



## The Jhanas (Meditative Absorptions)

The Jhanas are eight altered states of consciousness which can arise during periods of strong concentration. The Jhanas are naturally occurring states of mind, but learning how to enter them at will and how to stay in them takes practice. Their principle use in Buddhist meditation is to generate ever increasing levels of concentration so that later when the meditative mind is turned to a practice that tends towards wisdom, it can do that practice with far less distraction.

Below are links to several places on the 'net where the Jhanas are discussed. Some of these pages are [mine](#); some are at [other sites](#) I've found.

- The [Access to Insight](#) website's [Jhana Page](#)
- The Jhanas are defined by the **Buddha** as [Right Concentration](#). His declaration of this - here in both [Pali](#) and [English](#) - can be found in many discourses including [DN 22](#), [MN 141](#) and [SN 45:8](#).
- [Sharpening Manjushri's Sword](#) The Jhanas in Theravadan Buddhist Meditation ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
This is revised edition of a [paper](#) I presented to the American Academy of Religion/Western Regional meeting on 25 Mar '97. It contains a bibliography and links to other sites that discuss the Jhanas.
- [Instruction for Entering Jhāna](#) ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
This is a reprint of an article that first appeared in *Insight Journal*, Fall 2002. It is a transcription of a talk I gave at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in April of 2002.
- [The Neurological Correlates of the Jhanas](#) ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
Inspired by Emily Yoffe's article at Slate Magazine on [Wanting and Liking](#) and discussions with several students & neuroscientists, I propose a tentative hypothesis.
- [Jhanas at the Forest Refuge](#) Part I ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
I spent the month of May 2006 on retreat at the [Forest Refuge](#) with [Ven. Pa Auk Sayadaw](#). This details some extra curricular exploration of the jhanas while more deeply concentrated than described in the papers above.
- [Jhanas at the Forest Refuge](#) Part II ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
I spent 9 1/2 months in 2011/2012 on retreat at the [Forest Refuge](#). [Ven. Pa Auk Sayadaw](#) was again teaching jhanas for 4 months of that time and I got to explore more of his teachings.
- [Interpretations of the Jhanas](#). ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
There is no real agreement among Jhana teachers as to what exactly the Jhanic state are! This paper outlines the various methods that I have heard about.
- [Five Factors for the First Jhana - NOT!](#). ~ **Leigh Brasington**  
As described in the suttas, the first jhana has only four factors, not five.
- [Arguments for the Importance of the Jhanas in the Suttas](#) ~ **Leigh Brasington**

A paper I wrote back in 1996 discussing the importance of the Jhanas in the Pali Cannon.

- [3 handouts on the jhana factors](#) for a day-long course I taught at the [Sati Center](#). ~ **Leigh Brasington**
-  Slides from a presentation on the Jhanas at the Secular Buddhism Conference at [The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies](#), 26 March, 2013: [Practical Jhanas: Right Concentration and the Suttas](#)  ~ **Leigh Brasington**.
- [Stephanie Nash interviews Leigh Brasington about the Jhanas](#)  
Several short YouTube videos on what jhanas are, and how one works with them in one's practice.

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- [The Jhānas](#) in Theravadan Buddhist Meditation ~ **Mahāthera Henepola Gunaratana**  
This classic book on the jhanas is now available on the 'net.
  - **Ajahn Brahmavamso** is a Theravaden Buddhist monk who lives in Western Australia. He studied extensively with Ajahn Cha in Thailand as well as in other places before returning to Australia. His definition of exactly what constituted a Jhana seems to imply Much stronger absorption than my own definition - or that of other Westerners I have discussed the Jhanas with (such as [Ayya Khema](#), [Thanissaro Bhikkhu](#) and others). He has given several talks on the Jhanas which have been transcribed and now appear on the 'net:
    - [The Basic Method of Meditation](#)
    - [Travelogue to the four Jhanas](#)  
Both of these come from talks given during a 9-day retreat in North Perth, Western Australia, December 1997
    - Other of his writings can be found at [The Buddhist Society of Western Australia Publications](#)
  - [Practical Advice for Meditators](#) ~ **Bhikkhu Khantipalo**
  - [The Jhanas: Meditative Absorptions](#) ~ **Jay Michaelson**
  - "Nimitta, nimitta, who's got a nimitta?" Ever wonder why the suttas don't mention "nimitta" but that "nimitta" is so important in the Visuddhimagga? Definitely read [The Mystery of the Breath Nimitta](#) ~ **Bhikkhu Sona**.
  - And for an explanation of what's going on in the brain when a nimitta appears, see [Near-Death Experiences: In or out of the body?](#) - scroll down to "The Physiology of the Tunnel" for the details ~ **Susan Blackmore**.
  - [Reinterpreting the Jhanas](#) by Roderick S. Bucknell is an excellent discussion of the difference between the Sutta Style Jhanas and the later Visuddhimagga Style Jhanas.
  - Two articles by **Biswadeb Mukherjee** on the pre-Buddhist history of the jhanas discuss [A Pre-Buddhist meditation system and Early Modifications by Gotama the Bodhisattva](#).
  - The Winter 2004 issue of [Tricycle](#) magazine has a special section on Jhanas.

- **Lloyd Burton** has written a paper entitled [The Jhanas and the Brahma Viharas](#) which discusses Brahma Vihara practice in relation to the Jhanas.
- The first Western conference on Jhana practice in Theravada Buddhism was held near Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, in June, 2001. See **Lloyd Burton's** report [Gathering Fruit and Planting Seeds](#) for the details.
- **NEW** A paper from the journal [Neural Plasticity](#) on neurological findings about Jhanas: [Case Study of Ecstatic Meditation: fMRI and EEG Evidence of Self-Stimulating a Reward System](#) (PDF version [here](#)) which includes an interesting [picture of Leigh Brasington's brain on Jhana](#). The picture is a "difference" picture - the difference is between my brain in a state of "rest" and my brain in 2nd Jhana. The blue areas got quieter; the red areas got more active.  
An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2008 Mind and Life Conference: [EEG Power and Coherence Analysis of an Expert Meditator in the Eight Jhanas](#) (MS-Word file).
- And finally, I've compiled a one page [Lists of Things To Do](#) that are helpful for entering the Jhanas ~ **Leigh Brasington**

For further reading on the Jhanas, see the books on my [Buddhist Reading List](#) that are marked with an asterisk.

Tho not specifically about the Jhanas, this [article from Newsweek](#) on meditation is interesting as well.

New Scientist reports that [self-awareness is switched off when the brain needs to concentrate hard](#).

Jean Holroyd discusses [The Science of Meditation and the State of Hypnosis](#) - not much about the Jhanas but interesting nonetheless.

Time magazine has an interesting article on consciousness (and not-self): [The Brain: The Mystery of Consciousness](#)

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[Dhyana in Buddhism - from Wikipedia](#) has a good write up, tho I disagree with some of the statements there.