10: A Comparative Study of Dhāynas according to Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna

In the Pāli Nikāyas of the Sutta Pitaka we come across only four rūpāvacara-jhānas (of the Realm of Form). But the Pāli texts of the Abhidhamma-pitaka speak of four jhānas according to one method and of five according to another. Thus, the Dhammasaṅgani first enumerates the four jhānas as found in the suttas and says this is the catukka-naya (Method of Four), and then gives five jhānas according to another method and calls it pañcaka-naya (Method of Five). The Vibhaṅga too, as usual, first gives the four jhānas and says it is the Suitanta-bhājaniya (Division according to the Suttanta), and then gives five jhānas and says it is the Abhidhamma-bhājaniya (Division according to the Abhidhamma). The later Pāli works on the Abhidhamma such as the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha and the Abhidhammavatara speak only of five jhānas, ignoring altogether even the classifications according to ‘the method of four and five’ or ‘the divisions according to the Sutta and Abhidhamma’. But in the Abhidharma-samuccaya of Aśaṅga, a purely Mahāyāna Abhidharma text of the fourth century A. C. as well as in the Abhidharmakośa of Vasubandhu, a Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma text also of the same century, we find only four rūpāvacara-dhyānas.

We hear only of attha-samāpatti (eight attainments), i.e. four rūpāvacara-jhānas (jhānas of the Realm of Form) and four arūpāvacara-jhānas (jhānas of the Realm of No-Form), but never of nine samāpattis as five rūpāvacara- and four arūpāvacara-jhānas.

The Mahāparinibbāna-sutta of the Dīgha-nikāya says that the Buddha, just before his Parinirvāṇa, attained to the four jhānas of the Realm of Form and the four jhānas of the Realm of No-Form, and also to the samāpatti of the Cessation of Perceptions and Sensa-
tions (saññāvedayitanimoda-samāpatti). Had there been a fifth jhāna of the Realm of Form, the Buddha should as well have attained to it on this occasion and the fact should have been mentioned here. There is no reason why he should have not attained to the fifth rūpajhāna. If there had been a particular reason for such an event, it should have specially been mentioned there.

It is evident that the list of five rūpavacara-jhānas, which is not found in the original Pali suttas, is a later development in the Abhidhamma, and the very terms Suttanta-bhājaniya and Abhidhammabhājaniya found in the Vibhanga seem to indicate this. There is no such division in the original suttas.

The later Abhidhamma Pali works maintain that there are five jhānas on account of their different combinations of their factors, members or constituents (jhāhana). Accordingly, they say, the first jhāna is composed of five factors and then by gradually eliminating them one by one the second, third and fourth jhānas are obtained, while the fifth jhāna acquires upekkhā (equanimity) in place of sukha (happiness). The full scheme, according to them, is as follows:

1st jhāna: \( \text{vitakka} \quad \text{vicāra} \quad \text{pīti} \quad \text{sukha} \quad \text{ekaggatā} \)

(reasoning) (reflection) (joy) (happiness) (one-pointedness of mind)

2nd jhāna: \( \ldots \quad \text{vicāra} \quad \text{pīti} \quad \text{sukha} \quad \text{ekaggatā} \)

3rd jhāna: \( \ldots \quad \text{pīti} \quad \text{sukha} \quad \text{ekaggatā} \)

4th jhāna: \( \ldots \quad \text{sukha} \quad \text{ekaggatā} \)

5th jhāna: \( \ldots \quad \text{upekkhā} \quad \text{ekaggatā} \)

How far are the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna accounts of the jhānas in conformity with their descriptions found in the original Pali suttas, which are universally accepted as the oldest and most authentic records of the Buddha’s teachings, and hence our highest and ultimate authority?

The stereotype formula which describes the first jhāna in the Pali suttas reads as follows: vivicc'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkam savicāram vivekajam pītisukham pathamajjhānam. Aloof from sense-desires, aloof from unwholesome thoughts (one
attains to) the first jhāna (recueillement) which is born of detachment (freedom) and which has reasoning, reflection, joy and happiness.’

This formula is only a description of the first jhāna and does not make a numerical analysis of its factors or constituents. It is the texts on the Abhidhamma that make the analysis and enumerate the factors. Thus, according to the Vibhaṅga the first jhāna is composed of five factors: vitakka (reasoning), vicāra (reflection), pīti (joy), sukha (happiness) and cittassa ekaggatā (one-pointedness of mind).9

According to the Abhidharmasamuccaya: ‘The first dhyāna has five factors. The five factors are: reasoning, reflection, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness of mind.’10

According to the Abhidharmaśāṅkā: ‘In the first dhyāna (there are) reasoning, reflection, joy, happiness and concentration (one-pointedness).11

According to the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha: ‘The first jhāna is composed of reasoning, reflection, joy, happiness and one-pointedness of mind.’12

All these texts agree that the first dhyāna is composed of five factors. But in the original passage cited above there is no mention of one-pointedness of mind (citt’ekaggatā) or concentration (samādhi), although the other four factors, namely reasoning, reflection, joy and happiness are to be found. This fact was clearly noticed by Buddhaghosa, for he says in the Visuddhimagga that though one-pointedness of mind is not to be seen in the original passage, it should be included in the first jhāna because it is mentioned in the Vibhaṅga.13

Unless one takes for granted that a dhyāna should have one-pointedness of mind and therefore freely adds it, there is no support from the original sutta passage to include one-pointedness of mind as a factor of the first dhyāna. It is true that any kind of thought has a certain percentage of concentration in addition to several other mental activities. It is according to this theory that the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha (p. 6) lays down one-pointedness of mind (ekaggatā) as one of the mental activities (vetasika) common to all thoughts (sabbacittasādhāraṇa). But it is not necessary to mention one-pointedness of mind of that calibre as a factor in speaking about dhyānas, for then several other things like contact (phassa) may also be mentioned.
The first dhyāna has **vitakka** (reasoning) and **vicāra** (reflection). It is not possible that a real one-pointedness of mind can exist in the company of reasoning and reflection. Asaṅga says that both reasoning and reflection are 'mental babble' (manojaipa): reasoning is a mental babble in search (paryesa manojaipa) while reflection is a mental babble in reviewing or reflecting (pratyavekṣa manojaipa).\(^{14}\) The **Vipaśyā** aptimātratāśiddhi defines 'search' as examining 'what is this?' and 'reviewing or reflecting' as noticing or observing: 'it is this' regarding a thing already known.\(^{15}\) The **Visuddhimagga** defines **vitakka** as 'searching' or 'examining' (ubana) and **vicāra** as moving along or 'moving around' (anusatīcaraṇa).\(^{16}\)

All these definitions indicate that both **vitakka** and **vicāra** are movements or activities of mind. The **Visuddhimagga** itself admits that on account of the disturbance caused by **vitakka** and **vicāra**, the first jhāna is like water disturbed by waves.\(^{17}\) In such a disturbed state, however subtle the disturbance may be, true one-pointedness of mind is not possible.

Except that the texts of the **Abhidhamma-pitaka** and the later works like the **Abhidharmasamuccaya**, the **Abhidharmaśāstra** and the **Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha** postulate one-pointedness of mind as a factor of the first dhyāna, there is nothing in the original passage of the Pali suttas to indicate that this is so.

Real one-pointedness of mind or concentration comes into being in the second dhyāna in which **vitakka** (reasoning) and **vicāra** (reflection) are suppressed. This is clear from the words in the formula: \(\text{cetaso ekodibbāvan} (\text{unification of mind}) \) and \(\text{samādhiyam} (\text{born of concentration})\), describing the second dhyāna. In place of the term \(\text{samādhiyam} (\text{born of concentration})\) in the second dhyāna formula, there is the term \(\text{viveka} \text{yam} (\text{born of detachment or freedom})\) in the first dhyāna. It is evident that the term \(\text{viveka} \text{yam}\) was used because \(\text{samādhiyam}\) would not apply to the first dhyāna.

Here is the formula describing the second jhāna: **vitakkavicārānām vūpasamā ajjhattam sampasadānam cetaso ekodibbānam avitakkham avicāram samādhiyam pītisukham dutiyajjhānaṃ.** By the suppression (elimination) of reasoning and reflection (one attains to) the second jhāna which is inner serenity, which is unification of
mind, without reasoning and reflection, born of concentration, and
which has joy and happiness.’

This too only describes the second ānā and does not enumerate
its factors.

But the Vibhaṅga says that the second ānā is composed of four
factors, namely, sampasāda (serenity), pīti (joy), sukha (happiness) and
cittassā ekaggatā (one-pointedness of mind) according to the Suttas,
and that it is composed of three factors, viz. pīti, sukha, ekaggatā or
four, viz. vicāra, pīti, sukha, ekaggatā, according to the method of
the Abhidhamma.

It is difficult to understand how the same ānā could be composed
of three and four factors. There cannot be one second ānā com-
posed of four factors according to the suttas, and another composed
of three and a third of four, according to the Abhidhamma. The divi-
sion of Sutta and Abhidhamma is a literary business, but the ānā is a
spiritual matter independent of such considerations. A yogi does not
attain to a ānā at one moment according to the Sutta and at another
according to the Abhidhamma, but he attains to a ānā as such inde-
pendently of all such literary divisions. Whichever way one may ex-
plain it, the second ānā should remain the same; its intrinsic quali-
ties cannot change.

If the second ānā is composed of a set of four factors according
to one method, or another set of four factors according to another
method, and of three factors according to yet a third method, then it
has to be admitted at the same time that it is not one, but three differ-
ent ānās. Why? Because a ānā is merely a designation for the
arising of a certain number of psycho-physical qualities in a given
combination. There is nothing which can be taken as ānā apart
from this combination of factors. If this combination of a ānā is
changed either by adding, subtracting or substituting its factors, then
that particular ānā changes its character and becomes something
else.

For the convenience of linguistic expression we generally say that
such and such a ānā has so many factors, but in fact we should
say that such and such a ānā is the combination of such and such
factors. The *Vibhaṅga* itself defines *dhyāna* only by giving a list of factors. Thus, for example, the first *dhyāna* is defined as: ‘The *jhāna*, means reasoning, reflection, joy, happiness and one-pointedness of mind.’ The *Visuddhimagga* clarifies this point further: ‘When these five (qualities) have arisen, it is said the *jhāna* has arisen. Hence these are called its five composing factors. Therefore it should not be considered that there is another (thing) called *jhāna* which is composed of them.’

The *Visuddhimagga* decides that although the *Vibhaṅga* says that the second *jhāna* is composed of four factors taking *sampasāda* (serenity) as one of them according to the Sutta, yet according to the *Abhidhamma* system it should be accepted as composed of three factors, eliminating *sampasāda*, as mentioned in the same text. But it may be safer to accept as authority the original sutta passage than the *Abhidhamma* texts and the Commentaries.

How many factors can be discovered in the original formula (given above) describing the second *jhāna*?

The words: ‘by the suppression (elimination) of reasoning and reflection’ (*vitakka-vicārānaṁ viṭṭasamā*) and ‘without reasoning and reflection’ (*avitakkaṁ avicāraṁ*), indicate the absence of reasoning and reflection here which were present in the first *jhāna*. What are present in the second *jhāna* are described by the terms ‘inner serenity’ (*ājhattām sampasādanām*), ‘unification of mind’ (*cetaso ekodibbāvaṁ*), ‘born of concentration’ (*samādhijām*), ‘joy and happiness’ (*pītisukhaṁ*).

Looking at these terms, one may accept the four factors - *sampasāda* (serenity), *pītī* (joy), *sukha* (happiness), *cittassa ekaggatā* (one-pointedness of mind) - as the second *jhāna*, rather than three. *Ājhattām sampasādanām* indicates *sampasāda*’serenity’, while *cetaso ekodibbhāvaṁ* and *samādhijām* denote *citt’ekaggata* ‘one-pointedness of mind’. *Pītī* and *sukha* are clearly ‘joy’ and ‘happiness’.

Faithful to the original passage in the suttas, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* says that the second *dhyāna* is composed of four factors, namely, *ādhyātmasamprasāda* ‘inner serenity’, *pītī* ‘joy’, *sukha* ‘happiness’ and *vittaikāgratā* one-pointedness of mind’. The *Abhidharmakośa* also mentions the same four as the second *dhyāna*.22
The formula in the original Pali suttas describing the third jhāna reads as follows:

\[ \text{Pitiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca vibarati, sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena patisamvedeti, yatta tam ariyā āvikkhanti 'upekkhako satimā sukhaˈvāhiˈriˈti tatiyajhānati} \]

- By detachment also from joy, (one dwells) in equanimity, mindful and aware, and enjoys happiness in body, (and attains to) the third jhāna which the noble ones call: “dwelling in equanimity, mindfulness and happiness”.

This is not as clear as the previous two definitions.

The Vibhaṅga says that according to the Sutta there are in the third jhāna five factors, viz. upekkhā (equanimity), sati (mindfulness), sampajāñña (awareness), sukha (happiness) and cittasekkattā (one-pointedness of mind), and according to the Abhidhamma two factors, viz. sukha and cittasekkattā. The Visuddhimagga, as before, decides that the method of the Abhidhamma should be accepted.

The Abhidharmasamuccaya is again faithful to the original passage of the suttas when it says that the third dhyāna is composed of five factors, viz. upekkhā (equanimity), smṛti (mindfulness), samprajanja (awareness), sukha (happiness) and cittākāgratā (one-pointedness of mind).

The Abhidharmakośa too maintains that the third dhyāna is composed of five factors, viz. upekkhā (equanimity), smṛti (mindfulness), prajñā (wisdom), sukha (happiness) and sthiti (stability). The only difference here is the substitution of the term prajñā (wisdom) for samprajanja (awareness), and sthiti (stability) for cittākāgratā (one-pointedness of mind). The Vibhaṅga explains the terms sampajañña (Skt. samprajanja) also as pañña (Skt. prajñā), and the term samdāhi also as cittassā tātī (stability of mind). Also cetasa ekodibbavati (unification of mind) is explained as cittassā tātī (stability of mind). Therefore the substitution of prajñā for samprajanja and sthiti for cittākāgratā is quite justifiable. (Here one should also remember that as the Abhidharmakośakārikā is written in verse, the use of these short equivalents was necessitated by reasons of metre.)

How many factors can be discovered in the third jhāna according to the formula in the original suttas? The words pitiyā ca virāgā ‘by detachment also from joy’ show that the joy that was in the second
Jhāna is eliminated here. The remaining words indicate the factors which the third jhāna is composed of. By the words upekkhāko ca vīharati 'one dwells in equanimity' it is clear that upekkhā 'equanimity' is a factor. The words sati ca sampajāṇa 'mindful and aware' provide sati 'mindfulness' and sampajāṇa (awareness). From the expression sukha ni ca kāyena pītasaṃvedetī, 'and enjoys happiness in body', one has to include sukha 'happiness' also as a factor. Then again the three factors upekkhā, sati and sukha are repeated in the phrase: yam tām āriyā avikkhanti upekkhāko satimā sukhanābāriti which the noble ones call: 'dwell­ing in equanimity, mindfulness and happiness'. Now there are from the original passage four factors of the third jhāna: upekkhā (equanim­ity), sati (mindfulness), sampajāṇa (awareness) and sukha (happiness). There is no particular word in this passage to indicate ‘one-pointed­ness of mind’. But as it was already mentioned in the second jhāna, ekaggatā can also be legitimately taken as a factor of the third jhāna.

Thus according to the original Pali the third jhāna is composed of five factors - upekkhā (equanimity), sati (mindfulness), sampajāṇa (awareness), sukha (happiness) and ekaggatā (one-pointedness) exactly as they are mentioned in the Abhidharmasamuccaya and Abhidharmakośa.

The sutta passage which describes the fourth jhāna is as follows: Sukhassa ca pahānā dukkhabhassā ca pahānā pubbe vā somanassadomanassānaṁ atthaṅgamā adūkkaṁma asukhaṁ upekkhāsatipārisuddhiṁ catutthajjhānamaṁ. - 'By the abandonment of happiness and suffering, by the disappearance already of joy and sorrow, (one attains to) the fourth jhāna, which is neither happiness nor suffering and which is the purity of equanimity-mindfulness.'

This too only describes the fourth jhāna and does not enumerate its factors.

But the I`ibhaṅga33 says that it is composed of three factors - upekkhā, sati, cittekkaggatā - according to the Sutta, and of two fac­tors - upekkhā, cittekkaggatā - according to the Abhidhamma. When the I`ibhaṅga takes five jhānas into consideration, then the fourth jhāna is composed of sukha and ekaggatā and the fifth is composed of upekkhā and ekaggatā.34 The I`suddhinagga decides that the fourth jhāna has two factors: upekkhā and ekaggatā.35
Both the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and the *Abhidharmakośa* maintain that the fourth *dhyāna* is composed of four factors: upekkṣāpāriśuddhi (purity of equanimity), smṛtipāriśuddhi (purity of mindfulness), adukkha-asukhavedanā (feeling of neither suffering nor happiness) and cittaiākārata (one-pointedness of mind).

It should be asked how many factors of the fourth *jhāna* can be discovered in the original *sutta* passage. From the words *sukhassa ca pahānā dukkha ca pahānā ... somanassadomanassānām atthaṅgamā ‘by the abandonment of happiness and suffering ... by the disappearance of joy and sorrow’, it is clear that in the fourth *jhāna* there is no feeling of happiness or suffering, of joy or sorrow: (So there cannot be *sukha* in the fourth *jhāna*, as some *Abhidhamma* texts maintain.) The factors of which it is composed are to be found in the words *adukkham asukham, upekkhāsatipārisuddhim* ‘neither happiness nor suffering, the purity of equanimity-mindfulness’.

Here the *Vibhaṅga* does not mention *adukkham* asukkham ‘neither happiness nor suffering’ as a factor. But both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu take it as such.

Next, *upekkhāsatipārisuddhim* is an expression difficult to analyse. It is not clear whether it means ‘the purity of equanimity and the purity of mindfulness’ or ‘the purity of mindfulness produced by equanimity’. The *Isuddhimagga* accepts the second idea as it is explained in the *Vibhaṅga*: “This mindfulness is opened, cleansed and purified by this equanimity, hence it is called *upekkhāsatipārisuddhi* (purity of mindfulness by equanimity)’. This clearly shows that the expression means the purity of mindfulness produced by equanimity, but not the purity of equanimity itself. Yet the *Vibhaṅga* includes equanimity (*upekkhā*) as a factor of the fourth *jhāna*, as we saw above.

Both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu are certain that the expression denotes ‘the purity of equanimity’ (*upekkṣāpāriśuddhi*) and ‘the purity of mindfulness’ (*smṛtipāriśuddhi*), thus providing two of the four factors of the fourth *dhyāna*.

It is interesting to note here that the treatment of the *dhyānas* found in the *Mahāyāna* and *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma* is on the whole closer to the original Pali *suttas* than that found in the *Theravāda Abhidhamma*, particularly in the later *Abhidhamma* texts.