

## The World Buddhist University Sunday Forum

### BEGINNING MEDITATION, THE FOUR STAGES OF JHANA (SAMADHI)



**Speaker:** Mr. Eric Mitchell(Sukha), Jhana Teacher  
**Moderator** Dr. Somboon Duangsamosorn  
**Rapporteur** Mrs. Suttinee Yavaprapas

#### Introduction

On the First Sunday of the Month of August, Sunday, August 2, B.E. 2552 (2009) , Mr. Eric Mitchell(Sukha), Jhana Teacher, was the guest speaker of the Buddhist Forum talking on Beginning Meditation, The Four Stages of Jhana, How to Enter the 4 Jhanas.

In the Buddha's Suttas are descriptions of Buddha's primary meditation path, the four Jhanas. The speaker, Mr. Eric Mitchell (Sukha), over the last 40 years has tried and taught most meditation techniques, and now focuses on Buddha's 4 Jhanas. He has worked for many years at developing easy techniques, which allow everyone access to Jhana meditation, exactly as they are described in the Suttas. At 17, Mr. Eric Mitchell (Sukha), had a vivid dream of his future, which caused him to begin a search for the true meaning of life. In college in 1968, he was directed to a book by J. Krishnamurti, which changed his life and began his meditation practice, leading to Buddhist studies and becoming a monk for 7 years, studying with the great Chinese Mahayana monk, Hsuan Hua, and meditating 8 to 21 hours a day. He later studied with many great Hindu teachers, Tibetan teachers, and studied Theravada Buddhism. In the early 1980's, after 15 years of dedicated meditation, He realized he had wasted his time, and no teacher or literature could tell him How to get enlightened. All the teachers had a technique, but no one knew How. Enlightenment was something they taught was not what caused their advanced state, and whatever was written could not tell him How. In the late 1980's, in Jhana, He found guidance, and there was nothing left to learn from teachers or books, and he started teaching meditation. In 1990 he wrote a book which was published in the U.S. about a meditation technique, which could lead to some advanced states of consciousness. Recently, after more than 40 years of meditating, he wrote a commentary to Buddha's Ananda Sutta, which describes how to enter the four Jhanas, and currently teach this beginning meditation technique. His goal is to clearly describe each step on the path to enlightenment, so that anyone can know exactly how it is done, and do it.

Mr. Eric Mitchell (Sukha) started his lecture by asking the audience to go through his booklet and enjoy his frame of reference. It was unique coming from his personal experience. He studied for a long time meditating in an extremely harsh political condition when he gave up everything and gave up what he did not have. The original Buddha and the way he did was a very good example. Doing that in the western society was

probably crazy. During his years of being a monk practicing what he believed to be meditation, it took him 5-7 years to realize the direction that he had taken was basically wrong. It was not going to do what he had wanted to do. He became eventually convinced that it was not Buddha taught. It took him another 15 years to conceptually and physically throw out everything to find out what is real. What is meditation? What is the whole story of enlightenment? What are we going to get out of this? Haven't we all come here because of suffering? This is not the Heaven we came here to be. We all have our personal extensive story of realization of suffering. He remembered when he first meditated. He had no reason to live. He had no reason to die. It was essentially pain. And the pain caused this tremendous neurotic break down which formed his personality. Something really happened in his mind. And he forgot that experience when he got to the psychological personality creation which made him forget that it was not his own. And the more conscious he was, the more he could discover the whole of Buddhism and what the Buddha had to say.

The Buddha was immediately talking about the Four Noble Truth and suffering, often translated as unsatisfactory. The Buddha also talked about happiness and pleasure, In the Sutta, he talked continuously about the higher of bliss. Basically, we have got the five sense organs, brain and mind with consciousness just like every other animals or plants on this planet. We all generate the same panorama. The brain takes three-dimension experience moment by moment. The Buddha said, the pleasure is small compared to the suffering repaid. In meditation, we transcend sensory desire for the period by letting go of concern for this body and its five sense activity. Some imagine that the five senses are there to serve and protect the body, but the truth is that the body is there to serve the five senses as they play in the world ever seeking delight. The Buddha once said, "The five senses are the world" and to leave the world, to enjoy the other worldly bliss of Jhana, we must give up for a time all concern for the body and its five senses. When sensory desire is transcended, the mind has no interest in the promise of pleasure or even comfort with this body. The body disappears and the five senses all switch off. The mind becomes calm and free to look within. The mind that is free from five sense activity can truly look within and see its real nature. Only from that can wisdom arise as to what we are, from where and why? The first Jhana can be aware of the doorway out. But we can be aware of the results of the door being opened. Our body and mind are going to experience rapture and bliss born or withdrawn from the mind, body, human existence life. We are withdrawn and separating. We notice the wind and the cool breeze.

Mr. Eric Mitchell (Sukha) quoted what was written in the Sutta. The Buddha had a conversation with his cousin Ananda which begins like this:

Ananda says:

*"Is there one technique, which when developed & pursued, brings the four stages of mindfulness to completion?"*

*The Buddha says:*

*"Yes, Ananda,...Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, brings the four stages of mindfulness to completion. ...How is [it] developed & pursued...?"*

*"There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness towards the front."*

*"Breathing in long, he notices, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he notices, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he notices, 'I am breathing out short.'"*

Mr. Eric Mitchell (Sukha) then instructed Beginning Meditation, The Four Stages of Jhana, How to Enter the 4 Jhanas.

OK, keep your eyes open. This is simple. Everybody breaths, and everyone can notice their breathing. Whatever your breath is doing or whatever you want to do with your breath is OK. Just breath through your nose. (do some breathing). Do anything you like, but notice it.

Now relax and breath normally, relax and breath normally .... At the end of your next breath, the end of your next breath... pause...pause for a second and slowly carefully breath in or out as softly as you can, relaxing and watching the feeling in the nostrils. Pause, relax, and inhale or exhale very slowly and feel the sensitivity growing in the nostrils. Do this a few times and get a full breath, slow deep breaths while watching the

sensitivity in the nostrils. When you feel the sensitivity in the nostrils, breathe normally but keep feeling and watching the sensitivity. Now you are prepared.

### Moving Into Stage One The Blissful Body – 1<sup>st</sup> Jhana

OK, you have focus and sensitivity in the nostrils. Relax and Exhale. Pause.  
Focus on the face. Slowly inhale into the face-focus, Pause, slowly exhale into the face-focus, and feel the sensitivity ignite...Pause.  
Focus on the head. Slowly inhale into the head-focus. Pause.  
Slowly inhale into the face-focus. Feel the sensitivity ignite...Pause  
Focus on the neck, Slowly inhale into the neck-focus. Pause.  
Slowly exhale into the neck-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause  
Focus from shoulder to shoulder, Slowly inhale into the shoulder-to-shoulder-focus. Pause. Slowly exhale into the shoulder-to-shoulder-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause  
Focus on the right arm, Slowly inhale into the right arm-focus. Pause...  
Slowly exhale into the right arm-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause  
Focus on the right torso, Slowly inhale into the right torso-focus. Pause...  
Slowly exhale into the right torso-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause...  
Focus on the right leg, Slowly inhale into the right leg-focus. Pause...  
Slowly exhale into the right leg-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause  
Focus on the left arm, Slowly inhale into the left arm-focus. Pause...  
Slowly exhale into the left arm-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause...  
Focus on the left torso, Slowly inhale into the left torso-focus. Pause...  
Slowly exhale into the left torso-focus. Feel the sensitivity...Pause...  
Focus on the left leg, Slowly inhale into the left leg-focus. Pause...  
Slowly exhale into the left leg-focus. Feel the sensitivity...

Repeat this until every part of your body is filled with rapture and pleasure. Rapture is the strong ecstasy felt in the area of focus. Pleasure is the background feeling remaining from doing the technique.

The Buddha goes on to say:

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'*

When you can energize any object of focus, using the subtle breath-focus, you have learned the secret to beginning meditation.

This stage encompasses the first Jhana (Dhyana) as spoken of in the Kayagati-sati Sutta. Buddha says:

*"he enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal. Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder-saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without-would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpermeated by rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal."*

We have permeated the entire body with "rapture and pleasure" accompanied by "directed thought and evaluation". In this first stage the level of bliss and pleasure should reach an extreme level, such that you may not feel like you can sit or stand and prefer to lie down and enjoy the ecstasy. No need to feel constrained by conventions, and do whatever you need to do to enhance and permeate the body with 1<sup>st</sup> stage ecstasy.

Stage Two Focus  
Automatic Bliss – 2<sup>nd</sup> Jhana

**The Buddha goes on to say:**

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.'*

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.'*

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.'*

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.'*

The second Jhana (Dhyana) is described thusly:

*"with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana... Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time & again, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate & pervade, suffuse & fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates... this very body with...rapture & pleasure..."*

Then I want the entire body in one focus, one soft breath, so I can have one focus/breath "massaging" the entire body simultaneously, and I can relax in automatic bliss and pleasure.

This is Stage Two Focus. I have used directed focus to fill every part of my body with pleasure, and now I can abandon the directed focus, as each breath, with relaxation, automatically infuses my entire body with bliss and pleasure, over and over again. I am like the lake with pleasure raining from above and welling up from below.

Stage Three Focus  
Beyond Bliss – 3<sup>rd</sup> Jhana

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe in breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'*

*" He trains himself, 'I will breathe in breathe in sensitive to mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in satisfying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out satisfying the mind.'*

*" He trains himself, 'I will breathe in breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.'*

We begin Stage Three Focus very relaxed and blissful, with the only object of consciousness being the blissful body feeling. Now I want to expand this outside the body in every direction. Everywhere the mind and consciousness can go, I want to do the same technique. For me, I do two main methods here. One is using the content of consciousness and consciousness and consciousness itself. The other method is to see, feel, move outside the body in many directions and use the same technique to ignite, energize, soften, and create bliss. Both methods are the same, but appear different as everything outside the body is still just your consciousness. Every step gibes my body more pleasure and insight. The results I get are that all of consciousness, everything, is inside a ball of bliss (atman/soul). Inside the ball of bliss, the Soul, is the ego, self, body, world, cognition, thought, consciousness, etc. Nothing is outside at this point.

Now I am at a point where I can have some insight into reality. I witness all of consciousness, the entire content of consciousness, everything, is within a ball of bliss (atman/soul). The breath and the ball of bliss (atman/soul) are the complete content of consciousness. The main discovery for my meditation here is that the ball of bliss and the entire content of consciousness flickers and is spinning, impermanent. This is the endless spinning of consciousness.

This is the Third Jhana (Dhyana) as described below:

*"...with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and [he/she] senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana... Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born & growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated & pervaded, suffused & filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water..."*

The lotus born and growing, staying immersed in the water is the ball of bliss, the Soul, with the physical body inside. When you reach the end of Stage Three Focus the Soul/Atman is like a lotus bud under water totally immersed in cool water. When I see the inconstancy of the Soul and consciousness, the rapture experienced previously fades away, and you just have calm pleasure in the body and the movement of consciousness.

#### Stage Four Focus Beyond the Soul – 4<sup>th</sup> Jhana

*He trains himself, 'I will breathe in breathe in focusing on dispassion.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.'*

On the ball of bliss (atman/soul), when it flickers, is located a beginning point. I slow the pulsations down so I can see the beginning of one pulse, and use the breath technique on the beginning point. Immediately, that point ignites, energizes, softens and creates waves of bliss rippling along the surface of the Soul, but more importantly, the witness to this event is "above" and the ball of bliss is "below", and gravity is "messed up". It feels like gravity is tilted or gone, and I may be floating, and the feeling of witnessing the Soul from a distance predominates. As I continue the breath technique at the beginning of each ripple, the ball, bliss, breath and consciousness synchronize automatically and begin to disappear, disintegrate, melt into a small "linear" automatic movement between two points, devoid of anything but a feeling that everything is about to melt into nothingness.

Proceeding further, I remember that all consciousness and objects of consciousness, any experience, is to be abandoned and dissolved by using the breath/focus technique. At the top of the Soul I see a circular movement of light. The Soul and all consciousness is created from this circular movement at the top of the Soul. Sometimes it appears as a light, a fire, smoke, or a cloud in space. Using the Focus and breath to witness this can instantaneously trigger Fourth Stage Focus, and all the previous stages begin to function simultaneously. The first time I did this successfully, I could not stand up with my eyes open, as can be done through the previous stages. I could not even sit. For me the world was too unstable. It was like gravity shifted uncontrollably, consciousness was swirling.

A good description of Stage Four is found in the Sedaka Sutta (2: The Beauty Queen) quoted below:

*I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was living among the Sumbhas. Now there is a Sumbhan town named Sedaka. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, "Monks!"*

*"Yes, lord," the monks responded.*

*The Blessed One said, "Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together, saying, 'The beauty queen! The beauty queen! And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing & dancing, so that an even greater crowd comes thronging, saying, so that an even greater crowd comes*

*thronging, saying, 'The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!' Then a man comes along, desiring life & shrinking from death, desiring pleasure & abhorring pain. They say to him, 'Now look here, mister. You must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd & the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of oil, right there will he cut off your head.' Now what do you think, monks: Will that man, not paying attention to the bowl of oil, let himself get distracted outside?"*

*"No, lord."*

*"I have given you this parable to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: The bowl filled to the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body. Thus you should train yourselves: 'We will pursue it, hand it the reins and take it as a basis, give it a grounding, steady it, consolidate it, and undertake it well.' That is how you should train yourselves."*

"Mindfulness immersed in the body" is what we are calling Stages of Mental Focus, and it is clear that the Fourth Stage of Focus is the beginning point of this practice. The bowl filled to the brim with oil is the structure at the top of the Soul, and the brim of the bowl is the spinning light of consciousness, symbolized in religious paintings as a halo above or around the head.

This is the fourth Jhana (Dhlyana) as described below:

*"And furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain – as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress – he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness."*

The fourth Jhana (Dhyana) has no method of producing pleasure and pain. Consciousness is a distant object floating in space. There is no Me/Body/World conception. It is a light or white cloud spinning in a circle and drifting "downward". The Soul's surface is activated by the spinning light and it appears as if a white cloth is covering the Soul. When the light activates or moves, the surface of the Soul activates from top to bottom and appears white. This light spinning around the "Halo" at the top of the Soul produces a light traveling down the surface of the Soul. One vision for me is smoke/fog moving in a circle and descending "downward" floating in space, slowly dissipating. When seen through the eyes, the world has a white light permeating the visual field. You see the light which is coming down the surface of the Soul, and there is just bright awareness.

## Conclusion

Now beginning meditation is finished in the classical sense, because nothing else can be done with "existence" life, consciousness, etc. and our goal of beginning mediation is complete. Some people have spoken of "formless" levels, which must be beyond this Fourth Jhana (Dhyana), but those "formless" concepts or experiences have been exceeded here, and are contained within the Fourth Stage Focus. It is as if on a very dark night a lightning flash occurs and suddenly you can see things. When the lightning is gone and everything is black, nothing can be seen. When the lighting flash of the Soul occurs, it generates it's own space-time within which consciousness exists, but this vision is unimportant, as all visions are, and all of this is an obstacle, which I want to leap over.

Any experience, knowledge, image or thought is only experienced inside the Soul, the ball of bliss, and then it is only a quick flickering of consciousness, which disappears. The tendency is to believe consciousness and hold on to it after it gone. For instance, yesterday I was proceeding beyond Stage Four Focus, and as I was

separating, consciousness created a beautiful, meaningful image for me. The Soul took on wings and was flying upward. Since this is such a prominent religious symbol, you can easily think you're discovering something. You suddenly know the meaning of the symbol, and you can get excited, and forget what you are doing. You may even believe that this symbol should be your object of meditation. But if you are serious, this may cause you to smile, because this is what you are separating from, not what you are seeking.

Likewise, previously I was practicing the Jhanas and I became aware of a presence near me. I ignored it, but eventually became intrigued as it was black, so I "looked" and I became aware of a Tibetan female Bodhisattva named Tara on my left facing me, and she had been standing watching me meditate. Later in the day, White Tara came and watched on my right side. The point of this diversion is to say that incredible things can happen in consciousness with your eyes open or closed, and you can be distracted from separation and withdrawal. When these things happen, you just continue to dissolve all consciousness and withdraw as in Stage Four Focus.

