

## Jhana and Samadhi

In the vocabulary of Buddhist meditation the word "jhana" is closely connected with another word, "*samadhi*" generally rendered by "concentration." *Samadhi* derives from the prefixed verbal root *sam-a-dha*, meaning to collect or to bring together, thus suggesting the concentration or unification of the mind. The word "*samadhi*" is almost interchangeable with the word "*samatha*," serenity, though the latter comes from a different root, *sam*, meaning to become calm.

In the suttas *samadhi* is defined as mental one-pointedness, (*cittass'ekaggata* M.i,301) and this definition is followed through rigorously in the Abhidhamma. The Abhidhamma treats one-pointedness as a distinct mental factor present in every state of consciousness, exercising the function of unifying the mind on its object. From this strict psychological standpoint *samadhi* can be present in unwholesome states of consciousness as well as in wholesome and neutral states. In its unwholesome forms it is called "wrong concentration" (*micchasamadhi*), In its wholesome forms "right concentration" (*sammāsamadhi*).

In expositions on the practice of meditation, however, *samadhi* is limited to one-pointedness of mind (Vism.84-85; PP.84-85), and even here we can understand from the context that the word means only the wholesome one-pointedness involved in the deliberate transmutation of the mind to a heightened level of calm. Thus Buddhaghosa explains *samadhi* etymologically as "the centering of consciousness and consciousness concomitants evenly and rightly on a single object... the state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object, undistracted and unscattered" (Vism.84-85; PP.85).

However, despite the commentator's bid for consistency, the word *samadhi* is used in the Pali literature on meditation with varying

degrees of specificity of meaning. In the narrowest sense, as defined by Buddhaghosa, it denotes the particular mental factor responsible for the concentrating of the mind, namely, one-pointedness. In a wider sense it can signify the states of unified consciousness that result from the strengthening of concentration, i.e., the meditative attainments of serenity and the stages leading up to them. And in a still wider sense the word *samadhi* can be applied to the method of practice used to produce and cultivate these refined states of concentration, here being equivalent to the development of serenity.

It is in the second sense that *samadhi* and *jhana* come closest in meaning. The Buddha explains right concentration as the four *jhanas* (D.ii,313), and in doing so allows concentration to encompass the meditative attainments signified by the *jhanas*. However, even though *jhana* and *samadhi* can overlap in denotation, certain differences in their suggested and contextual meanings prevent unqualified identification of the two terms. First behind the Buddha's use of the *jhana* formula to explain right concentration lies a more technical understanding of the terms. According to this understanding *samadhi* can be narrowed down in range to signify only one mental factor, the most prominent in the *jhana*, namely, one-pointedness, while the word "*jhana*" itself must be seen as encompassing the state of consciousness in its entirety, or at least the whole group of mental factors individuating that meditative state as a *jhana*.