1 Introduction

The “higher mind” (adhicitta) or mental cultivation—such as the removal of the hindrances—is a gradual but sustained process. It is compared to the refinement of gold in the Nimitta Sutta (A 3.100), stresses the importance of paying proper attention to these three meditation signs (nimitta),² that is, the concentration sign (samādhi,nimitta), the effort sign (paggāha,nimitta) and the equanimity sign (upekkhā,nimitta) [§§13-15]. The idea is to balance your practice.

The gold-refining parable of the Nimitta Sutta [§13] illustrates the refining of meditative mental states leading to the six direct knowledges, including liberation.³ A closely related parable—that of the gold panner—found in the Paṁsudhovaka Sutta (A 3.100a), illustrates an earlier stage in gold-processing, that of mining the gold ore.⁴ As such, the two parables actually form a coherent whole.

The PTS text edition treats this text as the concluding half of the Paṁsudhovaka Sutta (A 3.100a). In fact, both Suttas have identical concluding sections on the six direct knowledges.⁶ Both the Suttas deal with the theme of mental cultivation and their gold parables are closely related. This may have (mis)led the PTS editor to conflate the two texts. Despite all this, it clear that they are separate suttas: the Sinhalese, the Burmese, and the Siamese manuscripts and the Aṅguttara Commentary, all treat the two as separate suttas. The Sutta is also quoted in the Vibhaṅga Commentary (VbhA 229 f).

2 The 3 bases and the 5 faculties

The Majjhima Commentary says that the four focusses of mindfulness are the basis of samadhi (samādhi,nimitta) in the sense of being its condition (MA 2:363).⁷ Bodhi says that here it “would seem incorrect to translate nimitta as ‘sign,’ in the sense of either distinctive mark or object.⁸ According to Analayo, “an object, image or concept which, on being meditated upon, induces samādhi (jhāna) is a nimitta” (2003:237 n21). As such, the term here can also be translated, somewhat freely though, as “condition.”

The Nimitta Sutta points to the three bases (tīni nimittāni) for mental-training. More often, however, meditation practice is taught and learned in terms of the five spiritual faculties or “controlling faculties” (indriya), that is,

1. faith (saddhā),
2. effort (viriya),
3. mindfulness (sati),
4. concentration (samādhi), and
5. wisdom (paññā).⁹

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¹ See §11n below ad loc for meaning of adhicitta.
² On nimitta, see esp Satipatṭhānas Ss = SD 13.1(3.1d(3)) & also Nimitta = SD 19.7.
³ The parable is qu at Vism 8.74-76/247 f & VbhA §1084/230.
⁴ A 3.100a,2/1:253 = SD 19.11.
⁵ A 3.100a/1:253-256 = SD 19.11.
⁶ (A 3.14b-10/1:257 f) = (A 3.11a,4b-9/1:255 f = SD 19.11).
⁷ See Satipatṭhānas Ss = SD 13.1(3.1d(1)).
⁸ M:NB 1242 n464 ad Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta, M 44.12/1:301.
⁹ S 5:191-204, 235-237; Pm 2:1-29. On the 5 indriyā, see Āpaqa S (S 48.50/5:225 f) = SD 10.4.
The three “bases” of the Nimitta Sutta are, in fact, conflated forms of the five spiritual faculties. The Sutta’s commentary (AA 2:364) glosses nimitta with kārana, whose meanings include the following: (1) cause, reason, ground, motive, means; (2) valid reason or argument; (3) event, matter; (4) proper action, task (DP, abridged). Here nimitta is best taken in the sense of “means,” since it refers to conditions for mental focus. Based on the Suttas and the Sutta commentary, we can have the following concordance of factors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 3 bases (nimitta)</th>
<th>The 5 spiritual faculties (indriya)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basis of samadhi</td>
<td>Faith (saddh'indriya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(samādhi,nimitta)</td>
<td>Samadhi (samādh'indriya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effort sign</td>
<td>Effort (viriy'indriya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(paggāha,nimitta)</td>
<td>Mindfulness (sat'indriya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The equanimity sign</td>
<td>Wisdom (paññ'indriya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(upekkhā,nimitta)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidently, the nimitta model here is one purely of technique, where the precondition of faith and the result of wisdom are implicit. Clearly, any serious meditator would be motivated by some level of faith in his practice, and his goal would be the attainment of liberating wisdom.

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10 Comy glosses as majhatha, bhāvassa, “the state of moderation” (AA 2:364), as such would refer to the function of mindfulness (sati) in the 5-faculty scheme.
The Discourse on the Meditation Signs

(A 3.100b/1:256-258)

The three meditation signs

11 Bhikshus, when a monk is devoted in [engaged in] the higher mind, from time to time, three signs should be attended to.

1. The concentration sign (samādhi, nimitta) should from time to time be attended to.
2. The effort sign (paggaha, nimitta) should from time to time be attended to.
3. The equanimity sign (upekkhā, nimitta) should from time to time be attended to.

12 Bhikshus, if a monk devoted to the higher mind were only to attend to the concentration sign, it is possible that it would bring about laziness (kosajja).

Bhikshus, if a monk engaged in the higher mind were only to attend to the effort sign, it is possible that it would bring about restlessness (uddhacca).

Bhikshus, if a monk engaged in the higher mind were only to attend to the equanimity sign, it is possible that it would not bring the mind to the full concentration [right samadhi] for the sake of destroying the mental influxes.

Bhikshus, insofar as a monk, devoted to the higher mind, only from time to time attends to the concentration sign, only from time to time attends to the effort sign, only from time to time attends to the equanimity sign, to that extent, the mind, pliant, malleable and bright, uncorrupted, it would fully concentrate for the ending of the influxes.

The simile of gold refining

13 Suppose, bhikshus, a goldsmith or a goldsmith’s apprentice prepares a furnace. Having prepared it, he starts a blaze in the furnace mouth. Having started the blaze, he places the gold [in a crucible] in the furnace mouth.

From time to time, he blows on it.
From time to time, he sprinkles water on it. From time to time, he simply looks on at it.\textsuperscript{18} Bhikshus, if the goldsmith or the goldsmith’s apprentice were only to blow on that gold, it is possible that it would burn.

Bhikshus, if the goldsmith or the goldsmith’s apprentice were only to sprinkle water on that gold, it is possible that it would cool down.

Bhikshus, if the goldsmith or the goldsmith’s apprentice only to look on that gold, it is possible that it would not come to full refinement.

But if he were only from time to time to blow on it, only from time to time to sprinkle water on it, only from time to time to simply look on, the gold would then become pliant, malleable and bright, uncorrupted, and it could be properly worked on. Whatever ornament that he wishes to make, be it a diadem, a gold plate, earrings, a necklace, or a gold chain, that gold can now be used for that purpose.

14a Even so, bhikshus, a monk devoted to [engaged in] the higher mind should only from time to time, attend to the three signs:

He should only from time to time, attend to the concentration sign.

He should only from time to time, attend to the effort sign.

He should only from time to time, attend to the equanimity sign.

Bhikshus, if a monk devoted to the higher mind were only to attend to the concentration sign, it is possible that it would bring about laziness.

Bhikshus, if a monk engaged in the higher mind were only to attend to the effort sign, it is possible that it would bring about restlessness.

Bhikshus, if a monk engaged in the higher mind were only to attend to the equanimity sign, it is possible that it would not bring the mind to the full concentration [right samadhi] for the sake of destroying the mental influxes.

Bhikshus, insofar as a monk, devoted to the higher mind, only from time to time, attends to the concentration sign, only from time to time, attends to the effort sign, only from time to time, attends to the equanimity sign, the mind, pliant, malleable and bright, uncorrupted, would to that extent come to full samadhi for the sake of destroying the mental influxes.

To whatever mental state realizable by direct knowledge he directs his mind, he has the capability of personally realizing that, whenever the conditions obtains.\textsuperscript{19}

The direct knowledges

14b Then when he directs his mind towards the attaining of any mental state attainable through direct knowledge, he gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Kālena kālaṁ abhidhamati, kālena kālaṁ udakena paripphoseti, kālena kālaṁ ajjhupekkhati. Here ajjhupekkhati refers to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} factor, “equanimity” (upekkhā, lit “on-looking”), ie observing without commenting.

\textsuperscript{19} Yassa yassa ca abhiññ, sacchikaraṁ jīyaṁ yassa dhammassa cittaṁ abhininnāmeti abhiññā, sacchikiriyāya, tatra tatr’eva sakkhi, bhabbataṁ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane.

\textsuperscript{20} From hereon throughout, it is the same as Paṁsu, dhovana S (A 3.11a.4b-9/1:255 f) = SD 19.11.

\textsuperscript{21} Yassa yassa ca abhiññā, sacchi, karaṇiyassā dhammassā cittam abhininnāmeti abhiññā, sacchikiriyāya, tatra tatr’eva sakkhi, bhabbataṁ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane. The latter phrase—tatra tatra...sati sati āyatane—is a common stock phrase that introduces the attainment of the direct knowledges (abhiññā); Mahā Vaccha,gotta S (M

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If he wishes, (1) **PSYCHIC POWERS.** ‘May I wield the manifold supernormal powers.** Having been one, may I become many; having been many, may I become one. May I appear, may I vanish. May I unimpeded through walls, ramparts, and mountains as if through space. May I dive in and out of the earth as if it were water. May I walk on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged, may I fly through the air like a winged bird. With my hand may I tough and stroke even the sun and the moon, so mighty and powerful. May I have power over my body up to as far as the Brahmi worlds.’

He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.

If he wishes, (2) **CLAIRAUDIENCE.** ‘May I hear, by means of the divine-ear element,** purified and surpassing the human, both kinds of sounds, divine and human, whether near or far.’

He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.

If he wishes, (3) **TELEPATHY.** ‘May I **know the minds of other beings,** other individuals, having encompassed them with my own mind.**

May I know a mind with lust as a mind with lust, and a mind without lust as a mind without lust.
May I know a mind with aversion as a mind with aversion, and a mind without aversion as a mind without aversion.
May I know a mind with delusion as a mind with delusion, and a mind without delusion as a mind without delusion.
May I know a contracted mind [due to sloth and torpor] as a contracted mind, and a distracted mind [due to restlessness and worry] as a distracted mind.
May I know an exalted mind [through the lower or higher dhyana] as an exalted mind, and an unexalted mind [not developed by dhyana] as an unexalted mind.
May I know a surpassable mind as a surpassable mind, and an unsurpassable mind as an unsurpassable mind.
May I know a concentrated mind as a concentrated mind, and an unconcentrated mind as an unconcentrated mind.
May I know a released mind as a released mind, and an unreleased mind as an unreleased mind.

He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.

If he wishes, (4) **RETROCOGNITION.** ‘May I **recollect my manifold past lives,** that is, one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many aeons of cosmic contraction, many aeons of cosmic expansion, many aeons of cosmic contraction and expansion, [recollecting],

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73.19/1:494 = SD 27.4); **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119.29 f/3:96 f = SD 12.21); **Paṁsu,dhovaka S** (A 3.100a.4/1:255 = SD 19.11); **Upakkilesa S** (A 5.23/3:16-19); **Dutiya Iddhi,pāda S** (A 5.68/3:82 f); **Sakkhi,bhabba S** (A 6.71/3:426 f); **Gāvī Upamā S** (A 9.35/4:421 f). It refers to the preliminary conditions (āyatana) for the 6 direct knowledges (abhiññā) which follow later. The preliminary condition for the first 5 knowledges (the mundane ones) is the 4th dhyana; for the 5th (the only supramundane one), it is insight. See SD 12.21 Intro (6).

22 Cf **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11.5) where the Buddha disapproves of the exhibiting of such powers.
24 The rest of this section is a list of mental states also appears in the **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.12/2:299 = M 10.34/1:59).
25 Unsurpassable (anuttara) mind, probably synonymous with “developed” mind. See D:W 592 n667.
26 Pubbe,nivāsanānussati, lit “recollecting of past abodes.”
“There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such.”

Thus may I recollect my manifold past lives in their modes and details.”

He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.

19 If he wishes,

(5) CLAIRVOYANCE. ‘May I see—by means of the divine eye [clairvoyance], purified and surpassing the human—beings passing away and re-appearing, and know how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, faring in accordance with their karma:

“These beings—who were endowed with evil conduct of body, speech, and mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—after death, when the body has broken up, have re-appeared in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, and mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—after death, when the body has broken up, have reappeared in a happy destination, in heaven.”

Thus, by means of the divine eye, may I see beings passing away and re-appearing, and how they fare according to their karma.’

He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.

20 If he wishes,

(6) GNOSIS. ‘May I, by realizing direct knowledge for myself, here and now, enter and dwell in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom27 that are canker-free with the destruction of the influxes.30

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27 This knowledge is detailed at Vism 13.13-71/411-423.
28 dibba,cakkhu, clairvoyance, not to be confused with the Dharma-eye (dhamma,cakkhu) (see n in §102).
29 “Liberation of mind and liberation through wisdom,” respectively: ceto,vimutti (or, liberation by concentration, ie through destruction of the mental hindrances) and paññā,vimutti (liberation through insight). One who is liberated by wisdom “may not have reached the 8 deliverances (vimokkha = jhāna) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70.16/1:478). All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain the 8 deliverances (āṭṭha,vimokkha), which include the 4 formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called liberated both ways, that is, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood. Arhats like Sāriputta and Moggallāna are “liberated both ways” (ubhato,bhāga,vimutta). The differences between the 2 types of liberation are given in Mahā-nidāna S (D 2:70 f) and Kīṭāgiri S (M 1:477 f).

Āṅguttara mentions the two states that partake of spiritual knowledge (dve vijjā,bhāgyā) as, namely, calm (samatha) and insight (vipassanā). The cultivation of calm leads to the destruction of passion and the cultivation of insight to the destruction of ignorance (A 2.4.10/1:61). The distinction between the two is expressed by “liberation of mind” (ceto,vimutti) and “liberation by wisdom” (paññā,vimutti) respectively. “However, these two expressions are not simply equivalent in value relative to realization. While ‘freedom by wisdom’ (paññā,vimutti) refers to the realization of Nibbāna, ‘freedom of the mind’ (ceto,vimutti), unless further specified as ‘unshakeable’ (akuppa), does not imply the same. ‘Freedom of the mind’ can also connote temporary experiences of mental freedom, such as the attainment of the four absorptions, or the development of the divine abodes (brahma,vihāra) [eg M 1:296]. Thus this passage is not presenting two different approaches to realization but two aspects of the meditative path, one of which is not sufficient by itself to bring realization” (Analayo, Satipaṭṭhāna: The direct path to realization, 2003:89 f). See Lily de Silva, “Ceto,vimutti, paññā,vimutti and ubhato,bhāga,vimutti,” Pāli Buddhist Review 3,3 1978:118-145.

For a full list of the 8 deliverances, see Mahā Nidāna S (D 15.35/2:70 f). For full list of the 8 deliverances, see Mahā Nidāna S (D 15.35/2:70 f) = SD 5.17.35. See also D 3:262, 228; Vimokkha S, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120.37/3:103 = SD 3.4.37.

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He gains the ability to witness [to personally experience] any aspect therein, whenever the conditions are right.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{center}
— evaṃ —
\end{center}

\begin{center}
070506; 070705; 081121
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{30} Āsavānaṁ khāya anāsavāṁ ceto, vimuttīṁ paññā, vimuttīṁ diṭṭhe va dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati. This is stock, found throughout the 4 Nikāyas. Āsava (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from ā-savati “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 āsavā: the influx of (1) sense-desire (kāmāsava), (2) (desire for eternal) existence or becoming (bhav’-āsava), (3) wrong views (diṭṭīhāsava), (4) ignorance (avij jásava) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (oghā) and “yokes” (yogā). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these āsavas is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: āsava.

\textsuperscript{31} The PTS ed includes the foll Sutta, conflating them as A 3.100. While they share a common theme on mental cultivation and connected parables on gold, it clear that they are separate suttas, as found in Be, Cē, Se and AA.