

In response to a question on *jhāna*, by Tahn Pamutto on June 12 2024:

What is *jhāna*? *Jhāna* is...

Well first, *samādhi* is the overarching word for Buddhist meditation. It's sort of like composure of mind. But *jhāna* is a more technical term. Like, when *samādhi* reaches particular stages, very deep stages of *samādhi*, very profound stages of *samādhi*, you'll have certain parts of the mind that to our surface mind seem like they're built in. It seems, "Well, that's just how the mind works. That's always there."

When you reach the *jhāna*, you'll reach a point where something falls away and you realize that that component of the mind was an optional part of the mind and that it was such an attractive and seemingly useful part of the mind that you never would have conceived of dropping it.

Once you reach *jhāna*, you kind of have these fallings-away and you get to a new level of purity of mind, because even something really useful, like applied and sustained thought along a particular theme, when it falls away, you say, wow, it's way more peaceful when I'm not thinking, when my mind doesn't have the idea of going here and there, when it's just in the neighborhood of the theme and it's not moving anywhere, this is way more peaceful.

And so it's a technical term. But it's useful to know, because when you read the scriptures, the Buddha definitely lets you know that *samādhi* will develop in that direction. If you're developing meditation, right meditation will lead to *jhānas* eventually. It's a really straightforward way of understanding why the attainment of *jhāna* is lauded as such a breakthrough moment, and why, when the Buddha, he was just kind of pitching it out to the group of five, he's like, "Well, how should we rank ourselves in the sangha? We have all these monastics of all different backgrounds and all different levels of practice. Like, how should we organize ourselves? Who's in charge?"

And some people said, "Well, I've attained the first *jhana*, I should be in charge." But then some people are like, "Well, I've attained the second *jhana*, I should be in charge." And, you know, on and on and on.

So it's like, getting to that point is you have accomplished something. It's something our minds can latch on to. "I'm gonna get *jhāna*, and then I'll have *jhāna*." You don't get anything. It's like pulling the blinds up on your window and getting a view of the outside. You don't own that. Yeah. But you have gotten that you suddenly know what's going on outside. You suddenly know where you are, and that's what the *jhānas* are.

It's like when you do attain that first moment, you're able to see something that you haven't seen before in the continuity of this current life, which is that there's something beyond the continuity of this very life, like the attainment of the first *jhana* actually breaks the life continuity.

I don't know how it's said in a particular way in the commentaries, but there's some principle of continuity where that's basically sort of like a death experience. Yeah. You suddenly realize that this life from birth to death is bounded, but that there is something outside of it. And the first *jhāna* gives you that glimpse. And, so, people come out of a near death experience and they can say, well, I'm so

changed. And you'd be like, well, what changed? They're like, well, nothing. Not my habits, not my personality, not my hairstyle.

What really changed is they just realized that this one life isn't everything, and jhāna is similar. It's like you've attained the second jhāna and you're like, wow, I really thought applied and sustained thought where things were at... it's way better when they're gone. You can't undo that knowledge. Yeah. So that's what's been attained, but it doesn't actually give you anything beyond that.