

Journey to Jhana
with Beth Upton

Video 10

The Higher Jhanas and Further Explorations

How Do I Move to the Second Jhana?

If you feel confident in your mastery of the first jhana, then what that should look like is that you can easily enter that jhana in most contexts of your daily life. You can certainly, easily, and quickly enter the first jhana on the meditation cushion. You can stay in that jhana easily for an hour, maybe longer than that. You can come out on time, pretty accurately on time, not more than a minute or two either side of your adhitthana, and you can quickly and efficiently identify the five jhana factors. If you've met that standard, then we can say, yeah, let's have a go at the second jhana.

If we want to practice the second jhana, then what we're going to do is reduce the time in the first jhana. This is just because the body has a hard limit of how long it can sit for, or we might not have all day to practice. So we reduce the amount of time that we spend in the first jhana to about 20 minutes. We make this adhitthana for the first jhana: "May I be with my nimitta and five jhana factors for 20 minutes."

When we emerge, we check the jhana factors—one, two, three, four, five—and we're not going to check the time this time because we don't want to open our eyes or break the flow. So we quickly notice these five jhana factors—applied thought, sustained thought, joy, happiness, one pointedness, or vitakka, vicara, piti, sukha, ekkagata—and what we notice is that of these five, the first two are the most coarse and the last three are more subtle.

We notice that without these first two jhana factors, the experience will be much more peaceful. We notice that and then we wish to renounce the vitakka and vicara—the applied and sustained thought.

Wishing to renounce them and wishing for a more refined experience we then focus back on the nimitta.

Now, me explaining that has taken a good few seconds, maybe a minute. But when we actually do that reflection, it should take us a couple of seconds. We can already identify the five jhana factors quickly, we can see that the first two are coarse quickly, we can prefer the other three

quickly, and we focus back on the nimitta. So what we're actually doing is: attention on the nimitta, attention on the jhana factors for a second or two, attention back on the nimitta. So our nimitta should be there waiting for us, nice and stable. We don't need to be recreating any nimitta or doing any work of the mind. We've been in the first jhana with these five jhana factors. We reflect for a couple of seconds. We focus back on the nimitta.

When we focus back on the nimitta, we're going to make a second adhitthana for the time, and we want to do whatever will make it up to being about an hour. So in this case, let's say 45 minutes. "May I be with my nimitta for 45 minutes." We focus back on the nimitta and we do not investigate. We don't investigate the time or the quality, same as before. But we also do not investigate whether or not vitalka and vicara are still there.

If you investigate, the investigation requires vitakka and vicara. So that will definitely be there. The only way that we can move into the second jhana is with no investigation. So we need to trust that we've already done the necessary work. We've already given the mind the instruction to renounce the first two jhana factors. We focus back on the nimitta, we forget about it. And if our absorption in the second jhana is deep, we won't know what jhana we're in because we're not thinking about it. All we will know is the nimitta.

At some point, we will emerge, hopefully, nice and on time. The first thing that we will do is review the quality of the absorption that we've just done. Was there any distraction or interference? Then we will check the jhana factors. Do we notice three jhana factors or do we notice five? There's a good chance that the first time practicing you will still notice five. In that case, no worries, just repeat. And there's a good chance that we'll notice three. If we notice three, then we know that we've successfully entered the second jhana.

We then want to open our eyes and check the time. And when we check the time, we're adding up the two pieces, aren't we? We're adding up, "OK, I did 20 minutes, then 45." It should be an hour and five minutes in this case, because we're not checking the time in the middle.

If we feel like we've successfully entered the second jhana and when we emerge we're like, "Yep good quality three jhana factors," then we want to practice reducing the time in the first jhana and increasing the time in the second jhana until we can be just a minute or two in the first jhana and almost the whole sitting in the second jhana.

We then want to practice all of the same masteries of the second jhana. So being able to enter the second jhana throughout the day, whenever we want, being able to stay in that second jhana for at least an hour and emerge on time, and quickly and confidently being able to identify the three jhana factors—joy, happiness, one-pointedness—that characterize the second jhana.

Moving from the Second to Third Jhana

When we've practiced that mastery of the second jhana, then we can go on to practice the third

and the fourth in much the same way. The move from the second to the third will be removing the joy so it's the same. We reflect on the jhana factors. We notice joy, happiness, one and pointedness. Joy is coarse, the other two are subtle. Wishing to remove the joy, we focus back on the nimitta and do the same practice, the same masteries.

Moving from the Third to Fourth Jhana

Moving from the third to the fourth, we notice that the happiness is coarse and it would be more peaceful if replaced with a neutral feeling. Wishing to remove the happiness and replace it with a neutral feeling, we focus back on the nimitta and then it's the same process, the same masteries, for the fourth jhana.

When the fourth jhana is nice and stable, then you might feel like you want to move on to practice vipassana. We spoke about driving the car in fourth gear. My van's only got four gears. Four is plenty sufficient for a strong vipassana practice. At that stage, some meditators prefer to also go on to master the immaterial jhanas, which are further refinements of jhana that I won't go into today, but it's good for you to know that those further refinements exist.

How Does Jhana Practice Differ Between Home and Retreat?

In daily life, it's going to take you a little longer to practice mastery because there are more coarse things happening on the day-to-day. That mastery of being able to enter whenever you want is going to take a little more time, practice, and repetition as you learn to integrate noise, disturbance, and distraction, difficult people, having to do some talking...

It does mean, though, that in the long run, your jhana is going to be more resilient. It means it stands up against more reality, against more life. When we practice in retreat, there's much less challenge in the context. So it means that mastery of entering the jhana whenever you want is relatively easy. Nobody's talking, everything's silent. It's easy to practice continually. But it does mean that your mastery is a little bit more fragile. It means when you enter a challenging context, you're going to struggle a little bit and at some point we'll need to do that integration work. So on retreat, people's progress tends to be a little more swift, a little more speedy, but the mastery is not quite so strong because they haven't practiced up against so much challenge.

How Long Does It Take to Progress Through the Jhanas?

Obviously it's a highly individual thing and there isn't really one size fits all for how long it takes to work through the jhanas. But what we can say in general is that once mastery of the first

jhana is strong, most meditators do not struggle to then go on and master the second, third, and fourth jhana.

The reason is that when mastery of the first jhana is strong, all of the key skills are there. We already know how to be with a subtle object for a long time. We've already got a real deep stability in our awareness. We already know how to put down our defilements and five hindrances for a long time.

So when there's a strong mastery of the first jhana, all of the key skills are there, including our continuity throughout the day and the alignment of our life with the practice such that to move to the second, third, and fourth isn't all that difficult. Most meditators can do it at home within a matter of weeks or months, and on retreat, sometimes within a matter of days because all of the key skills are there.

But where we see a great variation in meditators is getting to that first jhana—developing the skills to go from a basic mindfulness of breathing practice to that first jhana.

Can I Reach Jhana with Other Meditation Objects?

It is possible to attain jhana with other objects. The two main classes of objects are what we call *kasina* objects and then *brahmavihara* objects. Kasina objects are very simple mental concepts, essentially different nimittas. So we skip the whole stage of the practice that is being with the breath and we come in at the stage of a nimitta.

An example would be just a plain color, the color red, for example, or the color blue, or the color white. It's a very, very simple mental object. The reason it needs to be so simple is that if it's complex, our mind needs to do too much work in order to hold it. It will be a simple color, a plain color, or one of the four elements: earth, water, fire, wind. We also have a space kasina and a light kasina. They're very, very simple mental concepts.

If it's too difficult for us with kasina to start straight with the nimitta—to close our eyes and have a very stable red kasina as a mental image—we can start a kasina practice with our eyes open. This would mean literally sitting and looking at something red, in the example of the red kasina, until we can close our eyes and be with that red object.

Once we've got the nimitta though, like our red, blue, or yellow color, or our earth, the rest of the jhana practice proceeds in exactly the same way as we've already described with the anapana nimitta.

The second class is brahmavihara jhana, and this is our loving-kindness jhana, compassion jhana, equanimity jhana, mudita jhana. When we practice these brahmaviharas—*metta*, *karuna*, *upekkha*, and *mudita*—the object of our attention by definition is a being. There's no such thing

as loving-kindness without a being. Loving-kindness by definition is loving a being. So the object of attention will be a being or a group of beings, and the nimitta that we work with to carry us into jhana will also be a being or a group of beings.

It means rather than having this light nimitta, our nimitta is a being or a group of beings, and we practice jhana in the same way as we've just described, but with the nimitta as a being or a group of beings.

For that reason, most people, but not everybody, but most people struggle to practice the brahmavihara jhanas as their first-ever jhana practice, because it's a difficult and complex nimitta. Some people can do it, but we usually don't recommend it. We usually recommend that people practice these jhanas when they've already got some facility practicing jhana with an easier, more simple object first.

What Is the Purpose of Developing Jhana?

In many spiritual traditions throughout the ages, also predating the Buddha, jhana samadhi was seen as the end goal. It was seen as the end goal in and of itself, sometimes described as unification with God or unification with a cosmic consciousness, or letting go of a small self and merging with a big self.

The key piece that the Buddha brought to the spiritual landscape is that samadhi jhana is not the end goal. It's very much an intermediate state and it's a tool of mind to go on to practice vipassana.

It's a tool of mind because it's cleared out all of the defilements and also because it's inclined us already to subtle states. So we will then use this very refined quality of attention that we've developed in jhana essentially to investigate reality and to directly observe, directly absorb, into the truth that all of reality is impermanent, suffering, and non-self—*anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*.

But the ins and outs of vipassana are beyond the scope, unfortunately, of these videos. So if you want to know more about those vipassana practices, then you need to get in touch with me, or read the suttas, read the commentaries, read the *Visuddhimagga*, go and ask some other competent vipassana teacher.

Is There a Task for This Stage of Practice?

The task at this stage of practice is to have a go at the second jhana.

If your first jhana is really stable, you're confident with it, then shorten the time in the first jhana, emerging from the first jhana and checking those five jhana factors. Notice that the first two are

course, wish for them to be removed, and focus back on that on that nimitta. Make an adhitthana for the time. Don't investigate anything! Don't investigate what those jhana factors are doing, until you emerge. When you emerge, check: Were there five or were there three? If there were five, just repeat. If there were three, well done, you're in the second jhana. Reduce the time in the first jhana and increase the time in the second jhana. Repeat this step many, many times.

Where Can I Learn More About This Practice?

Realistically, if you're practicing at these levels of meditation, then video content probably isn't going to be enough for you. You're going to want to reach out to a competent teacher so you can speak through some of the nuance and confusions that are arising in your personal practice.

You can definitely reach out to me. I've got a strong international community of people who are doing these practices in their daily lives, amongst parenting and working full-time jobs. It's definitely possible and there's strength in wise association. There's strength in seeing and doing these things.

I definitely suggest that you reach out to me if you want, or another competent teacher who's got some eyes on your practice and can speak through any of the little nuances that might be coming up for you.

Final Thoughts...

What I'd really like people to know is that these things are possible. Possible for you. People are doing it. Give it a go. If you feel enthusiastic about it, it's one of the best uses of a lifetime. Get on the cushion, get off of the screens, and actually do the practice. Thank you for your time and your questions. It's been a pleasure discussing these things with you. Thank you.