The Second Jhāna

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Today I would like to talk about the second jhāna and weave into that, as usual, some things that apply much more generally to any jhāna or jhāna practice in general.

As I said at the beginning, the teachings will progress through the retreat at the pace that they do, dependent on a lot of factors. It's highly unlikely that your practice progresses at the same rate, and in fact, it's totally undesirable. At some point, you're going to coincide with the teachings—you may have already done that or maybe later—but what we're really interested in is your pace. That's really, really important. What's your playground? What's your pace? When is it a maturing or transition time?

Let me read again the Buddha's description of the second jhāna, of which there are two: a simile and a more technical-sounding one. A practitioner, with the subsiding of thinking and pondering—again, there's that vitaka vicāra, how different this translation from the more common these days "initial and sustained application"—by gaining inner tranquility and unity of mind, reaches and remains in the second jhāna, which is free from thinking and pondering, born of concentration and filled with delight and happiness.

So again, filled with pīti and sukha. This translator is rendering pīti as delight. With the subsiding of vitaka vicāra, by gaining inner tranquility and unity of mind, one reaches and remains in the second jhāna, which is characterized by being free from thinking and pondering, free from vitaka and vicāra, born of concentration and filled with pīti and sukha.

Let me read another translation so you get a sense: Furthermore, with the stilling of directed thought and evaluation—again, quite a different translation of vitaka and vicāra—she enters and remains in the second jhāna. Rapture and pleasure, pīti and sukha, born of composure. The actual Pali word is samādhi, which the first translator rendered as concentration and this person has translated as composure. As I said, I would translate samādhi as quite a broad term: it's unification, it's harmonization, it's the agreement of the elements of being. Born of samādhi—a unification of awareness—free from directed thought and evaluation, free of vitaka and vicāra, internal assurance. She permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture, with the pīti and sukha born of composure, born of samādhi. There is nothing of her entire body unpervaded by pīti and sukha born of samādhi.

Basically, the vitaka and vicāra fade, and born of the samādhi is pīti and sukha, which is then spread throughout the body. A couple of other elements: that it's born of samādhi distinguishes it from the first jhāna, where the Buddha said it is born from withdrawal from the hindrances, or seclusion from the hindrances. So this is born of samādhi. Remember how rich that term samādhi is, how wide—for me at least, hopefully for you. What's this unification of awareness? The Pali is cetasso ekodibhāvaṁ—the citta,

cetasso, the citta unified or raised to oneness. And then this word we'll come back to later: ajjhattaṁ sampasādanaṁ—internal assurance. Sometimes you hear the word confidence, internal confidence.

Then we have a gorgeous simile that I find absolutely beautiful: Just as a lake fed by a spring with no inflow from east, west, north, or south, where the rain god sends moderate showers from time to time, the water welling up from below, mingling with cool water, would suffuse, fill, and irradiate that cool water so that no part of the pool was untouched by it. So with this pīti and sukha born of samādhi, the practitioner so suffuses their body that no spot remains untouched.

Remember, we're talking about a very hot climate where that kind of image is going to be supremely appealing—unlike Devon in December. To me, that's a lovely, lovely image.

And I feel very much as you get more into the jhanas, some of these similes actually seem more accurate than the more technical sounding descriptions, which are open to all kinds of ambiguities over translations and terms and what they might have meant at one historical period and then another. To me, there's something much more accurate about the poetic translation than there is about what sounds more technical—the kind of descriptions and language where there are these five factors and there are these three factors, and we tend to think, oh, that must be the really accurate one. But you'll see how you do with it. See what you gravitate towards, what opens, what you learn as time goes on.

So these are the descriptions we have. They're pretty brief. Again, as I think I mentioned yesterday or another time, when the mind opens into new territory, a new realm, a new level, it tends to experience that level as effortless at first. It's just—whoa, we're suddenly not in Kansas anymore. We're suddenly, what is this? And you're just going along with the ride, it feels like, and it's effortless and wonderful. There are always exceptions, always exceptions, but it tends to be that that's the case.

Then at times after that, after those first few experiences where it's all just effortlessly kind of happening and you're almost just a bewitched witness of the whole experience, it might be that at times the relationship with the second jhana matures. And so at times we're actually practicing—we're conscious that it's not effortless anymore. I need to actually practice tuning to this frequency of happiness, which at times may be super obvious and kind of blow your socks off remarkable—like wow—and other times much more subtle and maybe not so remarkable. I need to practice tuning to that and steadying my attention on what is essentially a more refined object. The sukha is more refined than the piti.

As I mentioned, the jhanas are not primarily a spectrum of stronger and stronger concentration. The eighth jhana is not invariably a state of more immovability of mind than the fourth jhana or the seventh jhana or whatever. That's not necessarily the case. That's not the primary thing that's changing. It might happen that way sometimes, but it might happen completely otherwise at different times. Rather, the jhanas are primarily a spectrum of increasing refinement—let's say increasing refinement. I'm aware there's a bit of ambiguity between the word subtlety and refinement, so let's choose the word refinement, the way that this cloth is a lot more coarse and less refined than this cloth. The texture of it is much more

refined. They're primarily a spectrum of deeper and more refinement. They get more and more refined.

Technically—and we'll come back to this—there's a reason for that. It's because they're also a spectrum of less and less fabrication on the spectrum of the fabrication of perception. If you've never heard that term before, I'll explain it in more detail later on. This is really, really central and it's really, really important to understand that. In general, I would say, in terms of understanding what the Dharma is, where we're going, what emptiness means, what dependent arising means, what liberation means—it's a key concept. The jhanas too map onto that very key central concept because the jhanas too, in their spectrum of more and more refinement, are also, you could say, places or areas on a spectrum of less and less fabrication.

It's actually like this coarse cloth has almost more material to it. It's thicker and denser. And this fine cloth has less material to it. It's thinner with more filaments. So we're actually fabricating less as we go deeper and deeper into jhanas. We may or may not be aware of that, but to become conscious of it and to understand it and understand its implications is huge, is massive. In a way, I would say we don't really understand what the jhanas are, really understand how they relate to insight practice, or how they integrate into the whole practice. And we don't really understand what we're doing when we're practicing concentration—we don't really understand that until we understand this and its relation, the whole notion of the fabrication of perception: how one fabricates more or less at different times, how does that happen, and what happens when we fabricate more or less? We will come back to that.

However, having said all that, in the second jhana we've got "born of samadhi." So I think it's true to say that usually a state of second jhana is an improvement of concentration over the first jhana—usually. But that samadhi, again, it's a wider word—unification, harmonization, etc. A wider word than it usually gets translated as just concentration, I would say.

It may be that a practitioner is still at this point staying with their breath. The breath is the primary object and the piti has come up and they're really mixing that with the breath and getting into that, and then the happiness comes up. And one can, if one wants, stay with the breath. Or the metta might be the base practice and one can, if one wants, stay with the metta. But what happens is—or what should happen—is they get mixed. It must feel at some point that I am breathing happiness, or the breath has become happiness, or the metta has become happiness. I am radiating out sukha and happiness, or the body has become happiness.

The Buddha says, "no part of the body left unpervaded by this sukha and piti."

You have the option of keeping with the breath if that's your base practice and you want to, and that's what helps, or keeping with the metta. But these primary base practice objects—the metta or the breath—should completely integrate with the happiness. As I said, they just become happiness.

Or you can, as described with the first jhana, make the happiness the primary object and what you're primarily paying attention to. Then the breath or the metta may support that a little bit, or it's just

gone—you're really not concerned with it. You have a bodily sense of happiness, an emotional sense of happiness, and that's what you're concentrating on.

If we were all to take a sort of school trip to Newton Abbott and each one of us were to stop someone on the street and say, "Think of something that makes you happy, and then can you concentrate on that happiness?" I think most people would just be baffled. It would feel impossible or very, very difficult.

For most of us, happiness as an object to focus on and steady the mind with is actually something we never do. We wouldn't know how to do it and we wouldn't be able to do it. So we're training that. We have to train that.

We're not concentrating so much on a spatial point. We're concentrating, if you like, on that frequency or that bandwidth of frequencies, which is happiness. That's really what we're doing. Within that, or within our intention to do that and our playing with that, there may be times when the attention is really steady and really focusing on a spatial point. But that spatial point is happiness, or it's the center of the happiness.

Again, what we're really doing is focusing on the happiness, and that's central. Rather than thinking of concentration as a focus on a spatial point—which may be helpful at times and at other times not what's helpful—we let go of the sense of the spatial point being so important. It's the frequency.

This word sukha, S-U-K-K-H-A in Pali, is an emotional quality, the emotion of happiness. I mean that word in quite a broad way. Technically in Buddhist psychology, it's a citta quality—a quality of the heart and mind. However, it's also physical, and this we really want to emphasize. You feel it as much in the body, and you need to feel it in the body.

This is partly why the person in Newton Abbott won't be able to do it—because it's just an extremely ephemeral, extremely wispy mental quality. They can't locate it in their body. Feeling it in the body, pervading the body with it, is exactly what enables us to really get into it and really stabilize with it.

When I say "in the body," I mean in the energy body, in the whole space, in the vibration tone. It becomes happiness. The vibration tone of the energy body space becomes happiness.

At the beginning, when you first open to this level—either the second jhana or just the emergence of the sukha—identifying it as an emotion is for most people actually quite a crucial distinction to make. The piti is a primarily physical quality. The sukha is an emotion.

Just making that distinction, although because of what I just said, it's actually not quite true—they're both energy body vibrations, different energy body vibrations—will really help you make the distinction, get a sense of the different playgrounds, get a sense of the territory, and actually build the whole thing if you recognize it and feel it as an emotional quality as well. That's what's going to really start to distinguish it from the piti.

Identifying it as an emotional quality versus a primarily physical quality, which we could regard the piti as—and the piti isn't just that either—makes things black and white. It's not this absolute division, but sometimes making things black and white is actually really helpful at a certain stage to make things clearer. Is it the ultimate truth? Definitely not. But just making that division at first is really helpful.

It will help to draw it out of the mix, to draw out that emotional quality of sukha from the mix. "Ah, this is the emotion. That's what I'm paying attention to at first." And to begin to distinguish: this is piti, this is sukha.

You really need to taste it—which really means feel it in the body and feel the different qualities and enjoy them—several times, perhaps quite a few times, to really get used to this. At first, it might be very, very obvious. If the second jhana just explodes out of the first, it's very obvious: I'm in a completely different territory now. But as time goes on, there might be a "hold on a minute, where's the division here?"

This distinguishing, this making discernment, is actually really key. This is what we're talking about when I emphasize sensitivity, attunement, discernment—it's all really key not just to jhana practice, but to what we said right at the beginning: the quality of your relationship with your own emotions and your wisdom with your own emotions, your sensitivity to all kinds of things in life, your capacity...

for relationship, the skill you can work with in emptiness practice, in soul-making practice, in brahmaviharas practice. That's why we emphasized it.

I would say—or rather a lot of people say, and I agree with them—that as the Buddha describes, piti and sukha are both present in the first jhana, and they're both present in the second jhana. But what's characteristic of the first jhana is that the piti is to the fore. We're entranced by that more, and maybe there's more of it in the mix. Then in the second jhana, that flips and the sukha becomes prominent over the piti. The piti is still there, but the sukha becomes prominent, and the sukha is our primary nimitta, whereas in the first jhana, the piti was the primary nimitta.

Karen asked me, "Is that in the Pali Canon?" No, I've never seen it in the Pali Canon. I mean, it might be somewhere—I very much doubt it, but I don't think so. Maybe it's in a commentary somewhere, I'm not sure. When I say that, I'm speaking from the teachers that I have really trusted and who have taught me jhana practice, or from whom I've learned jhana practice, and from my own experience. That's pretty clear. Is it in the Pali? I don't think so.

We get these very brief descriptions, and as we go into the further jhanas, the descriptions are even briefer. So we have to somehow discern and get a sense of what the territory is. But as I said—I think I've already said it twice and I'll say it once more—back to this distinguishing between piti and sukha, really making that distinction. What can happen if we don't is this kind of stagnation. It's the discernment that takes us deeper. It's the sensitivity that takes us deeper on the whole path, deeper on the jhana path in a full way.

I know practitioners who sit a lot, who did sit a lot, put a lot of work in, and they reach a kind of place that's around this area. It's a kind of a mix. They do not—either they do not take the instruction or they do not bother to make the differentiation. Twenty years later they're still pretty much hovering around in the same kind of soup. That might be completely fine with them, or they might want something different, but they're not going to open up anywhere deeper unless they make the distinctions, the discriminations, the subtle discriminations. It's nice where they are and they can sit for quite a while, but it hasn't gone anywhere and there isn't much new insight. So it doesn't just apply to the depth of samadhi practice—it applies to the insight practice as well. That all gets stagnated as well.

Sometimes, though, they're mixed. The piti and the sukha are mixed and it's hard to tell at the beginning. So there will be times, if you're new to the second jhana, when you're not quite sure. But generally speaking, we want to be clear: this is piti and this is sukha. Generally speaking, they do kind of separate like that. But there will be times when it's actually quite hard to tell.

What all that means is that part of the work—or play, depending on your favorite word there—part of the work and play at this stage is exactly that. That's part of your job. Can I really get used to what the differences are? Can I make the discriminations? That's really part of the work.

So how does the second jhana arise? What color is an unripe mango? Is it green? What color is a ripe mango? Is it kind of yellow, red? Let's say it's more yellow-red. Ajahn Jeff used to say, "Don't take a green unripe mango and paint it yellow-red and then call that a ripe mango." Don't take your practice wherever it is and try to do something and call that the second jhana. Don't take your first jhana and push it or put pressure on it or just do something that you're kind of forcing.

You don't force a mango to ripen. His approach was very much that these things will ripen in their own time. If you do it that way, rather than kind of jumping the gun or forcing anything or wanting to achieve something or having some kind of timetable, it will be much, much more fruitful. Again, generally speaking—there are all kinds of exceptions, and I'll come back to some of those exceptions.

So again, we talked about pīti—remember when we discussed it, we said that generally speaking, you could say there are two ways that pīti arises. One is I take an object—maybe it's a point in the abdomen or the breath at the nostrils, if it's the breath, maybe I take the metta, whatever it is—and I just work with that, work with that, work with that. I do not put up with the hindrances when they come. I really try to work with the hindrances, and I have this background awareness. I play with this idea of more intense attention, less intense attention, delicacy of attention, subtilizing the attention. If I do all that—those four things—then the way the pīti tends to arise is sudden and eruptive and quite strong after, for most people, quite a while.

Then there's another way, which is taking the energy body experience from the beginning and actually just kind of tending to the little ember of well-being there, fanning it when it needs fanning, protecting it when it needs protection from the winds, building in a way, coaxing it to become more of a campfire—the

pīti. But that needs work and play: playing with the modes of attention, playing with very intense probing at times or intense attention, intense opening, radical opening, receiving. So I have to be intense. I can't—at times at least—I have to be intense with how I'm coaxing this ember. Sometimes my intention and my attention and my whole work and play has to be quite intense without putting pressure or a demand on it.

When we get to the second jhāna and this happiness, it might be the case, as I said, that it probably relies more on its arising in a way that's helpful. It probably relies more on a really, very gratifying relationship with the pīti. The pīti—one is really into it and really enjoying it. So if the pīti is okay and it's kind of just okay, and then you think, "Maybe the second jhāna would be better"—that goes back to the foolish, inexperienced cow. Remember that?

So I have to—what does this mean here? It means then that again, with the pīti that's arisen, I have to work and play with that in these ways. I actually have to shape it. I need to really take care of it and take care of my relationship to it. The sukha of the second jhāna will only arise when I do that.

So if it matures—if the sukha of the second jhāna matures organically like this mango—it emerges through working and playing with the pīti, and through the pīti feeling really lovely, really pleasurable, really enjoyable. Then the sukha emerges in a much clearer way. It's like, "Whoa, this really is—okay, this really is something else now. Now this is really something quite extraordinary." And this is clearly what that word sukha means. It's clearly the second jhāna.

After that—to say in different words what I said earlier—after a few times of that, then you might find yourself needing to... In other words, after quite a bit of experience with the second jhāna, then you might find yourself needing to go back and work with a much more subtle and unremarkable sukha and build it up the way we built up the ember of well-being into pīti.

Does this make sense what I'm saying? It's like if I've got a pīti that's not that great, then my chances of taking a happiness that's okay and building it into the second jhāna are probably—there are always exceptions, and I'd be really interested if there are actually, to hear back just for teaching purposes—but it's more likely that the happiness that comes when the pīti wasn't that remarkable, and then the sukha is not that remarkable, it will be hard to get that to feel really gratifying and like "this is really something." Versus the pīti that can arise with patience and time from just working with the ember in the energy body.

With the pīti, we can go two ways. I take an object, I stick with it, but I have to be careful how I'm sticking with it and be intense and watch—be subtle with the attention and the delicacy and all that. I can do that, or I can just take the ember of well-being in the energy body and build it and build it and build it. So basically, I can get either of two ways to a pīti that's really nice.

When you come to the second jhāna, I'm just wondering whether the probability of coming to a sukha which is characteristic of the second jhāna that's really nice is not an equal probability. I can't start from a

happiness that's not really that gratifying, especially if that was built on a pīti that never got really that gratifying. It's probably possible, but at first it's unlikely. With the pīti, I have to get really into the pīti. I have to really get that far and really enjoy it. And then it's more likely to succeed.

After a lot of experience with the sukha and the second jhāna, then you can take a really quite unremarkable happiness—you're already quite skilled and it's already quite familiar—and that can grow.

Having said all that, sometimes what happens—sometimes what I encounter in teaching—is someone whose first jhāna is just great and they're even getting all the elements of mastery. So it's usually the case that as a person really starts to gain those elements of mastery through practice with the first jhāna, the second jhāna is already kind of intruding, emerging, showing itself.

That's usually the case. Occasionally—or sometimes; I don't know what proportion of times—someone's first jhana is going really well. They're really enjoying it, they're really into it, and there are some of those elements of mastery, but the second jhana is not showing. It's not emerging.

Sometimes—this is not how Ajahn Chah teaches; he would say you never paint that mango at all, or you never force a ripening—obviously there are some things you could do, little tricks you can play with.

So one is: here's the piti. I'm really used to it. I'm really into it. It's going great right now—it's going great generally, I'm into it, I've practiced with it, I've gotten used to all that mastery, or a lot of the mastery. And then right now, it's going great in this sitting, walking, standing, whatever it is. When it's going great, I can just drop a question—just a really light question: "What is the emotion right now? What's the emotion I'm feeling right now?" And the answer should be happiness. It should be sukha.

A second possibility: again, here it is going quite well. (This is something that doesn't need to be going well—after a while, after a lot of practice, it doesn't need to be going well for this one to work. But here, let's say at the beginning when it's not quite happening.) Here I am, and I drop in the word—whichever word I prefer—just a whisper, a grain of magic, alchemical, chemical. Just drop it in, a drop into the citta: "happiness," or "joy," or "sukha," or whatever word you prefer.

As I said, the mind goes deeper in samadhi, becomes more and more suggestible, and potently so. More and more sensitive the mind becomes—sensitive to suggestion, sensitive, becomes more malleable in all kinds of ways.

Another thing you can try: you've probably noticed that most often piti tends to flow upwards in the body. One feels a sort of upward current of it. What you can try sometimes is just feel that upward current. Again, this is when you're really used to it and it's great and you're enjoying it. Then the upward current—imagine it shooting out the top of your head like a fountain, like a spout of a fountain. The water comes out the top of your head and then, like a fountain, it falls back down. Just imagine that; see what happens.

A fourth possibility—I'm not sure how much one might want to try this, but it may well be very useful for some people at some times: again, here's the piti. It's going well. I'm into it; my practice is right now. And just the memory—introduce, again, very, very subtly, just the memory of something that makes you happy, or a happiness. Just like a little tincture, a little drop of tincture into the citta, the memory of a happiness while the piti is there. Drop that in.

So these are all little tricks. In a way, the safest gamble is to let something mature and just get really, really into the piti. Find that enjoyment, find that intensity of relationship with the piti. Don't confuse intensity with this kind of forward-probing narrowing—that's one form of intensity. Another form is: how intensely am I opening? But an intensely enjoyable relationship with the piti, and it matures out of that in time.

If not, or if you feel like—or if the teacher says—well, maybe you want to try one of those tricks. If you're playing enough, you will discover your own tricks at this point, at this threshold, at this border between the first and second jhana. You should discover your own tricks and come and share them with us. There's all kinds of things that are possible.

Eventually you won't need any tricks, because hopefully you have mastery of the second jhana, which means you just have the subtle intention for the second jhana or for the sukha to arise, and it goes there. I can't even remember the tricks I used to use. This was all I could come up with because I couldn't remember. After a while, one just doesn't need them.

It's just from intention. But there is that point of learning new territory where you will be like, "Well, it's gone there before and how do I get it back?" Or if it needs a nudging, you know?

Going back to something I mentioned earlier, there's this phrase in Pali which means something like "with the subsiding, with the allaying, with the cessation, with the calming" of what? Thinking—thinking about vitakka and vicāra begins to not make much sense at this point. So what is that? This refers to what's characteristic here.

Vicāra, that word also has a particular meaning sometimes. So it's used as a pair. Vitakka-vicāra just means thinking. Vicāra has a particular meaning of a kind of discursive thought. What I mean by that is the mind getting hooked on a thought and following a thought for more than one moment. So this thought leads to that thought, or I'm following a train of thought. This is discursive thinking.

"Discursive" in English comes from the Latin curare, which means to run, to move, to move fastly. The mind is in a certain—you understand, it's hooked and it's moved. Does that make sense? The mind is moved with a thought. One thought follows another. So when we reason "this, therefore that, therefore the next thing"—that's also, in English, discursive thought. That's also one of the meanings of discursive thought: consequential movement of thought.

I would say that if you're careful enough in your attention, if you're sensitive enough in your attention, you will notice in the second jhāna that it may be that thought arises at times. This citta, which has infinite

depth and subtlety—it may be that thought arises at times, but what there isn't in the second jhāna is any being hooked to a thought. The mind is not then moved off on a thought. One thought does not lead to a second thought. This follows that, or "I was thinking this." And the kind of thought that arises is probably very, very wispy, very, very subtle. It's not extended in time either.

So there's a larger point here, I think, just about—in addition to mapping out what actually is the range of experience of the second jhāna—and there's a larger, perhaps even equally important point. What is it to have a thought? We use that word so much. "I'm thinking," or "there was thought," or "there wasn't thought."

I would say the whole idea of thought and the whole experience of thought has an enormous range to it—from the mind shouting something and completely lost in a tangle of shouting at itself or whatever it is and very coarse thoughts, to extremely, extremely subtle, the kind of subtlety that most people wouldn't even notice. And we're not used to, we're not even aware that, oh, there might be this level there.

So an invitation alongside all this: to open up that investigation, to pay attention and notice, what do we mean when we say thought? And what does it mean when the mind gets quiet? Is it completely quiet? Is it quiet at a certain level? What kind of thoughts have gone? What kind of relationship with thought has gone?

So what has gone is that being hooked onto a thought, or rather more than being hooked onto a thought—one thought hooking us to the next, one thought being hooked to the next. That's gone. And also gross thought has gone.

Again, this is the sort of thing—it may take a while to notice this. And I really mean, again, this is also why I keep—and sorry to anyone who doesn't like this—but why subtlety and sensitivity is such an important part for me in the teaching. One begins to realize, oh, these things are not so black and white. And there's way more subtlety of range for most phenomena than we tend to realize at first, and we can develop our sensitivity and get aware of that range of subtlety. And that pays enormous dividends.

All this business about what is thought actually has huge implications for very, very deep insight. People talk about non-conceptual awareness and "the mind was completely non-conceptual," etc. And so what's the difference between a conception and a thought? And does a conception have to be verbal? Does a thought have to be verbal? I need to notice all this for the really deep end of insight, when you're talking about really deep unfabricating, or understandings of emptiness and the way certain words are used in texts and stuff like that—but we won't talk about that now.

So like I said, it may take a while to notice this. In a way, what happens with the samādhi of the second jhāna is partly what enables us, or should enable us, to begin to notice this a little bit. But as I said whenever it was—usually at first, a new level, when the mind enters a new level, it's like a dam bursting and the water is just gushing and you're just going along for this water ride. And it just seems like there's

no thought happening. In time, it's like your eyes getting used to a darkened room.

You grow accustomed to this new territory, like your eyes adjusting to a darkened room. You say, "Oh, hold on a minute. There are some things here I didn't notice at first." But we're talking about something very, very subtle and a whole different relationship, a whole different level of thought.

So let's leave that aside for now. But this brings me to an important question I posed earlier: How wise would it be to use my perception of the presence or absence of thought as a kind of measurement of where I am in samadhi? To keep glancing there asking, "Has it stopped thinking yet?" I don't think that would be very helpful or very wise at all. Given both the confusion about what vitakka and vicara actually mean and the subtlety of the range of what thinking might be, I can't see much value in this approach.

You will notice something in relation to thought if you're really getting into the second jhana. But don't make that the primary criteria.

As I said before, each jhana has a primary nimitta. And in the second jhana, the primary nimitta is sukha. That's the thing we're really making primary and really getting into. That's what we're really taking care of and really opening our relationship with.

Now there's what's significant in practice, but there's also why that's significant—why are we making that the significant thing in practice? There may be people out there with the idea that the most significant thing about the second jhana is the quieting, the stilling of thought. I would be very surprised if there aren't. But again, we have to think: Why do I choose to emphasize this over that? Of all the things I could emphasize in practice right now, of all the things I could make a priority, why this and not that?

Remember we were talking about how I think about samadhi and how I relate to samadhi in the present moment is connected to my big view. So we apply that here. Here's this collection of factors. Which is the most significant one and why?

I'm going to choose the sukha as the most significant one. Maybe there's someone who chooses the lessening of thought as the most significant one. But I would say the quietening of thought is not the most significant or transformative aspect or factor. It's actually an absence of a factor here, isn't it? It's the absence of two factors that were present in the first jhana.

I would say that's not the most transformative factor or aspect of the second jhana. I would say happiness is. It's the sukha, it's the range of happiness, it's the remarkableness of that happiness. It's the fact that it comes pretty much independent of someone needing to praise me or some sense pleasure or something—these are the things that transform.

If and only if I really marinate in it and really drink it lots and lots of times for a long time, then that happiness is really, really going to make a difference in one's life—a huge difference. As a resource, we've talked about this before, it's a tremendous resource. Just imagine several hours a day just drinking that

kind of happiness, that depth of happiness, that beauty of happiness. Even half an hour a day, whatever it is.

After a while, just knowing it's there and that you can access it if you want to—the sense of what's possible is also really transformed by the tasting of that happiness. One's ability to let go becomes vastly expanded. That's part of the function of a resource in Dharma. This lovely, lovely feeling means it doesn't so much matter how much money I have, whether I get famous, whether I get rich, whether the food is nice where I'm staying or not. It's completely relativized by that kind of experience.

So one's ability to let go is made much more vast, much more steady, much more profound, much more wide-reaching because of the happiness. And it's the happiness that's pretty much independent of what someone is giving me or sense pleasures. It's massive, the difference—but only if we marinate for a long period of time with the happiness as what I'm drinking, drinking, drinking, slaking the thirst for what we're really looking for in chasing sense pleasures or praise or whatever it is.

I'm going to leave soul-making Dharma and sensing the soul completely out of this conversation for now, because some of you know that gets a lot more interesting and there's a lot more to say there. I'm just leaving it out for now not to complicate things.

If, though, I decide to say or to take, "Oh no, it's the quietening of thought..."

That's the most significant thing about the second jhana. My question would be why? Why do you think that is, and can you explain how that fits into and makes more sense in a bigger picture? Is it that you believe that when the mind is free of thought it's seeing things as they really are, or that thought creates a kind of smoke screen in front of reality? When I bring in this question, it's like: how does it fit? What actually is most significant? And why, if I'm choosing to emphasize this, or if a person's choosing to emphasize that, why is that significant? And how is that significant - for jhana practice, for what it's going to deliver, and in the whole path?

Sometimes what happens in practice is that a person is in the first jhana, and then they just completely leapfrog the second jhana and end up in the third jhana. That's the next thing that just emerges by itself. I don't know how common this is, but I've certainly encountered it quite a few times. This is quite an interesting phenomenon.

We have to think back: where are we trying to go? In this way of setting up where we want eventually to have mastery of the second jhana too, it becomes a question of: do we need to stop now and go back? Or should we let the third mature and really get into that, then go back?

It's also possible that practice might skip from the first jhana to a peacefulness that is not really akin to the third jhana. It's peaceful, it's relatively still, there's some equanimity there. It's certainly not unpleasant, but it's not really the third jhana.

This partly depends on background practice, and partly depends on one's psychological patterns. For some people, there's a kind of resistance to intense happiness for whatever reasons, however that came to be as a karmic formation, a sankara. Sometimes that needs a little unpacking, or the relationship with happiness and bubbly happiness needs a little looking at. But eventually we want to master them all.

We could say that each jhana delivers its particular insight - though more accurately, each jhana delivers something particular in relation to the ability to let go. That's what I would translate insight as. Insight has to be directly related to letting go. Insight is what allows letting go.

With the first jhana, it might simply be the fact that a whole other realm is possible. Other states of consciousness, other dimensions are possible when the mind is not entangled. Just that knowledge, that firsthand intimate experience and the intensity with which it impacts consciousness as something completely different than we have experienced before - that makes a big difference for many people.

With the second jhana, it's related to this happiness. In the very short Buddhist description, there are just two words: ajjhatam pasadanam, which translates as something like internal confidence or internal assurance. I think this confidence could mean one of three things, or two or three of them together.

It could mean confidence in the stability of the citta right then, in that moment. Because of the samadhi and the stilling of thought and the sense of integration, there's confidence in how stable this is. Instead of the first jhana's more active quality - the vitakka and vicara working like a soap mixer - here it's more still. There's a kind of confidence in that stability.

It could be confidence that comes from discovering such a profound and fulfilling happiness that doesn't seem primarily dependent on external conditions. Just knowing that, tasting that, drinking from it - that's going to give one quite a bit of confidence in one's life.

Or it could be confidence in the Dharma itself and in one's own ability to tread the path that the Buddha described. One really has a sense: here I am 2,500 years later experiencing these remarkable experiences that the Buddha described. He's got them in a kind of spectrum, and if I'm experiencing this and it has such an intimate sense of "this really is what we're talking about," then one's confidence in the Dharma itself and in one's ability to tread the path gets quite a support. Maybe I can do more. If I can do this, I can do more - all the way to liberation.

I don't know which of those confidences the term refers to, but confidence is part of the gift. I would emphasize the second one as primary, but I think maybe they're all there. I certainly remember the confidence it gave me in the path and that I was actually walking this path and it was possible. What the Buddha was talking about was real. It makes such an impact - much more than just being mindful and being a little calmer, or seeing impermanence. It makes such an impact because of the beauty and the depth and the remarkability of the experience.

It really gave me a lot of confidence in the path and that I was on the path and that I could do that

because, look, I'm doing it. I feel it.

But I think probably for me, the most important one is the discovery of this kind of happiness—that we have access to this kind of happiness. It's open to us and it's not dependent on external conditions.

So I mentioned earlier, probably when we were talking about the first jhana, that each jhana has a primary nimitta in our language and a secondary nimitta, right? And I think I just gave one—I'm not sure how many examples I gave of a secondary nimitta in the first jhana. The primary nimitta is piti.

In the second jhana, the primary nimitta is sukha.

But in the first jhana, for example, or any jhana, you could have a secondary nimitta of, say, a bright white light in the mind or a cloud of light, that sort of thing. You could also, for some people, have something aural—they hear a sound or sounds or whatever it is. There can be different ones. Those two are probably the most common.

But there are also other kinds of secondary nimitta which are a little bit more, let's say, intrinsically important or valuable. And one of them is quite common at this stage, the second jhana, and then in a way even more differently so in the third jhana: metta is there.

So sometimes people are not doing a metta practice—they're just working on the breath and now it's open to the second jhana—and actually feel... sometimes people have come to me and say, "I think the metta is the primary thing, not the happiness." It's not technically—it's a secondary nimitta—but it's very valuable.

So automatically in a jhana, there is metta in it. It's kind of impossible to be in a jhana and have ill will or aversion, the opposite of metta. So it's more again back to: what will I become sensitive to? What can I pick up on? What's in the mix of frequencies here? And metta is especially noticeable in different flavors in the second and third jhanas.

So we can allow that. And sometimes you can focus more on that. You can lean your emphasis more into the metta there—again, it's a dialer. How much does it become completely primary? Does it become kind of fifty-fifty? Does it become just in the background? There can be, for a lot of people obviously, a lot of healing—a lot of healing with the love that's there. And particularly when we talk about the third jhana, but a lot of healing.

But we need to be clear: what's the primary nimitta? And that's the sukha, that's the happiness. So we're not leaning too much and too often and too long into the love over the stretch of our practice.

Why would metta come up at that point? Why would metta reveal itself, do you think?

"Because they're both unfabricated," someone suggests.

So if I say that slightly differently, if that's okay: when we're in a jhana, we're not fabricating. So I'm introducing more this conversation about fabrication, this teaching about fabrication.

When we're in a jhana, and more and more so as we go down the jhanas, we're fabricating less and less self and less and less of any kind of otherness—other person or whatever. So the duality between self and other gets less. And there's more sense of non-separation, more oneness. There's less like, "That's your space and this is my space, thank you very much," or whatever it is. Less judging or less irritation. There's just a tendency—self and other, both less fabricated, more non-separateness, less duality there and less polarity in all that and all the difficulties.

So in a way, there's a kind of natural arising of metta because of that, because we feel less separate. Afterwards, even the metta gets unfabricated, but we'll talk about that later. That's when we get into equanimity and things.

So if you're practicing in this territory—when you're practicing and when this territory opens up for you and it feels like, okay, now that's my playground and that's what I'm really exploring, and you're really into it and you've just spent a sitting period in the second jhana—whatever it is, and it's time to end because you have to go wash up or whatever, so you know it's coming up time to end, but it's still going well and there's still energy there, then you can spend a few minutes, if you want, just a few minutes at the end of the session playing what I call two games: ping pong and leapfrog.

For example, here I am in the second jhana, and then I go, okay, well, let's go to just normal consciousness. I'm leapfrogging the first jhana. Then I go from there to one, and then I'll go from one back to two, and then I'll go from two back to one, and then I'll go to two again. Then I'm ping-ponging: one, two, one, two, one, two, one, two.

I actually need to practice that transition both ways. So this is a minor part of our practice, but one of the elements of mastery. Can I really just move back and forth at ease between any jhana and its adjacent jhana? So if I'm practicing the second jhana, can I go to the first? And if I haven't reached the third yet, then second to first, to second, to first, to second. It's all very light. It's all just a game.

And then I can also practice leapfrog. Here there aren't too many leapfrog options because we've only got zero, first, and second jhana. So you can go from second to ordinary consciousness to second. There aren't many leapfrog options available yet. So you can just spend a few minutes of fun at the end of sitting playing ping pong and leapfrog. These are the elements of mastery. I would like to encourage this. I wouldn't spend a whole sitting doing this, but they're part of learning the territory, they're part of the discrimination, they're part of the mastery, they're part of what makes the mind and the citta really malleable.

So again, when we come to talking about mastery, we have to think about pacing. Is it not ripe yet to try this stuff? I'm just getting used to the second jhana and it's too soon to try going for a walk in the second jhana when I'm just getting accustomed to it. I need to be really, really familiar. And when I do try all that—like the whole practice and the whole tenor of the days here—we really want to encourage this kind of light playfulness. If I get too heavy and too tight and too pressured, it just squeezes the sukha out of

things and then there won't be the fruit. So the whole thing is very light when it's time to play.

Okay, so I don't know where things are at in the dharma world these days. I don't get out much—it's actually true. But certainly, if I think back years ago, and I don't know, maybe this is a question for you: Who's heard from anyone, "Oh, careful with the jhanas, there's a danger you might get attached"? Some years ago, this would have been everyone. It would have been the default response. "You don't really want to be—A, what's the point? It's not insight. And B, there's really a danger there that you're going to get attached." And that's really pretty serious.

So, like I said, it's interesting. I'm not sure—maybe two-fifths of the people put their hand up. Anyway, half of you. If you go back to what the Buddha said, what did he say about all this? There is one occasion where I remember him talking about a monk who was very ill and because of the low energy was not able to access whatever level of jhana he was able to reach before his illness or when he was well. This monk was having some dukkha about that. And the Buddha said, "It's anatta. It's anatta." You see it as anatta, both the jhana and the self. It's not-self. So there's that kind of attachment possibility.

But what the Buddha mostly said, a few times, is this: Talking about the pleasure of jhana, he said, "This, the pleasure of jhana, is a pleasure I will allow myself." This is someone who talks about the middle way in terms of renunciation and the senses, but basically relative to most of us, he's a pretty extreme renunciant. This extreme renunciant says: "This is a pleasure I will allow myself. This is a pleasure that should not be feared. This is a pleasure that should be pursued and developed. This is a pleasure that should not be feared. This is a pleasure that should be pursued and developed."

And when he talks about sense pleasures, he talks about them as a pit of vipers, a pit of—you know those elephant traps that old hunter-gatherers made, with these big wooden stakes, and the elephant or mammoth is supposed to fall in? That's the sort of image he gives for sense pleasures. It looks like a nice piece of grass or whatever is there, but actually it's a trap. So he talks about the jhanas in that way—not to be feared, this is a pleasure, I will allow myself this pleasure, should be pursued and developed—and he talks about sense pleasures with a whole list of pretty extreme negative similes.

Is it or was it the case that somewhere along the line modern dharma teachings have kind of reversed the Buddha's instructions regarding these kinds of pleasures—sense pleasure and jhanic pleasure—and reversed the Buddha's concerns regarding attachment to either?

I find this really interesting, both historically and psychologically, and how that may have evolved and why. It may be changing—it's definitely changing, no question—but the Buddha is pretty clear about this.

Again, I don't know if anyone is still unsure when the piti, for example, feels very sexual or orgasmic. Is that okay? It seems a bit much, or it can't be right, surely. Just to remind you again of the Buddha's words describing the jhana: piti, sukha, whole body pervaded, leaving no spot untouched. What he does not say is "the whole body pervaded except below the waist and above the middle of the thigh." He says whole

body.

This is one of these things that's changing now, but years ago it was quite a pervasive belief that you really shouldn't mess with the jhanas—there's a real danger you'll get attached. Again, can we bring a little intelligence to this, a little questioning?

It seems to me there are three kinds of attachment that are potential with jhanas. One is attachment to the pleasure—that would be the most obvious one people would think of. After sixteen or seventeen years of teaching, I honestly struggle to remember one person who had experienced an actual jhana more than ten times who was attached to the pleasure there. Maybe other people encounter this a lot, but I don't. I don't think it's a problem for Westerners.

I just wonder what that attachment would look like. Is there some basement at Gaia House like an opium den with old yogis in the dark, getting older and not doing their work? What do we actually think it would look like? I think it would look like someone who's unwilling to explore or investigate the difficult. I think this is extremely rare. I've never encountered it. I really sit here struggling to think of anyone. I just can't.

After about ten times of jhana, you're not going to be attached to the pleasure in any problematic way. I just can't see it.

What I do see, and what we might recognize in ourselves much more commonly, is an attachment to looking at, obsessing with, prioritizing, attending to the difficult. I mentioned this before—sometimes that's a psychological tendency, sometimes cultural, sometimes dharmically trained. When I have the option of giving equal attention to the pleasant, I find that I can't. I'm so trained. Immediately there's a contraction in the body. Immediately there's some dukkha. The mind goes there.

That willingness is great, but if it's not balanced with equal freedom and willingness on the other side, there's actually an attachment. Sometimes that attachment is ideological because a person thinks this is where the real stuff is—that what's happening in a jhana is suppressing or hiding the difficult. What's dukkha is what's real. A jhana is a fabrication, a construction, a reality where you're stepping out of touch, hiding from the real stuff.

This can be extremely common and extremely entrenched. So sometimes as a teacher over the years, I have to be really delicate and careful how I bring this up, what I say to people, and how I might say it.

It could be an ideological attachment, or it could just be habitual—a tendency of personality, culture, upbringing, or dharma practice. In a way then, practicing the jhanas wholeheartedly and being open-minded will actually remedy that opposite attachment, which doesn't even occur to people as possibly being an attachment.

When I can keep both open, when I'm really able to do both, I'm really free to do both.

That's where we want to arrive—at range and possibility.

Second, what seems to me another way of getting attached to the jhanas is developing a grandiose self-view: "Look at me, look what I can do. I can reach this or that jhana." There's a kind of inflation of self-importance.

Again, I would say that after twenty experiences of a certain jhana, it should become really obvious to a person that the self isn't making it happen. This jhana simply arises when the conditions are present. When the conditions are there, a jhanic experience, a jhanic perception manifests. It depends on conditions—all kinds of conditions.

I mentioned that monk earlier. The Buddha also says at one point that jhana depends on digestion being neither too hot nor too cold. In Asian medicine, they speak of digestion in these terms. I certainly know that samadhi is greatly dependent on things like digestion and all kinds of other factors—energy levels, countless variables.

After twenty experiences, one really sees—it becomes almost difficult not to recognize—that it's entirely dependent on conditions. It's not something the self can feel grandiose or pumped up about.

What's actually much more common is a negative self-view in relation to not reaching jhana: "I'm not far enough along yet. I can't do it. I'm a failure. I bet everyone else is better. I'm progressing too slowly." Then what can happen is that a person thinks, "I want to attain this deeper jhana. I want to attain the jhanas or reach beyond where I am now." But actually, the intention is one of achievement for decorating the self-view and propping it up, or—this is a better way of putting it—addressing a negative self-view. "If I could just get that, then I'd feel better about myself, earn a badge, whatever."

Sometimes this intention isn't fully conscious. We don't quite realize what's mixed into our intention when it comes to practice. What's actually operating is a kind of avoidance of negative self-perception, an intention to sidestep a negative self-view. This can be quite subtle and operate very quietly.

Even here, the attachment is the opposite of what we tend to think. We imagine attachment looks like grandiosity and inflated self-view, but actually it's happening in reverse and often much more subtly.

Why not let the jhana give you the deepest things it can offer? The deepest gifts are the beauty of that happiness and the way it touches your being, the way it bathes the whole body and the entire citta. These are much deeper, more far-reaching, more lasting, and more impactful gifts than the ability to say, "I have achieved this" to yourself or others, or to feel included when others discuss their attainments.

Let the jhanas give you the deepest gifts they want to offer, that they can give you. This returns us to what's truly significant—what we're emphasizing when we speak about happiness.

Perhaps for me, the most interesting kind of attachment that might arise from jhana practice is attachment to view. For example, someone opening to the sixth jhana and experiencing this infinite consciousness—the Buddha's description is quite brief, but there's an experience of infinite consciousness

that pervades the cosmos, or exists as a transcendent realm. It can be felt both ways.

It's possible that someone opening to this experience might think, "Ah, this is ultimately true. This is what they're talking about—cosmic consciousness," and decide that it represents ultimate truth, becoming attached to that as a view. To be attached to a view means truly believing this view, this perception, is true.

Here again, there's something paradoxical. I would say that attachment to such views—seeing this cosmic consciousness, this infinite awareness, this vast awareness as ultimate reality, the eternal backdrop of all things, the source of everything—someone is much more likely to get stuck in that view and believe it's the final truth when they haven't experienced jhanas five, six, seven, and eight.

So it's the opposite. Having the map of something that goes beyond this quasi-sixth jhana state of infinite consciousness—once you reach the seventh or eighth jhana, you see that the previous state was fabricated, merely a stage in the journey.

So it's actually the jhanas that help us wean off attachments to this or that as the ultimate truth. The concern, I would say, is actually the opposite. The jhanas are rather a remedy for certain attachments rather than a concern.

That kind of view of a vast awareness being ultimately real, cosmic consciousness, awareness being the nature of things, that awareness being eternal and unruffled—all that is much more likely to arise from standard insight meditation practice. It's a very common experience, really quite common in other spiritual traditions as well. But if we can go beyond that kind of experience, if we have the map and it places that experience in context, we begin hopefully to experience something beyond it. We can see that it's not ultimate because we've gone beyond it, and we begin to understand its context.

So what is that exactly? How did that experience of this vast, eternal-seeming awareness, cosmic consciousness, whatever it is—how did it arise? How did it dependently arise as a perception? We understand its context.

This understanding of its dependent arising and dependent ceasing is more than saying we see that it's impermanent as a view. A person can go in and out of the vastness of awareness or cosmic consciousness many times and think, "Yeah, my experience of it is impermanent, but it's not impermanent. It's eternal. It's just there and unchanging and radiant forever and serene and untouched forever, and it embraces everything and permeates everything." There are different variations of this. Even if I realize my experience of it is impermanent, I can either accept that my experience of it comes and goes, or I can just work towards making it more and more of the time that I'm hanging out there.

But that's not what I mean by understanding its dependent arising and dependent cessation. What I mean is: how does this perception arise and how does it cease? Not that it arises and ceases, but how? It's dependent on a certain amount of unfabricating, and if I unfabricate more, it goes beyond it. This is

different than just saying, "Yeah, it's impermanent" or "My experience of it is impermanent."

So hopefully, if we have the right context for what we're doing in the whole of the Dharma, how what we're doing in jhana practice fits into that, this kind of attachment doesn't arise. Or we can get beyond it, to put it that way.

The more common danger here is attachment to what the Buddha would call wrong view or a misunderstanding—a limited and limiting view of emptiness, of the nature of awareness. If I think that's the ultimate nature of awareness, it's not ultimate. It's a perception. It's a relative perception. It's incredibly useful, incredibly healing and valuable and liberating to a certain extent. Is it ultimate? No. How am I going to find out that it's not ultimate? Through having the map, through going beyond it. Otherwise I might have a limited understanding or wrong view about what nibbana is and all this.

So the shoe is rather on the other foot, I think, in terms of attachment and jhana. They're actually very powerful in terms of weaning us off what can be really difficult kinds of attachment to sense pleasures, and in this case, to certain spiritual views.

This phenomenon I've just described—I said I couldn't really think of anyone who'd gotten attached to jhanic pleasure, anyone that I'd encountered as a teacher or heard about over however many years of teaching and meeting a lot of people. But I think in the first six months of teaching, I lost count of how many people I encountered who seemed to me actually pretty entrenched in some version of that vast awareness being ultimate. It's so common, and it can get very, very entrenched. There are people who remain in that kind of view for decades and never get out of it.

Sometimes the language that goes with it is very free and easy. It's very much like, "Well, awareness is ultimately there. I don't have to do anything. It's just there. Whatever happens, whether I'm aware or not, it's there. And everything's kind of equal within that." So it can sound very easy, and the person seems unattached, and it's all very free. It may even go with the view that there's no need to meditate because this is just there all the time. And actually, all that is hiding a really quite entrenched view that's very, very difficult to budge.

But one of the ways of going beyond this entrenched view is actually through the jhanas and with the jhana map—actually placing these experiences in their proper context. As I said, understanding their dependent arising and dependent fading, understanding the whole process, and then having this framework provides an entirely different relationship with all these beautiful and actually quite valuable mystical openings. We begin to understand their relationship with truth and therefore with liberation.

So I think that's all I wanted to say today.

Should we take a couple of questions, or shall we leave it here? Let's just sit quietly. I think that's enough.

Thank you, everybody. Time for tea.

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