The Direct Jhānic Path to Liberating Insight

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ABSTRACT

I consider the notion that the *jhāna*s are intrinsically soteriological. When discussing reasons for a neglect of the *jhāna*s as a means to liberating insight, I refer to the commentarial literature, but otherwise I take as primary sources, texts from the *Sutta Piṭaka*. For insight to arise after the first *jhāna*, it would have to be unmediated by concepts, as discursive thinking is then absent. I argue that the meditative practice of bare cognition occurs optimally in the fourth *jhāna*. Alexander Wynne has described this practice as characterised by mindfulness, equanimity and absence of mental construction, and as a way of de-conditioning our tendency to mental proliferation and views. Bare cognition also allows a refined observation of the rise and fall of phenomena leading to insight into impermanence. Not only was *jhāna* a practice of the Buddha and his early followers, but, as indicated by accounts in early texts of the *Sutta Nipāta* and *Udāna*, bare cognition was also. Indeed, a misinterpretation of the Pāli word *apilāpanatā* may have led to *sati* (mindfulness) being interpreted as more active and focused, compared to an earlier view of mindfulness as a receptive, non-interfering monitoring. I additionally argue that the non-conceptual experience of jhānic *pīti* and *sukha*, by attenuating our attachment to sensual pleasure, leads to insight. I conclude that jhānic experience induces insight directly and may take us to a point at which liberation is virtually assured.

INTRODUCTION

Different ways have been described by which the four *rūpa jhāna*s may lead to the acquisition of liberating insight (Gethin, 1998, pp.198-201). They may prepare the mind suitably so that it can be applied to ideas, so that a discursive knowledge may be fully understood and internalised. Alternatively, they may

provide subjects, such as their impermanence, for discursive consideration as a means to insight. I propose that additionally they have an intrinsic role in inducing insight, and that insight of a non-conceptual kind arises during these meditative states.

After the first *jhāna* any discursive thinking is said to be absent (Rahula, 1978, p.48; Arbel, 2016, p.86), so my thesis hinges on the possibility of non-conceptual insight occurring thereafter. There are two strands to my argument as to how this occurs. Firstly, in the higher *jhāna*s and optimally in the fourth, there occurs a bare cognition type of meditation, described by Alexander Wynne (2018b, pp.84-89) as characterised by awareness, equanimity, and lack of mental construction.[1] This approach alters the way in which our cognition works and resets our view of reality. It also permits a refined observation of the rise and fall of phenomena which leads to insight into impermanence (*anicca*). Secondly, the refined, non-conceptual experience of *pīti* in the second *jhāna* and of *sukha* in the second and third *jhāna*s weakens the unwholesome attachment to sensual pleasure. I shall argue that sustained or frequent jhānic experience therefore makes liberating insight more likely, and may take us to a point at which liberation is virtually certain.

Various means to liberation are described in the Pāli canon. To adopt Wynne's (2018c) categories, these means range from insight when not meditating,[2] at one extreme – through variations on insight mediated by concepts while meditating – to insight by meditation on the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*) or the deathless realm (*amatā dhātu*) at the other. It is notable that nowhere in the canon does there appear to be explicit mention of an intrinsically jhānic liberation. With the model of *jhāna* preparing the mind for discursive understanding, *jhāna* experience appears to be ancillary to gaining insight – not inherently insight-producing. Insight by meditation on the cessation of perception and feeling or the deathless realm occurs in meditative states beyond the *rūpa jhāna*s. It appears, however, that jhānic experience was at the heart of the Buddha's own enlightenment and that

[1] Indeed, as I discuss later, this approach to meditation is likely the early form of *sati* (mindfulness) as a misinterpretation of the Pāli word *apilāpanatā* may have led to *sati* being interpreted as more active and focused, rather than a receptive, non-interfering monitoring.

[2] For instance in the Pāli canon are instances of awakening while not even in a meditative state, e.g. in the *Dīghanakha Sutta* (MN i.501) Sāriputta is liberated while fanning the Buddha, immediately after listening to a teaching by the Buddha. Likewise, Sāriputta's liberation as recounted at Vin I 40 occurs while he is receiving teaching and not in a meditative state. There is also the account, in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN iii.66–68), of the five *bhikkhus* liberated while hearing doctrinal teaching from the Buddha.

of many his early followers, and the possibility of an intrinsic role for *jhāna* in producing insight lies at the core of my enquiry.

The focus of my method is the texts of the Pāli canon, the only complete Buddhist canon preserved by one of the early schools in an Indian language probably very close to the languages used by the Buddha and his disciples.[3] I cite commentarial sources however to explain why a neglect of the *jhāna*s as a means to insight has occurred. The *arūpa-jhāna*s or *samāpatti*s (formless *jhāna*s or attainments) will not be discussed. This is because they are rather different to the *rūpa-jhāna*s. They were rejected at first, by the Buddha himself and may have been included in older texts that originally only mentioned the four *jhāna*s (Wynne, 2019, Communication via email with author, 26 June). [4] I shall argue that the four *rūpa-jhāna*s were the Buddha's original method of attaining liberation (see also Wynne, 2007, p.108). For clarity and brevity, I shall hereafter refer to the *rūpa jhāna*s as the *jhāna*s and the formless states as the *arūpa samāpatti*s. Translations are from those listed at the end, or mine where specified. For an account of the fourfold *jhāna* model, I have drawn on the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN 18)[5] because it is a text I am familiar with in the Pāli and it presents a representative account of these meditative states. Since my concern is 'early

[3] Of course textual and philological scholarship is but one method in Buddhist studies, and has inherent pitfalls. Certainly, a degree of hermeneutical suspicion needs to be exercised, not only towards the text in question, but also in regard to one's own preconceptions and motives (Wallace, 2000, pp.82-86). So our search for origins may be shaped by our position *vis-à-vis* the past. An investigation of a specific Buddhist theme (including the present one) would ideally be approached from different disciplinary perspectives, alongside discussion of living Buddhist traditions (Cabezon, 1995, pp.240-241). Such an approach lies, however, beyond the scope of this study.

[4] Alexander Wynne (2019, Communication via email with author, 26 June) has shared these views about the formless states (which I find plausible), as follows: The formless states may have been at most only valued by the Buddha as providing a basis of *samādhi* which could be used towards the attainment of *rūpa jhāna*. Some time after the Buddha, the formless states became valued as practices leading to cessation of feeling and perception, an understanding of liberation not found in the Buddha's original teachings. So the four formless states and cessation were included in older texts that originally only mentioned the four *jhāna*s. One outcome of this development was that the four *jhāna*s eventually became known as 'form *jhāna*s', and the formless states were called 'formless *jhāna*s'. But the terms *rūpa-jjhāna* and *arūpa-jjhāna* are found in the commentaries, not the Tipiṭaka itself.

[5] The Pāli text for this is from the Sutta Central website at https://suttacentral.net/.

Buddhism',[6] any detailed account of the later commentaries on meditation and insight is precluded.[7]

Although, in the Pāli canon, practice of the *jhāna*s is frequently associated with liberation, this soteriological path appears to have been subsequently de-emphasised. This may have been associated with a progressive process of intellectualisation after the time of the Buddha. Gombrich (1997, pp.123–131) argues that the Pāli version of the *Susīma Sutta* (SN ii.119), in its account of monks released by insight alone, differs from the earlier Chinese translation, and that this alteration reflects a trend towards considering liberating insight as an intellectual matter not requiring meditation. For Eliade (1969, pp.173-177), a later intellectualisation of the Buddha's original experience exemplified a wider rivalry between 'the yogins' and the 'metaphysicians', which was also present within Hinduism. What is clear is that some contemporary Buddhist schools pay jhānic practice little heed. For instance, Stephen Bachelor (2020, ch.22) states that in his own training (six years of Tibetan and four years of Korean Zen monastic training), he was never once advised to practise the *jhāna*s.

During a period of four weeks, six years ago, I was able to enter jhānic states whenever I wished. I have experienced my relationship to the world differently since and I became convinced that these states are soteriologically valuable in themselves; that they may be considered an embodied experience and understanding of how things really are (*yathābhūta*). This, and jhānic experience since, provided the context and motivation for this study.

[6] 'Early Buddhism' has been defined in terms of 'pre-Aśokan Indian Buddhism' (Griffiths, 1983, p.56; Collins, 1990, p.89), but the definition here will be the period after the Buddha's death and before schisms occurred, creating different schools with different doctrinal positions (Schmithausen, 1987, p.1). The dates of the Buddha's death, of the first schism, and, to a lesser extent, of Aśoka's reign are all problematical, but Kuan (2008, p.2) argues that 'early Buddhism', by both definitions, may correspond roughly to the first one or two centuries of Buddhist history.

[7] Lists of *jhāna* factors are sometimes provided in meditation books. According to Stuart-Fox (1989): 'The device of listing jhāna factors as a means of characterizing the sequence of jhānas was a relatively late development, a typically Abhidhammic mode of analysis and presentation which effectively reduced the jhāna description to its barest essentials' (p.83). Furthermore, the Abhidhamma separated *vitakka* from *vicāra* (rather than treating these terms as synonyms for discursive thought) and added *ekagattā* (one-pointedness) to the description of the first *jhāna*, in order to give an equal number of five hindrances and five antidotes, the commentarial tradition regarding the qualities of the first *jhāna* as antidotes to the five hindrances (pp.85–87).

THE *JHĀNA*S OF THE *SUTTA*S (DISCOURSES)

The *sutta*s portray the *jhāna*s as having a major role in liberation and it is worth emphasising this before I discuss why their role in producing liberating insight has sometimes been undervalued. In the *sutta*s, the path of the Buddha-to-be to enlightenment is via the four *jhāna*s.[8] Notably, his memory of being in the first *jhāna* as a child under a rose apple tree, led him to value happiness, and to value *jhāna* as a source of happiness and as a fundamental part of his spiritual path (MN i.246). For his disciples too, a similar path to awakening is frequently described in the *Dīgha* and *Majjhima Nikāya*s (Cousins, 1996, p.56; Polak, 2011, pp.25-26).

Significantly, Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) constitutes the eighth component of the Noble Eightfold Path leading to full awakening (AN iii.426). Indeed, most of the Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅgā)* (SN v.71) correspond to qualities mentioned in the *jhāna*s: mindfulness (*sati*) is present in the last two *jhāna*s, joy (*pīti*) in the first two *jhāna*s, concentration (*samādhi*) in the second *jhāna*, and equanimity (*upekkhā*) is present in the third and fourth *jhāna*s. Notably also in the positive *nidāna*s various aspects of jhānic experience are presented as a sequence culminating in liberation (Attwood, 2013, pp.10-11),[9] although they may not necessarily be factors of *jhāna* in this context.

Despite this evidence for *jhāna*s having a major role in liberation, curiously they have been neglected as a means to liberating insight and it is worth trying to understand possible reasons for this.

A NEGLECT OF THE *JHĀNA*S AS A PATH TO INSIGHT

In this section I will refer to commentarial texts as some have contributed to a neglect of the soteriological role of the *jhāna*s. Cousins (1973, p.116) characterises the *Theravāda* position as follows:

[8] See: MN i.16-24, MN i.115-118, MN i.238-250, MN ii.91-97, MN ii.210-213, MN iii.153-162.

[9] 'Which nine things greatly help? Nine conditions rooted in wise consideration (*yoniso-manasikāra-mūlakā dhammā*): When a monk practises wise consideration, (a) joy (*pāmojja*) arises in him, and (b) from his being joyful, delight (*pīti*) arises, and (c) from his feeling delight, his senses are calmed; (d) as a result of this calming, he feels happiness (*sukha*), and (e) from his feeling happy, his mind becomes concentrated (*samādhiyati*); (f) with his mind thus concentrated, he knows and sees things as they really are (*yathābhūtaṃ jānāti passati*); (g) with his thus knowing and seeing things as they really are (*yathābhūtaṃ jānaṃ passaṃ*), he becomes disenchanted (*nibbindati*); (h) with disenchantment he becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*), and (i) by dispassion he is liberated' (DN iii.288).

> One whose vehicle is calm develops proficiency in the four *jhāna*s and optionally also the four formless attainments (*arūpa-samāpatti*s) or the various kinds of psychic power (*iddhi)*. He then embarks upon the development of insight. One whose vehicle is insight requires only a stage of concentration less than that needed for the attainment of *jhāna* and may never develop it [*jhāna*] at all.

With the insight path, the lesser levels of concentration described as adequate for insight include: 'access concentration' (*upacāra-samādhi)* – a precursor to the first *jhāna* (Vism vii.66); and 'momentary concentration' (*khaṇika-samādhi)*, a more transient type of concentration, which, while mentioned rarely in the *Visuddhimagga* (iv.99), has acquired importance in some contemporary *vipassanā* meditation schools as sufficient for insight attainment (Arbel, 2016, p.182). Furthermore, the *Abhidhamma* describes two categories of *jhāna*: ordinary (*lokiya-jhāna*), and supramundane (*lokuttara-jhāna*) which allows for *jhāna* at the moment of liberation. As such, the latter represents a result of the path rather than a means to awakening (Brahmāli, 2007, p.90).[10]

Critical to any discussion of this, is a declaration attributed to Ānanda on four relationships between *samatha* and *vipassanā* (AN II 157; Cousins, 1984, pp. 59-61; Anālayo, 2003, p. 85). While in the first relationship *vipassanā* is preceded by *samatha*, and with the third calm and insight are yoked as a pair, two connections clearly depart from the normative post-canonical account of *samatha* followed by *vipassanā*. In the second relationship, *samatha* arises from *vipassanā*, while in the fourth, a *bhikkhu* is gripped by excitement about the Buddha's teaching, and when the mind enters concentration the path is born to him. According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* exegesis, as explained by Cousins (1984, p.61), this way is that of the pure or 'dry' insight follower (*sukkha-vipassaka*).

A neglect of the role of *jhāna*s in enlightenment may also be connected to an undue distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā* (e.g. Gunaratna, 1980, pp.11–12; 1995), and I will discuss below why such a distinction may have arisen. It is notable, however, that the *jhāna*s actually feature qualities of both calm and insight practice. While the second *jhāna* is characterised by *samādhi* and *ekodibhāva* (both traditionally associated with *samatha* meditation), *sati*, *sampajañña* and *upekkhā* of the third and fourth *jhāna*s are typically associated with *vipassanā* meditation. The situation *vis-à-vis* calm and insight in the *sutta*s is contested. Anālayo (2016b, p.39) opines that 'a clear-cut division between tranquillity and insight of the type found regularly in Buddhist exegetical works … does not necessarily correspond to the situation in the early discourses' where '*samatha*

[10] In the *Nikāya*s, this dichotomous conceptualisation into ordinary and supramundane *jhāna* does not occur, and reference to the *jhāna*s appears to be always to the ordinary *jhāna*s (Brahmāli, 2007, pp.84–85).

and *vipassanā* are rather interrelated qualities, instead of representing two separate meditation practices'. He considers that the presentation in later tradition may be a consequence of attempts to standardise accounts of the path of practice (p.40). Wynne (2018c) however considers that 'an intricate interrelation between calm and insight should not be taken as standard' (p.87) and that the early discourses describe different versions of practice and experience at the very end of the path, because some early Buddhists may have diverged from an older jhānic soteriology (p.99). Regardless of whether *samatha* and *vipassanā* are intertwined according to the early *sutta*s, and if so to what extent, the separation between the two appears to have widened in the later exegetical texts. Although this may have occurred with the best of pedagogical intentions, a consequence was a de-emphasis of *jhāna* as a means to insight.

Any distinction drawn between *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices is certainly relevant because *jhāna* and *samādhi* may be seen as emblematic of *samatha* practice, while the practice of the *satipaṭṭhāna*s (the applications of mindfulness) is sometimes viewed as the method *par excellence* for achieving insight. In relation to this however, Gethin (2011, p.273) considers that 'the taking of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as a succinct manual of insight (*vipassanā*) meditation as opposed to calm (*samatha*) meditation is a modern Buddhist reading, rather than a traditional one', and points out that neither term – *vipassanā* nor *samatha* – actually occurs in that *sutta*. Furthermore, other *sutta*s that set out the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna,* such as the 'Discourse on mindfulness of the body' (MN iii.88–99), integrate this with *jhāna* and *samādhi.* Gethin concludes that there is 'little explicit indication before the twentieth century that it [the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*] has been read exclusively in terms of the way of insight'(p.273).

Turning to practice, certain contemporary meditational schools tend to overlook *jhāna* experience for the purpose of insight (King, 1992, pp.123–4; Rahula, 1978, p.68; Kornfield, 1977, p.288).[11] The *vipassanā* schools which originated in south-east Asia exemplify this (Sharf, 1995, pp.242–3, pp.251–9). These schools can be traced to teachers such as Phra Acharn Mun (1870–1949) in Thailand, Dharmapāla (1864–1933) in Sri Lanka, and U Nārada (1868–1955) and Ledi Sayādaw (1846–1923) in Burma (p.242). In response to colonialism, the emergent Westernised class in these countries reasserted their traditional, cultural and spiritual heritage under the banner of Theravāda Buddhism (p.252). But, in its emphasis on the acquisition of Buddhist insight without the need for prior training in *samatha* meditation or practice of *jhāna*, the type of meditation that was encouraged does not appear to have its roots in

[11] The concentration of the *jhāna*s may even be considered as useless for investigation and insight – Bhikkhu Buddhadasa states: '*Deep concentration is a major obstacle to insight practice*' [italics in original] (Bucknell and Kang, 1997, p.107).

the Sutta Piṭaka (p.255). Analāyo (2015) surveyed three contemporary *vipassanā* meditation schools which differ in the amount of formal development of mental calm: none (Mahāsi Sayādaw), some (S.N. Goenka), and variable – from none to much (Pa Auk Sayādaw). Even when formal *samatha* practice is adopted (by Goenka and Pa Auk), it is viewed as a preliminary practice before meditators embark on *vipassanā* meditation.

Views on the provenance of the fourfold *jhāna* model of practice also influence Buddhist teachers as to whether these meditative states should be practised with the aim of insight. While some scholars (Bronkhorst, 1986, pp.108–17; Arbel, 2016, pp.23–44; Wynne, 2007, pp.122–5) hold that it originated with the historical Buddha, others contend that it was borrowed from non-Buddhist Indian contemplative traditions (Rahula, 1978, p.68; King, 1992, p.viii; see Cousins, 1996, pp.56–7; Nhat Hahn, 2006, p.37). As part of this debate, Anālayo (2016a, pp.277–8) argues that certain early discourses consider 'absorption' (meaning *jhāna*s in this context) a pre-Buddhist form of practice, but his interpretations are disputable. While he interprets the *Aggañña Sutta* as describing ancient Brahmins undertaking *jhāna* practice, the Pāli words in question – *jhāna*, *jhāyanti* and *jhāyaka (*at DN iii.94) – may refer more generally to meditation, and not necessarily the specific sense of *jhāna* in the Pāli discourses. Anālayo interprets the *Cūlasakuludāyi Sutta* (MN ii.32–39) as featuring contemporaries of the Buddha apparently familiar with an ancient practice of the third *jhāna*, and so apparently indicating that *jhāna* was practised before the Buddha. But the 'exclusively pleasant world' (MN ii.37) taught in their teachers' doctrine may not be a *jhānic experience*, particularly as the Buddha proceeds to teach the fourth *jhāna* as such a state. Of course, whether or not the fourfold model of *jhāna*s was practised prior to the Buddha is irrelevant to their soteriologial significance. My argument is that viewing the *jhāna*s as pre-Buddhist may have contributed to a decrease in their practise in some Buddhist schools.

A DIRECT JHĀNIC PATH TO LIBERATING INSIGHT

As mentioned above, after the first *jhāna* discursive thinking is absent. The notion of insight which is direct and unmediated by concepts is therefore pertinent to my thesis. Indeed, Schmithausen (1981, pp.205–8) regards an intellectual form of insight effected through the Four Noble Truths and overcoming the corruptions (*āsava*s) implausible as a representation of the enlightenment of the Buddha. He contends it is unlikely that an intellectual knowledge of the Four Truths would have sufficient psychological impact to eradicate craving or the *āsava*s. Others proffer reasons for the presentation of liberation in conceptual terms. Vetter (1988, p.5) interprets this understanding of insight as 'a later branch of thought, which relied on a dogmatic approach

… and which did not want the proclaimed truths to be seen as products of reflection … [and] tried to place words and concepts directly in the liberating experience of the Buddha'.

Is intellectual understanding sufficient for liberation?

Certain texts highlight how an over-reliance on intellectual understanding of the tenets of Buddhism may hinder spiritual development. For instance, at AN v.162–3 an over-emphasis on theoretical understanding of the Buddha's teaching (*dhamma*) leads a *bhikkhu* to mistakenly claim that he is liberated. Other texts indicate that such an understanding alone may be insufficient to remove craving, aversion, and ignorance for liberating insight to occur. For instance, at AN iii.86 the Buddha encounters a *bhikkhu* who is absorbed in learning the *dhamma*, but because he 'neglects seclusion and does not devote himself to internal serenity of mind [he is] not one who dwells in the *dhamma*.' The *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN i.91) is more specific in prescribing what is needed for liberation. Mahānāma, who understands the *dhamma*, in particular the role of the three taints in defiling the mind, wonders, 'what state is still unabandoned by me internally, owing to which at times these states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain'. The Buddha explains that even though a noble disciple has clearly seen as it actually is with perfect understanding that sensual pleasures provide little gratification and cause suffering, he may remain attracted to them until he has experienced the joy and happiness of *jhāna*. It appears, therefore, that the state that is not totally relinquished by Mahānāma is sense desire (*kāma*). Furthermore, conceptual understanding is not enough for the mind to become fully disenchanted with sense gratification, and something else is needed to uproot the tendency to desire – that something is *jhāna*. This *sutta* lends support to my thesis to be explicated later that jhānic *pīti* and *sukha* may lead to insight through weakening sense desire.

The nature of insight-producing *jhāna*

For insight to arise into the impermanence and insubstantiality of phenomena, one might expect a need to be mindful of the phenomenal field and not be cut off from sensory awareness. The *Indriyabhāvanā Sutta* (MN iii.298–302) provides confirmation of this. When the Buddha asks Uttara how his teacher, Pārāsariya, teaches his disciples the development of the faculties, Uttara answers that 'one does not see forms with the eye, one does not hear sounds with the ear' (298). To this the Buddha's riposte is that then a blind man and a deaf man would have developed the faculties! He then proceeds, using the language of the third *jhāna*, to teach the supreme cultivation of the faculties. The mindful one stays with experience until it fades into equanimity: '… avoiding both the repulsive

and the unrepulsive, abide in equanimity, mindful and fully aware' (302). Although in the second, third, and fourth *jhāna*s discursive thinking is absent, the mind may then be knowing and discriminative, in spite of being non-discursive (Sarbacker, 2005, p.37). Perhaps this is what Bronkhorst has in mind when he states that 'immobilisation of the mind was no aim of the Buddha', and that for psychological transformation to occur, 'the Four Dhyānas [Skt for *jhāna*s] in general, are not totally devoid of mental activity' (1998, p.12).

Wynne (2007, p.123) argues that terms such as *sati* and *sampajañña* have quite distinct meanings in the early texts and refer to particular ways of perceiving sense objects. He contends that *sato ca sampajāno* ('mindful and clearly knowing') in the third *jhāna* denotes a state of awareness different from the 'meditative absorption' of the second *jhāna* (*cetaso ekodibhāva*) – the meditator 'has come out of his absorption and is now again aware of objects'. Arbel (2016) however considers that insight-provoking awareness occurs in all four *jhāna*s. Using an argument from silence, she (2015, pp.192–3) stresses that there is no mention that the meditator in the first *jhāna* is detached from the five sense organs, the 'twelve *āyatana*s' or from the 'five strings of sensual desire' (*pañca-kāma-guṇā*) – one is cut-off not from sense experience but rather from the craving for sense pleasure, so that one observes phenomena unobstructed by the hindrances or other unwholesome states that prevent wisdom. In the second and subsequent *jhāna*s, observation is additionally unhindered by conceptual thinking (Arbel, 2016, p.89).

How the *jhāna*s may produce insight directly

Wynne (2018a, lecture 2; 2018b, p.90) argues that a bare cognition type of meditation deconstructs gradually our cognitive processes using bodily mindfulness, and resets our view of reality. For this de-conditioning to occur, meditational practice must be non-conceptual, as concepts are a form of knowledge and within the limits of conditioning. Also, if ideas based on mental proliferation are not to clutter our minds and trouble us, we must adopt an attitude of equanimity as taught by Kaccāna, saying at length what was taught by the Blessed One:

> … as to the source through which perceptions and notions [born of] mental proliferation beset a man: if nothing is found there to delight in, welcome, and hold to, this is the end of the underlying tendency to lust … this is the end of the resorting to rods and weapons … here these evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. (MN i.111)

Such a meditational practice of mindful awareness (particularly of the body), equanimity, and lack of mental construction may be termed 'bare cognition'.[12] Importantly for my thesis, I contend that the fourth *jhāna* in which discursive thinking is absent and there is purity of equanimity and mindfulness (*upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi*) constitutes bare cognition *par excellence*.

But how more precisely does the bare cognition of the fourth *jhāna* dispel ignorance and evoke insight? Progress on the Buddhist spiritual path is often described in affective terms of overcoming craving for sensual pleasure, and most schemes for dependent origination focus on affective dysfunction (e.g. SN ii.2). But Kaccāna's eloquent elaboration of a brief teaching of the Buddha in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* constitutes a rare exposition in the *sutta*s of the dependent origination of cognition, and of the role of mental proliferation and views in suffering:

> Dependent on the eye and forms, eye consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ*) arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. What one feels (*vedeti*), that one perceives (*sañjānāti*). What one perceives, that one thinks about (*vitakketi*). What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates (*papañceti*). With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions [born of] mental proliferation (*papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*) beset a man with respect to past, future, and present forms cognizable through the eye. (MN i.112)

It can be seen how the mind moves through the stages of assembling experience, from sensation to perception to conception to proliferation, moving progressively into the realm of mental macro-construction. At each step we see things less *as they really are* and more *as we construe them to be.*

Wynne (2018a, lecture 2) defines *papañca* as a 'profusion of ideas about subjective and objective reality which arises through apperception and language-use and which lays down deep ideational structures in the mind'. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995, MN, p.1204, n.229) provide the following vivid definition: 'the propensity of the worldling's imagination to erupt in an effusion of mental commentary that obscures the bare data of cognition'. Olendzki (2006) emphasises, concerning *papañca*: 'the tendency of the mind to: 1) spread out from any sense object that arises in experience, smothering it with wave after wave of mental elaboration, 2) most of which is illusory, repetitive, and even obsessive, 3) which effectively blocks any sort of mental calm or clarity of mind'. With regard to views (*diṭṭhiyo*), it is important to realise that in the Buddhist context they represent not merely abstract propositions that one can dispassionately decide whether or not to hold, but rather results of mental

[12] This term has been used with other meanings (see Bodhi, 2011, pp.27–32).

conditioning that shape our thoughts, feelings, and actions (Lusthaus, 2002, p.242, n.46; Fuller, 2005, pp.79–84).[13]

Mental proliferation (*papañca*) and views (*diṭṭhiyo*) may then be considered to represent a manifestation of ignorance, and to condition a person's mental world so that a sense of unsatisfactoriness is perpetuated (Wynne, 2018a, lecture 2). On the other hand, 'another expression for nibbānic experience is conceptual non-proliferation (*appapañca, nippapañca*)' (Karunadasa, 2018, p.134).

Some critics contend, however, that a purely non-conceptual awareness, as with bare cognition, is either impossible or undesirable. Sharf (2015, pp.474–5), taking the *Theravāda Abhidhamma* analysis of mind and perception as his basis, asserts that 'objects of experience appear not upon a *tabula rasa,* but rather within a cognitive matrix that includes affective and discursive dispositions'. In a similar vein, Schulman (2010, p.406) argues that *satipaṭṭhāna* practice involves more than a careful monitoring of experience and that the meditator is actively structuring what he sees in order to accord with Buddhist categories and doctrine. Bodhi (2011, p.26) considers that in mindfulness (*sati*) there may be a spectrum of conceptualisation from 'heavy' to 'light' to 'zero', and that such a spectrum is exemplified in the *satipaṭṭhāna* system. *Sati* at the zero end of the conceptualisation spectrum, i.e. when not accompanied by conceptualisation, would then resemble bare cognition. According to Bodhi however, mindfulness will normally, from a canonical perspective, include aspects of conceptualisation, discrimination, and evaluation, and as a limb of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Mindfulness will work in unison with Right View and Effort. As against this notion of mindfulness, view and effort all operating in tandem, it may be argued that, although ethical preparation is necessary for jhānic practice, by the relatively advanced stages of *sammā-sati and sammā-samādhi* on the Noble Eightfold Path, ethical and metaphysical aspects of the path have already been well inculcated and need no longer occupy the mind of the practitioner (Wynne, 2018b, p.88–9). Furthermore, when one turns to the early texts of the *Sutta Nipāta* one finds an understanding of mindfulness as non-conceptual observation in equanimity – 'bare cognition'. Mindfulness which includes conceptualisation and discrimination is to be found in later canonical and the Theravāda exegetical texts.

By countering mental proliferation and views, insight into *anattā* occurs in other ways, and here I necessarily utilise concepts to discuss what I hold may occur non-conceptually. Firstly, by reducing craving, conceit, and view we target three different aspects of ego-consciousness which bolster our sense of permanent self. Much of our mental activity is based on the ideas: 'this is mine'

[13] To emphasise the importance of relinquishing them, at Vin iii.4 the holding of views (*diṭṭhāsava*) is considered a fourth *āsava*.

(*etaṃ mama*), 'this I am' (*eso 'ham asmi*), 'this is my self' (*eso me attā*) – the first being due to craving (*taṇhā*), the second to conceit (*māna*), and the third to view (*diṭṭhi*) (Karunadasa, 2018, p.42). Secondly by attenuating views we may weaken our sense of an abiding self. People personally identify with views, even staking their identities and self-esteem on their convictions about the truth, so that conflict arises when they encounter others with alternative views. In these ways the *jhāna*s de-condition the tendency to prefer, compare, interpret, and react, and thus deconstruct the fabricated sense of fixed self (Arbel, 2016, pp.116–20).Thirdly, there is the potential to weaken the sense of abiding self through the cessation of discursive thought evoking insight into the emptiness of thoughts and the absence of a 'thinker'.

Besides countering mental construction and views, there is another way by which the fourth *jhāna* may induce direct insight. By offering a heightened awareness with equanimity in the absence of discursive thought, this jhānic stage allows a direct, immediate observation of phenomena. My own experience is of a refined observation of a transient world without firm boundaries; yet one in which everything seems somehow complete and perfect as it is. So, I am arguing that such experience leads to a realisation of impermanence (*anicca*) and insubstantiality (*anattā*) which persists beyond the period in time of the jhānic experience (see Karunadasa, 2018, pp.37–8; SN i.188, MN iii.282; AN ii.52).

Mindfulness of the body seems important in de-constructing mental proliferation and views, and it is integral to the psychosomatic jhānic experience. Imagery of the *jhāna*s provides vivid imagery expressing their embodiment:[14] a moist ball of lathered soap powder that does not leak; a deep pool without any inlet or outlet, whose cool, clear waters are being fed from within by an underground spring; a lotus immersed in water; a white cloth fully enveloping a man. In the third *jhāna*, as described in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN i.183), the choice of instrumental case (*kāyena*) rather than locative underlines the role of body, providing a translation of *sukha kāyena* as 'happiness with the body' rather than merely '…in the body'.[15] Some accounts of the fourth *jhāna* (e.g. DN i.76) mention suffusion of the body 'with that mental purity and clarification so that no part of his body is untouched by it' so that this *jhāna* might be considered as embodied bare cognition.

[14] Recurrent in DN and at MN i 276-278, MN iii 92-94, MN ii 15-17, AN III 25ff.
[15] *Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhu pītiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti, yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti : "upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī" ti, tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. tassa yā purimā samādhijapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññā, sā nirujjhati. Upekkhāsukhasukhumasaccasaññā tasmiṃ samaye hoti, upekkhāsukhasukhumasaccasaññīyeva tasmiṃ samaye hoti.*

If bare cognition is understood as equanimous awareness without mental proliferation or views, we find such meditation advocated in the *Sakkapañha Sutta* (DN ii.279),[16] the *Māluṅkyaputta Sutta* (SN iv.73)[17] and the *Bāhiya Sutta* (Ud 1.10). It is also described in some of the earliest texts of the Pāli canon, in particular the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta.* These appear to be among the oldest strata of the Pāli canon (Wynne, 2007, pp.73–5; Sujato and Brahmāli, 2014, pp.9–10), and may represent the Buddha's teaching before its presentation became formulaic – for instance, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are not mentioned in these two collections. Wynne (2018b, p.88) regards these two compilations as 'the key to understanding early Buddhism'.

In the *Aṭṭhakavagga* we find allusions to a bare cognition type of practice in the *Paramaṭṭhaka* (Sn 801–3), the *Jarā* (Sn 811–3); the *Mahāviyūha* (Sn 911–4); the *Suddhaṭṭhaka* (Sn 788–95) and the *Paramaṭṭhaka* (Sn 796–803) *Sutta*s. For instance in the *Paramaṭṭhaka Sutta,* the following is stated in reference to the spiritually wise:

> 802. Not even a subtle notion is formulated by him about what is seen, heard, or sensed here. How could anyone here in the world categorize him, that brahmin who does not cling to any view?
>
> 803. They do not construct, they have no preferences; even the teachings are not embraced by them. A brahmin cannot be led by good behaviour and observances; the impartial one, gone beyond, does not fall back.

Turning now to the *Udāna*, the Buddha's teaching to Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth in the *Bāhiya Sutta* (Ud 1.10) is that also given to Māluṅkyaputta (SN iv.73). Bāhiya was a renowned *samaṇa* (wandering renunciant) when he turned to the Buddha for teaching (Malalasakera, 1937). He wore a simple bark garment, refusing offers of costly robes and other luxuries. We may surmise that his mind was ready, having been sufficiently purified ethically and trained in right view, for the practice of bare cognition prescribed by the Buddha – observing without mental elaboration. I say this because Bāhiya was soon after attacked and killed by a cow with a young calf, but it appears he had achieved arahantship.

The *sutta*s above are redolent with the features of bare cognition: observation, equanimity, and absence of views or mental proliferation.

[16] The Buddha teaches the ruler of the gods, Sakka, that equanimity not accompanied by thinking and pondering is more excellent that equanimity so accompanied. Such practice, he advises, leads to the cessation of the tendency to proliferation.

[17] 'When, Māluṅkyaputta, regarding things seen, heard, sensed, and cognized by you, in the seen there will be merely the seen, in the heard … merely the heard, in the sensed …. merely the sensed, in the cognized … merely the cognized' (SN iv.73).

Furthermore, in the *Udayamāṇavapucchā Sutta* of the *Pārāyanavagga* (Sn 1105–11), there is evocation of *jhāna*, using similar language to that used to describe bare cognition. When Udaya asks the Buddha for guidance about the path to liberation, the Buddha enumerates various hindrances that must be relinquished,[18] before emphasising the need to achieve equanimity and mindfulness:

> 1106. "The abandoning of both, (Udaya," said the Blessed One), "sensual desires and dejection; the dispelling of mental dullness, the warding off of regrets:
>
> 1107. "purified by equanimity and mindfulness, preceded by [the investigation of mental phenomena][19] — I call this emancipation by final knowledge, the breaking up of ignorance."

In this succinct *sutta*, the mention of hindrances signals jhānic experience, while purification by mindfulness and equanimity (*upekkhāsatipārisuddhiṃ*) characterises bare cognition. So the sutta presents a condensed summary of bare cognition in the context of the four *jhāna*s, as a path to liberation. The reference to the *jhāna*s suggests that these were regarded as the meditative states in which bare cognition could be optimally practised, with liberation to arahantship as the goal.

In the Introduction, I contend that *jhāna* was a practice of the Buddha and his early followers, but, as indicated by accounts in early texts of the *Sutta Nipāta* and *Udāna*, bare cognition was also such a practice. These early *sutta*s suggest that bare cognition was a practice at the time of the Buddha, a contention supported by Anālayo (2018), who, in a study of the *Bāhiya* and *Māluṅkyaputta Sutta*s, concludes that: 'Bare awareness does after all appear to have a place in accounts of early Buddhist meditation' (p.16).

It has also been suggested that a misinterpretation of the Pāli word *apilāpanatā* by the Pāli Abhidhamma tradition contributed to mindfulness being misinterpreted (Norman, 1988, pp.49–52; Gethin, 1992, pp.38–40; Anālayo, 2019, pp.1183–4). This resulted in mindfulness being interpreted as

[18] This sequence at 1106 does not correspond exactly with the more usual list of five hindrances (e.g. DN i 71), but there is significant overlap.

[19] In 1107 I prefer Wynne's (2007, p.101) translation of *dhamma-takka-purejavaṃ* as the 'investigation of mental phenomena' to that of Bodhi – 'thought on the Dhamma'. Wynne (2007, pp.101–2) discusses three alternative interpretations: 1. As equivalent to the *vitakka* and *vicāra* of the first jhāna so that *dhamma-takka-purejavaṃ* simply means the latter stages of jhāna are preceded by the first jhāna, 2. A literal translation: 'preceded by an examination of the *dhamma*s' (his favoured interpretation), 3. A contemplation of the Buddha's teaching before any meditation has taken place. (I wonder if 3. might also apply during the first *jhāna*).

much more active and focused ('plunging into objects'), compared to an earlier view of mindfulness as a receptive, non-interfering monitoring – of the bare cognition kind, I would suggest. As it is salient to my thesis that bare cognition was an early form of mindfulness, I will summarise the argument. *Apilāpanatā* (formed by adding the suffix *-tā* to *apilāpana*), in the *Vibhaṅga*'s listing, is preceded by two terms, both of which convey the sense of remembrance, namely *saraṇatā* and *dhāraṇatā*. *Apilāpanatā* was apparently considered a close synonym of these two terms.[20] In Pāli prefixing a word with *a-* negates that word. Doing that, or divesting an already negative word of its prefix *a-,* produces a word of opposite meaning. So, for the list of synonyms to define the term *muṭṭhasacca*, 'loss of mindfulness', *saraṇatā* and *dhāraṇatā* were prefixed with *a-* producing: *assaraṇatā* and *adhāraṇatā*, and *apilāpanatā* was divested of the prefix *a-* producing *pilāpanatā*. The authors cited above argue however, that the division of *apilāpanatā* was in the wrong place, and that the correct division of *pilapati* would be into *api-* and *lapati.* It is suggested the pair of opposites, *a-pilāpanatā* (meaning 'submerged') and *pilāpanatā* (meaning 'floating') became erronously used to explain *sati* and *muṭṭha-sati* ('lost mindfulness') respectively. *Sati* became associated with things not floating but entering into the mind, and *muṭṭha-sati* acquired connotations of floating on the (surface of the) mind. The mistaken division led thus to a rather different image for *sati* : it became the mental quality that submerges itself in or plunges into the objects of the mind, unlike the understanding of mindfulness from the early Buddhist discourses as a receptive monitoring of the bare cognition type. According to Anālayo (2019, p.1194), this erroneous interpretation had 'considerable impact on insight meditation as taught in the contemporary Theravāda tradition'. I would add that it may have distracted later Buddhists away from the early Buddhist version of *sati* as a bare cognition type of meditative practice.

JHĀNIC *PĪTI* AND *SUKHA*

Joy and happiness in day-to-day life may convince the meditator that pleasurable emotions can arise without trying to satisfy the urges of clinging or aversion, but, on the evidence of the texts cited in the following section, the intense, refined and non-conceptual experience of *pīti* in the second *jhāna,* and *sukha* in the second and third *jhāna*s are more potent producers of insight. As mentioned previously, in the *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN i.91), the Buddha

[20] According to Gethin (1992, p.39), *apilapati* equals *abhilapati* in meaning 'to recite', with the causative *apilāpeti* meaning 'to cause to be recited, to enumerate' or 'to remind someone of something by enumerating it to them'. He suggests *sati* would then be what causes the practitioner to 'remember' that any of the *satipaṭṭhāna*s exists in relation to other feelings, 'bodies', minds or *dhamma*s.

explains to Mahānāma that even though a noble disciple understands intellectually that sensual pleasures provide little gratification and cause suffering, one may remain attracted to them until one has experienced the joy and happiness of *jhāna*. But how may insight arise from jhānic *pīti* and *sukha*? In the twelve *nidāna*s explication of Dependent Arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) (e.g. SN ii.2), depending on attachment (*upādāna*) – including sensual attachment – there arises becoming (*bhava*). Now *bhava* may be thought of as future existence but it may also be considered as a sense of self-identity.[21] It is by enabling one to transcend the basic tendency of the unliberated mind to cling to sense pleasure (*kāmacchanda*), that jhānic *pīti* and *sukha* help break the causal connection between *upādāna* and *bhava,* and provoke insight into lack of an abiding self (*anattā*). One way in which this happens is that the abandonment of attachment to sensual pleasure attenuates our habitual tendencies to bolster our sense of self by comparing, interpreting, prefering and reacting whereby we try to attract towards our selves what we believe to be pleasurable, and push away what we consider painful. Such tendencies may be seen as attempts to perpetuate the notion of an abiding self (*attā)* so that their abandonment indicates insight into *anattā*. Alongside this, overcoming the tendency towards sense pleasure promotes a realisation of the futility of clinging to the objects of cognition and insight into their impermanence (Arbel, 2015, p.193).

If the meditative experience of jhānic joy (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*) weakens the unwholesome desire for sensual pleasure, are they different from joy and happiness experienced in other situations? Three different types of *pīti* and *sukha* are described at SN iv.235–7: material (*sāmisā*),[22] spiritual (*nirāmisā*), and 'more spiritual than spiritual' (*nirāmisā nirāmisatarā*). The material states arise in dependence on the five strings of sensual pleasure, while the spiritual arise in the first and second *jhāna*s. The third type of joy and happiness, 'more spiritual than spiritual', arises when the taints (*āsava*s) are destroyed and the mind liberated from greed, hatred, and delusion.

As illustrative of the different types of *pīti*, at MN ii.203–4, the Buddha asks the brahmin student, Subha, which fire would have a better 'flame, colour and radiance' – one 'that might burn in dependence on fuel, such as grass and wood', or one that might burn independent of such fuel? Subha asserts the second, and the Buddha likens the first fire to *pīti* dependent on the five strings of sensual pleasure (material *pīti)*, and the second fire to the *pīti* of the first two

[21] According toThanissaro Bhikkhu (2011, n.1): 'Nowhere in the suttas does he [the Buddha] define the term becoming, but a survey of how he uses the term in different contexts suggests that it means a sense of identity in a particular world of experience: your sense of what you are, focused on a particular desire, in your personal sense of the world as related to that desire.'

[22] The feminine endings are to agree with *pīti.* The endings would be different to agree with *sukha* which is a neuter noun.

*jhāna*s (spiritual *pīti*). What may perhaps be inferred from this is that jhānic joy, which is independent of desire for sense gratification, is not only more intense but also purer and more refined than joy from other causes. The same is likely to apply to jhānic *sukha.* So, joy and happiness arising in the *jhāna*s or with liberation are of a distinctly higher spiritual order.

AGAINST *JHĀNA*S FOR INSIGHT

It has been argued that the *jhāna*s may give rise to wrong views, lack of effort or complacency on the spiritual path, less favourable rebirth as a 'worldling' than that of a noble disciple, and addiction to the bliss or associated special powers. I shall argue that possible adverse effects of jhānic experience do not preclude benefits of such practice, in particular liberating insight; indeed that the potential benefits outweigh any risks. I shall also argue that spiritual practice in other limbs of the Noble Eightfold Path, including ethical speech and behaviour, needs to be continued alongside jhānic meditation.

Anālayo (2016a, pp.275, 277) adduces evidence from canonical sources which shows, he contends, that attainment of the first *jhāna* is not productive of wisdom, or even that jhānic experience may have adverse consequences. In the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, which he considers relatively early, because it is one of the few *sutta*s mentioned by name in another Pāli discourse (at SN iv.287), the *jhāna*s are regarded as sources of misinterpretation resulting in the wrong view that *nibbāna* has been attained (DN i.37). Also, at AN iii.394, after attaining the *jhāna*s, a monk does not strive for further spiritual progress, associates with laypeople, and becomes so consumed with sensual desire that he disrobes. These objections while implying that *jhāna* may lead to wrong views, conceit and stalling on the path, would in my opinion not argue against the possibility that *jhāna* is insight-producing *per se*. In a different paper, Anālayo (2016b, p.46) argues that the detachment from sensual desire in the *jhāna*s is merely temporary and that sensual passion may later overwhelm the mind. The *Mahāsāropama Sutta* (at MN i.194) describes a *bhikkhu* who 'becomes intoxicated with … [the] attainment of concentration, grows negligent … [and] lives in suffering'. We are cautioned that attainment of deep concentration (*samādhi-sampadā*) does not constitute the goal of the holy life, but *jhāna,* which might be regarded as exemplary *samādhi,* is not mentioned specifically in this passage. In a passage at AN ii.126–8, a 'worldling' with experience of any of the four *jhāna*s is reborn in one of the heavenly or god (*deva*) realms, but when next reborn will go to a hell or animal realm, or to the 'sphere of afflicted spirits'. On the other hand, a noble disciple, while similarly reborn in a *deva* realm, will attain final *nibbāna* there. It seems to me that the point made here is that *jhānic* experience in isolation is not liberating, but when combined with the ethics and insight of the noble discipline it can be.

Certain other possible disadvantages of *jhāna* attainment are alleged: a risk of addiction to the bliss or misuse of the special powers (*iddhi*s) (Ajaan Lee Dhammadaro, quoted in Kornfield, 1996, p.260). These detractions, together with those of wrong view, lack of effort and complacency that are imputed by Anālayo, might be construed as adverse side-effects of *jhāna* experience. In this respect the *jhāna*s could be likened to the majority of effective therapies, i.e. having, alongside beneficial qualities, a liability to undesirable secondary effects. Indeed some of the most effective medical treatments have this propensity. One example, among many in medicine, is a drug used in psychiatry called clozapine, which is generally regarded as the most effective antipsychotic medication available, but which can induce a seriously low white cell count in the blood (Asenjo Lobos *et al*, 2010). With the *jhāna*s therefore there may sometimes be unintended adverse results, but these do not preclude or outweigh the potential benefits of this practice – which can include direct insight.

There is also the perceived difficulty of jhānic practice. This perception may however relate to a difference in *jhāna* as described in the *Visuddhimagga* from that discussed in the *sutta*s, with '*sutta*-style' *jhāna*s involving more accessible states of concentration (Brasington, 2018; 2015, p.167).

JHĀNA AND *NIBBĀNA*

The Pāli word *vipassanā* is often translated as 'insight'. While it is often employed in contemporary literature on meditation, it occurs infrequently in the *Sutta Piṭaka* (Polak, 2016, p.86). Several Pāli terms, including *paññā*, *aññā*, *ñāṇadassana*, *abhiññā*, *vipassanā*, appear in discussions of the English language term 'liberating insight' but there is no single Pāli equivalent term. The context in which any of these Pāli words occurs seems crucial to determining whether it refers to liberating insight (Polak 2016, pp.87–8). Polak tentatively defines 'liberating insight' as 'a cognitive act leading to seeing things as they really are and resulting in the transformation of a human being and feeling certain of one's own liberation' (p.88).

Notably, in the life story of the Buddha-to-be, he attained the first *jhāna* under the rose apple tree and again, along with the other three *jhāna*s, under the bodhi tree before he became a Buddha. So, we are told only of his having experienced the first *jhāna* twice and the other three higher *jhāna*s once before his enlightenment. Other accounts imply that one may progress through the *jhāna*s once before liberation (Arbel, 2016, p.199). This raises the question as to whether one becomes a noble one (*ariya puggala*) after attaining the *jhāna*s and whether having more of such experience raises the likelihood of this. The *Cittasaṃyutta* and *Sekha Sutta* are relevant to these questions and suggest an adeptness in experiencing *jhāna* may be key. In the former (SN iv.301), Citta,

the householder, is asked by Kassapa if, in his 30 years as a lay follower of the Buddha, he had attained the knowledge and vision worthy of a 'noble one' (*ariya*: stream entrant, once-returner, non-returner or *arahant*). Citta replies emphatically with the rhetorical question, 'How could I not…?' – the reason being that he is able to enter the four *jhāna*s for as long as he wants (*ahañhi … yāvadeva ākaṅkhāmi*).[23] His spiritual status as a 'noble one' is apparently the result of his being able to attain the four *jhāna*s for as long as he wishes i.e. being adept at attaining *jhāna*. Interestingly, Citta goes on to say that if he were to die before the Buddha died, it would be no surprise if the Buddha were to declare that he would not return to the world - the implication being that he is now a 'non-returner' (one who will not be reborn) presumably because of his attainment of insight and consequent breaking of the first five fetters.

In a similar vein, in the *Sekha Sutta* (at MN i.356–9), Ānanda relates to Mahānāma, the Sakyan, how a noble disciple, who attains the four *jhāna*s without difficulty (*nikāmalābhī hoti akicchalābhī akasiralābhī*),[24] is capable of enlightenment in the same way that chicks will hatch safely from properly incubated eggs even when the hen has not wished it (MN i.357–8). It may be inferred from this analogy that someone, properly 'incubated' by jhānic experience, will be liberated even if not wishing it – there is an implied inevitability to it. At AN iv.126–7 the same comparison is made not to *jhāna* practice but generally to engaging with the Dhamma life so that an implication is that liberation is not the result of willing or wishing but rather through creating the right conditions.

So, the *Sekha Sutta* implies a natural occurrence of liberation with jhānic attainment and another account of effortless liberation is found in the *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta*. It is explained how after attainment of the fourth *jhāna*,[25] the factors that maintain conditioned existence naturally cease – expressed in a reverse mode of links (*nidāna*s) of conditioned arising (MN i.270).

[23] Wynne, A. (2018) Communication via OCBS Pāli Studies Forum with author, 19 December: 'A useful parallel, but not applied to the four jhānas, is found in the Mahānidāna Sutta, in part of the definition of the arahant "released on both sides". Apparently he can attain and emerge from the eight vimokkhas "where, when and for long as is wanted" (DN ii.71: *yatthicchakaṃ yadicchakaṃ yāvaticchakaṃ samāpajjatipi vutthātipi*). So I think the passage at SN 41: 9 has to be more specifically about length of time – Citta is claiming to be able to enter the jhānas for as long as he wants [rather than whenever he wants]'.

[24] The three terms may be more or less synonymous, i.e. *akiccha* = *akasira* = *nikāma* (*akiccha* and *akasira* are two alternative dialect versions of Skt *akṛcchra*) (Wynne, A., 2018, Communication via OCBS Pāli Studies Forum with author, 21 December).

[25] The fourth *jhāna* is implied in the following: 'On seeing a form with the eye, he does not lust after it if it is pleasing; he does not dislike it if it is unpleasing. He abides with mindfulness of the body established, with an immeasurable mind, and he understands

Now, the *jhāna*s are themselves conditioned (*saṅkhata*) and have arisen dependently (*paṭiccasamuppanna*) (Karunadasa, 2018, p.48), but it appears they nevertheless present a readiness for liberation. They lead one to the threshold of enlightenment, by perhaps giving one an experience of unalloyed reality that is without desire or mental proliferation, so that one's habitual, conditioned proneness to suffering is interrupted. At this threshold, however, it may be that one cannot *do* anything to bring about the final transition from conditioned to unconditioned, from *saṃsāra* to *nibbāna.* As *nibbāna* is unconditioned, it follows logically that nothing can condition its arising – nothing can ultimately be *done* to bring it about (Wynne, 2015, p.57; Karunadasa, 2018, pp.131–2).[26] Perhaps an analogy of accident proneness and actually having an accident may be apt for the connection between jhānic attainment and *nibbāna.* As a situation becomes more and more risky, the likelihood of an accident occurring increases until one becomes virtually inevitable. Similarly, jhānic experience may take us to a point at which liberation is virtually assured.

Conclusions

Liberating insight may be acquired in different ways. In the context of meditative practice, *jhāna* experience has been neglected as a means to Buddhist insight. It can prepare the mind for contemplation of doctrine, or present subjects such as impermanence for later reflection, but it also, in itself, represents a means to non-conceptual liberating insight. Such insight arises because there is in the higher *jhāna*s and optimally in the fourth a bare cognition of refined awareness with equanimity and lack of mental construction. Bare cognition appears to have been a practice of the Buddha and his early followers. Also jhānic *pīti* and *sukha,* by weakening the unwholesome desire for sensual pleasure, give rise to *anattā* and *anicca* insight. Experience of the *jhāna*s, if frequent or sustained, produces a readiness for liberation. In my view, therefore, *Jhāna* practice should be promoted as an important path to Buddhist insight.

Personal reflections

In this article my intention is to present a primarily theoretical basis for the notion that jhānic experience in itself produces insight, but some personal reflections may be in order. In discussion of *jhāna*, difficulty in attaining these meditative states is often raised. It appears however that the *jhāna*s may be

as it actually is the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder.'

[26] Accordingly, the Noble Eightfold Path ends at Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) and the Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅgāni*) finish at equanimity (*upekkhā*).

experienced at different intensities, and, described as they are in the *Visuddhimagga*, they may be more difficult to attain than as portrayed in the *sutta*s (see Shankman, 2012, pp.101–4; Culadasa, Immergut and Graves, 2015, p.385).[27] In my opinion, the *jhāna*s as described in the *sutta*s, should be within the grasp of most regular meditators. I have found Brasington (2015) useful as a practical guide to attaining jhānic states.

Being in the right 'frame of mind' appears to be crucial for me. Traditionally certain practices are described as prerequisites for entry into the *jhāna*s, although the detail may vary in the *sutta*s (Kuan, 2008, pp.60–1). One list cites: training in morality (*sīla-khandha*); guarding and restraining the impressions brought about by sense experience (*indriya-saṃvara*); and the practice of full awareness (*sampajañña*) (MN i.180–1). The *Sāmañña*phala *Sutta* mentions accomplishment in mindfulness (*sati*) through acting with clear awareness in the activities of everyday life (DN i.71), before the abandonment of the hindrances.[28] In summary morality (*sīla*), awareness (*sampajañña*), and mindfulness (*sati*) are required to a sufficient degree, as well as abandonment of the hindrances, before the first *jhāna* may be achieved. In my experience, this means 'feeling alright' about myself ethically, without guilt or shame, and feeling inspired by the Dhamma; not having too much sensory stimulation; and being mindful and aware in everyday life, including bodily awareness.

Not only does jhānic experience bring wholesome happiness which fuels one's practice generally, their experience, I contend, constitutes in itself a means to insight. An implication of this for one's own meditation practice and for teaching meditation to others is to set in place actively the conditions for jhānic experience and not to just carry on with one's usual practice in the hope it will happen. A basis of mindfulness of breathing and *metta bhāvanā* practice needs to be well established of course, but my own experience was of continuing with these practices for years without being directed to or seeking more actively myself jhānic experience. It was after I eventually experienced *jhāna* more frequently and at will six years ago that I attempted to put in place the conditions for its subsequent experience.

[27] The former type use a *nimitta* for access and involve very deep concentration, while '*sutta*-style' *jhāna*s do not require a *nimitta* and may involve more accessible states of concentration (Brasington, 2018; 2015, p.167). (*Nimitta*s are sequential stages of imagery and conceptualisation obtained when there is absorption into a specific object of meditation).

[28] The hindrances (*nīvaraṇāni*) are covetousness (*abhijjhā)*, ill will (*byāpāda*), sloth and drowsiness (*thīnamiddha*), restlessness and remorse (*uddhaccakukkucca*), and doubt (*vicikicchā*) (e.g. MN i.60).

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ABBREVIATIONS

AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
PED	Pāli-English dictionary (Rhys Davids and Stede, 2015)
SA	*Saṃyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*
Skt	Sanskrit
SN	*Saṃyutta Nikāya*
Sn	*Sutta Nipāta*
Ud	*Udāna*
Vin	*Vinaya*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*

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