

Śamatha

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Developing Concentration

Types of concentrations

Definition of an actual meditative absorption that is a concentration is: a virtuous knower included in the level of a concentration that has passed beyond the level below it by way of its branches. (Ocean of Sport p. 412)

Causal

The concentration gained in this life

- Mere first concentration – a person who has all five branches

- Special first concentration – a person who only has four, missing investigation which is coarser than the others and can be separated. Does not occur like this for the other 3 concentrations as there is not such difference in coarseness and subtlety.

Resultant birth

The concentration at the birth in lands of the first concentration. For example, for first concentration: (1) Family of Brahma (2) Entourage of Brahma (3) Great Brahma

Divisions

- Pure – not polluted by afflictions of the first concentration (but still contaminated)
- Uncontaminated – used by aryas as a mental bases for paths
- Afflicted – polluted by afflictions of the first concentration

Conducive Conditions

1. A conducive place (yul).
2. Little attachment – to people, friends and loved ones, food, clothing, our own bodies, affection, comfort, praise, blame, sleep, and so on.
3. Contentment with the food, clothing, weather conditions, and so on that we have.
4. Being rid of having many distracting activities, worldly affairs.
5. Pure ethical self-discipline.
6. Being rid of obsessive prejudiced thoughts (rnam-rtog) about what we usually consider desirable to do.

Maitreya's Mahayanasutra-alamkara) gives the five qualities of the first of the above six conducive conditions (a conducive place):

1. Easy availability of food and water.
2. An excellent spiritual situation (gnas), having been approved and sanctified by our own spiritual mentor or by previous masters who have meditated there.
3. An excellent geographic situation (sa), being secluded, quiet, distant from people who upset us, with a pleasant long-distance view of nature, no sound of running water or the ocean to mesmerize us, and a good climate.
4. The excellent company of friends similarly engaged and either living nearby or practicing with us.
5. The items required for a happy bonding (Skt. yoga) with the practice, namely having the full teachings and instructions for the practice and having thought about and understood them beforehand so that we are free of questions and doubts.

Objects of meditation

Body of a Buddha

Imagine a Buddha sitting on top of the heads; then a duplicate the size of the top joint of the thumb separates from that Buddha, and we imagine it at whatever place is most

comfortable - at eye level or navel level, about six feet in front of us; or inside the throat, inside the heart, or inside the solar plexus.

Choosing the body of a Buddha as the object of observation brings great benefit. It hastens the collection of meritorious power, through recollecting the Buddha's qualities, and serves as a basis for cleansing negativities; for a trainee in the Mantra Vehicle, it gives familiarity with meditating on oneself as a deity.

One's own mind

The object of observation is the mind itself, which has three features: it is clear; it is a knower, and it is empty.

There is a possibility of error because, with that achievement, one attains a state similar to a realization of emptiness. The achievement of the bliss of pliancy, could thus be mistaken for innate bliss and having achieved the primordial, innate wisdom-consciousness.

Pervasive objects

1. Analytical image
2. Non-analytical image
3. Observing limits of phenomena, referring to both the varieties and mode
4. Thorough achievement of the purpose, referring not to the object of observation but to the purpose for which one is meditating; this class includes all the fruits of meditative stabilization from liberation up to the omniscience of a Buddha.

Objects for purifying behaviour

Antidotal for people who are dominated by certain afflictions.

Desire

Forms of ugliness to counter the affliction of desire, like the 36 impure substances, or the nine facets of external ugliness (the four colours of rotting corpses - putrid blue, putrid black, pus colour, and putrid red; two antidotes to attachment to shape of being chewed at or pieces having been ripped off; two antidotes to attachment to touch of being eaten at by worms and skeletons held together by ligaments.

Hatred

Two types of which the first is the mental engagement of belief, pretending a meditative equipoise in the present and the second directed towards the future:

1. To take cognizance of friends father, mother, mate, and other friends - and to cultivate the belief that they have attained happiness free of suffering, to see them that way. Similarly, the practitioner concentrates on persons toward whom he or she is neutral and on enemies. This is called a mental engagement of belief.
2. Called taking to mind, it has three aspects.
 - a. The thought, with respect to friends, persons toward whom the practitioner is neutral, and enemies, " How nice it would be if they possessed happiness free of suffering!"

- b. "May they possess happiness free of suffering!"
- c. "I will cause them to possess happiness free of suffering." *Obscuration*

Mediation on dependent arising to counter belief in phenomena as not being created by a permanent agent or creator but as having their own function - that of creating their own specific effect. In this way one equally counters the notion of a permanent self.

Pride

Meditation on the constituents in our own continuum, until a sense of unpleasantness arises. *Discursiveness*

Meditation on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. One can imagine discursiveness as a dark colour being expelled with the breath; then, with inhalation, imagine the blessings of the Three Jewels being drawn into us in the form of bright light. Once discursiveness has been overcome, one continues without the visualization.

Skilful objects

By taking them as objects of observation, we can become skilled with respect to them.

The aggregates

As being the basis of designation of 'person'.

Constituents

The six objects serve as the objects apprehended by the six consciousnesses, and the six consciousnesses have the function of apprehending their six objects. When we understand this, we understand that there is no separate creator of these, such as a substantially existent self

Sources

When we understand that the six powers use the six objects and that pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings are produced as a result of this use, we understand that there is no substantially existent person separate from these.

Dependent-arising

Refers to the fact that all internal and external phenomena depend on causes and conditions for their arising. A lifetime in cyclic existence depends on its root cause, ignorance, so it is not produced causelessly and is not produced from discordant causes, such as a permanent deity.

The appropriate and the inappropriate

Involves an understanding of what effects arise, and what effects do not arise, from what causes, with regard to karma.

Objects for purifying afflictions

Objects for purifying afflictions are of two types - those having the aspect of grossness and peacefulness and those having the aspect of the truths

The five faults according to the Abhidhamma

Introduction

The “hindrance” (nīvaraṇa) are singled out because they they “hinder” the proper functioning of the mind. The hindrances not only obstruct absorption attainment, they also impede the establishment of the awakening factors.

If a hindrance is present and one does not recognize it, one is “mis-meditating”.

When Anuruddha complained to his friend Sariputta that despite concentrative attainments, unshaken energy, and well-established mindfulness, he was unable to break through to full realization, Sāriputta pointed out that Anuruddha’s boasting of concentration attainments was nothing but a manifestation of conceit, his unshaken energy was simply restlessness, and his concern about not yet having awakened was just worry.

This technique of simple recognition constitutes an ingenious way of turning obstacles to meditation into meditation objects. Practised in this way, bare awareness of a hindrance becomes a middle path between suppression and indulgence.

Absence of the hindrances forms the starting point for a causal sequence that leads via delight, joy, tranquillity, and happiness (pāmojja, pīti, passaddhi, and sukha) to concentration and the attainment of absorption.

The positive act of recognizing and even rejoicing in the absence of the hindrances, which then paves the way for deep concentration.

Two sets of similes

The first set of similes illustrates the effect of each hindrance through the image of a bowl filled with water and used as a mirror in order to look at the reflection of one’s face. In all five cases, one is unable to see one’s reflection properly in the water:

- The effect of sensual desire is similar to water mixed with dye in that it colours one’s perception
- aversion resembles water heated to the boil; as one gets heated
- sloth-and-torpor is compared to water overgrown with algae; as it result in stagnation
- restlessness-and-worry affect the mind like water stirred by wind; as through them one is tossed about
- doubt is like dark and muddy water, because it obscures one’s vision.

The other set of similes illustrates the absence of the hindrances:

- To be free from sensual desire is like being relieved from a debt; as it’s agitation the is comparable to being heavily in debt
- To be free from aversion is like recovering from physical illness; as the tension created by it is quite literally a dis-ease
- To be unobstructed by sloth-and-torpor is akin to being released from prison; as they dull and imprison the mind

- To be free from the agitation of restlessness-and-worry is like being liberated from slavery; as they can control the mind to such an extent that one is completely at its mercy
- To overcome doubt resembles crossing a dangerous desert safely; as it leaves one in a state of insecurity, not knowing which way to turn.

Since the first set of similes illustrates the presence of the hindrances (in terms of their debilitating effect), while the second describes the relief of being free of them, these two sets correspond to the two alternatives for contemplating the hindrances: awareness of their presence or of their absence.

Definitions from Abhidhammattha Sanghaha

Greed (lobha): covers all degrees of selfish desire, longing, attachment, and clinging. Its characteristic is grasping an object. Its function is sticking, as meat sticks to a hot pan. It is manifested as not giving up. Its proximate cause is seeing enjoyment in things that lead to bondage. Here it refers specifically to sensory desire (kamacchanda).

Hatred (dosa): comprises all kinds and degrees of aversion, ill will, anger, irritation, annoyance, and animosity. Its characteristic is ferocity. Its function is to spread, or to burn up its own support, i.e. the mind and body in which it arises. It is manifested as persecuting, and its proximate cause is a ground for annoyance. (syn. Ill will (vyapada)).

Antidote is moral conduct. By keeping the five precepts incumbent on a lay-follower of Buddhism one gives a gift of fearlessness, non-anger and non-ill-will to other beings.

- First one needs a clear recognition of the presence and causes of ill-will, and then to know it as evil. Knowing it thus with right effort one can arouse energy and strive to overcome any ill-will and prevent its re-arising.
- Ill-will is listed as a bodily tie. Shortness of breath, clenching of teeth and tensing of shoulders are easily detectable bodily indicators of the presence of ill-will, and to consciously counteract them by relaxation can have remarkable effects on one's mental condition.
- As ill-will inevitably involves a narrow perspective, usually focussing on the irritating and displeasing aspects of a situation or person, at the exclusion of other aspects. This can escalate towards action. Thus a conscious broadening of the scope of perception can go a long way in undermining the foundations of ill-will. True broadening of the mind, and removal of ill-will comes about through the development of loving kindness, mettā, whose meditative radiation is quite literally "boundless", as well as being free from anger and ill-will.
- Additional tools for overcoming ill-will include:
 - consciously ignoring the negative qualities of a person that is experienced as irritating, and instead directing attention to whatever positive qualities can be found in him or her

- In case one is unable to find anything positive, then one develops compassion, *karuṇā*, as a person bereft of any positive quality should indeed call up one's compassion and pity.
- Equanimity can help to overcome irritation, or else trying to forget the issue that has caused irritation, or reflecting on the fact that all beings are the heirs of their own deeds
- Practising wise reflection repeatedly, associating with good friends, and having suitable conversations as means for overcoming ill-will. Those who are under the influence of ill-will tend to associate with others who have the same mental inclination.

Sloth (thīna): sluggishness or dullness of mind. Its characteristic is lack of driving power. Its function is to dispel energy. It is manifested as the sinking of the mind. Its proximate cause is unwise attention to boredom, drowsiness, etc.

Torpor (middha): the morbid state of the mental factors. Its characteristic is unwieldiness. Its function is to smother. It is manifested as drooping, or as nodding and sleepiness. Its proximate cause is the same as that of sloth. Sloth and torpor always occur in conjunction, and are opposed to energy (*virīya*). Sloth is identified as sickness of consciousness (*cittagelaṇṇa*), torpor as sickness of the mental factors (*kāyagelaṇṇa*). As a pair they constitute one of the five hindrances, which is overcome by initial application (*vitakka*).

Antidote to sloth and torpor is the development of “perception of light”, *ālokasaññā*, together with mindfulness and clear comprehension. Some discourses associate the expression “perception of light” with a mind that is “open”, *vivaṭa*, and “uncovered”, *apariyonaddha*, by day and by night, and indicate that such “perception of light” will lead to knowledge and vision. This suggests the expression “perception of light” to refer to the development of mental clarity. The commentaries, however, take the expression “perception of light” more literally. The task Mindfulness in relation to this hindrance ranges from clear recognition of the presence or absence of sloth-and-torpor to understanding what has led to the arising of this hindrance, what will lead to its removal, and how a future arising of sloth-and-torpor can be prevented.

Restlessness (uddhacca): Restlessness (or agitation) has the characteristic of disquietude, like water whipped up by the wind. Its function is to make the mind unsteady, as wind makes a banner ripple. It is manifested as turmoil. Its proximate cause is unwise attention to mental disquiet.

Worry (kukkucca): a worry or remorse after having done wrong. Its characteristic is subsequent regret. Its function is to sorrow over what has and what has not been done. It is manifested as remorse. Its proximate cause is what has and what has not been done (i.e. wrongs of commission and omission).

Doubt: signifies spiritual doubt, from a Buddhist perspective the inability to place confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, and the training. Its characteristic is doubting. Its

function is to waver. It is manifested as indecisiveness and as taking various sides. Its proximate cause is unwise attention.

Antidotal aspects of Awakening Factors

Developing out of well-established *Mindfulness*:

Investigation of dhammas: derived from the verb ‘vicinati’, whose range of meanings includes both ‘investigation’ into nature of subjective experience and ‘discrimination’, correlating the experience with the teachings of the Buddha. Contrasts with **doubt**, which arises owing to the lack of clarity about what is wholesome and unwholesome. It arouses:

Energy: Related to putting forth effort and qualified by the attribute ‘unshaken’. To be applied with continuity (parallels ‘diligence’), it can manifest both mentally and physically. It stands in direct opposition to **sloth and torpor**. Branch of definite emergence according to OCR. Leads to the arising of:

Joy: a non-sensual type of joy, such as the one experienced during absorption attainment.

Tranquillity: Related to physical and mental calmness and therefore a direct antidote to **restlessness and worry**, but also to elation from earlier progress with investigation. Called pliancy in OCR. Leads to a happy state of mind, which in turn facilitates:

Concentration: Arises because of development of calmness and lack of distraction. Can function as an awakening factor even without initial application. Culmination of awakening factors comes with establishment of:

Equanimity: A balanced state of mind resulting from concentration and well developed satipaṭṭhāna, when the meditator is capable of dwelling ‘independently, without clinging to anything in the world’.

As mental factor: Neutrality of mind (tatramajjhataṭṭā): The Pali term for this cetasika literally means “there in the middleness.” It is a synonym for equanimity (upekkhā), not as neutral feeling, but as a mental attitude of balance, detachment, and impartiality. It has the characteristic of conveying consciousness and the mental factors evenly. Its function is to prevent deficiency and excess, or to prevent partiality. It is manifested as neutrality. It should be seen as the state of looking on with equanimity in the citta and cetasikas, like a charioteer who looks on with equanimity at the thoroughbreds progressing evenly along the roadway. Neutrality of mind becomes the sublime quality of equanimity towards living beings. As such it treats beings free from discrimination, without preferences and prejudices, looking upon all as equal. This equanimity should not be confused with its “near enemy,” the worldly-minded indifference due to ignorance.

Five hindrances according to Asanga

Hindrance	Antidote
Laziness	Faith
	Aspiration
	Effort
	Pliancy
Forgetting the instruction	Mindfulness
Laxity and excitement	Introspection
Non-application	Application
Overapplication	Non-application

Laziness

A mental factor which, through its own power, causes procrastination with respect to cultivating concentration:

- Laziness of neutral activities is putting off meditation by engaging in neutral activities such as sleep or gardening.
- Laziness of attachment to bad activities is thinking about negative things such as one's enemies rather than cultivating concentration.
- Laziness of inadequacy is, for example, putting off concentration by thinking that one could not possibly attain the realizations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Forgetfulness

A mindfulness that is concomitant with afflictions. It has the function of acting as a support for distraction. 'Forgetting the precept' means that one loses the object of observation.

Laxity (mental dullness)

A sub-division of lethargy. Lethargy is a heaviness of mind and body; a state of being close to sleep. It causes an unserviceability of mind and body and is included within obscuration and its entity of lethargy can be either non-virtuous or neutral, whereas the entity of laxity can be either virtuous or neutral. When lethargy arises during the cultivation of meditative stabilization, it is a contradictory circumstance. However, the reason that lethargy is not listed as a fault and that laxity is, is that lethargy is less frequent than laxity, but when laxity is mentioned, lethargy is implied.

A distracted mind which destroys the intensity of clarity in a concentrated mind, due to:

- Decreasing concentration (loss of intensity)
- Lethargy and sleepiness (cloudy mind)
- Overly withdrawn mind (loss of clarity)

Laxity	Stability	Clarity	Intensity of clarity
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Coarse	Yes	No	No
Subtle	Yes	Yes	No

'Clarity,' refers here not to the clarity of the object but to the clarity of the mind apprehending the object. Without clarity the mind seems dark, like in a shadow. Without intensity of clarity there is stability and clarity, but the mind's mode of apprehension has become loose with respect to the object. If, within that looseness, stability increases it turns into subtle laxity. With intensity of clarity, there is not only stability and clarity but also a sense of tightness of mind with respect to the object. It is difficult to distinguish between subtle laxity and meditative stabilization.

Excitement

A division of attachment. It is a disturbed mental state which loses the object of concentration and scatters towards external objects of attachment.

"Scattering" means the moving of the mind to external objects. Within scattering, there are many types, such as desirous and hateful. Almost all distractions are cases of the scattering of the mind. Excitement itself is a case of scattering that occurs only with regard to objects of desire. It is posited as one of the five faults and scattering is not because, in the cultivation of meditative stabilization, there are more cases of excitement than of scattering.

- Gross excitement completely loses the object of meditation.
- Subtle excitement holds the object, but a corner of the mind has come under the influence of discursiveness (vikalpa, rnam rtog), and pleasing object of desire is about to appear to the mind.

Not applying the remedies

Even though laxity and excitement have been recognized, one does not apply the remedies.

Overapplication

Consists of applying remedies for laxity and excitement even though they have not arisen. Though overapplication occurs mainly in the eighth mental abiding, a similitude of it can occur earlier. Thus, in some sense, all five faults can arise in the first mental abiding.

The Eight antidotes

Faith (śraddhā, dad-pa)

A conviction, clarity, and wishing with respect to an existent (virtuous beings) that is endowed with excellent qualities and power. It has the function of acting as a support for aspiration. Three types:

1. **Clarifying (admiring) faith:** a clear mind engendered by seeing the excellent qualities of those endowed with concentration. It is called "clarifying" because the

murkiness of the mind is cleared away, whereupon all excellent qualities of realization become suitable to arise in one's continuum.

2. **Faith of conviction:** the gaining of conviction through contemplating the methods and stages of concentration.
3. **Wishing (aspirational) faith:** having ascertained the disadvantages of a distracted, dull mind and the disadvantages of the desire realm or the four noble truths, one thinks I will definitely obtain calm-abiding.

Aspiration (chanda, 'dun-pa)

the very wish to be endowed with this or that [attribute] of a desired thing, concentration in this case. It has the function of acting as a support for making effort.

Joyous effort (vyayama, rtsol-ba)

Vasubandhu: the antidote for laziness and a mind that is enthusiastic about virtue. Asanga: a mind that is enthusiastic in regard to armoring, application, non-inferiority, irreversibility, and non-complacency. It has the function of fulfilling and accomplishing the class of virtue:

- **Armoring** is the donning of the great armor of preceding attitude, a mental enthusiasm prior to embarking on a virtuous activity.
- **Application** is a mind that is enthusiastic when engaging in practice through application. It is of two types: constant application and respectful application.
- **Non-inferiority** is a generation of enthusiasm when engaging in virtue without the mind being discouraged, thinking, "How could one such as I do this?"
- **Irreversibility** is an accomplished mental enthusiasm such that one cannot be diverted by other circumstances at the time of engaging in virtuous activities.
- **Non-complacency** is exertion that does not just rest complacent with some trifling virtue, but seeks higher qualities.

Suppleness or pliancy (praśrabdhi, shin-sbyangs)

A serviceability of body and mind due to severing the continuum of unfavorable states of body and mind. It has the function of eliminating all obscurations. Used as antidotes throughout cultivation of the nine stages in the sense that one can reflect on the benefits of having suppleness.

- **Physical pliancy** is such that, through the power of meditative stabilization, unserviceability of the body is purified, whereupon the body is buoyant and light, like a ball of cotton, and can be applied to virtuous activity according to one's wish.
- **Mental pliancy** is such that, through the power of meditative stabilization, the mind becomes free of unserviceability, whereupon it becomes amenable to application to an object of observation without hindrance.

Mindfulness (smṛti, dran-pa)

A non-forgetfulness of the mind with respect to a familiar object. It has the function of nondistractedness.

Introspection (samprajaña, shes-bzhin)

Also 'clear comprehension,' 'circumspection.' Closely related to, and often appears in compound with, mindfulness. The factor that observes the mind to determine whether it has strayed from its object (laxity and excitement). It is not the actual antidote, because it merely identifies laxity and excitement.

The antidote for laxity is finding the right balance between looseness and tightness of the mode of apprehension. If while tightening the mode of apprehension, laxity is still being generated, it means the mind has become too withdrawn inside, a case of coarse laxity. The antidote here is to enlarge the scope of the object, by making it brighter, or paying slightly more attention to the features of the object. If laxity still persists, the original object of observation should be given up in order to engage in means of invigorating the mind.

The antidote to persistent coarse excitement is leaving the object and contemplating somber subjects like death, impermanence etc. If this doesn't help force should be applied. Subtle excitement is caused by the mind's being a little too tight, in which case the mode of apprehension should be loosened a little.

Pāli sources refer to four aspects of clear comprehension, which involve the application of mindfulness in practice.

- **Purpose** (P. sātthaka): whether the action will be in the best interests of oneself and others; its principal criterion is whether it leads to growth in dharma.
- **Suitability** (P. sappāya): skillfulness in determining if an action is in accord with the appropriate time, place, and personal capacity.
- **Domain of meditation** (gocara): making all experiences topic of mindful awareness, or including them in meditational topic.
- **Nondelusion** (asammoha): recognizing that what seem to be the actions of a person are in fact an impersonal series of mental and physical processes. Helps to counteract the tendency to view all events from a personal point of view.

Samprajanya thus expands upon the clarity of thought generated by mindfulness by incorporating the additional factor of wisdom.

Application (abhisamskāra, 'du byed-pa)

Applying the antidote at exactly the right time after recognizing distraction through introspection. It concerns the mental factor of intention, a compositional mental action of the mind. It has the function of engaging the mind in virtue, non-virtue, or the unspecified. (check this latter point, as the Tibetan term 'du-byed refers to saṃskāra, 'volitional formations')

Non-application (anabhisamskāra, 'du mi-byed-pa) or Equanimity (btang snyoms)

A discordance with afflictive states, an evenness of mind, a dwelling in a natural state, and a spontaneous abiding, within abiding in non-attachment, non-hatred, non-ignorance, as well as effort. It has the function of not allowing an opportunity for afflictions.

When the ninth abiding is achieved, one no longer needs not strive to use the antidotes to laxity and excitement and one attains a spontaneous abiding of the mind.

The function of equanimity is specified as "not allowing an opportunity for afflictions," because upon attaining the ninth mental abiding, the manifest afflictions of the desire realm are easily overcome, and in particular, laxity and excitation do not arise during meditative equipoise.

In general, there are three types of equanimity:

1. Equanimity of application
2. Equanimity which is feeling
3. Immeasurable equanimity

From among these, this [mental factor here] is the first one.

Six Powers

(*bala, stobs*)

1. Hearing (*śruta, thos-pa*)
2. Thinking (*cintā, bsam-pa*)
3. Mindfulness (*smṛti, dran-pa*)
4. Awareness (*samprajaña, shes-bzhin*)
5. Effort (*vīrya, brtson-'grus*)
6. Familiarity (*paricaya, yong-su 'dris-pa*)

Four modes of mental engagement

(*manaskāra, yid-la byed-pa*)

1. Forcible engagement (*balavāhana, sgrim-ste 'jug-pa*)
2. Interrupted engagement (*sacchidravāhana, chad-cing 'jug-pa*)
3. Uninterrupted engagement (*niśchidravāhana, med-par 'jug-pa*)
4. Spontaneous engagement (*anābhogavāhana, lhun-grub-tu 'jug-pa*)

Progression of the nine stages

Six Powers	Nine Mental Abidings	Four Engagements
Hearing	1. Setting the mind	Forcible Engagement
Thinking	2. Continuous setting	

Mindfulness	3. Resetting	Interrupted Engagement
	4. Close setting	
Introspection	5. Disciplining	
	6. Pacifying	
Effort	7. Thoroughly pacifying	Uninterrupted Engagement
	8. Making one-pointed	
Familiarity	9. Setting in Equipose	Spontaneous Engagement

1. Setting the Mind

Power: hearing, to place your mind on the object you need to receive instruction

Mental engagement: forcible engagement, repeatedly bringing the mind back

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness (main)
- Forgetting the object (main)
- Lethargy: heaviness of mind and body; state of being close to sleep. Causes unserviceability of mind and body. Non-virtuous or neutral. When laxity is mentioned, lethargy is implied.
- Course laxity: having stability-the ability to stay on the object -but not clarity (of mind apprehending it), as if having become dark
- Subtle laxity: having stability and clarity but not intensity of clarity. Mind's mode of apprehension has become loose with respect to the object and within that looseness, stability has increased. Worst unfavourable circumstance. Can even lead to coarse laxity. The mind is too withdrawn inside.
- Course excitement: case of scattering, but of the side of desire. One loses the object
- Subtle excitement: object is not lost, but corner of mind has come under the influence of discursiveness. Caused by the mind's being a little too tight

Achieved when you can maintain undisturbed concentration for twenty breaths.

2. Continuous setting

Power: thinking or reflection, giving insight into freedom from distractions.

Mental engagement: forcible engagement

Benefit: Extend slightly the duration of the setting of the mind on its object to 1,5 min (or a mala of OM MANI PADME HUNG). Sense that thought is resting.

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness (main)
- Forgetting the object (main)
- Laxity
- Excitement

Duration of distraction is still longer than the duration of good concentration.

3. Resetting

Power: mindfulness

Mental engagement: interrupted engagement

Benefit: Growing familiarity; increased duration of staying on the object of observation and ability to abide on the object and shorten the periods of distraction. Distraction is immediately noted and attended.

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness (main)
- Forgetting the object (main)
- Laxity
- Excitement

The duration of distractions is much less than before.

4. Close Setting

Power: mindfulness gains strength, but effort still required.

Mental engagement: interrupted engagement

Benefit: Object of observation is no longer lost. Mindfulness has matured.

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness
- Only subtle excitement (main)
- Course (and subtle) laxity (main)

5. Disciplining

Power: introspection overcoming subtle laxity

Mental engagement: interrupted engagement

Benefit: As before meditator is able to stay on the object continuously and mind withdraws too much, until strong laxity develops, causing one to enter Disciplining. Especially

necessary to heighten and revivify the mind by contemplating the advantages of meditative stabilisation, and thereby overcoming dislike for meditative stabilisation (why next stage is called pacifying)

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness
- Only subtle excitement
- Course and subtle laxity

6. Pacifying

Power: introspection overcomes subtle excitement. Subtle laxity is rare.

Mental Engagement: interrupted engagement

Benefit: Mind revivified, danger of generating subtle excitement: meditator has arrived at the sixth mental abiding.

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness
- Subtle excitement (main)
- Subtle laxity

7. Thoroughly Pacifying

Power: effort, perseverance showing the disadvantages of dullness and excitement and, although there is still the risk that they will arise, they do not actually harm the sixth or the seventh stages.

Mental Engagement: interrupted engagement

Benefit: Called thorough pacifying because, when in between sessions afflictions arise meditator is able either to rely on an antidote or, through not getting involved in these afflictions, to suppress them. The powers of mindfulness and introspection have reached their maximum and it is difficult for subtle dullness and excitement to arise. Gaps in concentration may occur but one continues through them.

Faults and antidotes:

- Laziness
- Subtle excitement
- Subtle laxity

These no longer harm process of meditative stabilisation. Not necessary to rely on antidotes to subtle laxity and subtle excitement set forth earlier; it is sufficient merely to stop them.

8. Making One-Pointed

Power: effort has matured, requiring only initial application after which one continues effortlessly throughout the session

Mental Engagement: uninterrupted engagement, by dullness or excitement.

Benefit: Absence of laxity and excitement: at the beginning of the session, the meditator is able to rely on only a little effort with regard to them.

Meditator is able to loosen the exertion involved in introspection

Faults and antidotes:

- Over-application

9. Setting in Equipose

Power: familiarity

Mental Engagement: spontaneous engagement

Benefit: Point at which the meditator is able, spontaneously and without any striving at all, to engage in meditative stabilisation. Not yet have actual calm abiding.

Faults and antidotes: none

This is called the single-pointed calm abiding of the Desire Realm because it is the best mind of the Desire Realm. It is only an approximation of calm abiding, not actual calm abiding.

Śamatha

Is defined by the attainment of pliancy.

Increased familiarity with meditative stabilization overcomes bad physical states of the winds (prana or rlung), that are an unserviceability of mind with respect to virtuous objects, which generates a sense of bliss. The top of the head tingles, because the winds of the bad physical states are leaving the body through the top of the head.

This leads to mental pliancy, bringing serviceability of mind. This in turn leads to a wind of physical pliancy pervading the whole body, overcoming of bad physical states.

Having a sense that the body has melted into the object of observation, and no sense of other objects, the meditator has the special bliss of mental pliancy accompanied by a feverish joy. When this is calmed immovable mental pliancy is attained, according with meditative stabilization, the meditator has attained calm abiding.

Simultaneously the preparation (samantaka, nyer bsdogs) called the not unable (anagamyā, mi lcog med), a mind, not of the Desire-, but of the Form Realm is attained.

Signs:

- There is a sense of appearances vanishing and of the mind fusing with space itself
- The mind is steady like a mountain
- The five sense consciousness are dormant
- The meditator has great clarity and feels as though he or she could count the particles in a wall
- Even during post-meditation a portion of pliancy, or mental and physical serviceability remains and afflictions are generated to a lesser degree, are weaker, and disappear of their own accord
- Upon rising from equipoise, the meditator has a sense of achieving a new body
- The meditator is free of the five obstructions: aspiration to attributes of the Desire Realm; harmfulness; lethargy and sleep; excitement and contrition; and doubt

Stages in Theravada

Introduction

Development of Samatha is described in terms of three successive mental images or 'signs' (nimitta) and five stages of joy (Pīti); gladness or rapture arising from the abandonment of the five hindrances in favor of concentration on a single object. These stages are outlined by the Theravada Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga and the earlier Upatissa in the Vimuttimaggā.

Five stages of joy

Slight joy (khuddaka pīti): Raises the hairs of the body

Momentary joy (khanika pīti): Arises momentarily like repeated flashes of lightning

Showering joy (okkantika pīti): Washes over the body, like waves, again and again and then subsides

Uplifting joy (ubbega pīti): Sensations of lifting of the body into the air

Suffusing joy (pharana pīti): Pervades the whole body touching every part - signals 'access concentration'.

The three nimittas

The three kinds of 'nimitta,' 'sign' or 'image' (although this latter meaning is not always intended) do not appear in the Piṭakas. There the use rather suggests association of ideas, than the more definitely visualized "image" in some instances of the "counterpart sign" described in the following chapters.

These are certain mental images, perceptions or sensations which indicate a further refinement of the state of meditative awareness.

- Preliminary-work sign: the external object
- Learning sign: the mental image

- Counterpart sign: when the hindrances eventually become suppressed and the defilements subside, the mind becomes concentrated with access concentration, and the counterpart sign arises. The difference between the earlier learning sign and the counterpart sign is that in the learning sign any fault in the kasiṇa is apparent. But the counterpart sign appears as if breaking out from the learning sign, and a hundred times, a thousand times more purified, like a looking-glass disk drawn from its case, like a mother-of-pearl dish well washed, like the moon's disk coming out from behind a cloud, like cranes against a thunder cloud. But it has neither colour nor shape; for if it had, it would be cognizable by the eye, gross, susceptible of comprehension [by insight] and stamped with the three characteristics. But it is not like that. For it is born only of perception in one who has obtained concentration, being a mere mode of appearance.

Following the establishment of access concentration (upacāra-samādhi), one can enter the four jhanas, powerful states of joyful absorption in which the entire body is pervaded with Pīti.

(this needs to be checked and elaborated)

Preparations for the concentrations

Definition: Virtuous knower included in the level of a concentration that is the means for attaining an actual meditative absorption of a concentration, which is its respective object of attainment.

The mode of cultivation is that when excitement begins to be generated the meditator engages in stabilizing meditation, and when laxity begins to be generated he or she engages in analytical meditation.

Divisions:

1. Preparation for the first concentration
 - a. Not unable (trans-worldly or uncontaminated)
 - b. Mental application of a mere beginner (CA)
 - c. Purifying afflictive emotions (see chart)
2. Preparation for the second concentration
3. Preparation for the third concentration 4. Preparation for the fourth concentration.

Notes:

- Mental preparation = means of attaining the respective concentration.
- Preparations 1-6 can have two aspects:
 - Aspect of grossness and peacefulness
 - Sixteen aspect of the truths
- The last liberated path is the concentration

- The process is the same to attain 2nd, 3rd, 4th concentrations, but the preparation not unable is only connected with the 1st concentration.
- Not Unable – needed for bodhicitta therefore needed to enter the Mahayana path. Not Unable preparation is a supermundane uncontaminated path because it abandons all the afflictions of the desire realm simultaneously.

Cultivating the 6 preparations or meditating on the preparation not unable require different attitudes. In the first case one seeks to abandon the afflictions in stages, seeing the faults of the desire realm and seeing the form realm as peaceful. In the second case one generates the preparation 'not unable' to straight away destroy all the afflictions. The six preparations can never become a path, but if the second persons attains to a path, his preparation notunable itself becomes a path.

Preparations purifying afflictive emotions		Path		Afflictions of the Desire Realm	
Mental contemplation of a mere beginner (calm abiding)					
1. Mental contemplation of individual knowledge of the character		One reflects on the individual character of the gross (desire realm) and subtle (first concentration). One proceeds to pass through nine stages of calm abiding to attain a special insight. When this is attained, simultaneously one attains the 2nd preparation.			
2. Mental contemplation arisen from belief		This preparation arose from the belief in the two aspects of the previous preparation.			
3. Mental contemplation through isolation	Small	Small	Uninterrupted path	Great	Great
			Liberated path		
		Middling	Uninterrupted path		Middling
			Liberated path		
		Great	Uninterrupted path		Small
			Liberated path		
4. Mental contemplation of withdrawal or joy	Middling	Small	Uninterrupted path	Middling	Great
			Liberated path		
		Middling	Uninterrupted path		Middling
			Liberated path		
		Great	Uninterrupted path		Small
			Liberated path		
5. Mental contemplation of analysis		The meditator tests himself by visualising objects that previously generated hatred or desire to see if there are afflictions left. Then he understands there are some left...			
6. Mental contemplation of final training	Great	Small	Uninterrupted path	Small	Great
			Liberated path		
		Middling	Uninterrupted path		Middling
			Liberated path		
		Great	Uninterrupted path		Small
			Liberated path		
First Concentration					
The afflictions of the desire real have been blocked					

Afflictions of the first concentration:

1. **Attachment:** to the bliss of the 1st concentration
2. **View:** through their newly acquired clairvoyance, they see their past and future lives and assume the self to be permanent.
3. **Pride:** at having attained this concentration "Who but me could have attained this state?"

4. **Ignorance** & 5. **Doubt**: through the power of ignorance the meditator doubts if this concentration is a path to liberation. Since the first concentration is not a path of liberation – this doubt is mistaken

The Four Concentrations

Noble concentration

"Now what, monks, is noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions? Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness — is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions." (MN 117)

"These are the four developments of concentration. Which four? There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now. There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision. There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to mindfulness & alertness. There is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the ending of the effluents.

(1) *"And what is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now? There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' 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. This is the development of concentration that... leads to a pleasant abiding in the here & now.*

(2) *"And what is the development of concentration that... leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision? There is the case where a monk attends to the perception of light and is resolved on the perception of daytime [at any hour of the day]. Day [for him] is the same as night, night is the same as day. By means of an awareness open & unhampered, he develops a brightened mind. This is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the attainment of knowledge & vision.*

(3) *"And what is the development of concentration that... leads to mindfulness & alertness? There is the case where feelings are known to the monk as they arise, known as they persist, known as they subside. Perceptions are known to him as they arise, known as they persist, known as they subside. Thoughts are known to him as they arise, known as they*

persist, known as they subside. This is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to mindfulness & alertness.

(4) "And what is the development of concentration that... leads to the ending of the effluents? There is the case where a monk remains focused on arising & falling away with reference to the five clinging-aggregates: 'Such is form, such its origination, such its passing away. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.' This is the development of concentration that, when developed & pursued, leads to the ending of the effluents.

"These are the four developments of concentration." (AN 4.41)

Concentration	Branches			Remark
1st Concentration Separated for the afflictions of the Desire Realm	Bases	1. Meditative Stabilisation	The mind abides single-pointedly on the object, which are the bases of the other two branches.	Meditative stabilisation is not complete here, although it is both clear and stable. This is because the 1st concentration has investigation and analysis which prevent it reaching its peak.
	Benefit	2. Bliss 3. Joy	Actually, one thing (mental bliss) seen from two points of view. Two benefits: (1) helps the body become lighter (2) causes the accompanying mental factors to become joyful	
	Antidote	4. Analysis 5. Investigation	Antidotal branches because they cause separation from the faults of the desire realm.	
2nd Concentration Separated for the afflictions of the 1 st Concentration	Bases	1. Meditative Stabilisation	Same as previous concentration	Investigation and analysis are no longer present, therefore meditative stabilisation becomes complete. However, benefit is not complete in the 2nd because both joy and bliss are present.
	Benefit	2. Bliss 3. Joy	Same as previous concentration	
	Antidote	4. Internal clarity a. Mindfulness b. Introspection c. Equanimity	Mindfulness is the nonforgetfulness of the objects of the 2nd concentration. Introspection determines if the mind is abiding on the object or not. Equanimity is the mental factor that frees the mind from fluctuation caused by investigation and analysis during the 1st concentration.	
3rd Concentration Separated for the afflictions of the 2 nd Concentration	Bases	1. Meditative Stabilisation		Because joy is not present in the 3rd concentration, benefit is complete. However, thorough purity is not complete because the meditator still has some of the eight faults (inhalation, exhalation and the feeling of bliss).
	Benefit	2. Bliss	Called the branch of bliss produced by the separation [from joy] brought about by mindfulness, introspection and equanimity.	
	Antidote	3. Mindfulness 4. Introspection 5. Equanimity	Path consciousnesses that cause separation from the attachment to the 2nd concentration (mainly joy & bliss).	
4th Concentration	Bases	1. Meditative Stabilisation		This is the best concentration for enlightenment.
	Benefit	2. Thoroughly pure Neutral feeling	These are all called thoroughly pure because the meditator has	

Separated for the afflictions of the 3rd Concentration	Antidote	3. Thoroughly pure Mindfulness 4. Thoroughly pure Equanimity	separated from eight faults: (1) Investigation (2) analysis (3) inhalation (4) exhalation (5) the feeling of pleasure (6) the feeling of pain (7) the feeling of mental discomfort (8) the feeling of mental bliss. Although there is introspection in this concentration, it is not needed as there is no fluctuation.	
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First jhāna

Sutta definition and simile¹: *"There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities — enters and remains in the first jhana: rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and 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 and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder — saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without — would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal...

Antidotal branches of the first jhāna according to Abhidhammattha Sanghaha

With the realization of access to the first stabilization, five mental factors associated with that level of samadhi arise, which directly counteract the five hindrances:

Initial application counters lethargy and drowsiness

Initial application (vitakka): the application of the mind to the object. Its characteristic is the directing of the mind onto the object. Its function is to strike at and thresh the object. It is manifested as the leading of the mind onto an object. Though no proximate cause is mentioned in the Commentaries, the object may be understood as its proximate cause. Ordinary vitakka simply applies the mind to the object. But when vitakka is cultivated through concentration it becomes a factor of jhāna. It is then termed appanā, the absorption of the mind in the object. Vitakka is also called sankappa, intention, and as such is distinguished as micchā-sankappa or wrong intention and sammāsankappa or right intention. The latter is the second factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

¹ All sutta definitions are from AN 5.28

In the Suttas the word vitakka is often used in the loose sense of thought, but in the Abhidhamma it is used in a precise technical sense to mean the mental factor that mounts

or directs the mind onto the object. Just as a king's favourite might conduct a villager to the palace, even so vitakka directs the mind onto the object. In the practice for attaining jhāna, vitakka has the special task of inhibiting the hindrance of sloth and torpor (thīnamiddha).

Investigation (coarse examination) is a mental expression of inquiry depending on either intention or wisdom; it is a coarse mind. (Yeshe Gyeltsen)

Sustained application counters uncertainty/doubt

Sustained application (vicāra): also a jhāna factor, has the characteristic of continued pressure on the object,¹⁰ in the sense of examining it. Its function is sustained application of the associated mental phenomena to the object. It is manifested as the anchoring of those phenomena in the object. The object may be understood to be its proximate cause.

The word vicāra usually means examination, but here it signifies the sustained application of the mind on the object. Whereas vitakka is the directing of the mind and its concomitants towards the object, vicāra is the continued exercise of the mind on the object. The Commentaries offer various similes to highlight the difference between these two jhāna factors. Vitakka is like a bird's spreading out its wings to fly, vicāra is like the bird's gliding through the air with outstretched wings. Vitakka is like a bee's diving towards a flower, vicāra is like the bee's buzzing above the flower. Vitakka is like the hand that holds a tarnished metal dish, vicāra is like the hand that wipes the dish. Vicāra in the jhānas serves to temporarily inhibit the hindrance of doubt (vicikicchā).

Analysis (precise investigation) is a mental expression of individual examination depending on either intention or wisdom; it is a fine mind. (Yeshe Gyeltsen)

Zest counters malice

Zest (pīti): Pīti, derived from the verb pīnayati meaning "to refresh," may be explained as delight or pleasurable interest in the object. The term is often translated as rapture, a rendering which fits its role as a jhāna factor but may not be wide enough to cover all its nuances. The commentators distinguish five grades of pīti that arise when developing concentration: minor zest, momentary zest, showering zest, uplifting zest, and pervading zest. Minor zest is able to raise the hairs on the body. Momentary zest is like flashes of lightning. Showering zest breaks over the body again and again like waves on the sea shore. Uplifting zest can cause the body to levitate. And pervading zest pervades the whole body as an inundation fills a cavern. The latter is identified as the pīti present in jhāna. As a factor of jhāna pīti inhibits the hindrance of ill will (vyāpāda).

Pīti has the characteristic of endearing (sampiṇṇāyana). Its function is to refresh mind and body, or its function is to pervade (to thrill with rapture). It is manifested as elation. Mind-and-body (nāmarūpa) is its proximate cause.

Zest is always accompanied by joyful feeling (somanassa), but the cittas of the fourth jhāna contain joyful feeling without zest.

Happiness counters excitation and anxiety

Happiness (sukha): This jhāna factor is pleasant mental feeling. It is identical with somanassa, joy, and not with the sukha of pleasant bodily feeling that accompanies wholesome-resultant body-consciousness. This sukha, also rendered as bliss, is born of detachment from sensual pleasures; it is therefore explained as nirāmisasukha, unworldly or spiritual happiness. It counters the hindrance of restlessness and worry (uddhaccakukkucca). Though pīti and sukha are closely connected, they are distinguished in that pīti is a conative factor belonging to the aggregate of mental formations (sankhārakkhandha), while sukha is a feeling belonging to the aggregate of feeling (vedanākkhandha). Pīti is compared to the delight a weary traveller would experience when coming across an oasis, sukha to his pleasure after bathing and drinking.

Sukha has the characteristic of experiencing a desirable tangible object, the function of intensifying associated states, manifestation as bodily enjoyment, and its proximate cause is the body faculty.

One-pointedness counters sensual craving

One-pointedness (ekaggatā): The Pali term means literally a one (eka) pointed (agga) state (tā). This mental factor is the primary component in all five jhānas and the essence of concentration (samādhi). One-pointedness temporarily inhibits sensual desire, a necessary condition for any meditative attainment. Ekaggatā exercises the function of closely contemplating the object, the salient characteristic of jhāna, but it cannot perform this function alone. It requires the joint action of the other four jhāna factors each performing its own special function: vitakka applying the associated states on the object, vicāra sustaining them there, pīti bringing delight in the object, and sukha experiencing happiness in the jhāna.

Ekaggatā is the unification of the mind on its object. Although this factor comes to prominence in the jhānas, where it functions as a jhāna factor, the Abhidhamma teaches that the germ of that capacity for mental unification is present in all types of consciousness, even the most rudimentary. It there functions as the factor which fixes the mind on its object. One-pointedness has non-wandering or non-distraction as its characteristic. Its function is to conglomerate or unite the associated states. It is manifested as peace, and its proximate cause is happiness.

Second jhāna

Sutta definition and simile: *"Furthermore, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters and remains in the second jhana: rapture and pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation — internal assurance. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of composure.*

"Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and with the skies periodically supplying abundant showers, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of composure..."

Third jhāna

Sutta definition and simile: *"And furthermore, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture.*

"Just as in a blue-, white-, or red-lotus pond, there may be some of the blue, white, or red lotuses which, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those blue, white, or red lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture..."

Fourth jhāna

Sutta definition and simile: *"And furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure and stress — as with the earlier disappearance of elation and distress — he enters and remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.*

"Just as if a man were sitting wrapped 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 his body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness."

The Four Formless Absorptions

Introduction

Only the first four jhānas are considered "Right Concentration", as in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. If he describes all the jhānas, the emphasis is on the 'Cessation of Feelings and Perceptions' rather than stopping short at the 'Dimension of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception'.

Whereas a practitioner passes into the first concentration or from one concentration to the next by way of the presence or absence of branches, he or she passes beyond the fourth concentration by way of the object of observation and aspect; no branches are posited for any of the formless absorptions.

In the four concentrations; the main meditative activity is that of analytical meditation; in the formless absorptions, however, the main meditative activity is that of stabilizing meditation.

In Sutra

"Herein, monastics, what are the four formless attainments?"

Here, monastics, a monastic, having completely transcended perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of (sensory) impact, not attending to perceptions of variety, (understanding): 'This is endless space', abides in the sphere of endless space.

Having completely transcended the sphere of endless space, (understanding): 'This is endless consciousness,' he abides in the sphere of endless consciousness.

Having completely transcended the sphere of endless consciousness, (understanding): 'This is nothing,' he abides in the sphere of nothingness.

Having completely transcended the sphere of nothingness, he abides in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

These, monastics, are said to be the four formless attainments." (Arhaviṇīśaya Sūtra)

Preparations to the absorptions

Like the concentrations, the formless absorption of limitless space has the seven preparations; within a mind of calm abiding, the meditator engages in analysis. The mental contemplation of individual knowledge of the character views the Fourth Concentration as gross and the discrimination that space is limitless as peaceful. Though the meditator is analyzing, he or she now engages mainly in stabilizing meditation. Taking the limitlessness of space to mind repeatedly the meditator gradually develops the meditative absorption of limitless space and, within focusing on the discrimination that space is limitless, generates the nine uninterrupted paths and the nine paths of release of nine afflictions.

Infinite space

(Pāḷi ākāsānañcāyatana, Skt. ākāśānantyāyatana).

With the generation of the actual absorption, the meditator loses all perception of obstruction and variety. The object of observation is the mental aggregates of the meditator; "limitless space" means that for the meditator's mind, space pervades everywhere, there being a nonappearance of obstructive and various forms.

Infinite consciousness

(Pāḷi viññāṇaṇcāyatana, Skt. vijñānānantyāyatana).

As before, through some analysis, but mainly stabilizing meditation, the meditator reviews the discrimination of limitless space to be gross and the discrimination of infinite consciousness as peaceful. The ninth path of release is the meditative absorption of limitless consciousness. The object of observation, again, is the meditator's mental aggregates.

Infinite nothingness

(Pāḷi ākiñcaṇṇāyatana, Skt. ākiṃcanyāyatana).

Again attained by way of the gross and peaceful analysis, while mainly engaging in stabilizing meditation. The meditator engages in the discrimination that there is nothing formed or formless to be apprehended.

Neither perception nor non-perception or peak of cyclic existence

(Pāḷi nevasaññānāsaññāyatana, Skt. naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana).

After reviewing the discrimination of infinite nothingness as gross, the meditator contemplates "coarse discrimination does not exist; subtle discrimination is not nonexistent;" meaning that the meditator lets go, and subtle discrimination is left.

The meditator cultivates the meditative absorption of the peak of cyclic existence by way of the seven preparations, abandoning nine afflictions with respect to the level of Nothingness, through nine uninterrupted paths and nine paths of release; the ninth path of release is the actual meditative absorption of the peak of cyclic existence.

Nirodha-samāpatti

Cessation of perception, feelings and consciousness.

The samadhi in which feelings and volitional formations cease is also called absorption of cessation. It is such that among the five aggregates of “form, feelings, volitional formations, discrimination and consciousness” feelings and volitional formations are dropped off. (A Brief Explanation of the Lankavatara Sutra by Lian Long Jushi)