

AS Buddhism – Meditation and the Jhanas.

The *jhanas* are altered states of consciousness which are produced from periods of strong concentration. Although not enlightenment experiences, they do provide experience into the Path and explain much of the cosmology in an experiential way. For example, each jhana tends to correspond to one or more heavenly realms in the cosmology. By attaining different levels of jhana, the meditator increases the likelihood of being re-born to a heavenly plane of existence. If you pass away while meditating at one of the jhanic levels, you will be re-born to that heavenly existence. If you pass away when you are not in a meditation session, but have attained to a certain level of jhana in the past, you can still be re-born to one of those heavenly planes.

To reach the jhanic states of the jhanas, one must choose a [meditation](http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Meditation) subject and use one-pointedness concentration. The subject can be a devotional statue, a coloured disc, or simply your breath. As opposed to insight meditation or [vipassana](http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Vipassana" \o "Vipassana), in this meditation you focus all your attention on your subject. The background views and noises must remain only part of the background. You concentrate on your subject with eyes sometimes open and then closed. When your eyes are closed, look for the after-image of your meditation subject in your mind. Eventually you will reach a high state of concentration with all of the five hindrances gone from your mind. The [five hindrances](http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Five_hindrances) are not permanently extinguished, but gone for the meditation to allow the entry to jhanic states.

When your mind state is free of the [five hindrances](http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Five_hindrances) and your concentration is especially strong you enter the first jhana of pleasant sensations. It takes much practice and remember patience is very important. You may not experience your first jhanic state until many years of practice.

List of jhanas

There is no exact title of each level of jhana but some terms have been used here to help differentiate from one level to the next. As you reach each jhanic level, your mind will be tempted to remain at the previous jhanic state. Simply keep a balanced mind with no clinging to the pleasant or unpleasant and you will progress to the higher levels. The nine levels of jhana are:

1. Delightful Sensations
2. Joy
3. Contentment
4. Utter peacefulness
5. Infinity of space
6. Infinity of consciousness
7. No-thingness
8. Neither perception nor non-perception
9. Cessation

## The First Jhana: Pleasant Sensations

The concentration begins with one-pointedness concentration and then when the concentration becomes strong you enter a sustained concentration with no interruptions. You start to enter the remaining jhanic factors of aiming, happiness, and joy or rapture. You shift your attention from the meditation subject to the joy associated with your concentration. You do not cling to the sensations, but just watch them. The experience can include some very pleasant physical sensations such as goose bumps on the body and the hair standing up to more intense pleasures. If you have pain in your legs, knees, or other part of the body during meditation, the pleasure is such that the pain will actually disappear while you are in the jhanas.

## The Second Jhana: Joy

You proceed from the first jhana to the second by keeping a balanced mind with no clinging to the sensations of the first jhana. Then you shift your attention from the physical pleasure to emotional pleasure. The pleasurable sensations get put to the background and calm the mind further. You feel a great joy in your meditation and keep one-pointedness of mind.

## The Third Jhana: Contentment

You let go of the physical pleasures which changes the emotional pleasure from joy to contentment. You experience a more motionless, quiet contentment.

## The Fourth Jhana: Utter Peacefulness

The fourth jhana is entered when the mind remains calm and composed to the third jhana of contentment long enough that you are ready to let go further. There is no positive or negative feeling in the mind or body. There is an all pervading, deep peacefulness, with one-pointedness of mind.

## The Fifth Jhana: Infinity of Space

The fifth through the eighth jhanas are the “absorptions without form.” This is because they refer to states of consciousness where there is no perception of a form or body. They correspond to heavenly realms which also have no form or body. That is, beings re-born to the formless realms, which are some of the heavenly planes, do not have a body, but do have pleasant existences.

You enter the fifth jhana by remaining in the utter peacefulness state and then shift your attention to the boundaries of your being. You focus your attention outward as if you are watching yourself from above. You may feel like you are floating above your body at first. You put your attention on your body so that it feels like you are filling the room. You find yourself in this huge expanse of empty space.

## The Sixth Jhana: Infinity of Consciousness

You enter the sixth jhana by realizing that the infinite space you occupy includes your consciousness. So you shift your attention to infinite consciousness instead of infinite space. You may feel “at one” with all nature and existence, but do not be fooled, this is not full enlightenment. Concentration is further increased and there is still one-pointedness of mind.

## The Seventh Jhana: No-thingness

The seventh jhana is entered by realizing that the content of the infinite consciousness is basically empty of any permanent nature. We also realize that there is no ‘thing’ either. There is nothing in the universe that has any permanent essence to it. We realize that everything is in constant flux.

## The Eighth Jhana: Neither perception nor non-perception

The eighth and ninth jhanas are difficult to discuss because they are so hard to describe in much the same way nibbana is hard to describe. This is because they are such heightened levels of concentration and of the Path itself, that they must be experienced. You enter the eighth jhana by letting go of the sense of no-thingness and enter a very natural, calm place. In the eighth jhana there is very little recognition of what is happening, but you are also not totally unaware of what is happening.

## The Ninth Jhana: Cessation

When you reach the limits of perception, you realize that lesser mental activity is better for your calm and peaceful state. You enter a state of “cessation” of consciousness where there is only a very subtle form of perception. The meditator may appear to be unconscious. The nearest way to describe this state is something like a very deep sleep. The eighth and ninth jhanas are not full enlightenment, but very close stepping stones to full awakening. Only those who are very close to being fully enlightened can enter the eighth and especially, the ninth jhana.

Past Lives.

It is at advanced jhana levels, that one may be able to see one’s past lives and even of others. It is appropriately not talked about much, since these levels are difficult to achieve and when you do, who will believe you? The jhana levels and powers are not to be used for entertainment purposes, for showing off, or for profit. Since such usage would entail attachment to sense desires and other unwholesome desires, the abilities would not work in a profitable-money-making endeavour anyway.

One-Pointedness.

Lama Je Tsongkhapa taught that Buddhists should practice both contemplative meditation and concentration meditation. In the former we investigate the object of meditation by contemplating it in all its details; in the latter we focus single-pointedly on one aspect of the object and hold our mind on it without movement. Single-pointed concentration, Samadhi, is a meditative power that is useful in either of these two types of meditation. However, in order to develop samadhi itself we must cultivate principally concentration meditation. In terms of practice, this means that we must choose an object of concentration and then meditate single-pointedly on it every day until the power of samadhi is attained.

Returning attention again and again to a fixed, relatively unchanging object sharpens and strengthens our ability to pay close attention to life. With concentration on seeing, the object is visual, and the practice is to see while being awake to the fact that seeing is taking place.

How to practice one-pointed concentration;

 Choose an object that you like, a beautiful stone, dried flower, or leaf, a candle, a piece of jewellery...nothing too large. Stay with the same object in each sitting. Rest the eyes while seeing: practice relaxation whenever tension in the body-mind becomes noticeable. If there is pressure on the eyes, unusual visual effects, such as seeing colours or losing focus, may occur. Blinking the eyes helps. Notice how little effort is needed for vision to "happen." Sometimes it can be useful to pinpoint the vision on a tiny detail of the object.

Beginning meditators may notice that their power of concentration, or energy to keep returning to "just seeing," runs out after ten or twenty minutes. In that case, take a mental break, while maintaining physical stillness. After a few minutes, begin again the practice of continually returning the attention to simple seeing.



# 5 Hindrances

1. Sense desire (kamacchanda)
2. Anger (byapada)
3. Sloth and torpor (thina-middha)
4. Agitation and worry (uddhacca-kukkucca)
5. Extreme skepticism (vicikiccha)

Listed above are the five hindrances to meditation. Each one or a combination of more than one can prevent a successful practice. If you have too much sense desire you will find your mind wandering in meditation toward those things which you crave. If you are full of anger, you will be agitated and it will be very difficult to stay concentrated on your meditation subject. Sloth and torpor refers to sluggish-ness. You may just be tired and in need of rest. After you are rested, you can return to your meditation practice. Agitation and worry will keep your mind occupied away from your subject the same way that anger works in that way. Extreme skepticism refers to your doubts in the [Dhamma](http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Dhamma" \o "Dhamma) or your ability to practice. This is normal for any meditator, but as you learn more, the doubt will fade and you will proceed with your practice.

Very few people can eliminate all five hindrances all the time, except for enlightened ones. But there may be times when your concentration is strong and you can eliminate the five hindrances for at least a meditation session. When this happens there is the opportunity to enter some advanced states known as the [jhanas](http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Jhanas).





Things to do.

1. Explain what the Jhanas are and how they link to meditation.
2. How are the jhanic states reached through meditation?
3. In the outline of the ladder note down and very briefly explain each of the nine levels of jhanas starting from the bottom.
4. Note down each of the five hindrances and explain how each can hinder meditation.
5. How might being able to witness your past lives through the highest jhanic states be an advantage?
6. What is one-pointed concentration?
7. Explain the differences between contemplative and concentration meditation.
8. Give an example of how contemplative meditation can work in practice.
9. Explain how concentration meditation works and how it can be practiced.







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