

Jhāna and Buddhist Scholasticism

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Buddhism teaches as its highest truth a path of meditative practice for the attainment of a series of altered states of consciousness culminating in enlightenment and liberation. The central place accorded this course of meditative techniques in early Buddhism is reason enough to examine carefully and critically the various descriptions of it given in the Buddhist canon.

An examination of the texts, however, reveals both inadequacies and discrepancies. The more advanced techniques are too sketchily described to serve as guides to practicing meditators; descriptions of stages are repeatedly presented in stereotyped terms, discussed or elaborated upon only in much later commentaries; the meanings of words are often unclear. Variant listings of stages on the path to enlightenment are frequent.¹ And, in certain cases, textual descriptions contain what appear to be outright contradictions.

The tendency has been for believers and scholars alike to attempt to explain away such discrepancies, rather than to explain how they came to be present in the canon. In part this has been due to the concern of Buddhist scholars to extract from the texts some definitive statement of Buddhist theory and practice in order to reveal the "true nature" of Buddhism. Unfortunately, this often entails an exaggerated and uncritical respect both for the texts and for those who compiled them, together with a reluctance to question their accuracy, especially where they pertain to higher meditative practices. Thus, it has been claimed that if paradoxes occur, these must have been deliberately designed by the ancient compilers to shake us out of established patterns of thought, thus preparing our minds for the revelation of *Dhamma*.² Other modern scholars either

have been content to accept the attempts of earlier commentators to reconcile evident contradictions, or have simply ignored them.

Instead of explaining away textual discrepancies, however, a more productive line of inquiry would be to examine them critically for any light they may shed on the evolution of Buddhist thought and institutions. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to examine two related discrepancies: the first between two descriptions of the composition of first *jhāna*; the second, the insertion of an additional *jhāna*, designated in this paper as *jhāna la*, in certain later texts.

A comparison is first made between the descriptions of first *jhāna* in the fourfold series given in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, and the descriptions of the first two *jhānas* in the fivefold series in the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. It will be maintained that neither the contradiction evident between the two descriptions of first *jhāna*, nor the insertion of *jhāna la* have been satisfactorily accounted for either in the commentarial literature or by modern scholars.³ It will be argued on various grounds that the description of first *jhāna* in the *Abhidhamma* account is phenomenologically questionable. A discussion then follows of how the conflicting descriptions are likely to have come into existence, given what we know of the historical conditions under which early Buddhism evolved. It is suggested that the *Abhidhamma* listing is probably a product of Buddhist scholasticism, having no basis in meditative experience. The paper concludes by drawing out certain implications this study has for our understanding of the development of early Buddhism, and for the methodology of Buddhist studies.

I. Jhāna in the Suttapiṭaka

The importance of the *jhānas* as stages in Buddhist meditation is made abundantly clear time and again in the *Sutta-piṭaka*. Together the *jhānas* comprise the last stage, right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*), of the Noble Eightfold Path.⁴ This indicates that the *jhānas* are stages in the practice of *samatha*, or meditation for calm, where the mind is prepared for *vipassanā*, the practice of insight.⁵ This interpretation of the position of the *jhānas* in the Buddhist path is supported by canonical accounts of

Gotama's own enlightenment, according to which attainment of the fourth *jhāna* prepared his mind for developing the three forms of supernormal knowledge, (*tisso vijjā*), the last of which appears to constitute enlightenment.⁶

Descriptions of the four *jhānas* occur frequently throughout the *Sutta-piṭaka*, always in the same stereotyped form. The standard description for the first two *jhānas*, literally translated, and with certain key terms retained in their Pali forms, reads as follows.

- (1) Detached indeed from desires, detached from unwholesome states, attaining the with-*vitakka*, with-*vicāra*, detachment-born, *pīti-sukha* first *jhāna*, he abides [therein].
- (2) From the suppression of *vitakka-vicāra*, attaining inner tranquillity, one-ness of mind, the non-*vitakka*, non-*vicāra*, concentration-born *pīti-sukha* second *jhāna*, he abides [therein].⁷

The terms left untranslated—*vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti* and *sukha*—are those identified in the *Abhidhamma* as four of the five *jhāna* factors (*jhānarūpa*), to be discussed below.

Any analysis of the descriptions of the *jhānas* is hampered by difficulty in determining the meanings of key terms. Nevertheless, it is possible from these brief descriptions to gain some idea of (a) what constitutes first *jhāna*; and (b) how the progression from *jhāna* 1 to *jhāna* 2 is achieved. To begin with, first *jhāna* is characterized by separation (*vivicca*) from desires and unwholesome states. These are traditionally summed up in the five “hindrances” (*nīvarana*): sensory desire, malice, sloth and torpor, distraction and remorse, and doubt.⁸ In addition first *jhāna* is described as “detachment-born” or “separation-born” (*vivekajāta*), reinforcing the notion of separation from unwholesome mental states. On the positive side, first *jhāna* is characterized by the presence of *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti* and *sukha*. *Pīti* (usually translated as “joy”) is subsequently transcended in the transition from second to third *jhāna*, and *sukha* (“pleasure”) in the transition from third to fourth *jhāna*. As neither *pīti* nor *sukha* are involved in the transition from first to second *jhāna*, they will not be considered further in this discussion.

Vitakka and *vicāra* together constitute that characteristic which is present in first *jhāna* but not in second. The meaning

of these terms is therefore crucial to an understanding of what is entailed in that transition. Let us, therefore, look first at what light the textual description of second *jhāna* may shed on the meaning of *vitakka* and *vicāra*. The importance of the elimination of *vitakka* and *vicāra* for the attainment of the second *jhāna* is made clear by the repetition involved in the statement that the attainment of second *jhāna* is achieved through the suppression of *vitakka-vicāra*, and that the resulting state is non-*vitakka*, and non-*vicāra*. Now when the description of second *jhāna* is compared with the structurally similar description of first *jhāna*, it is clear that just as first *jhāna* is born of the detachment or separation (*viveka*) necessary to counter desires and unwholesome states, so second *jhāna* is born of the concentration (*saṃādhi*) necessary to suppress *vitakka-vicāra*. The quality of concentration is indicated by the statement that second *jhāna* is characterized by inner tranquillity (*ajjhattam sampaśādanam*) and one-ness of mind (*cetaso ekodibhāvam*).

We are now in a position to investigate further the meaning of the two terms *vitakka* and *vicāra*. In the *Sutta-piṭaka*, *vitakka* often stands alone to mean “reflection, thought, thinking,”⁹ whereas *vicāra* is only rarely found alone, and then in texts which reveal evidence of early *Abhidhamma* analysis, such as the description of three types of *saṃādhi*, to be discussed below. *Vitakka* is thinking *about* something: for example, *kāmavitakka* translates as “thoughts about love.”¹⁰ *Vicāra*, according to the definition given by Rhys Davids and Stede in their *Pali-English Dictionary* is “investigation, examination, consideration, deliberation,”¹¹ implying a deeper, more focused form of thinking. However Rhys Davids and Stede note that *vitakka* and *vicāra*, when used together in the combined form *vitakka-vicāra* found in the description of second *jhāna*, denote “one and the same thing: just thought, thinking, only in an emphatic way (as they are semantically synonymous) . . . one has to take them as one expression.”¹² The suggestion here seems to be that when *vitakka* and *vicāra* were used in combination, the effect of adding *vicāra* was to reinforce or emphasize the denotation of *vitakka*, perhaps extending it to cover *all* varieties of thinking, including sustained and focused thought. It is thinking in this inclusive sense that the meditator suppresses through concentration when he attains one-ness of mind and thus moves from first to second *jhāna*.

So much can be gleaned from the stereotype description of first and second *jhāna* given in the *Sutta-piṭaka*. While lacking specific details, this description does provide certain essential instructions for the practicing meditator: to attain first *jhāna*, practice detachment to overcome desires and unwholesome mental states; to attain second *jhāna*, practice concentration to suppress thinking. In addition, the description specifies the positive qualities that indicate success in these endeavours, most notably the presence of inward tranquillity and one-ness of mind as signalling attainment of second *jhāna*.

II. Jhāna in the Abhidhamma

Elsewhere in the *Tipiṭaka* are found two other descriptions of the *jhānas*, both differing in important respects from the *Sutta* account. They are formally set out only in the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, where they either have the same general form as the *Sutta* account, or take the form of lists of “*jhāna* factors.”¹³ These lists of factors are clearly not meant to be a comprehensive statement of the characteristics of the mental states constituting the various *jhānas*, as they omit some of the qualities included in the *Sutta* account.¹⁴ Instead these lists of *jhāna* factors name only those characteristics that are involved in the transition from each *jhāna* to the next. The device of listing *jhāna* factors as a means of characterizing the sequence of *jhānas* was a relatively late development, a typically Abhidhammic mode of analysis and presentation which effectively reduced the *jhāna* description to its bare essentials.

Sometimes four *jhānas* are listed in the *Abhidhamma*; sometimes the number is extended to five by interpolating an additional *jhāna* (here called for convenience la) between the first and second *jhāna* of the *Sutta* account. Both the fourfold and fivefold *Abhidhamma* lists include mental onepointedness (*ekaggatā*) as a characteristic (or factor) in all the *jhānas*, thus conflicting with the *Sutta* account, which makes no mention of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna*. In the fivefold list, *jhāna* la is characterized as with *vicāra* but without *vitakka*. The two *Abhidhamma* descriptions, together with their counterpart from the *Sutta-piṭaka* are therefore as depicted in the following three tables.

Table 1

The *jhāna* factors in the *Sutta-piṭaka*

<i>jhāna 1</i>	<i>vitakka-vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	
<i>jhāna 2</i>		<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i> (= <i>ekodibhāva</i> *)
<i>jhāna 3</i>			<i>sukha</i>	(<i>ekaggatā</i>)
<i>jhāna 4</i>				(<i>ekaggatā</i>)

**Ekodibhāva* is specifically mentioned only in *jhāna* 2. Though not mentioned in *jhānas* 3 or 4, it is clearly to be taken as characterizing these as well.

Table 2

The *jhāna* factors in the *Abhidhamma* fourfold *jhāna*

<i>jhāna 1</i>	<i>vitakka-vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 2</i>		<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 3</i>			<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 4</i>				<i>ekaggatā</i>

Table 3

The *jhāna* factors in the *Abhidhamma* fivefold *jhāna*

<i>jhāna 1</i>	<i>vitakka-vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 1a</i>	<i>vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 2</i>		<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 3</i>			<i>sukha</i>	<i>ekaggatā</i>
<i>jhāna 4</i>				<i>ekaggatā</i>

There are in these tables two distinct, though related, discrepancies which require explanation: the addition in both *Abhidhamma* versions of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna*; and the interpolation in the fivefold *Abhidhamma* series of an additional stage (*jhāna* 1a), brought about through splitting *vitakka-vicāra* into two separate factors.

A comparison of tables 1 and 2 reveals that the only essential difference between the *Sutta* version and the fourfold *Abhidhamma* version lies in the addition of *ekaggatā* as a factor in *jhāna* 1. But this is a most curious addition. *Ekaggatā* (mental one-pointedness) is synonymous with "one-ness of mind" (*cetaso ekodibhāva*) and, as noted above, is that characteristic of second *jhāna* which arises with the suppression of *vitakka-vicāra* through concentration, and which thereafter characterizes the remaining *jhānas*. It is synonymous with *cittass' ekaggatā*.¹⁵ One would expect, therefore, that *ekaggatā*, if it is to be recognized as a *jhāna* factor, would appear only in second, third and fourth *jhānas*. In fact, however, in both the fourfold and the fivefold *Abhidhamma* lists of *jhāna* factors *ekaggatā* is included in first *jhāna* as well, along with the very factor, *vitakka-vicāra*, it is said in the *Suttas* to suppress. This obvious anomaly clearly requires explanation.

One possible explanation might be that the *ekaggatā* that the *Abhidhamma* ascribes to *jhāna* 1 may be somehow qualitatively different from that of the other *jhānas*. It seems reasonable to expect the mental one-pointedness of the lower *jhānas* to be less well-developed than that of the higher *jhānas*, less "stable,"¹⁶ so more likely to break down through the intrusion of "hindering thoughts." Credence is lent to this view by the existence, according to the *Abhidhamma* of a "weak" form of *ekaggatā* defined as "persistence of thought"¹⁷ or "stability of mind,"¹⁸ which is said to characterize other mundane states of consciousness.¹⁹ About this form of *ekaggatā* Buddhaghosa comments that none of the other characteristics of *ekaggatā* apply to it.²⁰ Buddhaghosa in fact recognizes three degrees or kinds of *ekaggatā*. The weakest kind is that present in "original consciousness." A degree stronger than this is the kind of *ekaggatā* present in the transitional state of consciousness known as access-*jhāna*, which characterizes the moment of entry into first *jhāna*. The third and strongest kind of *ekaggatā* is that characterizing first *jhāna*.²¹

In first *jhāna*, *ekaggatā* has already developed to the point where it is “touching the object well, as the lid above touches the surface of the box below.”²² In other words, Buddhaghosa believed both that the *ekaggatā* which characterizes first *jhāna* was qualitatively *different* from the weak form present in mundane states of consciousness, and that it was qualitatively *identical* with that characterizing the higher *jhānas*. Thus Buddhaghosa’s account, with its three different grades of *ekaggatā*, provides no resolution of the anomaly of the presence of *ekaggatā*, as a factor in the first *jhāna*.

This brings us to the second discrepancy noted above, namely that in the fivefold *Abhidhamma* series only *vitakka* is suppressed in moving from first *jhāna* to *jhāna* la. *Vicāra* is separately suppressed only in the transition to the next stage again (second *jhāna*). This description makes sense only if it is in practice possible separately to suppress first *vitakka* then *vicāra*. In the *Sutta-piṭaka*, the term *vicāra* was used only to reinforce the meaning of *vitakka*. However, according to Rhys Davids and Stede: “With the advance in the Sangha of intensive study of terminology these terms become distinguished mutually. *Vitakka* became the inception of the mind, or attending, and was no longer applied, as in the *Suttas*, to thinking in general.”²³ The *Vibhāṅga* distinguishes *vitakka* as “meditation, thinking, thought, fixation, focussing, application of the mind, right thought” from *vicāra*, which is “searching, examining, constant examining, scrutinizing, constant connection of (and) constant inspection by consciousness.”²⁴ In other words, by the time of the *Abhidhamma*, *vicāra* had already taken on the sense of steady, focused thinking. By the time of Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE), the distinction had become well established. According to Buddhaghosa, *Vitakka* “is literally ‘one thinks about,’ or a ‘thinking about’.... Its [main] characteristic is the lifting of consciousness on to the object.... It has the *function* of impinging, of circumimpinging.... Its *manifestation* is bringing the mind near to the object.” By contrast, *vicāra* is “discursive work upon, or traversing of the object. It has threshing out (or contemplation) of object as *characteristic*, the linking of co-existent states to the object as *function*, and continuous binding as *manifestation*.”²⁵ The question is, of course, whether the differentiation between *vitakka* and *vicāra* in the *Abhidhamma* reflected a more refined

introspective phenomenological description of mind, or was merely a scholastic distinction made in the process of intellectual analysis. Here the commentarial literature is unhelpful. As Rhys Davids and Stede warn: “The explanations of Commentators are mostly of an edifying nature and based more on popular etymology than on natural psychological grounds.”²⁶

This terminological distinction in the fivefold series between *vitakka* and *vicāra* actually makes inclusion of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* even more anomalous. For though there seems to be some plausibility in the claim that sustained thought (*vicāra*) can coexist with onepointedness of mind (in *jhāna* la), it is clearly impossible for the mental process of casting around and alighting on an object of thought (*vitakka*) to be able to exist with onepointedness (in first *jhāna*). In this connection, it is perhaps not surprising to note that in the *Abhidhamma* listing there is disagreement over the means of transition from first *jhāna* to *jhāna* la. The *Vibhanga* states that *jhāna* la is *vivekajam* (born of detachment), as is first *jhāna* in the fourfold series;²⁷ while the *Dhammasaṅgani* states it is *samādhijam*, (born of concentration), as is *jhāna* 2 in the fourfold series.²⁸ This suggests, at the very least, that the monastic compilers were in disagreement not only over how the interpolated *jhāna* ought to be characterized, but also over how it should be attained.²⁹

III. Attempts at Reconciling the Discrepancies

In view of these anomalies in both the four- and fivefold *Abhidhamma* lists, one might have expected Buddhists generally to have given preference to the *Sutta* description of first *jhāna* as being the “correct” version. Surprisingly, however, early commentators and modern scholars alike have consistently opted for the *Abhidhamma* account. For example, Buddhaghosa, while explicitly recognizing that *ekaggatā* is not present in first *jhāna* in the *Sutta* accounts, prefers the *Abhidhamma* version as superior even to that of the Buddha himself.

Among the factors, although collectedness of mind [*ekaggatā*] is not shown in this [*Sutta*] reading, as “wherein is thinking applied and sustained,” yet it is a factor, as is stated in the *Vibhanga*: “*jhāna* is applied thinking, sustained thinking, rapture, bliss, collected-

ness of mind." Whatever may have been the intention of the Blessed One in making the outline, it is revealed in the *Vibhaṅga*.³⁰

In fact, so eager is Buddhaghosa to paper over the difference between the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* accounts that in the chapter of his *Visuddhimagga* where he quotes the *Sutta* description, he goes on to refer in the next line to "the First Jhāna, which has put away five factors, is endowed with five factors . . .".³¹

Modern scholars have tended to follow Buddhaghosa. Paravahera Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera, in his *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, agrees that whatever the *suttas* say, *ekaggatā* was meant to be included in first *jhāna*.³² So too does Henepola Gunaratana, whose doctoral thesis on the *jhānas* is the most detailed modern study devoted to this most important aspect of Buddhist teaching. Gunaratana lists the four factors in first *jhāna* as described in the *Sutta* accounts, but then comments, "the fifth, one-pointedness, is added elsewhere."³³ Instead of discussing this discrepancy, he merely states that it is "more than obvious" that *ekaggatā* ought to be included in first *jhāna*.³⁴

To account for the omission of *ekaggatā* from the *Sutta* account of *jhāna* 1, Gunaratana suggests that "the prominence of *ekaggatā* in the attainment of *jhāna* [by which he means specifically first *jhāna*] was so evident that it was felt unnecessary to mention it separately."³⁵ This suggestion finds little textual support. *Ekaggatā* is certainly prominent as a characteristic of *jhānas* 2, 3 and 4, but its prominence in them derives from the complete suppression of discursive thought; in *jhāna* 1 discursive thought is still present. Elsewhere, Gunaratana suggests that *ekaggatā* is not mentioned in the *Sutta* account of first *jhāna* because it is not until second *jhāna* that "concentration first acquires eminence." He supports this with the observation that: "The concentration of the first *jhāna*, being subject to the disturbing influence of applied thought [*vitakka*] and sustained thought [*vicāra*], is still imperfect."³⁶ But these two suggestions are based on contradictory premises. He cannot have it both ways: *ekaggatā* cannot both be so prominent in first *jhāna* as not to warrant mention and not acquire eminence until second *jhāna*.

There do exist, in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, three references to the occurrence of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna*. It is conceivable, therefore, that the *Abhidhamma* description is merely the formalization of

an alternative earlier, canonically supported description. However, critical examination of these three references reveals that all are textually suspect, late interpolations or additions to the Pali corpus. Only one of the three references attributes a statement on the occurrence of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* to the Buddha himself. It is found in the *Salāyatana-vagga* of the *Samyutta* and is set in the context of a miraculous appearance by the Buddha to the disciple Moggallāna,³⁷ a context which already suggests that the passage constitutes a later textual interpolation. In the course of this appearance, the Buddha urges the meditating disciple to practice mental onepointedness, repeating an identical exhortation for each *jhāna*. Thus, for the first *jhāna* the formula becomes: "Make steadfast thy mind in the first trance [*jhāna*]. In the first trance, make the mind one-pointed [*cittam ekodim-karohi*]. In the first trance compose the mind."³⁸ That this same set formula is repeated without distinction for each *jhāna* could well be a consequence of faulty memorizing: reference to onepointedness in subsequent *jhānas* may have been extended inadvertently to first *jhāna* as well. But in view of the hagiographic reference to Moggallāna it seems more likely that this text is late, and was composed under Abhidhammic influence.

Support for this conclusion comes from another source, one whose importance was appreciated by A.K. Warder,³⁹ but which has not been used as often as it might have been by Pali scholars. That source is the Chinese counterpart of the four *nikāyas* (the Chinese *āgamas*). In the Chinese texts, this reference to the practice of onepointedness, together with "virtually the entire *Moggallāna-samyutta*" is missing,⁴⁰ thus indicating that the entire section represents a late addition to the Theravādin canon.⁴¹

A second example of a reference in the *Sutta-piṭaka* to the occurrence of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* occurs in the *Mahāvedalla-sutta* of the *Majjhima*.⁴² There, the disciple Sāriputta states that first *jhāna* is "five-factored," (counting *vitakka-vicāra* as two factors instead of one and including *ekaggatā*). But Sāriputta's description contains an inconsistency. When asked what characterizes first *jhāna*, Sāriputta answers by listing four factors: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *piti* and *sukha*, but then, on being asked how many factors are to be found in first *jhāna*, he replies that there are

five: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā*! Now, as Pande points out, this *Sutta* bears all the hallmarks of a late text.⁴³ What is more, although its counterpart in the Chinese canon is otherwise all but identical, it lacks precisely this section on the composition of the *jhānas*.⁴⁴ This section therefore constitutes an even later interpolation in a late text, almost certainly to be attributed to the influence of early Abhidhammic analysis.

The third reference to *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* is found in the *Anupada-sutta*. There *ekaggatā* is included in a list of sixteen characteristics of first *jhāna*.⁴⁵ The list itself is full of anomalies, being both repetitive and inconsistent. It first follows the stereotype description of first *jhāna* with only *vitakka-vicāra*, *pīti* and *sukha*, but then goes on to list these same factors again, with *ekaggatā*. Other qualities listed include equanimity (*upekkha*) and "desire" (*chanda*). Equanimity is out of place because it is not supposed to be attained until third *jhāna*. Desire is out of place both because it conflicts with equanimity, and because it should be overcome with the attainment of first *jhāna*.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, the entire *Anupada-sutta* does not exist in the Chinese canon, thus confirming Pande's identification of it as a demonstrably late text.⁴⁷

We can only conclude that none of these three *Sutta-piṭaka* references constitutes evidence that the Buddha himself ever taught that *ekaggatā* was present in first *jhāna*. By including *ekaggatā*, Buddhaghosa, and a number of modern scholars as well, have without valid reason preferred the *Abhidhamma* description to that of the Buddha—a choice which itself is perhaps in need of explanation.

When we turn to attempts to reconcile the second discrepancy, concerning the interpolation of *jhāna* la in the fivefold *Abhidhamma* listing, we encounter another set of similarly unsatisfactory explanations. To the question "Why are four and five meditations taught?" the *Vimuttimagga* replies: "because the result depends on two sorts of men."

Q. How does a yogin induce the second meditation from the first?

A. He considers the coarseness of initial and sustained application of thought, knows the disadvantages of initial

and sustained application of thought, and induces the second meditation, which is free from initial and sustained application of thought. This is the way of progress in the four meditations.

And again, there is another man. He is able to induce freely the second meditation out of the first meditation. He considers the coarseness of initial application of thought and knows the disadvantages of initial application of thought. He discerns the state of being free from initial application of thought. Possessing restricted sustained application of thought, he induces the second meditation. This is the way of progress in the five meditations. Therefore, the five meditations are taught.⁴⁸

To this, Buddhaghosa, in the *Atthasālinī*, adds a further reason: "to adorn the teaching." This he explains as follows:

Those conditions of the Law by which, because they have been thoroughly penetrated, the teaching is adorned—those conditions were thoroughly penetrated by the Tathagata. Hence, because of the vastness of his knowledge, the teacher, who is skillful in arranging his teaching, and who has attained the [art of] embellishing it, fixes that teaching by whatever factor that has come to hand, and in any way he chooses. Thus here he has classified a First Jhana of five factors, a fourfold Second Jhana 'without initial and with only sustained application of mind', a threefold Third Jhana, a twofold Fourth Jhana and a twofold fifth Jhana. This we have called embellishing the teaching.⁴⁹

Neither of these two commentarial explanations can be said to be convincing. Modern scholars offer a variety of suggestions as to how the two lists arose. According to Rhys Davids and Stede, the *jhānas* form "one series of mental states, and the stages might have been fixed at other points in the series."⁵⁰ This is to make Gotama's division into four stages all but arbitrary, which is hardly convincing. Narasabho says: "It should be noted that the fivefold system is given with a view to varying

mental endowments as well as simplicity for cultivation of the aspirants [sic]. To some only *vitakka* appears gross whereas the remaining factors appear calm . . ."⁵¹ Gunaratana agrees.⁵² Pande simply remarks that: "In the Abhidhamma-stage the four *Jhānas* were turned, for the sake of greater system, into a five-fold [sic]."⁵³ Other scholars ignore either one account or the other.⁵⁴

Again, it might be suggested that the interpolation of *jhāna* la in the *Abhidhamma* fivefold listing merely formalizes earlier distinctions between *vitakka* and *vicāra* drawn in the *Sutta-piṭaka*. On five occasions in the *Suttas*, the following threefold classification of *saṃādhi* is given: (i) with *vitakka* and *vicāra*; (ii) without *vitakka* but with *vicāra*; and (iii) without *vitakka* or *vicāra*.⁵⁵ Since the *jhānas* constitute stages in the attainment of *sammā-saṃādhi*, this classification could possibly have led to the insertion of *jhāna* la into the *Abhidhamma*.⁵⁶ (At the same time, if *ekaggatā* is taken as the defining characteristic of *saṃādhi*, this classification could also suggest the possible presence of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna*.)

Reference to the Chinese texts throws some interesting light on these five references. The references in the *Samyutta* and the *Anguttara* are both late, as neither Pali *sutta* has any Chinese counterpart. Chinese counterparts do exist for those *suttas* in the *Dīgha* and *Majjhima* in which the remaining three references occur. In the case of the *Saṅgīti-sutta*, itself a demonstrably late text comprising a series of *Anguttara*-like numerical groups of short doctrinal statements,⁵⁷ the Chinese text closely follows the Pali sequence, except at just the point where the reference to the three kinds of *saṃādhi* occurs.⁵⁸ Of this there is no sign. In the *Dasuttara-sutta*, a slightly different situation pertains. The reference to three kinds of *saṃādhi* based on the presence or absence of *vitakka* and *vicāra* is replaced by a reference to three kinds of *saṃādhi* characterized by emptiness, desirelessness, and signlessness.⁵⁹ In this case, it would appear that an earlier, rather cryptic reference to three kinds of *saṃādhi* preserved in the Chinese recension was replaced in the Theravādin canon by a simpler, but later classification.

It is the single reference to the threefold classification of *saṃādhi* that occurs in the *Majjhima* that permits us to narrow down the probable date of this curious doctrinal development. The reference occurs in the *Upakkilesa-sutta*, and is also found in the Chinese canon—with a single significant difference. The

second *saṃādhi* is described as one in which *vitakka* is absent and *vicāra* is reduced.⁶⁰ In the Pali version, *vicāra* is simply stated to be present. The Chinese description is repeated several times in this *sutta*, so it would appear that this may constitute a transitional version dating from the period when the distinction between *vitakka* and *vicāra* was being drawn on the basis that after “initial thought” was eliminated, it took time to eliminate “sustained thought.” Now since it has been shown that the Chinese counterparts of the *Dīgha* and *Anguttara* were probably translated from the Dharmaguptaka canon, whereas the *Majjhima* and *Samyutta* were translated from the Sarvāstivādin canon,⁶¹ it is possible to date this “transitional version” of the threefold classification of *saṃādhi* to the period between the breakaway of the Dharmaguptakas (no sign of the doctrine in the *Dīgha* or *Anguttara*) and the division between the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins (occurrence in the *Majjhima*, but not in its final Theravādin form).

IV. Resolving the Discrepancy

For modern scholars trained in the logic of textual analysis, the discrepancies evident between the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* descriptions of the *jhānas* are too obvious to be disregarded. Either *ekaggatā* can coexist with *vitakka-vicāra*, or it cannot. Either there exists an intermediate stage (*jhāna la*) which is without *vitakka* but with *vicāra*, or there does not.⁶² Logic alone suggests that *vitakka*, understood as discursive thought, cannot exist in any state of consciousness entailing one-pointed mental concentration: if the mind is casting around for an object upon which to focus, or is following one train of thought after another “like a wild monkey,”⁶³ it cannot be said to be one-pointed.

Whether or not *vitakka-vicāra* can coexist with *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* clearly has a lot to do with how the terms themselves are understood. It is admittedly difficult to be sure exactly what states and processes the terms used in early Buddhist psychology actually referred to, but as already indicted, change in the meaning of terms is insufficient to resolve the problem. Even as “initial application,” *vitakka* retains a discursive component. The change in meaning of *vicāra* noted above, while it may explain the

interpolation of *jhāna* la in the *Abhidhamma* series, does nothing to elucidate the problem of first *jhāna*. Nor can change in the meaning of *ekaggatā* account for the presence of this factor together with *vitakka* in first *jhāna*. Even Buddhaghosa did not accept that *ekaggatā* as a factor of first *jhāna* was some weak form of attention such as was said to characterize less developed states of consciousness, including access-*jhāna*.⁶⁴

In the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* accounts we have two different descriptions of what is purported to be the same mental state. But because the descriptions are different, different interpretations are possible. First *jhāna*, is usually interpreted as a state of deep concentration, achievement of which is beyond the capacity of all but the most advanced meditators. This interpretation is based on the *Abhidhamma* account. From the *Sutta* account, however, a rather different interpretation is required. First *jhāna* in the *Sutta* account is the stage *before* mental one-pointedness is established. Rather than being a state of deep concentration, therefore, it seems to be a preliminary stage preceding a series of such states (the higher *jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna*). In the *Sutta* account, *vitakka-vicāra* and *ekaggatā* do not coexist precisely because it is through the elimination of *vitakka-vicāra* in the transition to second *jhāna* that one-ness of mind is attained. The first *jhāna* of the *Suttas* is evidently a state that can be readily attained by anyone who has practiced right mindfulness, a state that many wandering *samanas* would have been conversant with.

In principle, it ought to be possible to test the *Sutta* description of the transition from first to second *jhāna* through introspective analysis.⁶⁵ Gotama learned the lower *jhānas* from his earliest meditation masters, practiced them even as a child, and enjoined his disciples to do the same.⁶⁶ It should be possible, therefore, for present-day practitioners of meditation to apply similar techniques to attain similar elementary concentrated states, and thereby test the accuracy of the textual descriptions. Though introspective analytical reports of the kind developed in modern cognitive psychology⁶⁷ could not be taken as in themselves providing conclusive empirical evidence in support of Buddhist claims for the effectiveness of meditation techniques, they would lend strong support to textual accounts so confirmed.⁶⁸

It is perhaps debatable whether this method of empirical

verification would be applicable for higher stages of the Buddhist meditative path, such as the *arūpa jhānas* or the “Three Knowledges”; however its usefulness is much less problematic for the lower stages. Introspective analytical descriptions of elementary concentration states could be checked against the findings of text-based approaches such as those which make it possible to distinguish an earlier “primitive” Buddhism which might be ascribed to Gotama himself from later accretions through the dating of texts on the basis of language or content;⁶⁹ or through form-criticism of the kind pioneered by Biblical scholars.⁷⁰

One way to obtain empirical verification of whether or not *ekaggatā* can possibly coexist with *vitakka-vicāra* in first *jhāna* would be to conduct a survey of Buddhist meditation masters from which presumably a clear consensus would emerge which would resolve the contradiction between the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* accounts of first *jhāna*. There are, however, practical difficulties in the way of conducting such a survey. Those undergoing training in Buddhist meditation are usually under strict instructions not to discuss their experiences in the presence of anyone but their meditation master. Masters themselves are likely to be reluctant to advance any claim to have achieved higher meditative states, if only for fear of the negative effect such a claim is believed to have on spiritual progress toward *nibbāna*, and of the skepticism it might well provoke. However, meditation masters might be less reluctant to report on their introspective experience of lower meditative stages—especially if this took the form of commenting upon published accounts by non-Buddhists applying Buddhist techniques.⁷¹

Descriptions of concentration practice by non-Buddhists provide a possible alternative means of verification, though only *prima facie* evidence could be so adduced in support of one textual description or another. Such *prima facie* evidence is available, in fact, to anyone willing to embark on a course of elementary concentration practice. The immediate goal of such practice is to achieve mental one-pointedness through concentrating attention upon some object of perception, such as the tactile sensation of the breath at the right nostril.⁷² The most notable characteristic of this concentrated state, when one reflects upon the experience, is that the chatter of thought is temporarily stilled. Most people have probably experienced this phenome-

non on occasions when they have become totally engrossed in some sensory stimulus—for example when listening intently to music, or when immersed in the beauty of a sunset. Normally, the flow of thought quickly resumes, but with practice it is possible to extend the concentrated state to endure minutes at a time. Even this elementary experiment in concentration indicates that mental one-pointedness cannot coexist with discursive thought. Phenomenological analysis thus confirms what logic would lead us to expect, namely that the *Sutta* description in which first *vitakka-vicāra* and *ekaggatā* do not coexist in first *jhāna* is the correct one.

Now it is just conceivable that confusion over the composition of first *jhāna* could have arisen from exegesis of the passage of the *Samyutta-nikāya* quoted above in which the meditator is instructed to make the mind one-pointed in first *jhāna*. According to the *Sutta-piṭaka* account, the meditator must suppress all discursive thought in order to attain second *jhāna*. This would require that preliminary attempts to establish one-pointedness be made in first *jhāna*.⁷³ In this sense, *ekaggatā* could perhaps be said to occur here. Even so, this one-pointedness of mind would never *coexist* with discursive thought. During those short periods when one-pointedness was achieved, discursive thought would necessarily stop. One-pointedness of mind of significant duration could only be said to be present when discursive thought no longer disrupted the concentrated state. If first *jhāna* is characterized by the presence of discursive thought, it can hardly also be characterized by mental one-pointedness, even if in the course of elementary concentration practice discursive thought were to be momentarily restrained. Only when discursive thought is fully suppressed through concentration could “one-ness of mind” be termed a factor, that is, a permanent characteristic of the state attained—and that is said to occur only in second *jhāna*. Thus, on the basis of the logic of definition, one would have to conclude that the Abhidhammic first *jhāna* was inaccurately characterized, and that the *Sutta* description should be preferred.

If logic and introspective analysis of concentration practice both confirm the *Sutta* description of first *jhāna*, and textual exegesis and change in the meaning of terms cannot explain the presence there of *ekaggatā* as a characterizing factor, one

must ask why all schools of Buddhism have accepted the later *Abhidhamma* account in preference to what was in all probability Gotama's own earlier description. This is not the same as asking, more fundamentally, how *ekaggatā* came to be included in first *jhāna* in the first place. Once *ekaggatā* had become included in the canon, Buddhists very naturally accepted the new description without question. The *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, as one of the three "baskets," not only is scripturally as authoritative as the *Sutta-piṭaka*; it even purports to be more analytically exact. If the *Abhidhamma* says *ekaggatā* is present in first *jhāna*, no school would contradict it. To elaborate the doctrine is one thing; to take issue with the most authoritative texts on Buddhist analytical psychology would be quite another.

We should not be surprised that once *ekaggatā* had come to be included in first *jhāna*, this was accepted by all schools of Buddhism. What is noteworthy is that this development necessarily led to a reinterpretation of first *jhāna*. Once *ekaggatā* had been included, first *jhāna* could hardly be taken to be an elementary stage in concentration practice. Instead it came to be conceived as something far more exalted which few monks could hope to attain—a view that would have been reinforced by the belief that gradual decline of the *Dhamma* was inevitable.

The interesting question, however, is not why believing Buddhists accepted the *Abhidhamma* account once *ekaggatā* had become a factor of first *jhāna*, but rather how it came to be included as a factor in the first place. As we have seen, *prima facie* evidence that mental one-pointedness and discursive thought cannot coexist makes the possibility that the change in description was based on more refined introspective analysis unlikely. It is possible that more refined introspective analysis was responsible for drawing the distinction found in the *Abhidhamma* fivefold series between *vitakka* as the "initial application" of thought and *vicāra* as "sustained" thinking about it. This distinction between two modes of thought is one which most people would be familiar with, and could hardly have been overlooked by those responsible for the kind of psychological analysis we find in the *Abhidhamma*. Anyone who has thought deeply about anything knows that focusing attention on *content* can prevent the arising of random mental images.⁷⁴

The description of *jhāna* la in the fivefold series as charac-

terized by both sustained thought and mental one-pointedness could, therefore, conceivably be defended as phenomenologically accurate on the grounds that sustained thought constitutes a form of concentration, that concentrated focus on the content of thought constitutes mental one-pointedness. However, this description of *jhāna* la could still be questioned on the grounds that *ekaggatā* as one-pointed concentration actually eliminates *all* thought. In any case, while it may well be that more refined Abhidhammic introspective analysis led to differentiation between *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and even to the inclusion of *ekaggatā* as a factor of the additional inserted *jhāna* la, this cannot with any plausibility explain how *ekaggatā* came to be considered to coexist with *vitakka* in first *jhāna*.

Neither changes in the meanings of words, nor refinements in psychological analysis, can provide, with any plausibility, an explanation for the discrepancies associated with the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* descriptions of the *jhānas*. Nor, as indicated above, did references in the *Sutta-piṭaka* provide precedent for the inclusion of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* or the insertion of *jhāna* la, since the relevant sections did not form part of the early corpus of memorized texts upon which early *Abhidhamma* formalization would have been based.⁷⁵ On the contrary, it is much more likely that both references to *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* and the threefold classification of *samādhi* were products of Abhidhammic scholasticism only later interpolated into the canon.

This conclusion would be further strengthened if it could be shown how the earlier *Sutta* description came to be altered to produce the *Abhidhamma* version. Unfortunately, conclusive historical evidence of this kind simply does not exist. What the historian can do, however, is attempt to construct a hypothetical account of how the alteration might have occurred, given what we know of the historical development of early Buddhism, and offer some assessment of the likelihood and coherence of such an account.

The following explanation for why the *Abhidhamma* lists *five* factors in first *jhāna* takes particular account of Buddhist scholastic mentality. Let us begin with the *jhāna* factors. These are known collectively as the *jhānarīgas*, a term which does not occur in the *Sutta-piṭaka*. Together with the concept it connotes, this term is a product of Abhidhammic scholasticism.⁷⁴ It seems

likely that for the *jhānas*, the characterizing factors first listed were those which necessarily had to be overcome in moving successfully to higher *jhānas* (see table 1). *Ekaggatā* would have been included as a factor *gained*, not lost, because of its prominence in characterizing the higher *jhānas* and the emphasis placed upon it by practicing meditators. With the division of *vitakka-vicāra* into two factors, first *jhāna*, the stage attained through overcoming the five hindrances, was characterized by four factors. But for the scholastic mind, there existed an uncomfortable asymmetry where five hindrances were juxtaposed with four *jhāna* factors. Five hindrances needed to be paired with a list of five factors, a compelling reason for discovering an additional factor in first *jhāna*—and the factor most readily available (as comparison of tables 1 and 2 shows) was *ekaggatā*.

Scholastic concern over the relationship between the hindrances and the *jhāna* factors provides the key to understanding how the discrepancy between the *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma* descriptions of the *jhānas* is likely to have arisen. A direct relationship is first stated in the *Mahāvedalla-sutta*, already referred to. There, Sāriputta replies as follows to the question how many “factors” are abandoned and how many possessed in first *jhāna*:

Your reverence, in regard to the first meditation, five factors are abandoned, five are possessed: if a monk has entered on the first meditation, desire for sense-pleasure is abandoned, malevolence is abandoned, sloth and torpor are abandoned, restlessness and worry are abandoned, doubt is abandoned, but there is initial thought and discursive thought, rapture and joy and one-pointedness of mind. Thus, your reverence, in regard to the first meditation, five factors are abandoned, five factors are possessed.⁷⁵

It is never explicitly stated in the *Tipiṭaka* that each of the five *jhāna* factors is instrumental in overcoming a specific hindrance. Buddhaghosa states that a direct one-to-one correspondence between the five *jhāna* factors and the hindrances is given in the *Petakopadesa*.⁷⁶ But in this he is mistaken; all we in fact find in the *Petakopadesa* is a statement that the “five-factored meditation [*jhāna*]” is the “opposite” of the five hindrances.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, by the time Buddhaghosa was writing, these equivalences were well established: one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) was said to be

opposed to sensory desire (*kāmacchanda*), joy (*pīti*) to malice (*vyāpāda*), initial application of mind (*vitakka*) to sloth and torpor (*thīnamiddha*), bliss (*sukha*) to distraction and remorse (*uddhaccakukkucca*), and sustained application of mind (*vicāra*) to doubt (*vicikicchā*).⁷⁸

Now, some of these equivalences seem quite inappropriate.⁷⁹ For example, one might have expected *ekaggatā* to neutralize *uddhaccakukkucca* (distraction and remorse) rather than sensory desire. As for *vitakka*, it is hard to see how it could be thought of as neutralizing anything. Apologists explain that the *vitakka* which counters sloth and torpor is of a special kind!⁸⁰ Nor does it seem likely that *vicāra* would neutralize doubt. On the contrary, doubt could actually be encouraged by sustained thought. Here apologists claim that *vicāra* counteracts doubt only when it is “directed to *jhāna*.”⁸¹

The *Vimuttimagga* provides an even more bizarre example of the lists of one-to-one correspondences so dear to the scholastic mind. There the relevant passage states: “The hindrances are overcome by the perfection of the five *jhāna* factors. The overcoming of the first hindrance is the first meditation, *jhāna*. Thus the overcoming of the five hindrances results in five meditations, *jhānas*.⁸² The five hindrances are not overcome by five *jhāna* factors in first *jhāna*. Rather, the hindrances are overcome as the *jhāna* factors are lost in moving through the series of five *jhānas*. This account is obviously inconsistent with the description of the first *jhāna* as characterized by separation from unwholesome states (all five hindrances), and makes no sense in terms of the *jhānas* as a sequence of ever more concentrated mental states.

The *Vimuttimagga* provides an excellent example of two reinforcing scholastic tendencies—to draw up neat and regular lists wherever possible, and to equate lists so that individual items in each are paired in symbolic relationship.⁸³ Both tendencies are already evident throughout the later sections of the *Tipiṭaka*. It was this penchant in Indian scholasticism (for it is not found only in Buddhist writings) for composing lists and drawing symbolic parallels that best accounts for both the inclusion of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna*, and for the insertion of *jhāna* la.

The description of the *jhānas* in the *Sutta-piṭaka* specifies the presence of *ekaggatā* only in second *jhāna*, but it is clearly

to be understood as continuing to characterize third and fourth *jhānas*. If *ekaggatā* is included in *jhānas* 3 and 4, the asymmetrical Table 1 results. It would be natural for the scholastic mind to "complete" the table by including *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna*. Subsequently, *vitakka-vicāra* was divided into two separate factors almost certainly in order to "match" the previously existing set of five hindrances with the necessary number of *jhāna* factors,⁸⁴ rather than as a result of more refined introspective analysis. Together, these scholastic exercises would have given rise first to the *Abhidhamma* fourfold *jhāna* set out in Table 2, and then to the even neater and still more formally satisfying fivefold arrangement of Table 3.

That the inclusion of a *jhāna* stage in which *vitakka* is missing but *vicāra* retained probably resulted from scholastic formalizing rather than introspective analysis is further indicated by the conflicting descriptions of this *jhāna* in the *Dhammasaṅgani* and the *Vibhaṅga* remarked on above, and by the treatment of the *jhānas* in the *Kathā-vatthu*⁸⁵ where the "Theravādins" are said to argue, against adherents of other schools, that *no* intervening stage exists between first and second *jhānas* in the *Sutta* account. And yet in the Theravādin *Abhidhamma* the fivefold listing clearly does include *jhāna* la as just such an "intermediate stage." It appears that by this time the *jhānas* had for some monks become no more than another "point of controversy."

The suggestion that the Abhidhammic description of first *jhāna* resulted from scholastic elaboration rather than constituting a phenomenologically accurate reporting of an attained meditative state is unthinkable only for those who approach the *Abhidhamma* as sacred scripture or with exaggerated deference for the wisdom of the *arhats*. In fact, we have strong historical evidence for the development of Buddhist scholasticism. Soon after Gotama's death, the *saṅgha* changed from being a band of wandering mendicants to become a settled monastic order.⁸⁶ At the same time there developed an immense body of oral literature, all of which had to be memorized until the canon was written down, some time after the reign of Aśoka. To memorize these lengthy records groups of *bhikkhus* were responsible for different sections. Dutt describes the process:

Each group would then memorize and also specialize in its own

section, not as mere reciters (*bhānakas*), but as professors, expositors, commentators—in short as custodians of both the texts and their true meaning.⁸⁷

Thus, we find reference to *Dhammadhikas* (expounders of Dhamma), *Vinayadharas* (experts in the *Vinaya*), and *Suttantikas* (specialists on the *Suttas*). Another group were designated the *Jhāyins*, literally those who practice the *jhānas*. At *Anguttara* iii. 355 the tension is revealed that existed between the *Jhāyins* (which Hare translates as “musers”) and *Dhammayogas* (Hare’s “Dhamma-zealots”, followers of the *Dhamma* as texts to be studied).⁸⁸ Each group apparently had been criticizing the other: each considered its particular way of practice to be the only true way to *nibbāna*. The lesson of the text is that such disputes should end: each group should respect the methods of the other, for both lead to the same goal, though few enough of either group will attain it.

Two things should be noted about this text: first, that such mutual criticisms were being voiced; second, that there had already evolved an influential group of monks seeking to apprehend the supreme reality by means of the intellect,⁸⁹ rather than by the meditative techniques pioneered by the Buddha. A contest was taking place for the soul of the *saṅgha* between on the one hand, the *Dhammayogas*, those “puffed up, proud, excitable fellows, mouthy speechifiers, forgetful of mindfulness, lacking self-possession and composure, with their thoughts a-wander and their sense-governance rude,” and on the other hand the *Jhāyins*, those who had “touched with the body the deathless state.”⁹⁰ In this contest, the *Jhāyins* lost.

Further evidence for a steady decline in the practice of *jhāna* in the *saṅgha* comes from the *Vinaya-piṭaka*. As C.A.F. Rhys Davids points out, the *Vinaya* contains few references to the *jhānas* as a system of meditation a monk should pursue, and only four references to *Jhāyins* and their special needs. She concludes that the practice of *jhāna* had already seriously declined for:

there is no doubt that had the Sangha, during the centuries when the *Vinaya* was growing by accretions, held *Jhāna* in its original worth, it would have produced a disciplinary chronicle glowing with *Jhāna* atmosphere throughout.⁹¹

From the admittedly fragmentary evidence that is available, it is clear that the *Jhāyins* within the early *saṅgha* soon became a minority, a trend undoubtedly accelerated by the rapid expansion of the *saṅgha* under Aśoka.⁹² As meditators, they were probably as unconcerned with the organization and administration of the *saṅgha* as they must have been with speculative debates on aspects of *Dhamma*, or the compiling and memorizing of texts. This was left to the scholastically inclined.

Long before the time of Buddhaghosa, the Buddhist *saṅgha* had become predominantly a worldly organization, concerned above all with its own preservation, with maintaining its popular appeal and princely patronage. By that time the meditative tradition may well have been reduced to little more than an eccentric group of recluses.⁹³ Since most textual commentators stood squarely in the *Dhammayoga* tradition, it seems likely that most were not *Jhāyins* but scholars and exegetes who elaborated scholastic discussions of the path while lacking acquaintance with the higher stages of meditative practice. It is not hard to see how, in the hands of such monks, the scholastic equating of five *jhāna* factors with the five hindrances in first *jhāna* might have occurred.

V. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the two descriptions of first *jhāna*, the four-factor *Sutta* listing and the five-factor *Abhidhamma* listing, are contradictory and cannot be reconciled. Attempts to achieve such a reconciliation, both in the commentarial literature and by modern scholars, are unconvincing. Textual analysis alone suggests that the inclusion of *ekaggatā* in first *jhāna* is logically incompatible with the presence of *vitakka*, even given later modifications of meaning of both terms. Elementary concentration practice confirms that coexistence of *ekaggatā* with *vitakka* is at least phenomenologically questionable. There is a strong *prima facie* case, therefore, for supposing the later *Abhidhamma* description to be invalid, and the *Sutta* description to be the correct one.

This conclusion suggests that by the time the *Abhidhamma* texts came to be written down, a high degree of scholasticism characterized Buddhist thinking. Evidence of the incorrect description of first *jhāna* thus supports C.A.F. Rhys Davids' conclu-

sion that various "psychic" states are described in the *Abhidhamma* in such a way as to indicate that "the compilers *had not themselves any experience at first hand of what they were recording*."⁹⁴ By accepting the *Abhidhamma* texts as canonical, all later commentators were faced with the problem of explaining away evident discrepancies. Rather than do this, one would be better advised to treat *Abhidhamma* texts and the commentarial literature with more critical suspicion than has usually been the case, even where the subject matter is the descriptive psychology of those altered states of consciousness that the texts purport to reveal.

Two wider implications should therefore be drawn from the above analysis, touching upon both the historical development of early Buddhism and the methodology of Buddhist studies. It would appear that the gap between those who spent their time in the *sangha* practicing meditation (the *Jhāyins*) and those who discussed and commented upon the *Dhamma* (the *Dhammayogas*) was already wide and deep by the time the *Abhidhamma-pitaka* had taken shape. In part, no doubt, this was due to different abilities and interests. But it was probably also exacerbated by the form of esoteric transmission by which the meditative tradition was communicated to adepts. Divorced as they most probably were from experience of those states of consciousness attained through application of advanced meditative practices, Buddhist scholastics pursued their own course of elaborating increasingly complex lists of categories such as we find in the *Abhidhamma*. What they have to say about altered states of consciousness should therefore be treated with caution.

The second implication is that textual contradictions must be recognized as such. They must not be dismissed on the grounds that accounts of experiential states of mind "elude mere intellectual treatment."⁹⁵ Contradictions arise as historical developments and require historical explanation. We cannot assume meditative practices to have remained constant during the millennium from the time of Gotama to that of Buddhaghosa, any more than we can assume textual compilation over this period to have been unaffected by the divisions and debates that were occurring both within the *sangha* with the rise of the *Mahāyāna* schools, and between Buddhism and resurgent Hinduism. As scholars, we must be even more critical than we have been in studying the texts. By so doing, we will be in a position

both to throw further light on shaping historical circumstances, and to contribute to a better understanding of Buddhist meditative techniques. In this way, scholarly study may explicate stages in the Buddhist path to enlightenment of practical benefit to modern day meditators.

NOTES

1. This question has been dealt with by Rod Bucknell in "The Buddhist Path to Liberation: an analysis of the listing of stages", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7 (1984), pp. 7-40. I gratefully acknowledge Bucknell's valuable criticisms of successive drafts of this paper.
2. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, 2nd ed. trans. by Williard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 250.
3. Recent studies of *jhāna* include: L.S. Cousins, "Buddhist *jhāna*: its nature and attainment according to the Pali sources," *Religion* 3 (1973): 115-131; Winston L. King, *Theravāda Meditation: The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), pp. 47-48; Donald K. Swearer, "Control and Freedom: The structure of Buddhist Meditation in the Pali Suttas," *Philosophy East and West* 23 (1973) 435-455; and Paul Griffiths, "Buddhist *jhāna*: a form-critical study," *Religion* 13 (1983): 55-68.
4. D ii. 313.
5. The relationship between the two paths, of concentration and insight, is still a matter for debate among scholars. See Paul Griffiths, "Concentration or Insight: The Problematic of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation-Theory," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49 (1981): 605-624.
6. Cf M i. 22.
7. (1) *vivic'eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkam savicāram vivekajam pītisukham pathamam jhānam upasampajja viharati.*
- (2) *vitakka-vicārānam vūpasamā ajjhattam sampasādanam cetaso ekodibhāvam avitakkaṁ avicāram samādhijam pītisukham dutiyam jhānam upasampajja viharati.* This description occurs frequently, e.g., at D i.182ff.
8. Listed at, e.g., D i. 71-73, D iii. 49, etc. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* (hereafter Dhs) lists six hindrances, including ignorance (# 1152).
9. T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary* (London: Luzac, 1959), p. 620.
10. M i.114f. cf. Rune E.A. Johansson, *The Dynamic Psychology of Early Buddhism* (London: Curzon Press, 1979), pp. 185-190 for an analysis of the meaning of *vitakka*.
11. *Pali-English Dictionary*, p. 615
12. *Ibid.*, p. 620.
13. *Vibhaṅga* 263-266, (hereafter Vibh), translated as *The Book of Analysis* by Pathamakyaw Ashin Thittila (London: Luzac, 1969), pp. 344-348.

14. Cf. the list of "factors of association" given in the *Peṭakopadesa* 139 translated as *The Piṭaka-Disclosure* by Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli (London: Luzac, 1964), p. 186. In the *Anupada-sutta*, Sāriputta identifies numerous other factors characteristic of the *jhānas* (M iii. 25). This list is extended still further in the *Abhidhamma* and later commentaries. Cf. Nārada Mahā Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1968), pp. 77–78.

15. At D ii. 217, also M 1. 301, *saṃādhi* is defined as *cittass' ekaggatā*. See also Dhs 11 and 24 where *cittass' ekaggatā* and *sammāsaṃādhi* are defined in identical terms. (Cf also Dhs # 287 and 291.)

16. Vibh #575.

17. Dhs #424 (translated by Caroline A.F. Rhys Davids as *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, 3rd ed. (London: Pali Text Society, 1974), p. 105).

18. *The Expositor*, vol II, p. 345 (translation of the *Attasālinī* by Pe Maung Tin (London: Luzac, 1920)).

19. Dhs #556. Cf. *Attasālinī* p. 293. Bhikkhu J. Kashyap in *The Abhidhamma Philosophy* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1982), p. 46, states that *ekaggatā* varies in strength from "very feeble" to "fully steady" in these *jhānas*.

20. *Attasālinī* #259. Cf. *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, p. 105, note.

21. *Visuddhimagga* #147 (hereafter Vism) Translated as *The Path of Purity* by Pe Maung Tin (London: Luzac, 1923).

22. Ibid.

23. *Pali-English Dictionary*, p. 620.

24. Vibh #257 *The Book of Analysis*, p. 335. In *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* Caroline A.F. Rhys Davids states that, in her opinion, *vitakka* is a "distinctively mental procedure at the inception of a train of thought, the deliberate movement of voluntary attention" (p. 8, note 1). *Vicāra* is "the movement and maintenance of the voluntary thought continuum," something which includes the senses of investigation, analysis, and discursive thought (p. 9, note 4).

25. *Attasālinī* #114–115; *The Expositor*, pp. 151–152. Cf. also Vism #142, pp. 164–165.

26. *Pali-English Dictionary*, p. 620 A later text, the *Abhidhammattha-Saṅgaḥa*, adds little or nothing to our understanding of the meaning of the terms under discussion. *Vitakka* in first *jhāna* is said to be directing of the mind to the "after-image," a meaning apparently compatible with the presence of *ekaggatā*, while the presence of *ekaggatā* in mundane states of consciousness is explained by denying that in such cases it connotes "concentration." Cf. *Compendium of Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1972), p. 178, note 5. Such modifications of meaning constitute attempts to explain away, rather than explain, the presence of both *vitakka* and *ekaggatā* together in first *jhāna* in the *Abhidhamma*.

27. Vibh #264; *The Book of Analysis*, p. 345.

28. Dhs #168.

29. Henepola Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas in the Theravāda Buddhist Meditation*, Ph.D dissertation, American University, Washington 1980

pp. 214–215, suggests an editorial error may have occurred in one or the other description of *jhāna* la but is unable to decide which might be correct.

30. Vism #147. *The Path of Purity*, p. 170. Nāṇamoli translates the last sentence somewhat differently: “for the intention with which the Blessed One gave the summary [i.e., the *Sutta* version] is the same as that with which he gave the exposition that follows it [ie in the *Abhidhamma*]”. *The Path of Purification* vol. 1, p. 153.

31. Vism #139, *The Path of Purity*, p. 161.

32. Paravahera Vajirāñāṇa Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1962), p. 38.

33. Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas*, p. 105.

34. Ibid., p. 196.

35. Ibid., p. 143.

36. Ibid., p. 174. Cf Vism #126.

37. S iv. 263, translated as *The Book of Kindred Sayings* by F.L. Woodward (London: The Pali Text Society, 1927), p. 180.

38. Ibid.

39. A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), pp. 4–10.

40. Rod Bucknell, “The Importance of Pali/Chinese Comparisons in Studies of Early Buddhist Doctrine,” paper presented at the IXth annual conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Canberra, August 1984, p. 4.

41. Pande agrees that the “Sayings about Moggallāna” are almost certainly late. G.C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), p. 229.

42. M i. 294.

43. Pande concludes that the whole *sutta* is a late composition. See Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*, p. 134.

44. Taishō 26 (211). See Bucknell, “The Importance of Pali/Chinese Comparisons,” p. 4.

45. M iii. 25–29.

46. The translation of *chanda* as “desire” is I.B. Horner’s. A better translation might be “impulse (towards something).” But in any case *chanda* should be overcome in first *jhāna*.

47. Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*, p. 318, calls this an early Abhidhammic text.

48. *Vimuttimagga*, translated as *The Path of Freedom* by N.R.M. Ehara, Soma Thera and Kheminda Thera (Colombo: D. Roland D. Weerasuria, 1961), p. 46. The “second meditation” referred to is our “*jhāna* la.”

49. *Atthasālinī* 179, *The Expositor*, vol. 1, p. 240.

50. *Pali-English Dictionary*, p. 286.

51. Phra Maha Singathon Narasabho, *Buddhism: A Guide to a Happy Life* (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornraja-vidyalaya, 1971), p. 66.

52. Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas*, p. 211 Gunaratana illustrates the relationship of the two systems through the metaphor of two mountain climbers who climb the same mountain using different ascent stages (pp. 211–212).

53. Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*, p. 534.

54. For example, Edward J. Thomas does not mention fivefold *jhāna* in either *The Life of Buddha* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), or *The History of Buddhist Thought* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951). Nor does Winston King, in *Theravāda Meditation*. Neither does Nalinaksha Dutt in *Early Monastic Buddhism* (Calcutta: Oriental Book Agency, 1960); but whereas King quotes the *Sutta* account of first *jhāna*, Dutt describes the fourfold *Abhidhamma* account with *ekaggatā* included (p. 188).

55. At D iii. 219; D iii. 274; M iii. 162; S iv. 360, 363; A iv. 300–301.

56. Buddhaghosa specifically refers to these three forms of *samādhi*. *Atṭhasālinī* #179.

57. Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*, p. 115.

58. Taishō i. 50. See Bucknell, "The Importance of Pali/Chinese Comparisons," p. 5.

59. Ibid. Cf. Taishō i. 53.

60. Ibid. Cf. Taishō i. 538.

61. See Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, pp. 7–9.

62. For believing Buddhists, the problem may not seem so clear cut. The Indian tetralemma permits the two further alternatives of "both . . . and . . ." and "neither . . . nor . . ."

63. S ii. 94.

64. Vism #147.

65. Cf. Roderick S. Bucknell and Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language: Explorations in Buddhist Meditation and Symbolism* (London: Curzon Press and New York: St Martins Press, 1986).

66. Cf M i. 246; D i. 74–76; M i. 347.

67. As developed in, for example, Alan Richardson, *The Experiential Dimension of Psychology* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984).

68. Cf. Frank Hoffman, "The Buddhist Empiricism Thesis," *Religious Studies* 18 (1982), pp. 151–158.

69. Cf. Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*. Also Kogen Mizuno, *Primitive Buddhism*, trans. by Kosho Yamamoto (Ube: The Karin Bunko, 1969).

70. Griffiths, "Buddhist Jhāna." Griffiths analyzed the 86 occurrences in the *Sutta-piṭaka* of the stereotype description of the four *jhānas* in order to define the position of the *jhānas* in alternative soteriological paths. His conclusions, though of interest, do not, however, go far enough, for the form-critical method fails to take account of historical context. We obtain no hint from Griffiths' study as to the origins of these different paths and the goals to which they lead. Nor is any light shed on the historical circumstances that led to the incorporation of variant paths in the Pali Canon.

71. For examples of descriptions of meditation, see R.N. Walsh, "Initial meditative experiences," parts I & II, *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 9 (1977), pp. 157–192 and 10 (1978), pp. 1–28; Rod Bucknell, "Experiments in Insight Meditation," *Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 3 (1983), pp. 96–117; and chapters 3 and 4 of Bucknell and Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language*.

72. Cf. the *Ānāpānasati-sutta* M iii. 82.

73. Gunaratana suggests that the term *samādhijam* (literally born of concentration) in the description of second *jhāna* could be understood as meaning that second *jhāna* is born of the concentration applied in first *jhāna* (Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis of the Jhanas*, p. 175). However, he later equates *samādhijam* with *ekodibhāva* as synonymous terms reinforcing the importance of one-pointedness in second *jhāna*. *Ibid.*, p. 178. Furthermore, the analogy with first *jhāna*, described as *vivekajam* makes it clear that the reference of words in “-jam” is to the factor that effects the transition, and not to a factor in the preceding *jhāna*.

74. Such meditation is practiced in all the major world religions as, for example, in Christian meditation on the cross.

75. See notes 37 to 47 above.

76. Vism #190.

77. M i. 294–295, translated as *The Middle Length Sayings* by I.B. Horner (London: Luzac, 1954), p. 354.

78. Vism #141. *The Path of Purification*, p. 147.

79. *Petakopadesa*, 161. *The Piṭaka-Disclosure*, p. 220

80. E.g., at Vism #141. *The Path of Purification*, p. 147. See also *The Expositor*, p. 221 Gunaratana argues that the *hindrances* were limited to five out of many such possible “factors of abandoning” because there were only five *jhāna* factors with which to correlate them (Gunaratana, *A Critical Analysis for the Jhanas*, p. 58). I argue just the opposite, that *five* *jhāna* factors were required because there already existed a well known far more ancient list of five hindrances which were said to be overcome in first *jhāna*. Cf. footnote 86 below.

81. The *jhāna* factors are not alone in counteracting the hindrances. At S v. 105–106 there occurs a set of five “wise considerations” which are also said to eliminate the five hindrances.

82. Gunaratana, for example, says the *vitakka* which counters sloth and torpor is “of a high quality and specialized function”! Gunaratana, *Critical Analysis of the Jhanas*, p. 151.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 151. The idea that *vicāra* could be “directed to *jhāna*” seems part of an attempt to provide *vicāra* with a new meaning, as a form of concentration, in order for it to be compatible with *ekaggatā*.

84. *The Path of Freedom*, p. 93.

85. For a detailed discussion of this development see Bucknell and Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language*, chapter 6.

86. The five hindrances are found in the earliest sections of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, e.g., at D i. 71–73, in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*. See Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*, p. 114.

87. *Kathā-vatthu*, translated as *Points of Controversy* by S.Z. Aung and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (London: Luzac, 1960), pp. 327–330.

88. In the summary which follows, I have drawn heavily on the work of Sukumar Dutt. See both *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries* (London: Luzac, 1957) and *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962).

89. Dutt, *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries*, p. 92.

90. A iii. 355. The significance of this text was remarked upon by Louis de la Vallée Poussin in "Musila et Nārada: le chemin du Nirvāna," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 5 (1937): 189–222.

91. A trend culminating in the method of Nāgārjuna. It seems likely that this intellectual trend was encouraged by the Brahmanistic concept of *jñāna-yoga*.

92. A iii. 355, translated as *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, vol 3 by E.M. Hare (London: The Pali Text Society, 1934), p. 252.

93. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, "Dhyāna in Early Buddhism," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 3 (1927), pp. 695–696. I cannot, however, accept the conclusion of this paper that *jhāna* had value over and above that of a state of mental preparation. Rhys Davids criticizes Ānanda (A ii. 195) for taking *jhāna* to be "pure and simple mind practice," and one of four "factors for utter purification." But these factors—*sīla*, *saṃādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti*—together comprise a statement of the Path. *Samādhi* (= four *jhānas*) is here, as elsewhere, a preparatory stage.

94. Further indirect evidence for the decline of the *Jhāyin* tradition comes from the decline both in status and numbers of the *arhat* in early Buddhism. Pande calls this decline "the most hotly debated point in the whole range of early sectarian controversy." Pande, *Origins of Buddhism*, p. 564.

95. Rod Bucknell and I have argued that knowledge of how to practice the higher meditative techniques became confined to an esoteric transmission in early Buddhism. See Rod Bucknell and Martin Stuart-Fox, "Did the Buddha impart an Esoteric Teaching?", *Journal of Indian History* 61 (1983), pp. 1–17; also Bucknell and Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight Language*, chapter 2.

96. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *The Birth of Indian Psychology and its Development in Buddhism* (London: Luzac, 1936), p. 333.

97. Gunaratana, *Critical Analysis of the Jhānas*, p. 216, makes this statement after devoting a whole thesis to precisely such an intellectual treatment of the *jhānas*.