

## Samadhi (56) Intro To Fourth Jhana

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Hello and welcome to this Monday, beginning of the week, continuity, continuation of *samādhi*, the theme of *samādhi*. And today, this week, we begin the fourth *jhāna*, which is in some ways of understanding the deepest of the *jhānas*. Sometimes there's a list of eight *jhānas*, but in the teachings of the Buddha, the final four, he calls the four bases, the four kind of fields, maybe. And what's called *jhāna* is reserved for just these first four. But then colloquially, people have, because these are the next four, even deeper states, that they call them all four *jhānas*. All eight of them are called *jhānas*.

But we come to a very significant step in the Buddha's teachings around the fourth *jhāna*, because it's a time when the mind is most malleable, most ready, most at ease, so that there's no lingering clinging anymore. There's no lingering resistance or pushing or preoccupation. And so the mind has gotten very equanimous, very peaceful, and it sets the stage for being able to have deep insight and for that insight to be liberating. Now, there's very little filters of concepts, ideas, stories with which we experience ourselves. There's a lot of equanimity and a lot of ease with how we are.

And that combination allows for insights to happen, and the mind is just ready to just kind of receive that in a dissolving, opening way, so that all clinging in some radical, deep way can let go. And that deep letting go is the ultimate purpose of going through these *jhānas*. The purpose is not the *jhānas* themselves. So we want to be a little bit careful not to overvalue the importance of these. They serve a purpose, and the purpose is freedom. And that freedom can be attained other ways besides the *jhānas*.

So it's a little bit important not to overprioritize and feel like we have to experience these. At the same time, it's remarkable that these are part of our human potential. And they create a tremendous feeling of beauty. The fourth *jhāna* is considered to be the most beautiful of it all. So the experience is probably one of the most beautiful things we can experience in life. And it provides phenomenal peace.

And a reorientation, a healing, quite a wonderful experience to be had. So on one hand, we don't want to strive for it. We don't want to measure ourselves by it, that spiritual success is only had by attaining

these things that then work somehow, you know, the best meditator on our block and we can get lots of status for it. That's all extra. At the same time, we don't want to dismiss them as unimportant or that they don't exist.

I remember many years ago when I was a graduate student in Buddhist studies, there were professors who didn't believe in *jhānas*. They thought that literally the language borrowing from a Buddhist scholar from the 1930s, that *jhānas* were the overactive fantasies, imagination of starving ascetics. And so it just seems so far-fetched from what they could imagine was humanly possible. But it is possible to dip into these *jhānas*. It is possible to experience them. And they are far from imagination.

In fact, these are almost the opposite of imagination, is when imagination drops away. Sometimes they're called, in the old school of translators, they're called trances. And these are not trances. These are almost like the opposite of trance. This is when the mind wakes up in a lucid and clear way. And there's very little that the mind is aware of in these states, so that can give impression maybe it's a kind of a trance, a disconnection.

But actually, we're more deeply connected to life, to the experience of being alive, than we are when we have a lot of thoughts and ideas in which we're navigating the ideas, the thoughts. And some people who are living a very active life in the world are mostly living in their imagination. And that's where imagination can interfere with our experience of freedom, of deep spirituality. And so these *jhānas* where the imagination quiets down and stills and there's very little thinking, the mind becomes lucid, kind of a lucid awareness. And where very little else is going on, partly because we're not focusing on our sense doors, we're not focusing on hearing and listening and hearing and smelling and tasting and all this.

And even to some degree, we're not focusing on sensing the body. There's no focus. There's no tightening of the mind, narrowing the mind to focus on anything in particular. It's more like we're floating in this vast sea, a lake, or the third *jhāna*, but where now even the water disappears. And we'll see tomorrow the metaphor of the fourth *jhāna* is someone sitting, meditating in the open air in a particular way. So the softness and the refreshment of water has even fallen away.

And in some ways you just feel so free and light to be in the open air now in this deep meditative way. And even that, so even the sense of the body in this is not there in the usual way. So it's a kind of a lucid awareness that's very equanimous, very peaceful. And in both the third and the fourth *jhāna*, there is equanimity. But it seems that in the third *jhāna*, the equanimity has a little bit more substance. It's its own thing.

In the fourth *jhāna*, awareness and equanimity are the same thing, just about the same thing. It's like a compound word. Equanimous awareness, aware, equanimity. It's just this, there's no texture, there's no flavor, there's no substance to either the awareness or the equanimity. And you can almost not say it's a thing. It's almost like what's left in the absence in great space.

Can you say that the sky is equanimous as a bird flies through it? I mean, we don't attribute consciousness to the sky, but the mind doesn't react to it, but the mind holds it. It's like equanimity is not a thing that is done. It's just that there's no movement of reactivity whatsoever. So it's called equanimous awareness, aware equanimity.

So I'll read to you the description. And the description of the fourth *jhāna* and the metaphor are shorter than the earlier three *jhānas*. And that's maybe appropriate given that there's so little happening now, so little to describe.

So letting go of pleasure and pain. How do you let go of pleasure and pain? That's a koan.

That's like a what? That doesn't make any sense. You either have pleasure and pain, but if you have pleasure and pain, can you let go of it?

Well, certainly the mind can let go of its orientation, preoccupation with it.

Letting go of pleasure and pain with the disappearance of mental happiness and mental suffering. So this is something very different is going on here.

There's no pleasure and pain, no mental happiness and suffering at all in this state.

One enters and abides in the purity of equanimous awareness of the fourth *jhāna*. And so the only description of the fourth *jhāna* is the absence of happiness, mental happiness and mental suffering. A phenomenal state to be in. There's no suffering whatsoever. And there's no pain and no pleasure.

Now this can seem like very dull, you know, there's nothing, but this is one of the most sublime peaceful feelings of well-being that is possible for a human being. And so the description maybe doesn't—you have to almost experience to see, oh, this is good. One abides in the purity of equanimous awareness of the fourth *jhāna*, once it's pervading this body with a pure, clear mind so that no part of the entire body is untouched by the pure, clear mind. So the word pure here, some people don't like to use it in their spiritual life. It could also mean clean. So once it's pervading this body with a clean, clear mind, and here mind means more like awareness.

And so the whole body becomes almost like a field of awareness. It's what it is. And it's a feeling of being very clean, very pure, and clear, this clear awareness. So I like to call the awareness here lucid awareness, a field, a state of vast, clear awareness. And what's the characteristic of this field of clear awareness that spreads through the body? It's equanimous and it's clearly aware.

And so that's the kind of classic description. And so we'll go spend this week kind of going into it with a little bit more detail and look at the metaphor and so forth. And my hope is that having done these now over 50-day sessions on *samādhi*, that as we go into the fourth *jhāna*, not expected to go into it, but maybe there's some way that you can kind of feel the edges of it or kind of feel some qualities of it that give you a sense of what this might be when it's complete and full. And if not that, I hope it's at least inspiring that this is a potential for each person's heart and mind. So thank you very much, and I look forward to continuing. Thank you.