

THREE STAGES OF SAMADHI

Introduction.

SAMADHI IS A MENTAL STATE in which the mind settles in itself. It is technically called Jhana in Pali; but in Buddhistic Sanskrit the term is Dhyana meaning the same-thing as in Pali. The word however has a shade of different connotation in Patanjali's Yoga-sutra or Yoga-philosophy. By general consent in oriental, and especially Hindu philosophy of Yoga, Samadhi has practically none of such differences in meaning.

Yoga, according to, its famous expounder, Patanjali, is the cessation of mental modifications with the means of attaining such a state. This is exactly the mental state in Samadhi. But there are several kinds of yoga, such as Hatha, Laya Raja, Jnana, and Karma. Samadhi, although only one, is spoken of as consisting of two kinds, one is with attributes such as images, conceptions, identifications etc, the other is without attributes.

Jhana is Yoga without attributes and equivalent to samadhi. The appropriate word in English would be Trance or complete mental absorption in meditation. The reason of Lord Buddha's choice of this word seems to be the popular conception of its simple connotation. But he has included all the qualifications of samadhi into this single word, Jhana. So we are to regard it as equivalent to samadhi or yoga in the pure sense of the term.

II. Meditative Stages

Meditation, as it is known to all, is a sort of mental silence. It is not physical movement, nor mental speaking. The term Jhana implies such a silence in gradual steps. We cannot, all at once, stop speaking and attain this silence. For we are habituated by long practice to mental speaking, deliberation, and causing emotive modifications to arise constantly. We are not generally aware of such changing moods and mental life. Only when we are able anyhow to attain this state of silence, we become aware of such constant changes.

This silence, if involuntary, must have come on over us by stages. It is but natural that our mental silence should have settled to itself by degrees or stages. It comes suddenly, so to say, only at violent deaths. We are not going, at such abnormal or accidental events, to dwell or deliberate in this article. Jhana is a voluntary effort of organizing such a mental silence as naturally as possible. The stages mostly three in number are technically known as the First, the Second and the Third Jhanas in the Buddhistic scriptures.

We may wonder at such ordering of mental stages naturally and constantly changing. It may seem to us some stationary events or happenings. It is never so, Lord Buddha has over and over again declared that everything physical and mental undergoes a state of constant change. This theory of flux was discovered, enunciated, and delivered to intelligent beings twenty-five hundred years before from now. It is something to be wondered at. Not only this simple theory, but also the entire cosmic world physical, mental, spiritual, and even divine is made to follow this very law.

III. Flux and Stages

Everything changes for better, worse, or normal. So it follows that the meditative state must also change from moment to moment. Consequently we must utilize very moment for the betterment of our mental life, as well as the life in general. This law of flux must operate even in samadhi, jhana, meditation, and their organization. If so, our effort in their betterment must surely bear desired fruit. This is the optimistic view we obtain in this apparently strange philosophy of change.

Meditation cannot remain consequently in the same state as it may have been organized at the initial stage. The least manifestation of the mental oscillation toward the objects of senses, physical or mental, mentally speaking or conceiving, might ruin the stage of samadhi we are in at the moment. The ruination of samadhi, jhana, or meditation might not be manifest to us at the moment such an occurrence, but an over-all view of the situation would ultimately convince us that it was so. The lives of yogins or meditationists of repute corroborate it. It only proves that the practice of meditation, Jhana or samadhi is not an ordinary thing nor only a hobby. It is taken up seriously.

Religion with its so called defects is however true to its seriousness. Similarly the study of arts and sciences should be serious, if it is meant to bear some sorts of fruit in future. Now yoga, jhana, dhyana meditation, and in short samadhi is everyone a combination of religion, art, and science. Religion, in the sense that it is the easiest means of attaining the main target aimed at, approaches the true benefit of art, science and medicine, only when yoga is closely followed in its pursuit. In the same way the study of arts, sciences and medicine will bear the desired fruit afterwards, only if it is done in the light of yogic exercises.

IV. Practice of Yoga

By yoga, it is now-a-days generally understood to be a sort of exercise in physical postures. Doubtlessly the third anga or organ of yoga is Asana or posture of physical body and its members, especially the postures of legs and feet. But yoga is much more than the mere exercise of body and its members. The difference in the said exercise and the yogic asana is that of the duration of each posture. Asanas, such as Padma, Siddha, Mukta, Matsyendra, Sukha and Shira, are performed and maintained for at least half an hour or more. Asana is intended for meditation without any feeling of discomfort during the entire period of meditation. So one must practice a desired asana for double the duration of time one intends to devote in meditation. As a matter of fact it is better to practice Padmasana, Siddhasana or Sukhasana for one hour at a stretch. It is taken for granted that one will devote at least one hour daily for any serious meditation, if one more. The duration of time in maintaining an asana or sitting posture is gradually increased, not abruptly. If it is regularly increased for five minutes a day, the initial start of fifteen minutes may reach the desired duration in ten days for any young man.

In the case of adults the initial start of five minutes with a regular increase of one minute daily might reach the desired limit at most in two months. It is so because the physical condition of us differs with age. But in meditation there is no difficulty with age. It is mostly the discomfort felt in asana or sitting posture that the duration of meditation suffers from oscillations of mind. So one should practice asana daily to maintain it longer and longer. It will never harm one even if one reach the period of two hours, in the maintenance of any asana at a stretch. Yogins are generally found to sit for three hours in anyone of meditative asanas. They can therefore perform their appointed task for three hours easily. It is quite easy

to find fault with their so-called defects, but it would be difficult for us to compete with them in the maintenance of any sitting posture. This sort of competence is due to their long practice in yogic asanas.

After the practice of asanas, the yogic system of Sage Patanjali introduces the practice to breath technically called Pranayama. This is the exercise of controlling the breath. Pranayama is very important for the practice of yoga. It does take a comparatively long time for the acquirement of the capability of retaining the breath for five minutes comfortable. There is however a system attributed to Lord Buddha, which does away with forcible pranayama or controlling of breath. The system of Lord Buddha is termed Anapana or observation of natural breathing. This sort of observation results in slowing the breath gradually till it stops as in the Kevali kind of Kumbhaka or Retention of breath according to the yogic system of Patanjali. There are several systems of slowing the natural breathing, but the system of anapana is simple, easier and natural. The system of anapana can be easily and comfortably practiced by the young and the adults alike. But I would like to suggest the regular practice of pranayama or control of breath for the young.

V. Observation of Anapana

This stage is termed Pathama Jhana in Pali or Prathama Dhyana in Sanskrit. There are fundamental factors comprising the initial stage of samadhi. These factors are Vitarka, Vichara, Priti, Sukha, Upeksha and Ekagrata. Vitarka is the mental speaking. Vichara is thinking or mentally conceiving. Priti is meditative joy, while Sukha is the happiness experienced in deep meditation. Ekagrata is concentration at nothing, while Upeksha is the mental equilibrium or indifference. Patanjali also speaks of these factors present in the first stage of meditation, but there is some fundamental difference in the two systems.

In the initial state the mind oscillates in mental speaking, it is vitarka. We may also imagine images, objects of senses. It is sometimes merely the echo or reverberation of our past habit and not actually the active mental speaking at the moment. But the mere appearance of such echo or reverberation may mislead us in taking it for own present mental action, which is not so. This false conception may reproduce a chain of reactions or Vitarkas. Hence the observation of anapana should be done mentally as silently as possible. One should not speak a single word in the mind, or remember a single name, or repeat a single word in samadhi.

When the complete stoppage, of mental speaking is achieved, the mental state is the First Stage or Pathama Jhana or Prathama Dhyana. This stage is clearly different from the ordinary mind, it is therefore called Pathama Jhana. The experience of this stage of samadhi is spoken of as extraordinary from human natural experience (Uttari-manussa-dhamma). According to Buddhistic Vinaya or Monastic rules of conduct for monks and nuns, the claim of the achievement of this stage of samadhi falsely with a purport of deceiving lay people is a crime of parajika punishable with excommunication for life. This shows the importance of this stage of samadhi or Pathama Jhana.

In reality the spiritual experience of this stage itself is enough to win one to a life of meditation. The law of mystic experience states that the mere touch of inner truth always pulls the incumbent towards it and he or she cannot loosen its hold on himself or herself. So we find it in real life. Again the proof of this truth is to be found in the lives of yogins both in the east and the west. Thus Vitarka is the key point of this stage of samadhi, in other words mentally speaking is the disturbing factor in this stage of deep meditation. Starting from the practice of a desired sitting posture or asana, we have to observe constantly the flowing of natural breathing in Anapana, the Pathama or Prathama Dhyana or Jhana is to be organized through the same Anapana. It consists of five fundamental factors such as Vitarka, Vichara, (mental

speaking and thinking), Priti (meditative joy), Sukha (meditative happiness), and Upeksha (indifference). The Ekagrata of mind is itself Samadhi, Dhyana, or Meditation, hence it is not a separate factor.

It is not merely concentration, nor one-pointed attention, as a certain section of people thinks. Sage Patanjali, the author of Yoga-sutra, technically uses the term, Sanyama (combined control), or the combination of Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi, for the effective means of all-purpose Samadhic powers. Lord Buddha, on the contrary, gives to the constant practice of moment-to-moment memory (Sati, smriti) for all-purpose Iddhi, Riddhi, or Samadhic powers. As a matter of fact the natural pose of mental stuff is aimed at in the practice of Sati, Smriti, or Moment-to moment Memory as taught by the Master (Lord Buddha). The purpose is achieved by discarding attributes such as spells, images, and conceptions, while keeping the mind constantly alert, watchful, and engaged in memory. The only active element in this jhana is constant memorizing, or observation of anapana or breathing, none other than this element is to be introduced into this system. This seems to be the principal reason why Lord Buddha's choice fell on this technical word among words appropriate for conveying the samadhic import and significance.

VI. The Second Stage of Samadhi

When the First Stage of Samadhi described in the preceding section is achieved, this second stage begins to appear. It is devoid of Vitakka or mental speaking and consists of four factors, viz. Vichara, Priti, Sukha, and Upeksha, besides ekagrata. In this second stage the Jhana is devoid of vitarka or mental speaking, hence it is calmer and quieter than the first stage. In meditative experience this stage would be more peaceful than the preceding one. Everything around would be seen and perceived without any reaction due to those stimuli coming from without. If minutely observed, this state or stage of samadhi would be felt as disturbed with the mental conception arising off and on.

VII. The Third Stage of Samadhi

With the disappearance of the mental conception arising off and on as mentioned in the preceding section, this third stage sets in. This state of samadhi consists of three factors only, viz. Priti (joy), Sukha (happiness), and Upeksha (indifference), besides Ekagrata (one-pointedness of mind). The complete absence of mental speaking and conceiving arising even once or twice makes this state entirely different from the preceding ones. Though this state may be organized yogins within or even without the fold of monks or nuns strictly belonging to the Buddhistic Sangha, it is highly spoken of by yogins even of Ariya class or liberated ones.

The meditative experience of this stage of samadhi is comparable however to the joyful state of mind without the least disturbance of mental activities. Joyfulness is a natural frame of mind and can be fully realized by anyone of us, but the joyful state of samadhi is something much more profound than our ordinary experience of it in the ordinary life. It is, so to say, the feeling of depth in samadhic state described in the preceding two stages of meditative trance or samadhi. Everything regarding the means of attaining such stages of samadhi or jhanas or dhyanas is the same as described above. The full description of these Jhanas technically termed the Form Trances may be profitably read in the First Volume of the Buddha's System of Meditation written by me and already published in four volumes by Sterling publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, India. This Research and final Publication was sponsored by the Nepal and Asian Studies- Research Center, under Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Nepal.

The original sources of these researcher is mainly the Pali scriptures and may be profitably studied in the yogic Upanisads, Puranas, Hathayoga-pradipika, Goraksha-sanhita, and the vyasa-commentary on Patanjali's Yoga-sutra.

VIII. Conclusion

In concluding this short description of "Three Stages of Samadhi", I must suggest some useful things to our would-be sadhakas of yoga or Jhana or in short meditation. This suggestion would be the serious study of the lives of yogins; in the same way the study of books on yoga, jhana or dhyana, and meditation. A regular practice of Hatha-yoga for a short time should be daily devoted for meditation whatsoever.

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i Buddhist Himalaya, Vol 1, No. 2 – 1988