara, piti, and sukha), are found in the jhana formula.

The fifth factor, unification of mind (Pali: cittass’ ekaggata), does not occur in the standard formula, but another similar term, singleness of mind (Pali: ekodi-bhava), appears in the definition of the second jhana.

Eleven other qualities are present each jhana:

These are sense contact, feeling, perception, volition, mind, intention, determination, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention. From the Anupada Sutta, MN111.4

The First Jhana:

Similies are given in a number of suttas, which expand on the definition and help explain the way to attain the jhana.

First Jhana Definition with simile:

“Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and abides in the first jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, and accompanied by thought and examination. He makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Just as a skilled bath man or a bath man’s apprentice heaps bath powder in a metal basin and, sprinkling it gradually with water, kneads it till the moisture wets his ball of bath powder, soaks it and pervades it inside and out, yet the ball itself does not ooze; so too, a bhikkhu makes the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.”

Suffusing the jhana factors throughout the body is both a characteristic of and the way to progress through the higher stages of jhana.

Jhana Definition in Detail:

Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and abides in the first jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, and accompanied by thought and examination.

Five Jhana Factors:

1&2) Vitakka-vicara

Together, Vitakka-vicara are variously translated as reflection and investigation, thinking and pondering, thought and examination, applied and sustained thought, thought-conception and discursive thinking, connecting and sustaining, initial and sustained mental application, and directed thought and evaluation.

Two distinct meanings are suggested from these various renderings:

One indicating mental activities such as thinking, reflecting, etc., and the other referring to the mental activity of connecting and sustaining the attention on a meditation subject.

3&4) Piti-Sukha:

Piti is translated as rapture, bliss, joy, delight, zest, and exuberance.

Sukha is translated as pleasure, happiness, joy, agreeable, and bliss.

5) Ekaggata

Cittass’ ekaggata, the fifth jhana factor, is translated as one-pointedness, singleness and unification of mind.

Some traditions maintain that ekaggata means being aware of only one point; others, that it indicates maintaining a single center in a larger range of awareness.

The term *one-pointedness* suggests a stable focus on a single object, in which no other awareness arises besides the meditation subject. One-pointedness is single-minded concentration, the ability of the mind to remain, without distraction, unwavering and steady on the fixed object of its attention.

Ekaggata translated as *unification of mind* includes this meaning, but can also suggest another connotation. Rather than a mind fixed on one object, in which the experience of changing phenomena is lost, in this state the mind itself is unmoving, not the objects of experience.

The Second Jhana

“With the stilling of thought and examination, he enters and abides in the second jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, and accompanied by inner composure and singleness of mind, without thought and examination.”

Progress through the stages of jhana is not accomplished by adding new factors, but by abandoning some of the factors already there.

The second jhana is attained upon the elimination or fading away of two factors, thought and examination, leaving three remaining factors of rapture, pleasure and unification of mind.

Inner composure, a new element introduced for the second jhana, is not a jhana factor.

The meditator attains the second jhana and, again, pervades the body, this time with rapture and pleasure born of concentration: “He makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration. Just as though there were a lake whose waters welled up from below and it had no inflow from east, west, north or south and would not be replenished from time to time by showers of rain, then the cool fount of water welling up in the lake would make the cool water drench, steep, fill, and pervade the lake, so that there would be no part of the whole lake unpervaded by cool water; so too, a bhikkhu makes the rapture and pleasure born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and pleasure born of concentration.”

Upon attaining the second jhana, one gains inner composure and singleness of mind.

The Third Jhana

“With the fading away of rapture, he abides in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware, feeling pleasure with the body, he enters and abides in the third jhana, of which the noble ones declare: ‘Equanimous and mindful he abides in pleasure.’”

Upon entering the third jhana, the simile continues: “He makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture. Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and cool water drenches, steeps, fills, and pervades them to their tips and their roots, so that there is no part of all those lotuses unpervaded by cool water; so too, a bhikkhu makes the pleasure divested of rapture drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of rapture.”

The Fourth Jhana

“With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters and abides in the fourth jhana, [which has] neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness and equanimity.”

Finally, upon attaining the fourth jhana, “He sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind. Just as though a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his whole body not covered by the white cloth; so, too, a bhikkhu sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind.”

Three Divergent Paths in Suttas After Jhana

Upon mastery of the four jhanas, three further paths of training and development are possible. These three divergent paths each have distinct goals and associated practices.

First, beyond the four jhanas already discussed, four additional *higher immaterial* or *formless* attainments, called the aruppas, are described.

The second training accessible upon attainment of the four jhanas is development of the Supernormal Powers or Higher Knowledge (abhinnas in Pali).

The third path of training and development is *insight*, the path leading to Nibbana, which is the ultimate goal of the Buddha’s teachings.

Samadhi in the Visuddhimagga

A treatise written around the fifth century C.E. by Buddhaghosa.

Expresses the commentarial understanding of the Pali teachings.

VM structure is based on the Relay Chariots Discourse (Rathavinita Sutta, MN24). In it, the spiritual path is likened to someone using a series of seven chariots to reach a destination.

1. Tranquility and Insight: Two Paths of Meditation Practice

The VM divides meditation into two distinct, separate paths: Tranquility or calm (Pali: samatha) and insight (Pali: vipassana)

Samatha is a path that strives to develop jhana and then turn to insight meditation practice.

Vipassana does not attain jhana, but goes directly to insight practice.

Samatha meditation:

Attention is focused on an unmoving object called a kasina, or on some other meditation subject, such as the breath.

40 meditation subjects are given.

Goal is to attain *fixed* concentration, concentration so intense that the mind is fixed on the object without wavering. No other experience can arise, so the mind is “one-pointed”, fixed on one point.

Awareness of changing experience is lost as the mind absorbs into its meditation object.

Vipassana meditation:

Insight meditation may be practiced either after attaining at least the first jhana, or directly without ever practicing towards jhana.

In either case, *momentary* concentration is employed.

In the VM, insight cannot occur while in jhana because the mind is absorbed into fixed concentration.

If one has attained jhana, they must come out of jhana into a lower level of samadhi in order to experience changing phenomena and practice insight meditation.

Attainment of insight without jhana is called “dry insight” because it is said to be “unmoistened” by the moisture of jhana.

2. Three Levels of Concentration

Preparatory Concentration (parikamma samadhi): Ordinary level of concentration when beginning meditation practice.

Access or Neighborhood Concentration (upacara samadhi): The meditator is close to accessing jhana, is neighboring jhana.

Access concentration is reached with the appearance of the counterpart sign.

Fixed Concentration (appana samadhi): The level of concentration in jhana.

The Bare Insight meditator takes up practices of insight into the arising and passing away of the five aggregates, other phenomena attaining khanika samadhi, momentary concentration.

3. Three Signs of Concentration

Nimitta means sign, basis, or theme of something.

In the VM, nimitta is a specific sign that arises in meditation.

Preliminary Sign (parikamma nimitta): This is the meditation object experienced at the initial stages of meditation.

Learning Sign or Acquired Image (uggaha nimitta): A mental image of the meditation object that arises. Can be seen even with eyes closed.

Counterpart Sign (patibhaga nimitta): Steady mental image that is flawless, clear and steady.

4. Developing Samadhi

Forty meditation subjects are given:

10 kasinas: earth, water, fire, air, the four colors blue, yellow, red, white, light, and limited space.

10 kinds of body decay, also called ten kinds of foulness: bloated corpse, livid corpse, festering corpse, etc.

10 recollections: Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, virtue, generosity, deities, mindfulness of death, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of breathing, and peace.

4 Divine Abidings: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity

4 immaterial states: the base of boundless space, the base of boundless consciousness, the base of nothingness and the base of neither perception nor non-perception.

1 perception: repulsiveness in nutriment

1 defining: of the four elements

Under the guidance of an experienced teacher, one of these meditation subjects will be selected according to the student's temperament, aptitude and needs.

5. Jhana in the Visuddhimagga

The four jhanas of the Pali suttas have been renamed *rupa jhanas* (fine-material or formal jhanas) in the Visuddhimagga.

The sutta's four *aruppas* also are usually called *aruppas* here, and are grouped with the four rupa jhanas to form the *eight attainments* (Pali: *attha samapatti*).

All of the forty meditation subjects previously discussed can lead to access concentration, but only thirty lead to the first jhana or beyond.

In VM jhana, body awareness is lost as the mind absorbs into the nimitta. And there is no awareness of changing experience.

There is only awareness of the jhana factors.

The Jhana Factors:

Vitakka-vicara: Specifically mean connecting and sustaining the attention on the meditation object.

Piti (rapture): Five types of rapture are listed.

Sukha: Pleasure or happiness.

Ekaggata: One-pointedness. Fixed concentration on a single object.

Controversies Surrounding Samadhi

1. What is Jhana?

A basic dispute regarding jhana is whether one is aware of the body while in jhana.

An intimate connection with body awareness that is maintained and refined throughout all four jhanas is an essential component comprising jhana in the suttas.

This important aspect of jhana is highlighted in the expanded jhana similes, which refer repeatedly to the body being filled with rapture, pleasure, or awareness.

Heightened awareness of and connection with the body is both a characteristic of jhana and a practice leading to it, as emphasized in the Kayagatasati (Mindfulness of the Body) Sutta (MN119), which states unambiguously that through attaining jhana one develops mindfulness of the body.

The sutta states explicitly that body awareness is present in jhana.

In contrast to the suttas, the Visuddhimagga clearly describes jhana as a state in which body awareness is lost as the mind absorbs into a nimitta, a mental image.

The Visuddhimagga states that when the suttas refer to the body in conjunction with jhana they are referring to a metaphorical 'mental' body:

It is possible to interpret jhana in the Kayagatasati Sutta in this way since the word 'kaya' means group, aggregate, collection, or body, and so could be used to refer to any group or 'body', either physical or mental.

However, the Kayagatasati Sutta is clearly about mindfulness of the physical body.

In the seventh section on jhana, there is no mention that 'body' is going to have a new meaning in the following discussion.

It is hard to conceive that the entire sutta would focus on mindfulness of the physical body, and then switch to mindfulness of the 'mental body' just in this last section on jhana.

It is unlikely that the Buddha would switch meanings for the word 'kaya' without signaling that he is doing so, especially if it is so essential to jhana that kaya *not* mean physical body.

Adding jhana in the Kayagatasati Sutta emphasizes the connection of jhana with mindfulness of the physical body.

2. Are Samadhi and Insight Two Paths or One?

The Visuddhimagga unambiguously separates meditation practice into two distinct types or paths of development, tranquility and insight.

The path of tranquility focuses exclusively on the attainment of jhana, defined as one-pointed concentration.

The path of insight can be pursued either after attaining jhana or directly, as the path of 'dry' insight, in which case samadhi develops in conjunction with the contemplations leading to insight but does not reach the level of jhana.

If read without imposing any interpretation on them, the suttas seem to be saying that insight can occur within a jhana:

In the Anupada Sutta (MN111) Sariputta is able to discern and analyze all the various qualities associated with each jhana:

“And the states in the first jhana – the thought, the examination, the rapture, the pleasure, and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention – these states were individually determined/defined by him; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared.”

In this way, Sariputta was able to recognize, investigate and develop insight into each of the jhanas.

Similarly, in another sutta, “The destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhana . . . a monk enters and dwells in the first jhana . . . whatever states are included there comprised by form, feeling, perception, volitional formations or consciousness (the five aggregates): he views those states as impermanent, as suffering . . . as empty, as non-self.” AN9.36

There are suttas suggesting that meditation should be practiced sequentially, developing samadhi until jhana has been achieved and then switching to insight as a separate practice, just as presented in the Visuddhimagga.

On the night of his enlightenment the Buddha practiced jhana meditation before his final great breakthrough into full realization and ultimate liberation:

“I entered upon and abided in the first jhana . . . in the second jhana . . . in the third jhana . . . in the fourth jhana . . . When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability . . . I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints.” MN36.34-43

A further example, that could be interpreted as a sequential style of development, is found in a stock passage recurring numerous times throughout the suttas, where a standard gradual path of practice proceeds progressively through the threefold division of the eightfold path: morality, concentration and wisdom (DN2 and others).

The meditator develops the four jhanas. Only after mastering jhana does he turn his attention to insight practices as he “inclines his mind towards knowing and seeing.”

But this is not an instruction that one should first attain jhana and then come out of jhana to begin insight practice, only that insight practice begins after the attainment of jhana.

Neither the above passage from the night of the Buddha’s enlightenment nor the standard graduated path of spiritual cultivation say that the meditator comes out of jhana into a lower level of samadhi to practice insight as a distinct form of meditation.

One can develop insight and then tranquility, tranquility and then insight, or both in concert. There is no stipulation that tranquility at the level of jhana must precede vipassana.

They can be developed in either order, but both are necessary in order to attain arahantship:

“[All who attain arahantship] do so in one of four ways . . . [one] develops insight preceded by serenity . . . or [one] develops serenity preceded by insight . . . or [one] develops serenity and insight joined in pairs . . . or [one’s] mind is seized by agitation about the teaching. But there comes a time when his mind becomes internally steadied, composed, unified, and concentrated.” AN4.170

“When one knows and sees [things as they actually are] . . . the Noble Eightfold Path comes to fulfillment in him . . . tranquility and insight occur in him yoked evenly together . . . he understands by direct knowledge those things that should be understood by direct knowledge.” MN149.10

3. Is Jhana necessary for Liberating Insight?

Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of jhana’s essential role in awakening is that the Noble Eightfold Path defines right concentration as jhana.

The Visuddhimagga acknowledges a path of the “bare insight worker”.

In order to find a similar dry insight path in the suttas, in which the deeper stages of samadhi play no part, we have to look for occasional hints scattered throughout the suttas.

The suttas contain examples of people attaining states of insight and awakening merely upon hearing a dharma talk from the Buddha or another monk.

The suttas are explicit that samadhi, in some measure, is indispensable for attainment of arahantship:

“Knowledge of the ending of the taints, as it is actually present, occurs to one who is concentrated, I tell you, and not to one who is not concentrated. So concentration is the path, monk. Non-concentration is no path at all.” AN6.64

“I declare, O monks, that the destruction of the taints occurs in dependence on the first jhana, the second jhana, the third jhana, the fourth jhana.” AN9.36 and others.

Right concentration of the Eightfold Path is defined as the four jhanas, and the four jhanas are integral to the complete model of monastic progressive training, as mentioned in the preceding section, as well as the threefold higher training:

“There are these three trainings: the training in the higher virtue, the training in the higher mind, and the training in the higher wisdom . . . And what is the training in the higher mind? . . . one enters and dwells in the first jhana . . . the second jhana . . . the third jhana . . . one enters and dwells in the fourth jhana . . . this is the training in the higher mind.” AN3.88

All of these examples seem to indicate that attainment of the jhanas is necessary for arahantship.

Conclusion

The Visuddhimagga presents a path of meditation and the states within it that is new and distinct from the Pali suttas.

The Meditative Path

In the Visuddhimagga, insight meditation and the path of concentration and tranquility were necessarily separated because in the fixed concentration of the Visuddhimagga insight could arise only upon leaving jhana.

In the Visuddhimagga, the entire reason for developing tranquility is to attain jhana in order to then turn to other practices for cultivating insight.

The suttas, however, do not make such a clear distinction.

The suttas never clearly articulate a dry path of pure insight in which jhana plays no role.

In the suttas:

- 1) The practice of right samadhi seems to integrate tranquility and insight into a single meditative path.
- 2) Mindfulness meditation is a concentration practice leading toward jhana; insight meditation is not a separate practice.

The Visuddhimagga introduces several other concepts and terms that are not found in the suttas: Preparatory, access and attainment concentration, as well as the signs, nimittas, accompanying these stages, are not found in the suttas.

The word nimitta does appear in the suttas in connection with right concentration, but there it simply means 'theme' or 'basis' of concentration, and is equated with the four foundations of mindfulness. MN44.12

The forty meditation subjects can be found in the suttas, but many are only mentioned peripherally, often with little or no explanatory detail.

Jhana

There are two distinct jhanas in the Pali literature, each one true and correct within its own system: 'sutta jhana' and 'Visuddhimagga jhana'.

These two jhana systems are not the same.

They comprise different meditative states, sharing some features in common, but with their own unique characteristics, potentials, and methods for realizing them.

Each can be properly understood only within the overall context of the texts within which it appears.

The two jhanas are equivalent in terms of the strength of concentration, but dissimilar in terms of the type of concentration.

Jhana in the suttas is a state of heightened mindfulness and awareness of an ever-changing stream of experiences, in which the mind is unmoving.

Jhana in the Visuddhimagga is a state of fixed concentration, where there is no experience of changing phenomena whatsoever, because the objects of the mind are unmoving.

The prominent role of physical body awareness in the sutta jhana definition, which is underscored in the jhana similes and the Mindfulness of the Body sutta, is understood purely as the ‘mental’ body in the Visuddhimagga.

Comparison of Jhana in the Pali Suttas and the Visuddhimagga

	Suttas	Visuddhimagga
The Four Absorptions	Called the Four Jhanas	Called the Rupa Jhanas
The Four Formless Attainments	Called the Aruppas	Usually called the Aruppas, in a few cases called Arupa Jhanas
Type of concentration	Unification of mind	One-pointed concentration fixed on a single object
Body Awareness in Jhana	Seems to suggest heightened experience of and insight into the physical body and changing phenomena	No experience of the physical body and changing phenomena
Insight Meditation Practice	Suggests that insight practice can be undertaken within jhana	Insight must come while not in jhana
Nimitta	General term used in a variety of contexts for ‘sign’, ‘theme’ or ‘basis’, but not specifically as a visual concentration object to attain jhana	A visual image that arises in access concentration, used as the meditation object to attain jhana
Preparatory, Access and Fixed Concentration	Terms are not found	Terms are used