

# *Jhāna* and *Lokuttara-jjhāna*

BRAHMĀLI BHIKKHU

Bodhinyana Monastery, Perth, Australia

ABSTRACT: The *Abhidhamma* uses the concept of *lokuttara-jjhāna* to refer to the moment one attains any of the four stages of Awakening. In contrast, the *Suttas* use the terms *jhāna* and *samādhi* to refer to aspects of the path *leading* to the stages of Awakening. Therefore, when the commentaries interpret *jhāna* and *samādhi* in *Sutta* usage as *lokuttara-jjhāna*, they are imposing an interpretation on the *Suttas* that is foreign to them. Directly contradicting the *Suttas*, this reinterpretation makes *jhāna* dispensable as a path factor *leading* to Awakening. More generally, this particular problem highlights the inherent danger of distortion when the commentaries use later concepts to explain the earliest teachings of the *Nikāyas*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When reading the *Suttas* of the Pāli Canon it is difficult not to be struck by the central importance of *samādhi* and *jhāna* on the Buddhist path. *Samādhi*<sup>1</sup> and *jhāna*

1. By *samādhi* I generally understand the four *jhānas*, sometimes a slightly broader concept.

It might be thought that this is a narrow understanding of *samādhi* because the *Suttas* contain many instances of *samādhi* that are clearly not *jhāna*. These *samādhis* can broadly be classified into two types: *samādhi* that can arise prior to *jhāna* and *samādhi* that comes after *jhāna* and that depends on *jhāna*. Into the latter category fall the formless attainments, the *samādhi* that leads to *Arahantship* (see A.II.45,23–33) and also the *samādhi* that is the result of *Arahantship* (see A.V.7,7–10,2). Because these *samādhis* are based on *jhāna* their existence confirms the importance of *jhāna* on the path.

Into the former category fall such *samādhis* as *animitta-samādhi*, *suññata-samādhi* and *appañihita-samādhi* (the signless, emptiness- and undirected-*samādhis*; see e.g. D.III.219,21–22), *samādhi* gained from walking meditation (see A.III.30) and possibly *samādhi* in conjunction with *satipaṭṭhāna* (see S.V.144,19–145,19 and A.IV.300,24–301,15). But even with these *samādhis* it is far from clear that they do not, or at least cannot, rely on *jhāna*. In the case of A.IV.300,24–301,15, if one is to follow the sequential presentation in the *Sutta* strictly (which presumably one must), *jhāna* precedes the *samādhis* based on *satipaṭṭhāna*. The same is quite possibly true of S.V.144,19–145,19. As for the three *samādhis* of *animitta-samādhi*, *suññata-samādhi* and *appañihita-samādhi*, it seems that they also are normally practised after *jhāna* (see M.III.111,6–112,30), although the evidence may not be conclusive that they *have* to be.

The most important fact about the various types of *samādhi*, however, is that by far the most frequently occurring type is *jhāna*. The three *samādhis* of *animitta-samādhi*, *suññata-samādhi* and *appañihita-samādhi* occur very rarely in the *Suttas* compared to *jhāna*, and the same is true for ‘*satipaṭṭhāna samādhi*’. Thus the relative importance of *jhāna* far outweighs the importance of

appear in *Sutta* after *Sutta*<sup>2</sup>, often as the pivotal condition that allows deep insight into the nature of existence. In spite of this, there appears to have been an historical tendency to underestimate the importance of these states.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most potent of the many factors that have led to such underestimation was the early post-*Nikāya* rise of the *Abhidhamma* concept of ‘*lokuttara-jjhāna*’. In this paper I wish to examine this concept, to investigate whether it has any counterpart in the *Suttas*, to discuss the implications of using it to interpret the *Suttas*, and finally to look more closely at the *Abhidhamma*’s treatment of *lokuttara-jjhāna*. I will argue that the common commentarial practice of using *lokuttara-jjhāna* to define *jhāna* is misleading.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF *LOKUTTARA-JJHĀNA*

The very name ‘*lokuttara-jjhāna*’ suggests a connection to *jhāna* and by implication to *sammā-samādhi* and *samādhi* in general. However, whereas *jhāna* and *samādhi* are important doctrinal terms of the Pāli *Suttas*, *lokuttara-jjhāna* first appears in the *Abhidhamma*. To avoid any confusion between these various terms it is necessary to look more closely at the *Abhidhamma*’s definition.<sup>4</sup>

---

any of the other types of *samādhi*, and *jhāna* is therefore the pre-eminent type of *samādhi* on the Buddhist path. Thus when the *Suttas* only speak of *samādhi*, without further qualification, it seems reasonable to conclude that this is predominantly a reference to *jhāna*.

2. The term ‘*Sutta*’ in this paper generally refers to the four main *Nikāyas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*: the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Samyutta Nikāya*, and the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.
3. By historical tendency, I primarily mean the development in meditation theory from the *Nikāyas* to the commentaries, and the consequent effect on the practice of meditation. Where the *Nikāyas* place great emphasis on *samādhi* and *jhāna*, even saying that full Awakening is impossible without *jhāna* (see ‘So Vata Sutta’, §4.2), the commentaries also refer to *pure vipassanā* practice and in the process invent new terminology such as ‘*sukkhā-vipassaka*’ (‘one who practises dry insight’; see e.g. SA.I.235,34) and ‘*suddhā-vipassanā*’ (‘pure insight’; see e.g. Vism 588,6). It must be assumed that this new development was a result of a real debate at the time. The fact that the idea of pure insight has made its way into the commentaries, including the *Visuddhimagga*, must mean that it was considered an acceptable part of meditation theory and practice by the Theravāda establishment. As such, it only seems reasonable to assume that there were meditators who were practising accordingly.

Unfortunately, there is little historical information on the actual practice of meditation in the Theravāda tradition. What is certain is that the commentarial idea of pure insight has gained strong currency in modern times. *Vipassanā* meditation with little emphasis on *samādhi*, and often no emphasis on *jhāna*, has been by far the most influential ‘meditation system’ of the Theravāda tradition worldwide in the second half of the twentieth century.

4. It should be noted that, although the term *lokuttara-jjhāna* first appears in the Canonical *Abhidhamma*, it is precisely defined only in the *Abhidhamma* commentaries. Whether the Canonical *Abhidhamma* understands *lokuttara-jjhāna* in the same way as the *Abhidhamma* commentaries is a moot point. However, because my main critique in this paper is aimed at the *Sutta* commentaries, which presuppose both the Canonical *Abhidhamma* as well as its commentaries (that is, Buddhaghosa would have had all the ancient commentarial works, as well as the Canonical works, before him when he compiled/wrote his commentaries), I have made no distinction between the two.

According to *Abhidhamma* theory, each stage of Awakening<sup>5</sup> is experienced through two types of consciousness, known as *magga* (path) and *phala* (fruit). The first type of consciousness, the *magga*, which lasts only one mind moment, has the function of cutting off mental fetters. The second type, the *phala*, is the experience of bliss that results from the cutting off of the fetters by the *magga* consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Again according to the *Abhidhamma*, these two types of consciousness are experienced together with a particular set of *jhāna* factors that corresponds to each of the four *jhānas* respectively.<sup>7</sup> Thus they are called ‘*lokuttara-jjhānas*’, ‘transcendent *jhānas*’ or ‘supra-mundane *jhānas*’, because they combine the *jhāna* factors with an Awakening experience.

From this it emerges that the *Abhidhamma* term *lokuttara-jjhāna* is a name for the particular moment one attains one of the various stages of Awakening. The *Suttas* have their own terminology for describing these attainments, terminology that does not refer to momentary experiences and that never explicitly relates to *samādhi* or *jhāna*.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, it seems from the outset that *lokuttara-jjhāna* and *jhāna/samādhi* refer to very different types of experience.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. ARIYA SAMMĀ-SAMĀDHI

In spite of the above, it has been argued that *lokuttara-jjhāna*, in its momentary *Abhidhamma* sense, is implicitly referred to in the *Suttas* but using different terminology. Of all the *Sutta* terminology, it is perhaps ‘*ariya sammā-samādhi*’, ‘noble right *samādhi*’, which is most often identified as *lokuttara-jjhāna*.<sup>10</sup> It appears it is

- 
5. Stream-entry, and attainments of the states of Once-returning, Non-returning, and *Arahantship*.
  6. According to the *Abhidhamma* commentaries the fruit consciousness initially lasts two or three mind moments, although it can subsequently last many moments (Bodhi 1993, 177, 66).
  7. And also to a fivefold classification of *jhāna* adopted by the *Abhidhamma* (cf. Dhs.167–74) but which is only rarely mentioned in the *Suttas* (cf. M.III.162,15).
  8. The *Suttas*, in contrast with the *Abhidhamma*, never focus exclusively on the precise moments that the stages of Awakening are attained. Rather, the *Suttas* seem to speak of these stages as ‘ongoing realities’. Typical terminology used in the *Suttas* include: ‘*dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi*’, ‘the eye of the *Dhamma* arose’, (e.g. Vin.I.11,34); ‘*sammāditṭhiyā uppadāya*’, ‘the arising of right view’, (M.I.294,1); ‘*soṭāpattiphalaṃ pi sacchikaronti, sakadāgāmi phalaṃ pi sacchikaronti, anāgāmi phalaṃ pi sacchikaronti, arahattaṃ pi sacchikaronti*’, ‘they realised the fruit of streamentry, they realised the fruit of once-returner, they realised the fruit of non-returner, they realised the fruit of *Arahantship*’, (D.I.229,4); ‘*anupadāya āsavehi cittāni vimuccimṣu*’, ‘(their) minds were freed from the outflowings without grasping’, (e.g. Vin.I.14,35); ‘*āsavaṇaṃ khayam pāpuṇāti*’, ‘he attained the destruction of the outflowings’, (M.I.436,4). Each of these refers to enduring realities.
  9. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the *Suttas* on a few occasions mention types of *samādhi* that possibly are directly related to the attainment of the four stages of Awakening. The most important example would seem to be *animitta-samādhi*, see A.IV.78,18–30 and Harvey (1986). However, even these *samādhis* do not appear to be momentary in the sense that *lokuttara-jjhāna* is said to be, see note 6 above.
  10. For example, this is how the commentaries understand *ariya sammā-samādhi*:

the qualifier 'ariya' which has made this identification common. 'Ariya', 'noble', is a *Sutta* term usually referring to the persons who have attained one of the stages of Awakening. Therefore, when it is used as a qualifier, it is likely to signify some connection to the stages of Awakening. To discover what this connection is we need to look at how this phrase is used in the *Suttas*.

*Ariya sammā-samādhi* is only found on five separate occasions in the *Suttas*.<sup>11</sup> Three of these occasions are simply the same bare definitions:

There are: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness. The one-pointedness of mind equipped with these seven factors is called noble right concentration [*ariya sammā-samādhi*] 'with its supports', and also 'with its accessories'.<sup>12</sup>

This is not enough to give a precise idea of the phrase, but at least it makes it clear that only a person practising the noble eightfold path can have this kind of *samādhi*.

The fourth occasion is found at M.117 where *ariya sammā-samādhi* is initially explained in the same way as above, but then expanded on considerably.<sup>13</sup> Of particular importance here is that the factor of *sammā-dīṭṭhi*, one of the seven 'equipments' mentioned above, can be either the noble right view of the *Sotāpanna* or it can be ordinary right view possessed by the person who is not yet a *Sotāpanna*.<sup>14</sup>

MA.IV.130,22–24: *Tattha ariyan ti niddosaṃ. Lokuttaraṃ niddosaṃ hi ariyan ti vuccati.*

*Sammāsamādhiṃ ti maggasaṃmādhīṃ*: 'Therein *ariya* means undefiled. For *ariya* is called the undefiled which is supramundane. *Sammā-samādhi* means path-*samādhi* [i.e. *lokuttara-jjhāna*]'.

AA.IV.28,19: *Samādhiparikkhārā ti maggasaṃmādhissa sambhārā*: 'Requisite of *samādhi* means a constituent of path-*samādhi*'.

See also Rupert Gethin (2001, 218): 'Secondly there is the attainment of right view etc. as noble, without *āsava*s, *lokuttara*, a factor of the path. It is precisely this second stage that must be understood as *ariyo sammā-samādhi sa-upaniso sa-parikkhāro*'.

11. It should be noted that only five occurrences in the four main *Nikāyas* makes the phrase a rare one, and as such its importance is limited. There are also three occurrences of a *samādhi* (as opposed to *sammā-samādhi*) which is said to be 'ariya' (see D.II.122,19 and D.III.278,27 and A.III.24,15).
12. D.II.216,33–217,4 and S.V.21,13–17 and A.IV.40,23–27: *Seyyathidaṃ sammā-dīṭṭhi sammāsaṅkappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammā-ājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati. Yā kho bhikkhave imehi sattahaṅgehi cittassa ekaggaṃ aparikkhārā, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave ariyo sammā-samādhi sa-upaniso iti pi aparikkhāro iti pī ti.*
13. M.III.71,16–72,28.
14. M.III.72,4–28: *Katamaṃ ca, bhikkhave, sammā-dīṭṭhi? Sammā-dīṭṭhiṃ p'ahaṃ, bhikkhave, dvaṃ vadāmi. Atthi, bhikkhave, sammā-dīṭṭhi sāsavā puññābhāgiyā upadhivepakkā; atthi, bhikkhave, sammā-dīṭṭhi ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggaṅgā.* (Then the two types of right view are explained in more detail).

The two views are clearly separate. One is called *puññā-bhāgiyā* and *upadhi-vepakkā*, 'partaking of merit' and 'ripening in the acquisitions', which means that it does not in itself lead to *Nibbāna*. The other view, on the other hand, is called *ariyā* and *lokuttarā*, 'noble' and 'supramundane', clearly indicating that this is the view of the *Sotāpanna* who is guaranteed to eventually attain *Nibbāna*.

The commentary to this *Sutta* gives an alternative interpretation of the view that is supramundane. (But note that this does not alter the fact that the two types of view are quite

Thus it seems that it is possible to possess *ariya sammā-samādhī* without yet having attained to *Sotāpatti*. If this is correct, it is impossible that this *samādhī* is the 'lokuttara-jjhāna' of the *Abhidhamma*.

However, it is the fifth and last occurrence of *ariya sammā-samādhī* which is the most interesting: it is a statement of what this *samādhī* consists of.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly it is said to consist of the four *jhānas* and also 'the reviewing sign which is well-grasped, well-attended to, well-considered, and well-penetrated by wisdom'.<sup>16</sup> Note that there is nothing here about attaining any of the stages of Awakening, just the standard passage on the four *jhānas* together with the usual similes. If there ever was a time for clearly defining 'lokuttara-jjhāna', if that were what is meant by *ariya sammā-samādhī*, this would seem to be the ideal opportunity. Each time an obvious opportunity for an explicit definition is missed, any claim that *lokuttara-jjhāna* is what is meant is severely undermined. Even the commentary does not seem to define *ariya sammā-samādhī* here as anything but 'ordinary' *jhāna*.<sup>17</sup>

---

separate). According to MA.IV.132,3-4 the view that is supramundane (*lokuttara*), rather than referring to the right view of the *Sotāpanna*, refers to the right view at the moment of the four paths, i.e. the moment when each of the four stages of Awakening is attained. Thus it is identical with *lokuttara-jjhāna*. This interpretation is probably the result of the peculiar vocabulary used to qualify *sammā-dīṭṭhi* in the present *Sutta*, in particular *anāsava* and the string *paññā, paññīndriya, paññā-bala, dhamma-vicaya-sambojjihaṅga* and *magg'ariya*, which is reminiscent of *Abhidhamma* usage (cf. Dhs.196,15-17 for the *Abhidhamma* definition of *anāsava* and Vibh.237,5-7 for its definition of *sammā-dīṭṭhi*). These terms are never used to qualify *sammā-dīṭṭhi* anywhere else in the *Suttas*, and several of the terms used, such as *magg'ariya*, *anāsava-citta* and *ariya-citta*, are never found at all in the *Suttas* apart from here. It thus seems possible that the view that is supramundane is a late addition, a possibility significantly strengthened by the fact that the *Āgama* version of this *Sutta* (i.e. the Chinese equivalent) only includes the 'ordinary' right view. (See Ven. Anālayo's forthcoming *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*).

15. A.III.25-27.

16. A.III.27,13: ... *paccavekkhanānimittaṃ sugghaṭṭaṃ hoti sumanasikataṃ sūpadhāritaṃ suppaṭividdhaṃ paññāya*. The *paccavekkhanā-nimittaṃ* does not occur anywhere else in the *Suttas* and one has to look to the *Vibhaṅga* of the *Abhidhamma* to find a definition. At Vibh.334,1-8 one finds the following: *Tattha katamā sammāsamādhī? ... Tamhā tamhā samādhimhā vuṭṭhitaṃ paccavekkhanāñāṇaṃ paccavekkhanānimittaṃ*: 'Therein what is the five-factored right *samādhī*? ... The reviewing knowledge, the reviewing sign of one who has come out of this or that *samādhī* (is the five-factored right *samādhī*)'. If one is to follow the *Vibhaṅga* here, then 'this or that *samādhī*' would seem to refer to the *samādhīs* just mentioned in the *Sutta* prior to the mentioning of the *paccavekkhanā-nimittaṃ*, i.e. the four *jhānas*. Thus the *paccavekkhanā-nimittaṃ* would be based on one or more of the four *jhānas*.

The same conclusion is arrived at when one takes account of the 'gradual' nature of the *Suttas*: the standard way of exposition of *Dhamma*, explicitly recommended by the Buddha (A.III.184,17) and a pattern which is easily recognizable in *Sutta* after *Sutta*, is one of natural progression. It is therefore to be expected that the *paccavekkhanā-nimittaṃ* is a stage on the path which comes after the *jhānas* and which is based on the *jhānas*.

17. AA.III.232,11-12: *Ariyassa ti vikkhambhanavasena pahinehi kileseshi ārakā ṭhitassa*: '(Of) noble (means): (of) one standing far from the defilements which have been abandoned due to suppression'. 'Abandoning due to suppression', '*vikkhambhanavasena pahinehi*', is a commentarial

Finally, it is useful to briefly consider the use of *ariya samādhi* at D.II.122,19.<sup>18</sup> Here we find an enumeration of four qualities that are to be penetrated and awakened to, that is, *ariya sīla*, *ariya samādhi*, *ariya paññā*, and *ariya vimutti*. If the term *ariya* is indeed a proxy for *lokuttara* (in the *Abhidhamma* sense),<sup>19</sup> then one would be forced to conclude that the four qualities all refer to the same thing, i.e. the moments of *magga* and *phala* attainment. But the very fact that the text lists four qualities seems to preclude that they all refer to the same thing. Thus *ariya samādhi* here is more likely to refer to 'ordinary' *samādhi*. This reinforces our findings above concerning the meaning of *ariya sammā-samādhi*. In conclusion, there is no evidence in the *Suttas* that *ariya sammā-samādhi* refers to *lokuttara-jjhāna*, but the evidence to the contrary is sufficient to throw serious doubts on this interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

It thus appears that even the most promising candidate-term from the *Suttas* has nothing to do with the *Abhidhamma*'s *lokuttara-jjhāna*. If this is correct, then it is unlikely that there is any terminology at all in the *Suttas* that is equivalent to *lokuttara-jjhāna*. If the most promising terminology fails to hit the mark, then any other terminology is even less likely to do so.

However, even if *lokuttara-jjhāna* does not have a one-to-one equivalent in the *Suttas*, it is still necessary to investigate whether the terms '*jhāna*' or '*samādhi*' in themselves, as they occur in the *Suttas*, have a twofold meaning, sometimes referring to ordinary *jhāna* but at other times referring to *lokuttara-jjhāna*.<sup>21</sup> This takes

---

reference to suppression due to *jhāna*. Thus it appears that the term '*ariya*' here is related to (ordinary) *jhāna* and not to the stages of Awakening.

It might be objected that this passage is about the 'development', '*bhāvanā*', of *ariya sammā-samādhi* (i.e. '*ariyassa bhikkhave pañcaṅgikassa sammāsamādhissa bhāvaṇaṃ desissāmi*'; A.III.25,1-2) and not about *ariya sammā-samādhi* itself. However, in the *Suttas* the development of a particular quality is usually explained in terms of the quality itself. For example, the development (*bhāvanā*) of *satipaṭṭhāna* is explained using the standard *satipaṭṭhāna* formula (S.V.182,23-183,4); the same holds for the *iddhi-pādas* (S.V.276,15-19), the *sammā-ppadhānas* (S.V.244,21-245,13), and indeed for the *jhānas* themselves (S.V.308,2-11). Thus it seems safe to conclude that the 'development of *ariya sammā-samādhi*' is identical with *ariya sammā-samādhi* itself; that is, *ariya sammā-samādhi* is developed by the attaining of it.

18. I have previously noted (see note 1 above) that *samādhi* is sometimes a broader concept than *sammā-samādhi*. Thus in this case *ariya sammā-samādhi* is either identical with, or falls within, *ariya samādhi*.
19. *Sutta* usage of the word *lokuttara* is rare but when used appears to have a much broader sense than that of *lokuttara-jjhāna* in the *Abhidhamma*; cf. M.I.323,24f; M.II.181,7; M.III.11,8-9; S.II.267,7+21; S.V.407,11+18; A.III.107,15; in addition to M.III.72,7 which has been dealt with above.
20. This still does not answer the question of why the name '*ariya sammā-samādhi*' is used. I would suggest that because this *samādhi* is defined as the eighth factor of the noble eightfold path, supported by the other seven factors, one is in effect developing the entire noble eightfold path when developing this *samādhi*. It would therefore seem that the qualifier '*ariya*' is taken directly from the name of the noble (*ariya*) eightfold path.
21. I argued above that the *Sutta* terminology for the experiences of Awakening never refers to *samādhi* and *jhāna*. However, since the *Abhidhamma*'s *lokuttara-jjhāna* is not directly equivalent to this *Sutta* terminology, it is still necessary to investigate whether it might relate to *jhāna* or *samādhi*.

us to the commentaries which often assert that particular instances of *jhāna* or *samādhi* in the *Suttas* actually refer to *lokuttara-jjhāna*.

#### 4. COMMENTARIAL INTERPRETATIONS

An important aspect of the commentaries' method is the use of later concepts, especially from the *Abhidhamma*, to explain the *Suttas*. One consequence of this is that when *jhāna* or *samādhi* occur in the *Suttas*, the commentaries decide whether 'ordinary' *jhāna* is meant or *lokuttara-jjhāna*.<sup>22</sup> The result is that the commentaries back-read a later concept into the *Suttas* themselves. To find out whether this is reasonable, it is instructive to investigate a few examples of such commentarial interpretations.

##### 4.1 Samaṇamaṇḍikā Sutta, M.78<sup>23</sup>

This *Sutta* contains a, for our purposes, interesting discussion on the ending of intentions (*saṅkappā*). The *Sutta* states that all unwholesome intentions cease without remainder in the first *jhāna* and that all wholesome intentions cease without remainder in the second *jhāna*.<sup>24</sup> The commentary then goes on to define both instances of *jhāna* here as *lokuttara-jjhāna*: the first being equivalent to the attainment of the state of Non-returnerhood and the second that of *Arahantship*.<sup>25</sup>

There are several issues here. Firstly, one might ask why the *Sutta* speaks of *jhāna* when in fact, according to the commentary, it means the attainment of Non-returnerhood and *Arahantship* respectively. There are several standard ways in which the *Suttas* describe the attainments of Non-returnerhood and *Arahantship*, but '*jhāna*' is not one of them. One may then wonder why this *Sutta* does not apply one of these standard ways of describing such attainments rather than use a term, i.e. *jhāna*, which ordinarily has a completely different meaning. According to the *Suttas* the '*brahmacariya* is endowed with all aspects, fulfilled in all aspects, not deficient, with nothing superfluous, well-proclaimed, fully complete, well-expounded',<sup>26</sup> but if the commentary is right, then one could rightfully question

22. The commentaries use various terminology, such as *magga-samādhi* and *phala-samādhi*, which is equivalent to *lokuttara-jjhāna*.

23. M.II.22-29.

24. See M.II.27,31-28,2 and M.II.28,20-23 respectively.

25. MA.III.270,14: *Paṭhamajjhānaṃ ti anāgāmīphale paṭhamajjhānaṃ*: 'The first *jhāna* means: the first *jhāna* with reference to the fruit of Non-returning'. MA.III.270,22-4: *Etth'ete ti arahattaphale bhummam dutiyajjhānikaṃ arahattaphalaṃ hi pāpuṇitvā, kusalasāṅkappā aparisesā nirujjhanti*: 'Here these ('here' refers back to the second *jhāna* in the *Sutta* text; 'these' refers to the wholesome intentions) means: with reference to the fruit of *Arahatta*, having attained the stage of the fruit of *Arahatta* relating to the second *jhāna*, wholesome intentions cease without remainder'.

26. D.III.126-7: *Sabbākāra-sampannaṃ sabbākāra-paripūraṃ anūnaṃ anadhikaṃ svākkhātaṃ kevala-*

whether this *Sutta* is indeed 'well-proclaimed'. The fact is that using *jhāna* in this context while meaning the attainments of Non-returnerhood and *Arahantship* would obscure the passage considerably and one would be totally dependent on outside expertise, i.e. the commentaries, to unravel the meaning.<sup>27</sup> The Buddha never said that one needed to depend on outside expertise to understand his teachings, quite the contrary according to the above quote.<sup>28</sup>

Even more problematic for the commentary's interpretation is the differentiation in the present *Sutta* between the use of the first *jhāna* to describe the ending of unwholesome intentions and the second *jhāna* to describe the ending of wholesome intentions. If indeed, as the commentary holds, this refers to the attainments of Non-returnerhood and *Arahantship* respectively, then the level of *jhāna* is in fact completely irrelevant as far as the ending of the corresponding intentions is concerned. Again, one can only wonder whether such a presentation could be considered 'well-proclaimed'.

Lastly, the *Sutta* is perfectly well explainable in terms of 'ordinary' *jhāna* without having to bring in an explanation from the *Abhidhamma*. The first *jhāna* is throughout the *Suttas* qualified as 'secluded from unwholesome states'<sup>29</sup>, which would include unwholesome intentions. In the second *jhāna* the *vitakka* and *vicāra* aspects of first *jhāna* cease. In the first *jhāna* these aspects are the movement of the mind onto the object and the holding on to the object respectively. It is easy to see how this could be regarded as the last vestige of intention, the mind intending towards the wholesome object of the first *jhāna*. In the second *jhāna* the mind is perfectly concentrated,<sup>30</sup> all movement has been abandoned, and therefore all intention, wholesome and unwholesome, has 'ceased without remainder'.<sup>31</sup>

---

*paripūraṃ brahma-cariyaṃ suppakāsitam*. Because of the use of 'well-expounded' (*svākkhātam*) and 'well-proclaimed' (*suppakāsitam*) to qualify *brahmacariya* ('the holy life'), I understand *brahmacariya* here to be practically equivalent to *Dhamma*.

27. Moreover, the use of '*jhāna*' does not appear to add anything that would be lost if the passage simply spoke of the attainments of *Anāgāmitā* and *Arahatta* respectively.
28. Of course, a single *Sutta* may not be fully self-explanatory. But all the *Suttas* taken together should give one a comprehensive and complete understanding of the *Dhamma*.
29. '*Vivicca akusalehi dhammehi*'; e.g. D.I.73,23-4.
30. The standard description of the second *jhāna* reads: '*avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ*', 'without *vitakka* without *vicāra* with rapture and happiness born of *samādhi*'; e.g. D.I.74,15.
31. One might think that the expression 'ceased without remainder', '*aparisesā nirujjhanti*', is more likely to be connected with the stages of Awakening where defilements are completely uprooted than with *jhāna* where the defilements are only temporarily suppressed. However, in the *Suttas* this term is also used with reference to the *jhānas* (e.g. M.II.263ff.).

It might also seem that because this *Sutta* ends with a description of the *Arahant*, the previous stages are likely to concern stages of Awakening. But it is common in the *Suttas* to describe the attainment of *Arahantship* directly after the attainment of the *jhānas*, for instance in the gradual training (e.g. D.2).

4.2 So Vata Sutta<sup>32</sup>

This *Sutta* is of particular importance because it gives a sequence of conditions without which a given effect cannot occur. The most interesting relationship for the purposes of this paper is the one between ‘*sammā-samādhī*’ (i.e. *jhāna*) and ‘the abandoning of the fetters’, where the latter is said to be impossible<sup>33</sup> without the former. This is clearly an important statement as it gives a fixed sequence of how the Buddhist path must be developed.

It is therefore highly significant when the commentary to this passage states that what is meant here by *sammā-samādhī* is in fact *lokuttara-jjhāna*.<sup>34</sup> It is not difficult to see how this commentarial interpretation undermines the vital necessity of *jhāna* on the path and potentially has a significant impact on our understanding of the *Suttas*. It is therefore necessary to investigate whether there are any grounds for the commentary’s assertion.

The first thing to note is that if *sammā-samādhī* here really is a reference to *lokuttara-jjhāna*, this passage in effect says that the necessary condition for *lokuttara-jjhāna* (i.e. ‘the abandoning of the fetters’, which in *Abhidhamma* terminology is a *lokuttara-jjhāna* mind moment) is *lokuttara-jjhāna* itself. Thus the whole purpose of the causal sequence is defeated.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as the *sammā-samādhī* here is defined by the commentary as including both path and fruit, whereas ‘the abandoning of the fetters’ is just a path moment, one ends up with a situation where the effect precedes the cause.<sup>36</sup> This clearly makes no sense.

At this point it seems worthwhile to quote a larger portion of the passage we are concerned with:

‘Not grasping the sign of the mind, one will fulfil right view’, this is not possible. ‘Not having fulfilled right view, one will fulfil *sammā-samādhī*’, this is not possible. ‘Not having fulfilled *sammā-samādhī*, one will abandon the fetters’, this is not possible. ‘Not having abandoned the fetters, one will realize *Nibbāna*’, this is not possible.<sup>37</sup>

32. A.III.422,25–423,18. The title is taken from the summary (the *uddāna*) at the end of the chapter (*vagga*).

33. *Ṭhānaṃ n’etaṃ vijjati*.

34. AA.III.410,21: *Samādhin ti maggasamādhīñ c’eva phalasamādhīñ ca*. ‘*Samādhī* means: just path-*samādhī* and fruit-*samādhī*. *Magga-samādhī* and *phala-samādhī* are commentarial names for the *lokuttara-jjhāna* happening at the path moment (*magga*) and fruition (*phala*) respectively.

35. It could perhaps be argued that *sammā-samādhī* here refers to the *lokuttara-jjhāna* of the first three stages of Awakening but not to the fourth. But this would be an additional complication which would lead one even further away from the most straightforward meaning of the passage.

36. ‘The abandoning of the fetters’ is the path (*magga*) consciousness relating to the attainment of *Arahantship*. *Sammā-samādhī* is here defined in the commentary in such a way that it appears to include the fruition (*phala*) consciousness relating to *Arahantship*. The fruition consciousness comes after the path consciousness.

37. A.III.423,2–423,7: *Cittassa nimittam aḡaṇhanto sammā-dīṭṭhiṃ paripūressatī ti n’etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati. Sammā-dīṭṭhiṃ aparipūretvā sammā-samādhīṃ paripūressatī ti n’etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati. Sammā-*

Of interest here is that *sammā-diṭṭhi* must be fulfilled before *sammā-samādhī* can be fulfilled. In *Sutta* usage the fulfilment of *sammā-diṭṭhi* is equivalent to the attainment of *Sotāpatti*. The attainment of *Sotāpatti* in turn is a *lokuttara-jjhāna* moment according to *Abhidhamma* terminology. Thus, once again, if one is to follow the commentarial interpretation, one arrives at a situation where *lokuttara-jjhāna* (i.e. *sammā-diṭṭhi*) is the cause for *lokuttara-jjhāna* (i.e. *sammā-samādhī*). Thus the conditional relationship expressed in the *Sutta* is apparently reduced to something quite trivial. To summarise, both ‘the abandoning of the fetters’ and ‘the fulfilment of right view’ are redundant if *sammā-samādhī* (as *lokuttara-jjhāna*) encompasses both of them.

The final question we need to answer is whether reading *sammā-samādhī* in the present passage as ‘ordinary’ *jhāna* is confirmed or negated by other *Suttas*. It is well known that *jhāna* and *sammā-samādhī* occur very frequently in the *Suttas* as part of the training leading to the attainment of *Arahantship*. Perhaps the most significant of these occurrences is the listing of the four *jhānas* in the gradual training immediately prior to the attainment of the three higher knowledges (*tevijjā*). This sequence is found countless times throughout the *Suttas*.<sup>38</sup> However, this does not establish that attaining *Arahantship* is impossible without ‘ordinary’ *jhāna*, as the *So Vata Sutta* seems to imply. To find such a passage we need to turn to M.64:

There is a path, Ānanda, a way to the abandoning of the five lower fetters; that anyone without relying on that path, on that way shall know or see or abandon the five lower fetters - this is not possible. Just as when there is a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, it is not possible that anyone shall cut out its heartwood without cutting through its bark and sapwood ...

And what Ānanda is the path, the way to the abandoning of the five lower fetters? Here Ānanda a bhikkhu ... enters upon and abides in the first *jhāna* ... the second *jhāna* ... the third *jhāna* ... the fourth *jhāna* ....<sup>39</sup>

Note that this passage is very clear that it is impossible to become an *Anāgāmi* without having attained at least the first *jhāna*. Also significant is that the commentary does not define *jhāna* here as *lokuttara-jjhāna*, and thus one has to assume that also the commentary regards this as ‘ordinary’ *jhāna*.<sup>40</sup>

---

*samādhim̐ aparipūretvā saṃyojanāni pajahissatī ti n’etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati. Saṃyojanāni appahāya nibbānaṃ sacchikarissatī ti n’etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati.*

38. See for example the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (D.2). The commentary does not explain the *jhāna* of the gradual training as *lokuttara-jjhāna* (but it also does not exclude it), see DA.I.217,14–18.

39. M.I.434,25–31 + 435,26–436,17: Yo ānanda maggo yā paṭipadā pañcannaṃ orambhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ pahānāya taṃ maggaṃ taṃ paṭipadaṃ anāgama pañc’orambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni ñassati vā dakkhīti vā pajahissati vā ti n’etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati. Seyyathā pi ānanda mahato rukkhassa tiṭṭhato sāravato taccaṃ acchetvā phegguṃ acchetvā sārachedo bhavissatī ti n’etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati ... Katamo c’ānanda maggo katamā paṭipadā pañcannaṃ orambhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ pahānāya: Idh’ānanda bhikkhu ... paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati ... dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ ... tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ ... catutthaṃ jhānaṃ ....

40. In fact it would seem impossible that the *jhānas* of M.64 refer to *lokuttara-jjhāna*. In this *Sutta*

Again, given this evidence from the *Suttas*, one can only conclude that there is no evidence to support the commentarial assertion that what is meant by *sammā-samādhi* in the *So Vata Sutta* is in fact *lokuttara-jjhāna*. Quite the contrary, the standard *Sutta* explanation of *sammā-samādhi*, as referring to the (ordinary) four *jhānas*, fits the situation perfectly.

#### 4.3 Other Suttas

The above examples are only two among a large number where the commentaries claim that *jhāna* or *samādhi* in the *Suttas* actually refer to *lokuttara-jjhāna*.<sup>41</sup> It would be an enormous amount of work to investigate each one of these occurrences to evaluate whether the commentarial interpretations are reasonable. In many instances it would in fact be impossible to come to any satisfactory conclusion because of a lack of revealing contextual evidence. In these circumstances one is left with the commentarial interpretation without any way of validating the commentary's assertions. This is surely not satisfactory, particularly when there is no convincing evidence from the *Suttas* that *jhāna* or *samādhi* ever refers to the attainment of the stages of Awakening.<sup>42</sup> There appears to be only one

---

the *jhānas* themselves are viewed as *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anattā* for the purpose of going beyond them and attaining at least to Non-returnerhood. This could therefore not refer to *lokuttara-jjhāna* because that attainment is said to be nothing but a temporary experience of *Nibbāna* itself and consequently cannot be considered as *dukkha*.

41. In fact, some of the most central occurrences of *sammā-samādhi* and *samādhi* in the *Suttas* are interpreted as *lokuttara-jjhāna/lokuttara samādhi* by the commentaries. The following is the commentary's interpretation of *sammā-samādhi* (and therefore *jhāna*) as the eighth factor of the noble eightfold path:

*Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sammāsamādhī ti ayaṃ pubbabhāge lokiyo aparabhāge lokuttaro sammāsamādhī ti vuccati:* 'Monks, this is called "sammā-samādhi" means: mundane in the earlier part and supramundane (*lokuttara*) in the latter part, this is called *sammā-samādhi*'. (DA.III.804,26-8 and SA.III.127,13-15)

The following is a commentarial interpretation of the *samādhi-sambojjhaṅga*:

*Avitakka-avicārā pana pīti-samādhī kiñcāpi rūpāvacarā va honti, rūpāvacare pana bojjhaṅgā na labbhantī ti lokuttarā va honti:* 'Samādhis which have joy and are without initial application and without sustained application, although belonging to the sphere of form, if the factors of Awakening are not obtained in the sphere of form, they are just supramundane (*lokuttara*)'. (SA.III.170,26-8)

The following is a commentarial interpretation of the *samādh'indriya*:

*Imasmiṃ sutte ... samādh'indriyaṃ nibbattitaṃ lokuttaram eva kathitaṃ:* 'In this *Sutta* ... the produced faculty of *samādhi* which is spoken of is just supramundane (*lokuttara*)'. (SA.III.234,11-13)

42. With the possible exception of *animitta-samādhi* (see note 9 above). It is difficult, however, to draw any authoritative conclusions on the precise nature of *animitta-samādhi* based on the *Suttas* alone. In the *Suttas*, it remains a marginal form of *samādhi* compared to the *jhānas* (see note 1 above) and as such its relevance is limited. Other types of *samādhi* that may or may not relate directly to the stages of Awakening, such as *suññata-samādhi*, *appañihita-samādhi*, and even *aññā-phala-samādhi*, 'the *samādhi* that has gnosis as its fruit' (A.IV.428), are even more marginal.

possible solution to this problem and that is to assume that *jhāna* and *samādhi* in the *Suttas* always refer to 'ordinary' *jhāna* and *samādhi*, even if this goes directly against the commentarial view.<sup>43</sup>

##### 5. THE DANGER IN REDUCED RESPECT FOR SAMĀDHI AND JHĀNA

If the analysis so far, on the whole, is accepted, it might reasonably be asked why the commentaries would mistakenly reinterpret the *jhāna/samādhi* of central *Sutta* passages in terms of the later *Abhidhamma* concept of *lokuttara-jjhāna* and thereby significantly distort the message of the former. There are in fact several *Sutta* passages that relate to this question. These passages concern the future of the *Dhamma* and, in particular, they mention how a reduced respect for *samādhi* is a condition for the decline of the Buddha's teaching as a whole. Consider the following:

Just as, Kassapa, gold does not disappear so long as counterfeit gold has not arisen in the world, but when counterfeit gold arises true gold disappears, so the true *Dhamma* does not disappear so long as a counterfeit of the true *Dhamma* has not arisen in the world, but when a counterfeit of the true *Dhamma* arises in the world then the true *Dhamma* disappears.

... It is senseless people who arise right here who cause the true *Dhamma* to disappear.

The true *Dhamma* does not disappear all at once in the way a ship sinks. There are, Kassapa, five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the true *Dhamma*. What are the five? Here the *bhikkhus*, the *bhikkhunīs*, the male lay followers, and the female lay followers dwell without reverence and deference towards the Teacher ... towards the *Dhamma* ... towards the *Saṅgha* ... towards the training ... towards concentration (*samādhi*). These are the five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the *Dhamma*.<sup>44</sup>

---

In any case, if the present discussion is limited to the *jhānas* (and thus *sammā-samādhi*) the situation is quite clear cut.

43. This may seem more radical than it really is. As do most Buddhist monks, I agree that it is important to respect the commentaries and all post-*Nikāya* Pāli works. After all, these works are the opinions of (presumably) highly respected Buddhist monks. One is obliged to be extremely careful not to overestimate one's own understanding above that of a strong and respected tradition. If there is any doubt, and one does not have direct experience of the *Dhamma* oneself, one should always defer to the tradition.

Having said this, however, one has to keep in mind what the Buddha stated in 'the four great standards' of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (D.II.13,30–126,5): that the word of any authority, other than that of the Buddha, which claims to speak the *Dhamma* should always be checked against what is known with adequate certainty to be the Buddha's own statements (i.e. the four main *Nikāyas*). What I have tried to do in this paper is simply to subject one specific commentarial interpretation to this test.

44. S.II.224,14–21 + 224,25–225,4:

*Seyyathāpi Kassapa na tāva jātarūpassa antaradhānaṃ hoti yāva na jātarūpapatirūpakaṃ loke uppajjati.*

Thus it appears that over time there is a natural tendency for the *Dhamma* to get distorted, that the distorters are members of the *Saṅgha* itself, and finally that one of the factors that lead to the gradual confusion and disappearance of the *Dhamma* is a lack of reverence and deference for *samādhi*.<sup>45</sup> It is easy to see why the Triple Gem and the training as a whole are mentioned here, because lack of respect for any of these is tantamount to a repudiation of the entire *Dhamma*. But it is quite remarkable that *samādhi* is the one aspect of the training that is singled out here, not wisdom, not the four *satipaṭṭhānas* or any other aspect of the path.<sup>46</sup> And this is only one among many instances where *samādhi* is singled out in this way.<sup>47</sup> This is surely highly significant and says much about the central importance of *samādhi* in the *Dhamma*.

So it seems that it is to be expected that the important role of *samādhi* is undermined over time, and therefore one should perhaps not be surprised that this is exactly what seems to happen in the Pāli commentaries.<sup>48</sup> Maybe this is because *samādhi* can appear so difficult to achieve. But this is obviously not a sufficient reason to downgrade its importance. *Samādhi* is an integral part of the Buddhist path and any attempt to reduce its importance because it is hard to achieve will only result in the exact opposite, making the true goal of the path, Awakening, even more difficult to achieve. By overlooking the absolutely central importance

---

*Yato ca kho Kassapa jātarūpapaṭirūpakaṃ loke uppajjati atha jātarūpassa antaradhānaṃ hoti. Evam eva kho Kassapa na tāva saddhammassa antaradhānaṃ hoti yāva na saddhammapaṭirūpakaṃ loke uppajjati. Yato ca kho Kassapa saddhammapaṭirūpakaṃ loke uppajjati atha saddhammaṃ antaradhānaṃ hoti.*

*... Atha kho idheva te uppajjanti moghāpurisā ye imaṃ saddhammaṃ antaradhāpentī.*

*Seyyathāpi Kassapa nāvā ādikeneva opilavati na kho Kassapa evaṃ saddhammassa antaradhānaṃ hoti. Pañca kho me Kassapa okkamaniyā dhammā saddhammassa sammōsāya antaradhānāya samvattanti.*

*Katame pañca? Idha Kassapa bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo sathari agāravā viharanti appaṭissā, dhamme agāravā viharanti appaṭissā, saṅghe agāravā viharanti appaṭissā, sikkhāya agāravā viharanti appaṭissā, samādhismiṃ agāravā viharanti appaṭissā. Ime kho Kassapa pañca okkamaniyā dhammā saddhammassa sammōsāya antaradhānāya samvattanti.*

45. All this seems to be a natural process. I think it highly unlikely that members of the *Saṅgha* would intentionally distort the *Dhamma*.
46. Note that the commentary glosses *samādhi* here with ‘*aṭṭha samāpattiyo*’, the ‘eight attainments’ (SA.II.205,3-5). This is typical late Canonical and commentarial terminology for the four *jhānas* together with the four formless attainments. Thus there is no indication even from the commentary that *samādhi* here might refer to *lokuttarasamādhi*.
47. A similar passage is found at A.IV.84,9-19. There are also a number of passages that mention the same list of five things as being respected by various persons. For example at A.IV.27,21-31,<sup>10</sup> there are four *Suttas* mentioning seven qualities that lead to non-decline, the five factors common to all these *Suttas* being the Triple Gem, the training, and *samādhi*. Another such set of seven occurs at A.IV.120,4-125,9. Finally, at S.V.234,26-31 an *Arahant* is said to conduct himself with supreme honour towards the *Tathāgata* and the *Dhamma* by being reverential and deferential to the same basic set of five.
48. Note the correspondence here between the Buddha warning that it is ‘senseless people’ in the *Saṅgha* itself that cause the *Dhamma* to disappear and the fact that the commentaries (written by the *Saṅgha*) seem to be distorting the *Dhamma*. (Again, this distortion seems to be natural and unavoidable. In fact, if it had not been for the *Saṅgha*’s efforts in preserving the *Dhamma*, it would almost certainly have disappeared long ago).

of *samādhi* one is in grave danger of making the supreme goal of the Buddhist practice unattainable.

#### 6. ABHIDHAMMA-BHĀJANIYA AND SUTTANTA-BHĀJANIYA

In light of the above, it may prove useful to take a closer look at the *Abhidhamma*.<sup>49</sup> The first thing to notice about the *Abhidhamma*'s treatment is that it is divided into two separate categories, the *Sutta*-exposition (*Suttanta-bhājanīya*) and the *Abhidhamma*-exposition (*Abhidhamma-bhājanīya*).<sup>50</sup> This is of great importance for this study because it suggests that the *Suttas* and the *Abhidhamma* must be kept strictly apart and, more particularly, that the *Abhidhamma* analysis is not applicable to the *Suttas*.<sup>51</sup>

This conclusion is reinforced by a closer comparison of the *Sutta*-exposition with the *Abhidhamma*-exposition. The *Suttanta-bhājanīya* is a list of factors, together with definitions, of some of the most important doctrinal sets found in the *Suttas*.<sup>52</sup> The exposition is largely identical to that of the *Suttas*, as one would expect. In the *Suttas* these sets are concerned with the pragmatic problem of how to arrive at Awakening, and the various factors listed refer to qualities of mind that have to be developed for Awakening to be possible.<sup>53</sup> The *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya*, however, is a significant departure from the *Sutta*-exposition. It discusses the same sets, but the definitions of the individual factors are here quite different from those found in the *Suttas*. The emphasis is now on how these factors, when they are fully developed, take part in the experiences of the stages of Awakening. The *Abhidhamma*'s

49. It is the second book of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Vibhaṅga*, that is of interest here.

50. This division is one of the main organising principles of the *Vibhaṅga*. (All the chapters of the *Vibhaṅga* that pertain to this paper (see n.53 below), with the exception of the chapter on the *indriyas*, are divided in this manner. For the *indriyas*, only an *Abhidhamma*-exposition is given). Moreover, it should be noted that many scholars consider the *Vibhaṅga* to be the earliest part of the *Abhidhamma*. It thus seems likely that in the rest of the *Abhidhamma* this division is implied, even if rarely explicitly stated.

51. That is, not *directly* applicable. This does not mean that the *Abhidhamma* analysis is not compatible with the *Suttas*, but rather that the terminology is used differently. See the following discussion.

52. That is, the *satipaṭṭhānas*, the *bojjhaṅgas*, the *iddhi-pādas* and so on.

53. These sets are collectively known as the *Bodhipakkiya-dhammas* and they are very prominent in the *Suttas*, see in particular volume V of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. (It should be noted that the *Vibhaṅga* includes other sets as well – that is, apart from the *Bodhipakkiya-dhammas* – but these sets are generally not concerned with *lokuttara-jjhāna* and are therefore not relevant to this study). It is significant that when these sets are spoken of in the *Suttas* they are always spoken of in terms of ‘development’ or ‘cultivation’, that is, ‘*bhāvanā*’. This seems to be a clear indication that they form part of the path of practice and not the result of practising the path. This is in sharp contrast to the *Sutta* terminology used to describe the attainments of the stages of Awakening (i.e. the results of practice), terminology such as: ‘realisation’ (*sacchikiriyā*); ‘attainment’ (*anuppatta*); ‘liberation’ (*vimutta*) and so on. This distinction seems to be very consistent in the *Suttas*, the former being the path, the latter the results.

purpose, therefore, is to describe the contents of specific states of mind rather than the path by which one arrives at those states.<sup>54</sup> In other words, where the *Suttas* and the *Abhidhamma* speak of what appears to be the same sets, they are actually speaking of quite different things. It now becomes clear why the *Sutta*-exposition has to be kept apart from the *Abhidhamma*-exposition.<sup>55</sup>

The above can now be related to *jhāna/samādhi* and *lokuttara-jjhāna*. *Samādhi* and *jhāna* are terms used in the *Suttanta-bhājanīya* and thus they refer to *Sutta* usage. In particular, as they are closely related to the above mentioned sets that constitute the path to Awakening, they are factors of that same path. *Lokuttara-jjhāna*, on the other hand, belongs to the *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya* and is a term for the constellation of mental factors present at the moments of Awakening. Being a term peculiar to the *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya*, it only relates to the *Abhidhamma* and can therefore not be used to explain *samādhi* or *jhāna* as it appears in the *Suttas*. If this is correct, it follows that the commentaries make a dangerous blunder when they explain *jhāna* and *samādhi* with *Abhidhamma* terminology that was never capable of being used in this way.

#### CONCLUSION

It is sometimes claimed that the *Abhidhamma* is simply a natural extension of the *Suttas*, and that its ideas flow without conflict straight out of concepts already established in the *Suttas*. This may be largely correct, but there is always a problem of unforeseen consequences when one elaborates on a body of texts of such fundamental importance for Buddhism as the original *Suttas*. I hope I have been able to show one such instance of unforeseen consequences, and an important one at that, in which the *Suttas* are effectively rewritten in line with later concepts and terminology.<sup>56</sup> It shows that one has to be careful about uncritically accepting the commentaries' interpretations of the *Suttas*. This is particularly so when established *Sutta* concepts are redefined by the commentaries in accordance with ideas that arose after the *Suttas* were composed.

As for the term *lokuttara-jjhāna*, I suggest that it was never meant to be used apart from the *Abhidhamma* itself. The idea of *lokuttara-jjhāna* may very well be a reasonable

54. This is not surprising because one of the main purposes of the *Abhidhamma* is precisely to analyse existence into its component parts. (Again, my concern here is with the *Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga*. Other parts of the *Abhidhamma*, in particular the *Paṭṭhāna*, are concerned with the causal connections between these component parts).

55. This does not mean that the *Abhidhamma* analysis necessarily is wrong, rather that it is not directly comparable to the *Sutta* usage. It could be argued that the *Abhidhamma*-exposition describes the culmination of the path as described by the *Sutta*-exposition (see Gethin 2001). Although the two expositions may thus be compatible, they are still concerned with two very different aspects of Buddhist practice, i.e. the result of practising the path and the path itself respectively.

56. Rewritten, that is, when one relies on the commentaries to explain the *Suttas*.

description of attainments on the Buddhist path, but this does not mean that it has any direct counterpart in the *Suttas*: in fact it seems clear that it does not. Because *lokuttara-jjhāna* concerns the goal of the path, in the sense of the four levels of Awakening, and not the path itself,<sup>57</sup> the commentaries' redefinition of *jhāna/samādhi* in terms of *lokuttara-jjhāna* has the effect of shifting the reality of *jhāna* from being a factor of the path to becoming a result of the practice of the path. Thus the *Suttas*' insistence on the centrality of *jhāna/samādhi* as a path factor is undermined, an undermining which only serves to seriously distort the timeless message of the Buddha.<sup>58</sup>

I acknowledge with gratitude the valuable review of an earlier version of this article by Dr. Rupert Gethin.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

A	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>	MA	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> commentary
AA	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i> commentary	S	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>	SA	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i> commentary
DA	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> commentary	Vin	<i>Vinaya Piṭaka</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>	Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
M	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>	Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

All textual references are to volume number, page number, and line number of the Pāli texts published by the Pali Text Society.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1993. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Gethin, R. M. L. 2001. *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*. Oxford: One World.
- Harvey, Peter. 1986. 'Signless Samadhis in Pāli Buddhism'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9(1): 25–52.

57. By path here I mean the entire path, all the way to *Arahantship*, except for the actual moments of attainment of the stages of Awakening.

58. In a private prepublication review of this article Dr. Rupert Gethin comments: 'Yet I do not really understand why [Brahmāli Bhikkhu] thinks the notion of *lokuttara-jjhāna* devalues ordinary *jhāna* practice'. Since this is absolutely central to the article it calls for comment.

The point I have been trying to make is that in the *Suttas* *jhāna* and *samādhi* are always described as states that *lead* to Awakening. Thus, when the commentaries claim that *jhāna* need not always be seen as *leading* to Awakening but can also be regarded as part of the Awakening experience itself, then *jhāna* as a factor of the path *leading* to Awakening is weakened. If *jhāna* can be understood as *lokuttara-jjhāna*, then the *jhāna* which *leads* to Awakening is no longer integral to the path, and the factor of *sammā-samādhi* on the eightfold path may now be fulfilled by *lokuttara-jjhāna* alone. That is, one may still want to practice 'ordinary' *jhāna*, but it is no longer indispensable. The problem is that this is in direct contradiction to those *Suttas* that explicitly state that *jhāna* is necessary for attaining *Arahantship* (see §4.2). And most alarmingly, this serious distortion of the *Dhamma* has been the *sine qua non* for the theory and practice of pure insight meditation.