

1

Bhāvanā

Mental cultivation, an introduction

Theme: The basic principles of early Buddhist meditation

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1. Meditation and its purpose

1.1 THE PATH TO LIBERATION

1.1.1 Awakening the mind. Early Buddhism is all about awakening (*bodhi*), that is, realizing our highest wholesome potential. This means breaking away from negative tendencies, cultivating a wholesome life, and breaking through into some direct self-understanding, even self-awakening. An awakened being is not troubled by suffering: the body may feel pain, but the mind can go beyond it. Even when we only have a vision of awakening but not yet reached the goal, suffering does not trouble us in the manner that it oppresses the unawakened.

A simple way of putting this is that when the mind of asleep (ignorance) and dreaming (craving), then it is unable to help the body (action and speech), but is in fact often negatively affected by it. But when the mind is awakened—we are mindful—then we are in some real control of our bodily actions. The practice and habit of keeping awoken, or the effort towards awakening, is broadly called meditation.

1.1.2 The mind looking at itself. Meditation is, in fact, the ideal vehicle for the journey of self-awakening. Mindfulness exercises are the best tools for looking directly into the mind, or introspection, the stage of life's passing drama. Only by directly experiencing the mind can we clear away what clouds it up and train it so that it awakens to its true potential.

Ironically, only the mind can work on itself—this is clearly a very human ability. The path of awakening to liberation lies in the mind's ability to see directly into itself. The mind, after all, is the source of all our ignorance, delusion, and also our wisdom and liberation. **Analayo** makes an important observation here:

It is particularly intriguing that early Buddhism treats the mind just like the other sense organs. Thought, reasoning, memory, and reflection are dealt with in the same manner as the sense data of any other sense door. Thus the thinking activity of the mind shares the impersonal status of external phenomena perceived through the five senses.

Insight into this impersonal character of “one's own” thoughts can be gained even with the first few attempts at meditation, when one discovers how difficult it is to avoid getting lost in all kinds of reflections, daydreams, memories, and fantasies, despite being determined to focus on a particular object of meditation.

Just as it is impossible only to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch what is wished for, so too, with an untrained mind, it is not possible to have thoughts only when and how one would like to have them. For precisely this reason a central purpose of meditative training is to remedy this situation by gradually taming the thinking activity of the mind and bringing it more under conscious control.¹ (2003:217 f)

1.1.3 Mental training. Meditation or mindfulness practice (or mind-training for short), unlike the commercial meditation methods, are not considered to be merely relaxation exercises or mood manage-

¹ This has found its expression in various passages such as M 1:122, where to develop mastery of the mind means to be able to think only what one wishes to think; or at M 1:214, which speaks of gaining control over the mind and thereby being no longer controlled by it; or Dh 326, which poetically compares controlling one's wandering mind to a mahout controlling a rutting elephant. (Analayo's fn)

ment techniques. Rather, they are, in terms of modern psychology, a form of *mental training* “to reduce cognitive vulnerability to reactive modes of mind that might otherwise heighten stress and emotional distress or that may otherwise perpetuate psychopathology.”² For Buddhists, mind training is the path to awakening or spiritual liberation itself.

1.2 THE TWO ASPECTS OF MIND-TRAINING. Early Buddhism meditation is the cultivation (*bhāvanā*) of the mind, training it in mindfulness (*sati*) to keep to a single wholesome mental object or keeping the mind wholesome so that concentration (*samādhi* or *samatha*) arises leading to mental clarity (*paññā* or *vipassanā*) conducive to spiritual insight that liberates us from suffering. In modern terms,³ we might describe meditation as keeping ourselves constantly in the present-moment awareness of whatever arises in our minds.

On a broader beginner’s level, both mindfulness and concentration, at least in their incipient forms, have to be cultivated. On a basic level at least, we need to know when and how to apply a *concentration* technique, and when and how to apply an *insight* technique. Indeed, calm and insight are tools or aspects of meditation, not “types” of meditation in their own right.⁴

Even when we use such expressions as “calm meditation” or “insight meditation,” we are only referring to a *technique*, that is, for calming the mind or for noting impermanence. Both are needed like the two wings of a bird that is flying (Dh 372).⁵ It is with this understanding that the notions of “concentration meditation” (*samatha bhāvanā*) and “insight (or mindfulness) meditation” (*vipassanā bhāvanā*) that we should appreciate how Buddhist meditation has evolved in our times.⁶

In **concentration meditation** (sometimes, “stabilizing meditation”), the attention is silently focused on a single object, such as the breath, a thought (such as lovingkindness), or even a sound (such as *Bud-dho*). When the attention wanders or there is a distraction, the mind is redirected to that single object. No attention is given to the nature of the distraction. When this practice is happily sustained, it will lead to a deepening sense of joyful calm and focus, called samadhi, the basis for dhyana (*jhāna* or mental absorption). [8]

Insight (or mindfulness) meditation (sometimes, “analytical meditation”), on the other hand, involves the observation of constantly changing internal and external stimuli as they arise. When the mind wanders, that process is noted as it is, as “Wandering mind, wandering mind...” Whatever stimulus arises at any of the six sense-doors, it is noted as such, thus: “Seeing, seeing ... ,” “Sound, sound ... ,” “Smell, smell ... ,” “Tasting, tasting ... ,” “Feeling, feeling ... ,” or “Thinking, thinking ... ” This is only a basic list and there are other variations as the need arises, especially with regards with the mind-door, where such noting may apply, eg, “Sleepy, sleepy ... ,” or “Doubting, doubting ... ,” or “Confused mind, confused mind ... ” and so on. The idea is to attend to the distraction in a non-evaluative manner by simply reflecting the reality of the situation.⁷

1.3 BENEFITS OF ATTENTION. Modern psychologists associate mindfulness practices with improvements in cognitive inhibition, especially at the level of stimulus selection. That is to say, a meditator can train himself to direct his attention away from unwholesome mental objects and distractions, and direct it back

² Bishop et al 2004:231.

³ Modern terms given to these 2 meditations incl *samatha bhāvanā* = stabilizing or placement meditation; *vipassanā bhāvanā* = analytical or discerning meditation. Further see *Samatha and vipassanā*, SD 41.1 (3).

⁴ See *Samatha and vipassanā*, SD 41.1.

⁵ See SD 41.1 (1.4.2).

⁶ A modern psychological discussion of the differences in the goals and methods of these two types of meditation is found Naranjo & Ornstein 1971.

⁷ Research scientists have been able to show that mindfulness is associated with improvements in sustained attention and switching by objectively measuring them with standard vigilance tests (Klee & Garfinkel 1983; Rogers & Monsell 1995).

to the meditation object (such as the breath). This capacity for attention can be measured using tasks that require the inhibition of semantic processing (eg emotional Stroop).⁸

Attention encumbered by mental proliferation (elaborative thinking) limits the capacity for attention.⁹ When attention is free from mental proliferation, it has a greater capacity for processing information relating to current experience. This greater access to current experience increases one's awareness, giving a broader perspective on the nature of experience. Instead of attending to experience through the filters of desires, biases, hopes and beliefs, mindfulness becomes a direct observation of experience as is for the first time, or what is often referred to as "a beginner's mind."

The "beginner's mind" or open-minded mindfulness, because it does not harbour preconceptions and biases, is able to quickly detect mental states and objects as they arise. Such a mindfulness facilitates the identification of objects in unexpected situations because one would not be biased against what should or should not be present. Research scientists have been able to measure such tasks where successful performance depends on tasks of detecting stimuli in unexpected settings.¹⁰

1.4 METACOGNITION. Mindfulness, in other words, can be described as a self-regulating of the mind, involving sustained attention, redirecting of attention (attention switching), and the inhibition of mental proliferation (elaborative thinking). Mindfulness, as such, is as *metacognitive*, that is, it is able to learn about how the mind learns.¹¹

Metacognition, research scientists have noticed, consists of two related processes: monitoring and control.¹² In meditation terms, monitoring the mental process (or "stream" of consciousness) has to do with turning the mind away from distractions and unwholesome mental states. Control refers to regulating the attention, that is, redirecting the mind to the meditation object and keeping it there. Both processes are necessary for a healthy mindfulness.

Observing how our minds work not only improves our mindfulness, but also builds our emotional intelligence, that is, a greater capacity to see the interrelationship of feelings, thoughts and actions.¹³ It includes the increasing ability to discern the conditions and meanings of behaviour and experience. All this gives one the skill to cut down or even uproot negative traits, and to build up positive habits in problem solving, interpersonal relations and personal happiness.¹⁴

1.5 PRESENT-MOMENT AWARENESS

1.5.1 "ABIDING IN THE PRESENT." Both concentration meditation and insight meditation centre around "present-moment awareness." The present-moment awareness, however, is more than mere "non-judgemental awareness." In fact, it is both an energetic as well as energizing endeavour of noting whatever arises in one's mind as well as keeping that focus in the present moment. As such, "good judgement" is vital here; otherwise, the mind will play havoc if left to its own devices.

We begin meditation practice by simply "letting it come, letting it go." The most popular opening gambit involves watching the breath (or "breath meditation").¹⁵ As we watch the breath (that is, keeping

⁸ A **Stroop test** is a procedure developed by John Ridley Stroop for studying verbal processes, first noted in an article, *Studies of interference in serial verbal reactions* published in *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 1935. The **Stroop effect** is a demonstration of interference in the reaction time of a task. When a word, such as "blue," "green," or "red," is printed in a colour differing from the color expressed by the word's semantic meaning (eg the word "red" printed in blue ink), a delay occurs in the processing of the word's color, leading to slower test reaction times and an increase in mistakes. See Williams, Mathews & MacLeod 1996.

⁹ See Schneider & Shiffrin 1977.

¹⁰ Henderson, Weeks & Hollingsworth 1999.

¹¹ Or, it refers to cognition about one's cognition: Flavell 1979.

¹² Nelson, Stuart, Howard & Crowley 1999; Shraw & Moshman 1995.

¹³ See Lane, Quinlan, Schwartz, Waller & Zeitlin 1990.

¹⁴ See Conte & Ratto 1997.

¹⁵ See *Ānāpāna,sati S* (M 10), SD 7.13.

our mind on *the awareness of the breathing process*), some physical discomfort may arise. Then, we simply note that discomfort as an experience without any comment (this is “non-judgemental awareness”), and whenever distraction arises we bring our attention back to watching the breath.

1.5.2 If the discomfort grows, and we may notice some negative emotion arising as a result, then we should simply turn our attention to watching that emotion *just as it is*, letting it come, letting it go. We should then go back to watching the breath. Or, lightly put, “Don’t do something: just sit!”

In due course, as we persevere in this present moment awareness of the breath, the mind settles and calm arises. We may notice some sort of negative desire for comfort or some passing thought, or on the other hand, we might experience a profound sense of uplifting and lasting joy. So, in simple terms, we have completed the first basic level of meditation.

1.5.3 The main difficulties we face in meditation are mostly rooted in either the past or the future. In the initial uneasy stillness of the meditating mind, unhappy thoughts of past things done or undone may arise, or we might project fond hopes for the future. These are simply tricks the “doing mind” plays on us.

To let go of the past means not thinking about our work, or family, or responsibilities, or bad times we had as a child. We abandon all past experiences by showing them no interest at all. We let go of even what happened to us just a moment ago. When we meditate, in a way, we become *someone with no history*. [6]

Or, we could lose ourselves in the future, wondering about the next thing to do, about the next meal or appointment, about our future, and so on. The point is none of these have happened. Whatever we plan or think it will be, the future is almost always something different. In meditation, the reason why we should not direct our mental energy into the future is because we need every drop of it to help the mind focus, and the only real mental focus is the present moment.

Or, the “watching mind” is still weak in the beginner, and is easily distracted by the smallest activity of the senses, luring it away from the meditation object. A sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch or a thought immediately builds a chatty narrative around itself. The doing mind chatters away, drawing one into wishful thinking or hateful thought, into mental flurry or into torpor, or locks one up in a maze of doubts. Our focus is gone!

1.5.4 Our six senses—the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind—are like six phones ringing all at the same time. In meditation, we simply unhook all of them except the sixth, the mind. It is as if we are doing a major brain surgery—only this is mental operation—we need to shut down all the other five senses. This is the best way to check and overhaul the mind, as it were. Oh yes, now we have a seventh phone, Māra’s phone, that is, our handphone: we need to switch that off, too, just before beginning our practice.

1.5.5 If, despite doing all this right, we find that we are not progressing very well, we then probably need to examine our life-style. Are we living a double life, are we doing things that hurt ourselves or others? [3]. Or, maybe we actually hate ourselves. In such cases, it is good to have a counseling session with an experienced and compassionate teacher.

1.5.6 Meantime, we could try the cultivation of lovingkindness¹⁶ or do one of **the 6 inspiring meditations** or recollections (*anussati*), focused on the joy (*veda*) of the virtues of one of the 3 jewels, our acts of charity, our own moral virtue, or divine beings (if we believe in them).¹⁷ It is useful, too, to understand

¹⁶ See **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8), SD 38.3.

¹⁷ **The 6 inspiring meditations**, or 6 bases of recollection (*cha anussati-ṭṭhāna*), are the recollections on (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) moral virtue, (5) charity, and (6) the devas: see **Sambādh’okāsa S** (A 6.26/3:314 f), SD 15.6.

the nature of the 5 mental hindrances—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt—so that we can learn skills to deal with them as they arise.¹⁸ [8.1.2]

It is the joy evoked by any of the 6 recollections that serves as a springboard, for those inclined to do so, to a deeper meditation as a basis for dhyana, or simply as a means of overcoming any mental hindrances. For this vital reason, this set of 6 recollections is popularly known as “**the inspiring meditations**.”¹⁹

2 The threefold training

2.1 The Buddha speaks of the three doors of action, namely, the doors of the body (*kāya, dvāra*), of speech (*vacī, dvāra*) and of the mind (*mano, dvāra*):

The wise is restrained in the body,	<i>kāyena saṃvutā dhīrā</i>
And is also restrained in speech,	<i>atho vācāya saṃvuta</i>
The wise is restrained in mind,	<i>manasā saṃvutā dhīrā</i>
They are indeed very well restrained.	<i>te ve suparisāṃvutā</i> (Dh 234)

While meditation deals directly with the mind, it is easily distracted and controlled by one’s bodily and verbal deeds. However, it is easier to control one’s body and speech than one’s mind. Understandably, the Buddhist spiritual training—called **the threefold training**—comprises the following:

training in moral virtue	(<i>sīla, sikkhā</i>)	restraint of body and speech;
training in mental concentration	(<i>samādhi, sikkhā</i>)	restraint and focus of the mind;
training in wisdom	(<i>paññā, sikkhā</i>)	wisdom, or the knowledge of true reality.
		(D 1:207, 3:220; A 1:229)

2.2 The Saṅgīti Sutta (D 33) lists the threefold training as the training in higher moral virtue, in higher concentration, and in higher wisdom,²⁰ and then follows up with the list of the threefold cultivation (*bhāvanā*), namely, cultivation of the body, of the mind and of wisdom (*kāya, bhāvanā citta, bhāvanā paññā, bhāvanā*).²¹ Walshe translates *kāya, bhāvanā* as “[development] of the emotions” (D:W 486), explaining that “*kāya* here means not (pace RD) ‘the psycho-physiological mechanism of sense,’ but ‘mental (ie broadly ‘emotional’) body’” (D:W 486).

While it is true that *kāya* is sometimes used in the collective sense of “body” (eg *rūpa, kāya* and *nāma, kāya*),²² this sense clearly does not apply here. The mental aspects of the training are all classed under “cultivation of mind” (*citta, bhāvanā*). Moreover, “emotion,” even in English and psychology, is a very nebulous and polysemic term. In **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), bodily cultivation (*kāya, bhāvanā*) is contrasted with mental cultivation (*citta, bhāvanā*).²³

The Mahā Saccaka Sutta recounts that Saccaka initially and erroneously identifies *kāya, bhāvanā* (“cultivation of the body”) as “self-mortification.”²⁴ The Commentary explains that the Buddha takes “cultivation of the body” to mean “cultivation of insight” (*vipassanā bhāvanā*) and “cultivation of the mind” to be “cultivation of calmness” (*samatha bhāvanā*) (MA 2:285). However, considering that the bi-

¹⁸ See *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1. At this point, it is useful to read Brahmavamso’s article, “Cultivate tranquility, harvest insight” (2004). If you are interested in practical meditation, then, having understood this preceding section, you should go on to (8.1.2), “Bringing the mind to focus.”

¹⁹ See SD 15.3 (3.3).

²⁰ *Adhisīla, sikkhā adhisamādhi, sikkhā, adhipaññā, sikkhā*, D 33, 1.10(47)/3:219.

²¹ D 33, 1.10(48)/3:219.

²² Pm 1:183 f; Nett 77, 78.

²³ M 36, 4-10/1:237-240 (SD 49.4).

²⁴ M 36, 4/1:237. On a similar usage of *kāya*, see (**Sappurisa**) **Vaḍḍhi S** (A 5.63/3:80), SD 3.4(3) & (**Upāsikā**) **Vaḍḍhi S** (S 37.34 = A 5.64), SD 3.4(4).

furcation of meditation into “insight” and “calmness” is not canonical, we might take the term “uncultivated body” (*abhavita, kāya*) here to simply mean “torturing the body,” “not taking proper care of one’s health,” or “not restrained in speech and action” (that is, not keeping to even the five precepts) or all of them, and that “cultivated body” (*bhavita, kāya*) to mean “not torturing the body,” etc.

2.3 On the other hand, if we examine “the threefold cultivation” in the light of satipatthana practice²⁵ — the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), the contemplation of feelings (*vedanā’nupassanā*), the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*), and the contemplation of dharmas (*dhammānupassanā*)—it is easy to see their relationship thus:²⁶

the cultivation of the body (*kāya, bhāvanā*) = the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) & the contemplation of feelings (*vedanā’nupassanā*);
 the cultivation of the mind (*citta, bhāvanā*) = the contemplation of mind (*cittānupassanā*) & the contemplation of dharmas (*dhammānupassanā*);
 the cultivation of wisdom (*paññā, bhāvanā*) = the wisdom arising from satipatthana.

On a broader perspective, however, it is also possible to say that the threefold cultivations (*bhāvanā*) are synonymous with the threefold training (*sikkhā*), thus:

the cultivation of the body (*kāya, bhāvanā*) = training in moral virtue (*sīla, sikkhā*);
 the cultivation of the mind (*citta, bhāvanā*) = training in mental concentration (*samādhu, sikkhā*);
 the cultivation of wisdom (*paññā, bhāvanā*) = training in wisdom (*paññā, sikkhā*).

“Body” here refers to physical and verbal actions, and “the cultivation of the body” refers to restraining ourselves in regard to killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and wrong speech. The cultivation of the mind is the training in mental concentration, and the cultivation of wisdom is the training in wisdom.

3 Moral virtue

3.1 Thus far, it is clear that the foundation of the Buddhist life is the training in moral virtue (*sīla, sikkhā*), which in turn supports the training in mental concentration, and yet both are like one’s two arms helping each other. A restrained mind leads to restraint in body and speech, and restraint of the three doors conduce to the arising of wisdom—seeing things as they truly are—that leads to spiritual liberation.

Buddhist training in moral virtue comprises of a set of precepts or training-rules (*sikkhāpada*) whose purpose is to hold one back from unwholesome actions and communication.

For one who is awakened such precepts are redundant, not because he or she is now permitted these kinds of behaviour, but because conduct is now perfected and the temptation or rather the motivation at the root of such kinds of behaviour has gone... Since a buddha or arhat has completely eradicated the defilements and any latent tendency to attachment, aversion, or delusion, he or she acts exclusively from non-attachment, friendliness, and wisdom (Gethin 1998:170)

3.2 Or, as **the Kīṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70) records the Buddha word thus:

I do not say of those monks who are **arhats**—those with mental influxes destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what is to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal,

²⁵ See SD 13.

²⁶ There is of course some overlapping of cultivation of the body and the mind in the case of the contemplation of feelings, because when one notices a feeling (a physical sensation), the reaction (like, dislike, neutral) is a mental one, and one deals with such responses on a mental level.

destroyed the fetters of being, freed through right knowledge²⁷—that they still have to do their duties with diligence.

What is the reason for this?

They have diligently done their duties. They are no more capable of being negligent.

(M 70,12/1:478), SD 11.1

The ordinary person of the world is sometimes motivated by greed, by hate or by delusion, and sometimes by detachment, by lovingkindness or by wisdom.

3.3 As part of their training, monastics observe over 200 monastic precepts, the foremost four of which are those against sexual intercourse, against taking the not given, against taking human life, and against false claims of superpowers.²⁸ Lay followers may also keep extra moral precepts as and when they choose to (usually during uposatha days).²⁹ Generally however all lay Buddhists “undertake” (*samādiyāmi*) the 5 precepts, which are listed here with their guiding values and respective virtue (wholesome counterpart to be cultivated) [11.1].³⁰

<u>Precept against:</u>	<u>Value (guide)</u>	<u>Virtue (positive counterpart)</u>
(1) taking life	life	compassion
(2) taking the not-given	happiness	charity
(3) sexual misconduct	freedom	contentment
(4) falsehood	truth	skillful means
(5) intoxication & addiction	mental clarity	wisdom

3.4 Precepts 1-3 deal with bodily restraint while precept 4 deals with restraint from wrong speech. The fifth precept, besides its health and social implications, plays an important role in one’s preparation for mental cultivation, as Gethin notes:³¹

The fifth precept also has wider implications. Heedlessness is interpreted by Theravādin commentators as the absence of “mindfulness” (*smṛti/sati*), an important psychological quality. It is not the taking of alcohol or other drugs as such that is problematic, but the state of mind that it generally induces: a lack of mental clarity with an increased tendency to break the other precepts. The fifth precept also highlights once more what we have to do with here are “principles of training” and what is of paramount importance in the Buddhist conception of spiritual training is mental clarity: this helps to create the conditions that conduce to seeing the way things truly are. The additional precepts in the list of eight and ten are similarly principles of training seen as helpful in the cultivation of the path, rather than prohibitions against intrinsically unwholesome ways of conduct. (Gethin 1998:171)

²⁷ “Arhats—those with mental influxes destroyed...utterly freed through final knowledge,” *arahanto khīṇ’āsavā vusitavanto kata,karaṇīyā ohita,bhārā anuppatta,sad’attha parikkhīṇa,bhava,samyojanā samma-d-aññā vimutta*.

²⁸ The breaking of any of these 4 *pārājika* rules entail “defeat,” ie automatic loss of one’s monastic state. See: (1) *The Pātimokkha*, ed William Pruitt & tr KR Norman, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2001; (2) Thanissaro (tr), *The Buddhist Monastic Code: The Patimokkha Training Rules*. [1994] with explanations; Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery, 2nd ed, 1996; (3) Ariyesako, *The Bhikkhus’ Rules: A guide for laypeople*, Kallista, Vic: Sanghaloka Forest Hermitage, 1998.

²⁹ The *uposatha* or observance days or precept days are the 8th (*aṭṭhamī*), the 14th (*cātuddasī*) or 15th (*pañṇarāsī*) days, and sometimes incl the 5th day (*pañcamī*), of the lunar fortnight (waxing moon & waning moon), when the laity observe the 8 *uposatha* precepts (V 1:87, 102; M 1:39, 2:74; A 4:248; Sn 401; Vv 37.11; Thī 31; J 4:1, 5:173, 194, 6:232; Cp 1:10:4; Vism 227 f). For details, see (**Tad-ah’**) **Uposatha S** (A 3.70), SD 4.18 + SD 9.7c n.

³⁰ On these precepts, see (**Bhaya**) **Vera S** (A 5.174/3:204-206), SD 6.4.

³¹ On a summary regarding moral virtue, see Gethin 1998:169-174.

3.5 The last of the 4 factors of a streamwinner³² is his immaculate moral virtue. The advantage that moral virtue gives to mental training is clearly stated in this stock phrase from **the (Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta** (A 6.10):

Furthermore, āvuso, the noble disciple possesses virtues dear to the noble ones,³³ unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.³⁴
(A 6.10.5/3:286), SD 15.7a

4 “Calmness meditation”

4.1 The closest native English word we have that describes the process of Buddhist mental cultivation is perhaps “meditation.” The advantage of the word “meditation” is that it has religious association since the 14th century or earlier.³⁵ In Buddhist usage, this word is redefined to mean mental “cultivation” (*bhāvanā*), one of the most common early Buddhist terms.³⁶ One of the most ancient Buddhist technical terms for mental cultivation is *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*) [8.4], the verb of which is *jhayati* (“he meditates”).³⁷ In the early suttas, the term *jhāyi* is often used for a meditator, as, for example, in **the Samādhi Samāpatti Sutta** (S 34.1).³⁸ Early in the Buddha’s own ministry, the term *jhāna* is usually used to refer to a deep mental absorption, dhyana. From the word’s context, we can tease out its sense.³⁹

4.2 The early Indian term for religious practice involving some level of mental concentration is *yoga* (Sanskrit & Pali),⁴⁰ which is directly related to the English word, “yoke,” that is, connoting some sort of connecting with or focusing on the spiritual. This stock passage on how one should prepare for meditation is found in such discourses as **the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas**,⁴¹ **the Ānāpāna, sati Sutta**,⁴² and **the Kāya, gata, sati Sutta**.⁴³

Here, bhikshus, a monk⁴⁴ who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty abode,⁴⁵ sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, establishes mindfulness before him.⁴⁶ (D 22,2b/2:291 = M 10,4b/1:56 = M 118,17/3:82 = M 119,4/3:89)

³² *Sotāpannassa aṅgāni*. See eg **Pañca, bhera, baya S** (S 12.41/2:68-70), SD 3.3.4(2); also D 33.1.11(14)/3:227.

³³ “Virtues dear to the noble ones,” *ariya, kantāni sīlāni*. The virtues of the noble one are explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the five precepts; hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74).

³⁴ “Unbroken, ... giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññūpa-saṭṭhehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi, saṁvattanakehi*. See UA 268. For details, see Vism 1.143 ff/51-58.

³⁵ See OED: meditation. Some however see this connection with Christian usage as problematic, but it is clear that some words may be defined by certain religious authorities, but their real meaning comes from general usage. Moreover, the meanings and usages of words evolve and change over time, even within one religious system.

³⁶ D 3:219 (*kāya-*, *citta-*, *paññā-*), 221, 225, 285, 291; S 1:48; Dh 73, 301; J 1:196 (*mettā-*), 3:45 (id), Nc 143 (*saññā-*); Vbh 12, 16 f, 199, 325.

³⁷ D 2:237; S 1:25, 57; A 5:323 f (incl *pajjhayati*, *nijjhayati*, *avajjhayati*); Sn 165, 221, 425, 709, 818 (= Nc 149 incl *pajjhayati*, *nijjhayati*, *avajjhayati*); Dh 27, 371, 395; J 1:67, 410; Vv 50.12; Pv 4.16.6.

³⁸ S 34.1/3:263 f.

³⁹ See **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1.

⁴⁰ M 1:472; Dh 209 (= *yoniso manasikāra*, DhA 3:275), 282 (id, DhA 3:21); Vbh 324. In some modern Buddhist meditation circles (esp in the Myanmar tradition), the meditator is called a yogi.

⁴¹ D 22,2.2/2:291 = M 10,4.2/1:56, SD 13.

⁴² M 118,17/3:82.

⁴³ M 119,4/3:89.

⁴⁴ Comy on **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** with the identical context here says that “monk” (*bhikkhu*) indicates “whoever undertakes that practice ... is here comprised under the term *bhikkhu*” (DA 756; VbhA 216 f; cf SnA 251): see Dh 142, 260-270, 362. Cf the **Bhikkhu Vagga** (ch 25) and the **Brāhmaṇa Vagga** (ch 26) of Dh.

⁴⁵ This stock phrase of 3 places conducive to meditation are at D 2:29; M 1:56, 297, 398, 425, 2:263, 3:82, 89, 4:297; S 5:311, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 329, 336; A 1:147, 148, 149, 3:92, 100, 4:437, 5:109, 110, 111; Pm

4.3 In simple terms, “(he) establishes mindfulness before him” here refers to the basic principle in early Buddhist meditation of conflating one’s attention (the mind) with the meditation object. In the best known meditation method, the mindfulness of the breath (*ānāpāna,sati*), the meditator trains to keep his mind on the breath in this manner:

- (1) Noting the in-breath and out-breath, whether it is long or short; then watching the whole breath (in, pause, out, pause...); then simply being aware whether he is breathing or not.
- (2) Noting without comment whatever physical feelings (pleasant, painful, or neutral) that arises at any of the sense-doors, he brings the attention back to the breath.
- (3) Should any “mental feeling” or emotion arises (desire, anger, wandering mind, etc), he notes them without comment, bringing the mind back to the breath.
- (4) When mindfulness become strong, he turns it to noting the true nature of the body and mind (“impermanent,” etc), noting the energy, the zest, the tranquillity, the happiness and the samadhi that arise until they lead to equanimity.⁴⁷

This is the practice of **satipatthana**,⁴⁸ where both calmness and insight are applied, often called the “twin practice” (*yuga,naddha*).

5 We create our own world

5.1 In **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23),⁴⁹ the Buddha recognizes that there are two sides to human experience, that is, the subjective or “internal” (*ajjhatta*) senses, and the objective or “external” (*bahiddhā*) sense-objects. However, he does not regard the “subjective” to be false and the “objective” true. Both the inner

1:175, 2:36. In **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2), probably an older account, the following instruction is given: “Possessing this aggregate of noble moral virtue and this aggregate of noble sense-restraint and this aggregate of noble mindfulness and clear comprehension and this aggregate of noble contentment, he seeks out a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw” (*so iminā ca ariyena sila-k,khandhena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya,samvarena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena sati,sampajaññena samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuṭṭhitāya samannāgato vivittam senāsanam bhajati, araññam rukkha,mūlam pabbatam kandaram giri,guhāṃ susānam vana,pattham abbhokāsam palāla,puñjam*, D 2.67/1:71): this stock passage also at **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,67), SD 8.10. The oldest reference to an ideal meditation spot is in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) and **Saṅgārava S** (M 100): “still in search of the wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I walked by stages through Magadha until eventually I arrived at Senānigama near Uruvelā. There I saw an agreeable spot, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I sat down there thinking: ‘This is conducive for spiritual striving.’” (M 26,17/-1:167 = 100,13/2:212).

⁴⁶ **Parimukha**, lit “around the mouth,” here always used idiomatically and as an adverb, meaning “in front”: so U Thittila (Vbh:T 319, 328), Walshe (D:W 1995:335), Soma Thera (1998:42 f digital ed), and Ñānamoli & Bodhi (M:ÑB 2001:527). The Vibhaṅga explains it as “at the tip of the nose or at the centre of the upper lip” (Vbh §537/252): see important n to §18(1). **Where to watch the breath?** Brahmavamso, however, says that *parimukha* does not mean “just on the tip of the nose, or on the lip, or somewhere in from of your eyes...[but] just means [to] make it important.” (2002:58). “Often people are told when meditating to watch the breath at the tip of the nose, but actually many people find this is a distraction. If you look at the suttas, the Buddha never tells us to watch the breath in a physical place. He says to know that you are breathing in and to know that you are breathing out. The important thing is to note it in time. So: ‘Am I breathing in at this time, or am I breathing out at this time?’” (Nyanadhammo, “The Spiritual Faculties,” 1999:3). Soṇa Bhikkhu, however, teachers the “traditional” approach of taking *parimukha* as air contact as “either at the nose or lip” (2000:6). (All three teachers here are pupils of Ajahn Chah.) See **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118), SD 17.13 (2d).

⁴⁷ See **Vimutt’āyatana S** (A 5.26), SD (2).

⁴⁸ See **Satipatthāna Suttas** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.

⁴⁹ S 35.23/4:15 @ SD 7.1.

world of subjective experience and the outer world of objective experience are equally real (meaning “experienceable”). This notion is clearly brought out by the Sabba Sutta.

5.2 Several other suttas in **the Book of the 6 Sense-bases** (Saḷāyatana Vagga, S 4)⁵⁰ of the Saṃyutta Nikāya identify the world with the six senses. All that we can know are the six sense-faculties and all that there is to know are the six sense-objects, and the means of this knowing are the six sense-consciousnesses, but the three—sense-faculty, sense-object and sense-consciousness—work in tandem with one another. In short, we create our own world.

5.3 The (Lujjati) Loka Sutta (S 35.82)⁵¹ and **the Paloka Sutta** (S 35.84),⁵² say that the world is whatever that breaks up (lujjati), since whatever can be experience are only meaningful—they make sense—only in relation to one another through incessant change. This reality is happening right now even as you read: if you focus on only one letter or even word, out of context with everything else, it will make no sense. When your eyes scan over the words in a coherent manner, these words you are reading begin to make sense.⁵³ Meaning comes from change.

5.4 The Lok’anta Gamana Sutta (S 35.116) speaks of “a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world” (*loka, saññī loka, mānī*), and by the “world” here refers to the 6 senses.⁵⁴ In his footnote to this sutta, Bodhi makes an interesting remark:

We might conjecture that the five physical sense-bases are prominent in making one a “perceiver of the world,” the mind-base in making one a “conceiver of the world.” No such distinction, however, is made in the text. The six sense-bases are at once part of the world (“that in the world”) and the media for the manifestation of a world (“that by which”). The “end of the world” that must be reached to make an end of suffering is Nibbāna, which is called (amongst other things) the cessation of the six sense bases. (Bodhi, S:B 1413 n99; emphases added)

5.5 My understanding of the notion that the 5 physical senses—the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body—“are prominent in making one a ‘perceiver of the world’ is that we recognize (*saññānāti*) the world mainly through the physical senses: our world comprises of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches (“feelings”) that we experience. However, we rarely remain on this simple, direct and joyful “beginner’s level” of experience, but the sixth sense—our mind—makes each of us a “conceiver of the world.” That is to say, we weave narratives and attach conceivings (*maññita*) to these sense-experiences so that they become realities of the own.

5.6 There is a special word here—*papañceti* (“he mentally proliferates”)—for turning a single thought into a myriad mental chaos. Our spiritual task is to let go of all conceivings (S 35.248), as **Sumedho** soberly points out:

To be aware we have to use skilful means, because at first we’re mystified. We tend to conceive awareness and try to *become aware*, thinking that awareness is something we have to *get* or *attain* or try to develop; but this very intention, this very conceptualization makes us heedless! We keep trying to *become* mindful, rather than just being aware of the mind as it tries to become

⁵⁰ Esp **Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta** (ch 35).

⁵¹ S 35.82/4:52 (SD 7.3).

⁵² S 35.84/4:94.

⁵³ This is of course a simple simile which discounts one’s ability to read, the level of one’s knowledge, the health of eye-sight, etc.

⁵⁴ S 35.116/4:93-96 (SD 7.4).

and tries to attain, following the three kinds of desire [“for sense pleasure, for becoming, or for getting rid of something”] that cause us suffering.

The practice of “letting go” is very effective for minds obsessed by compulsive thinking: you simplify your meditation practice down to just two words—“letting go”—rather than try to develop *this* practice and then develop *that*; and achieve *this* and go into *that*, and understand *this*, and read the Suttas, and study the Abhidhamma...and then learn Pali and Sanskrit...then the Madhyamika and the Prajñā Pāramitā...get ordinations in the Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana... write books and become a world renowned authority on Buddhism. Instead of becoming the world’s expert on Buddhism and being invited to great International Buddhist Conferences, just “let go, let go, let go.” (1992:43 f; emphasis added)

6 The unawakened are often controlled by their past

6.1 Biological evolution entails that we learn from our past. However, while biological evolution is wholly based on past experiences and memories that shape the species, spiritual evolution is about the present moment that would lead to our highest potential as liberated individuals. In a short but important discourse, **the (Nava Purāna) Kamma Sutta** (S 35.146), the Buddha teaches on what is “old karma” and “new karma,” and how to end them, thus:

“**Old karma**” refers to the six senses—the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind—“put together, willed, a basis for feeling.”⁵⁵

“**New karma**” refers to “whatever deed one does now through the body, through speech, through the mind.”⁵⁶

“**The ending of karma**” refers the liberation arising from the ending of karma, that is, “deeds of the body, of speech, and of the mind.”

“**The path leading to the ending of karma**” is the noble eightfold path.

The Sutta then closes with these compassionate admonitions:

Bhikshus, whatever a teacher should do out of compassion for the good of disciples, for the sake of their welfare, this has been done to you by me.

These, bhikshus, are the foot of trees;⁵⁷ these are empty abodes.⁵⁸ Meditate,⁵⁹ bhikshus! Be not heedless! Regret not later!

This is our instruction to you.”⁶⁰

(S 35.146/4:132 f), SD 4.12.

⁵⁵ *Vedaniya*, lit “to be felt”; “intelligible” (DPL); “(a) to be known, intelligible, comprehensible (D 1:12, 2:36; M 1:487, 2:220); (b) to be experienced (S 4:114; A 1:249, 4:382)” (PED: vedeti).

⁵⁶ In other words, “new karma” here refers to the 3rd noble truth, the arising of suffering.

⁵⁷ “Those are the foot of trees,” *etāni rukkha,mūlāni*. “Foot” here is usually single, like “bottom.”

⁵⁸ Sometimes rendered as “empty place”.

⁵⁹ “Meditate!” *jhāyatha*, lit “cultivate *jhāna*” (M 1:45, 118; S 4:133, 4:359, 361, 362, 368, 373; A 3:87, 89, 4:139, 392). Syn *bhāvētha* (2nd pl), “cultivate!” See **Buddha Discovers Dhyana**, SD 33.1b (3.3.2).

⁶⁰ This is stock: **Sallekha S** (M 8,18/1:46), SD 51.8; **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19,27/1:118), SD 61.1; **Āneñja,sappāya S** (M 106,15/2:266 f), SD 85.13; **Indriya,bhāvanā S** (M 152,18/3:302), SD 17.13; **(Nava Purāna) Kamma S** (S 35.146/4:133), SD 4.12; **Kāya S** (S 43.1/4:359), SD 12.21(1); & all suttas in the same **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta** (S 43.2-44/4:360-373); **Bhikkhuṇ’upassaya S** (S 47.10/5:157), SD 24.2; **Dhamma,vihāri S 1** (A 5.73/3:87), SD 44.4; **Dhamma,vihāri S 2** (A 5.74/3:89), SD 44.5; **Araka S** (A 7.70,4/4:139), SD 16.17; cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507). The sentence “regret not later” (*mā pacchā vippaṭisārino ahuvattha*), in the second para, also occurs at **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.19+20/ 2:147, 16,6.5/2:155 ×3, the Buddha’s last words) = **Kusinārā S** (A 4.76/2:79 f); **Devatā S** (A 9.19/4:392), SD 57.14; cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507). For comy, see MA 1:195 f; SA 3:111 f, 266 f.

6.2 Spiritual evolution is founded on our learning from the past. Failing to learn from the past, that is, continuing to make the same mistakes or conducting oneself in similar negative behaviour patterns only perpetuates and reinforces our sufferings and bring them upon others, too. In other words, such a mind is ruled by the past: one tends to miss the past, or to regret it, or to be depressed because of it, look at others as we knew them in the past, or simply live in the past.

6.3 All evil deeds are motivated by habitual tendencies rooted in greed, hate and delusion arising from past karma.⁶¹ How does the past enslave one to these unwholesome deeds and tendencies? In a number of discourses, such as **the Sabb'āsava Sutta** (M 2.7 f), **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38,23),⁶² and **the Paccaya Sutta** (S 12.20), we find a slightly different way of dealing with wrong views, that is, classifying them as “the 16 doubts,” in sets according to past, future and present (with comments added):⁶³

- (1) “Was I in the past?” He speculates whether he existed in the past.
 - (2) “Was I not in the past?” He speculates, for example, whether he arose from nothing.⁶⁴
 - (3) “What was I in the past?” He speculates on his past status, power, wealth, etc.
 - (4) “How was I in the past?” He speculates on his past health, pleasure, etc.
 - (5) “Having been what, did I become in the past? [What was I before I became that in the past?]” He speculates on the causes and conditions of these speculated past states.
 - (6) “Will I be in the future?” He speculates whether he will continue to live in the future.⁶⁵
 - (7) “Am I not in the future?” He speculates whether he will cease to exist in the future.
 - (8) “What will I be in the future?” He speculates on his future status, power, wealth, etc.
 - (9) “How will I be in the future?” He speculates on his future health, pleasure, etc.
 - (10) “Having been what, what will I become in the future? [What now would lead me to that future state?]”⁶⁶ He speculates on the causes and conditions of this speculated future.
 - (11) “Am I?” He speculates whether he is really existing now.
 - (12) “Am I not?” He speculates what he is not, and desiring for them.
 - (13) “What am I?” He speculates on his present status, power, wealth, etc.
 - (14) “How am I?” He speculates on his present health, pleasure, etc.
 - (15) “Where has this being come from?” He speculates about his “origin,” the creator-idea, etc.
 - (16) “Where will it [this being] go?” He speculates about death, survival, future state, etc.
- (M 2,7/1:8, 38.23/1:265; S 12.20/2:26 f)

Such speculations are not spiritually beneficial in that they are invariably skewed by the four biases (*agati*): greed, hate, delusion and fear (D 3:182, 228; A 2:18).

6.4 In other words, the unwise worldly person is a product of his past and a slave of his past, which goes on to blinker and colour his view of the present and the future. The wise spiritual person, on the other hand, leaves the past where it is, and thinks not of the future as it has not yet come, and truly grasps the present by its neck only to let it go. **The Bhadd'eka,ratta Gāthā** put this lyrically thus:

3 Let one not go back after⁶⁷ the past, *Atītaṃ nānvāgameyya*

⁶¹ See **Akusala,hetuka S** (A 10.174/5:261 f), SD 18.8 & also Nyanaponika, *The Roots of Good and Evil*. Wheel 251-253, 1978. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/roots_goodevil.pdf.

⁶² See SD 7.9 (2005).

⁶³ Further, on “the 15 wrong views,” see **Acchariya S 2** (A 4.128), SD 15.5(4).

⁶⁴ I.e., he did not exist in the past, and had arisen *ex nihilo*.

⁶⁵ For example, he may desire for “eternal life.”

⁶⁶ See **Sabb'āsava S** (M 2.7/1:8).

Nor harbour fond hopes for the future.

For what is past has gone away,⁶⁸
And the future has not yet come.⁶⁹

The present state as it arises,⁷⁰
With insight, see each of them;
Immovable, unshakable,⁷¹
Having known that, let one be sure of it.

Work at the task this very day!⁷²
Who knows, death would come tomorrow?
For, there is no bargaining whatsoever
With death's great horde.

One who dwells thus ardently,
Relentlessly, day and night—
He is '*bhaddeka, ratta* [of the wholesome night],'
Says the peaceful sage.⁷³

n'appaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṃ;

*yad atītaṃ pahīnaṃ taṃ
appattaṇ ca anāgataṃ.*

*paccuppannaṇ ca yo dhammaṃ,
tatta tatta vipassati;
asaṃhīraṃ asaṅkappaṃ,
taṃ vidvā manubrūhaye.*

*Ajj'eva kiccaṃ ātappaṃ
ko jaññā maraṇaṃ suve;
na hi no saṅgamaṃ tena,
mahā, senena maccunā.*

*Evaṃ vihāriṃ ātāpiṃ,
aho, rattam atanditaṃ;
Taṃ ve bhaddekaratto 'ti,
santo ācikkhate muni.*

(M 131/3:187), SD 8.9

6.5 The result of fully mastering the present moment is stated in **the Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (S 35.95) in these words of the Buddha:

13 ⁷⁴“When, Māluṅkyā,putta, in things to be seen, heard, sensed and cognized by you,

⁶⁷ “Let one...go back after” (*anvāgameyya*), pot 3 sg of *anvāgami* (caus of *anvāgacchati* = *anu* + *ā-gacchati*), lit “to let come back,” ie to wish something back (CPD).

⁶⁸ Alt tr: “For the past is gone.”

⁶⁹ Alt tr: “And the future is yet unreached.”

⁷⁰ Comy: One should contemplate each state as it arises by way of **the 7 contemplations of insight** (ie by way of insight into impermanence, suffering, non-self, disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, relinquishment) (MA 5:1 f).

⁷¹ Comy explains that this is said for the purpose of showing insight (*vipassanā*) and counter-insight (*pativipassanā*) [ie, the application of the principles of insight to the act of consciousness that exercises the function of insight, on the basis of which it is possible to attain arhathood: see M 52.4/1:350, 121.11/:108; also M:ÑB 1333 n1143.] For insight is “**immovable, unshakable**” [following Sn:N 1149] because it is not defeated or shaken [moved] by lust and other defilements (MA 5:2). Elsewhere, “immovable, unshakable” are epithets of Nirvana (**Sn 1149**) or of the liberated mind (**Tha 469**). Here, however, it seems to refer to a stage in the development of insight. The recurrence of the verb *saṃhīrati* [8, 9] “suggests that the intended meaning is contemplation of the present state without being misled into the adoption of a view of self” (M:ÑB 1343 n1213).

⁷² This line and the next are qu at UA 89, DhA 3:430. Cf *tumhehi kiccaṃ ātappaṃ | akkhātāro tathāgatā | paṭipannā pamokkhanti | jhāyino māra, bandhanā* (Dh 276).

⁷³ The peaceful sage here is of course the Buddha (MA 5:3).

⁷⁴ This teaching is also given to the ascetic Bāhiya Dārucīriya (**Bāhiya S**, U 1.10/8). According to SA, in the form base, ie, in what is seen by eye-consciousness, “there is only consciousness,” that is, as eye-consciousness is not affected by lust, hatred or delusion in relation to form that has come into range, so the *javana* will be just a mere eye-consciousness by being empty of lust, etc. So, too, for the heard and the sensed. The “cognized” is the object cognized by the mind-door advertent (*mano, dvārāvajjana*). In the cognized, “only the cognized” is the advertent (consciousness) as the limit. As one does not become lustful, etc, by advertent, so I will set my mind with advertent as the limit, not allowing it to arise by way of lust, etc. **You will not be by “that” (na tena):** you will not be aroused by *by that* lust, or irritated by *that* hatred, or deluded by *that* delusion. **Then you will not be “therein” (na tattha):** the seen.” For eye-consciousness sees only form in form, not some essence that is permanent, etc. So too for the remaining types of consciousness (ie the *javana* series, SAPT), there will be merely the seen. Or, alternatively, the meaning is “My mind will be mere eye-consciousness, which means the cognizing of form in form. When you are

in the seen there will only be the seen;
 in the heard there will only be the heard;
 in the sensed there will only be the sensed;
 in the cognized there will only be the cognized,
 then, Māluṅkyā,putta, you are ‘not by that.’⁷⁵
 When, Māluṅkyā,putta, you are ‘not by that,’ then you will ‘not be therein’.⁷⁶
 When, Māluṅkyā,putta, you are ‘not therein,’ then you will ‘be neither here nor beyond
 nor in between the two.’⁷⁷
 This is itself the end of suffering.’⁷⁸ (S 35.95.13/4:73), SD 5.9

7 Present-moment awareness and Fehmi

7.1 FEHMI’S “OPEN FOCUS” MODEL. So what is the benefit of the mastery of present-moment awareness? We should first know that while both animals and humans have mindfulness, they often use it in radically different ways. Animal mindfulness, or more correctly, attention, is generally limited to the narrow focus of a stalked prey or the rut, or to the diffuse attention of lazy rest. Humans, however, are capable of “open focus,” to use a modern psychological “model of awareness for integrating the styles of attention” presented by **Lester G Fehmi** (2003), as graphically represented in this “open-focus” diagram:⁷⁹

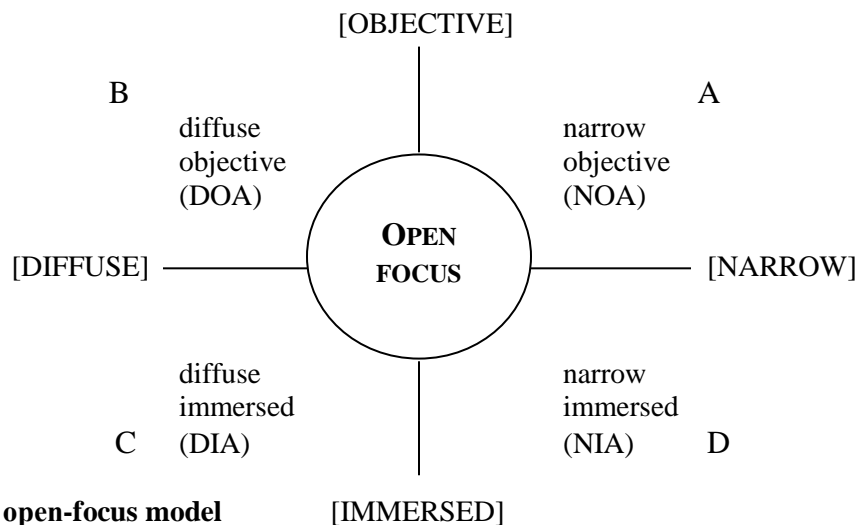


Fig 7.1 Fehmi’s open-focus model

According to Fehmi:

not aroused by that lust, etc, then “you will not be therein”—not bound, not attached, not established in what is seen, heard, sensed and cognized. See S:B 1410 n75.

⁷⁵ *Na tena*, that is, one would not be aroused “by that” lust, etc. See prec n.

⁷⁶ *Na tattha*, that is, one would not be “therein,” i.e. in the seen, etc. See n at head of §13 here.

⁷⁷ “Be neither here...nor in between the two,” *n’ev’idha na huram na ubhayam antarena*, meaning that one would not be reborn anywhere. Comy rejects *in between the two* (*ubhayam antarena*) as implying an intermediate state (*antarā, bhāva*). However, a number of canonical texts (eg, **Kutuhala, sāla S**) clearly support this notion. See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17.

⁷⁸ On this koan-like teaching, see “**The taming of the bull**”, SD 8.2(10).

⁷⁹ See Lester G Fehmi, “Attention to attention,” in *Applied Neurophysiology and EEG Biofeedback*, ed J Kamiya. Newtown, PA: Future Health, 2003. http://www.openfocus.com/text/a_to_a.pdf.

Each of these parameters, as their descriptors suggest, represent individual characteristics of attention. The extreme of “diffuse or broad” attention is associated with an all-around, three dimensional, simultaneous and equal attention to all available external and internal stimuli and the space in which they occur. “Narrow or pointed” attention refers to an awareness of a limited stimuli to the exclusion of the other stimuli. The extreme of “narrow focussed” attention is one-pointed attention. The extreme of “immersed or absorbed” attention refers to a way of relating to available experience such that the person paying attention enters into union with or becomes totally absorbed in the experience. The extreme of “objective or separate” attention occurs when the self is completely remote from the contents of attention, disconnected from single or multi-sensory experience of the attender, without empathy or intuition (into-it-ness).

Extremes of “objective or separate” attention are associated with coldness where as [sic] extreme “immersed or absorbed” attention may be associated with warmth and closeness, full immersion in ingoing single or multisensory experience. (Fehmi 2003:9 f digital ed)

Quadrant A—the narrow objective attention (NOA)—represents a preoccupation of a recurrent thought, of obsessive worry: such a *fixation* leads to the extreme of panic. This is in fact the most predominant attention style of modern urbanized society, “a civilization disposed to the over-use of linear-objective information processing skills of the left hemisphere.”⁸⁰

Quadrant C—the diffuse immersed attention (DIA)—is the attentional opposite of Quadrant A. This is the effortless performance of well-learned *skill* or instinctive behaviour, such as the creative performance of an art form, an athletic feat or a meditator. Such an attention is often healing as it dissipates accumulated stress, and often brings a sense of wellbeing or relaxation.

Quadrant B—the diffuse objective attention (DOA)—is where multisensory experience is simultaneously and objectively present, exemplified by playing in a band, enjoying a beautiful sunset, going for a walk, or driving a car. This type of attention is enhanced through *relational* strategy and interpersonal skill.

Quadrant D—the narrow immersed attention (NIA)—includes *absorptive* modes, such as those of intellectually, emotionally or physically pleasant or stimulating activities. This can be observed in the absorbed look of the face of an enraptured thinker, fantasizer, concert-goer, game player, and one enjoying deep muscle massage or other sensual activities. What Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi⁸¹ calls the “*flow*” would fit into this quadrant.

According to Fehmi, “**full open focus**” (FOF) includes diffuse, narrow, objective and immersed types of attention, all occurring more or less equally and at the same time, with a concurrent awareness of their presence:

The ultimate goal of Open Focus training is to attain the attentional flexibility adequate for moving freely by degrees among and within attentional styles, including all, at times, simultaneously and equally...because of the physical and functional independence of each of the mechanisms which give rise to each of these parameters of attention, it is possible for all of them to be present simultaneously. (Fehmi 2003:11)

7.2 THE BUDDHIST IMPLICATIONS OF FEHMI’S MODEL

7.2.1 According to early Buddhism, each of these attentional styles characterizes only a particular thought-moment. This is especially evident, for example, in the two **Assutava Suttas** (S 12.61-62), where it is illustrated by the famous monkey simile in **the Assutava Sutta 1**:

⁸⁰ Fehmi 2003:10.

⁸¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, NY: Harper & Row, 1990.

...bhikshus, that which is called “mentation” (*citta*),⁸² and “mind” (*mano*), and “consciousness” (*viññāna*), arises as one and ceases as another, just as night is to day [during the night and during the day].⁸³

Just as a monkey, bhikshus, roaming through the forest and mountain-side takes hold of one branch, letting that go, then grabs another, even so, bhikshus, that which is called “mentation,” and “mind,” and “consciousness,” arises, as one and ceases as another, just as night is to day.

(S 12.61.7 f/2:95 = S 12.61.7/2:96), SD 20.2-3

7.2.2 As such, it is impossible for even two, much less all, of these attentional types to occur at the same time. However, if we discount this point, Fehmi’s “open focus” model can be helpful in providing a basic understanding of how Buddhist meditation works. The main differences then would be that while his model is basically a psychological one, the Buddhist “open focus” model is an ethical one.

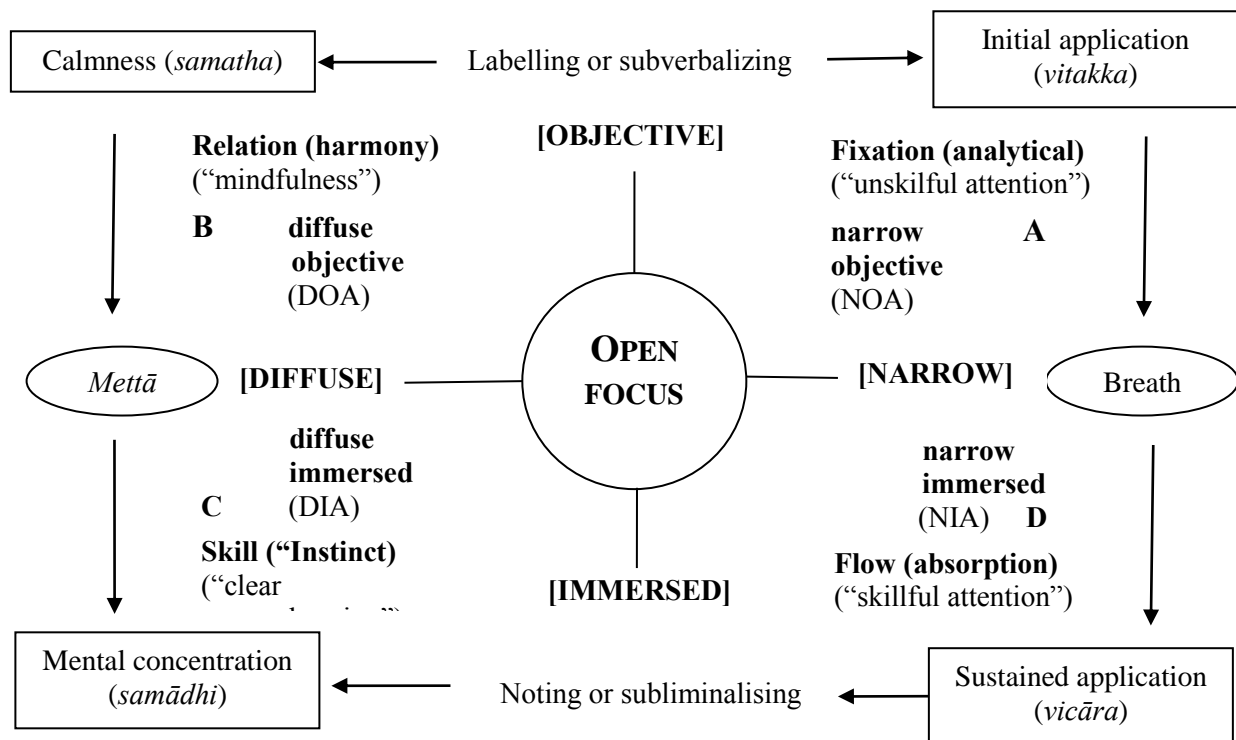


Fig 7.2 The Buddhist implications of Fehmi's "open focus" model

⁸² *Citta*, *mano* and *viññāna* are all synonyms here. Bodhi uses “mentality” for *mano* (S:B 595 & 769 n154). However, here I am influenced by BDict: *citta*, where *adhicitta* = “higher mentality.” Moreover, as Bodhi himself notes: “*Mano* serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense base (along with the five physical sense bases); as the mind base it coordinates the data of the other five senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects” (S:B 769 n154). As such, “mentation” (a function) is clearly a better tr of *mano* than “mentality” (more of a state). This is just a bit of pedantry probably limited to this passage. Elsewhere, it is best (as Bodhi himself admits) to translate *citta* and *mano* as “mind,” as most translators now do, too. See *Viññāna*, SD 17.8a (12).

⁸³ Here the imagery should not be overstretched, for the meaning here is simply that the thought-moment are discrete.

7.2.3 As such, the **“narrow objective” attention (NOA)**, for example, is negative if it is linked to one of the unwholesome roots, that is, greed, hate or delusion.⁸⁴ Whereas, the **“narrow immersed” attention (NIA)** is usually rooted in one of the wholesome roots of motivation: non-greed (charity), non-hate (lovingkindness) or non-delusion (wisdom). Even NIA is not always wholesome since it can be motivated by greed or lust (as in a sexual act, no matter how focused one is about it), or by hate (as how god-fearing terrorists might think after killing hundreds of non-believers), or by delusion (as in the case of one who has won the first prize in a national lottery, only later to discover it is the wrong ticket or wrong number).

The proper Buddhist term here for the processes underlying NOA and NIA would be *manasikāra*,⁸⁵ literally translated as “mentation” or mental activity or attention, but here with ethical tones. Where the mental activity is rooted in the wholesome (charity, lovingkindness, or wisdom)—that is, it is focused, “going with the flow”—it is “wise attention” (*yoniso manasikāra*); where it is motivated by the unwholesome (greed, hate, or delusion)—that is, it is neurotically fixated or coldly calculating—it is “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*).

7.2.4 When **“objective attention” (OA)** is applied to a meditation object (such as the breath) by way of labelling or subvocalizing mental phenomena,⁸⁶ general calmness (*samatha*) follows, which if sustained leads to the mind’s “initial application” (*vitakka*) or adverting to the object, which is in turn followed by “sustained application (*vicāra*), with the mind anchored to the object. In Fehmi’s model, the breath would be regarded as a “narrow” object, while lovingkindness (*mettā*) would be a “diffuse” one, as the goal of lovingkindness meditation is to encompass the whole world, as it were, without any exception, into one’s consciousness.⁸⁷

7.2.5 In either case, this is followed by zest (joyful interest), profound happiness, and one-pointedness of mind. This is termed “dhyana” (*jhāna*) in early Buddhism. In due course, one should “note,” the mental phenomena, that is, discern them in a non-verbally. This is usually more effective than labelling in leading to samadhi, even dhyana, that is, full mental focus.

7.2.6 In the Buddhist framework, the **“diffuse objective” attention (DOA)** and the **“diffuse immersed” attention (DIA)** also apply to more focused mental states. DOA may refer to basic mindfulness (*sati*) or general mental calm (not amounting to samadhi), that is, simple *samatha*. DOA, on the highest level, would refer to mindfulness practice (*satipaṭṭhāna*), or to what is today commonly known as “calmness” meditation (*samatha*), or the attainment of dhyana, when the mind is totally focused, even to the point where sensing and thinking (as we know them) cease. This is represented by DIA, which is related to samadhi or mental concentration in deep meditation.

7.2.7 The two important meditation terms—mindfulness (*sati*) and clear comprehension (*sampajañña*)—are relevant here. “Diffuse objective” attention (DOA) is close to the Buddhist notion of “mindfulness,” the directing of one’s attention to a mental object and yet one remains an observer, as it were.⁸⁸ “Diffuse immersed” attention (DIA) finds a parallel in “clear comprehension,” that is, the mental presence that sustains conditions conducive to mindfulness and that skillfully deals with any mental phenomena so that the mindfulness effectively continues.

Working together, mindfulness and clear comprehension are help us in noting that all our senses-experiences or phenomena are “mind-made,” and as such having the characteristics of being imperma-

⁸⁴ See **Akusala,hetuka S** (A 10.174/5:261 f), SD 18.8 & also Nyanaponika, *The Roots of Good and Evil*. Wheel 251-253, 1978. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/roots_goodevil.pdf.

⁸⁵ A syn is *samannāhāra*, in the sense of directing (*upasaṃharati*) the mind: see **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S**, M 28/1:190), SD 6.16; see also M 1:445; Vbh 321.

⁸⁶ This method is popular with the modern “insight” or Vipassana tradition (founded in Burma in the early 20th century).

⁸⁷ This is known as “breaking the barriers” (*simā, sambheda*) (Vism 9.40-58/307-311; DA 2:400).

⁸⁸ On *sati*, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss**, SD 13.1(3.1c). See foll n.

ment, suffering (unsatisfactory) and non-self (with no abiding essence). This is what is today popularly known as “insight” (*vipassanā*) or “wisdom” (*paññā*) [10]. The balanced development of calm and wisdom leads in due course to self-awakening.⁸⁹

8 The still mind: the hindrances and dhyana

8.1 TYPES OF MEDITATION

8.1.1 The purpose of meditation. Nyanaponika, in his classic work, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, writes that the Buddha’s Teaching comprises these 3 goals:

To know the mind—that is so near to us, and yet is so unknown;
To tame the mind—that is so unwieldy and obstinate, and yet may turn so pliant;
To free the mind—that is in bondage all over, and yet may win freedom here and now. (1962:23)

These are also the *purposes* of meditation. When one first begins to meditate, one is immediately confronted by one’s own mind’s true nature. This is not very flattering, especially when one has not been living a spiritual life; yet many expect to immediately see a calm and clear mind almost immediately. In the early stages of meditation, the practitioner invariably learns to counteract the mind’s tendency to restlessly run after pleasant feelings and different sense-objects.

The main method of overcoming such distractions is to train the mind to rest harmoniously with a meditation object, drawn from a wealth of meditation methods: 38 according to Upatissa’s **Vimutti,magga**⁹⁰ and 40 according to Buddhaghosa’s **Visuddhi,magga**.⁹¹ The most common meditation method is the cultivation of mindfulness of the breath (*ānāpāna,sati bhāvanā*).⁹² Whenever there is a mental distraction, the mind is directed back to the meditation object (the breath), thus keeping it from straying away from the present-moment awareness of the object.

8.1.2 Dealing with subverbalization

8.1.2.1 Once we have experienced “present-moment awareness” [1.5] for long, unbroken periods, then we could go on into even more beautiful and truthful silence of the mind—a stage known in forest meditation as “silent awareness of the present moment.” But before we can really do this, we need to know the difference between this and “inner speech” or sub-verbalization. It is through our inner commentary that we often think we know ourselves or the world. Actually this inner speech is simple self-flattery at best and self-delusion at worst.

Inner speech is the way we superimpose our views and biases onto our sense-experiences. As such, it does not know the world at all, but weaves in strands of desire or of hate, colouring all our experiences with delusion. It causes us to have risky attachments to people and things we think we “love,” and to show ill will to those we dislike. It constructs our fears and guilt, our anxiety and stress.

8.1.2.2 “SILENT AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT MOMENT.” The opposite of these negative states is *the silent awareness* that arise in meditation, and to value this, we need to remove the importance we give to our thinking, or the way we think. In this way, we are ready for the more valuable truthfulness of silent awareness that will raise the quality of our lives.

One way of overcoming inner speech or matter chatter is to cultivate a more refined present-moment awareness, watching every moment so closely that we have no time even to comment on what has just

⁸⁹ See **Samatha & Vipassanā**, SD 41.1; also Dh 1+2.

⁹⁰ Vimm (tr Ehara et al) 1977:63-70.

⁹¹ Vism 3.104-133/110-112.

⁹² M 118/3:77-88, SD 7.13.

happened. When watch something, at once it is gone, but we must keep our attention laser-sharp at what is happening *right here, right now*. If we had an experience and thought, “That’s nice!” “That’s bad!” “What’s that!” we are commenting on something that is already gone, and we just missed the present moment! We are entertaining old visitors and neglecting the new ones.

MEDITATION METHOD	PERSONALITY	CONCENTRATION LEVEL		
10 kasinas				
1. earth (<i>paṭhavī</i>)	all personality types	1 st -4 th dhyana		
2. water (<i>āpo</i>)				
3. fire (<i>tejo</i>)				
4. wind (<i>vāyo</i>)				
5. blue (<i>nīla</i>)	hating			
6. yellow (<i>pīṭa</i>)				
7. red (<i>lohita</i>)				
8. white (<i>odāta</i>)	all personality types			
9. light (<i>āloka</i>) ⁹³				
10. space (limited) (<i>ākāsa</i>) ⁹⁴				
10 foulness (<i>asubha</i>)				
11. the bloated	lustful	1 st dhyana		
12. the livid				
13. the festering				
14. the cut-up				
15. the gnawed				
16. the scattered				
17. the hacked and cut-up (scattered)				
18. the bleeding (blood-stained)				
19. the worm-infested				
20. the bones (skeleton)				
21. loathsomeness of food ⁹⁵	the intellectual	access		
22. analysis of the 4 elements				
10 recollections (<i>anussati</i>)				
23. recollection of the Buddha	the faith-inclined	access		
24. recollection of the Dharma				
25. recollection of the Sangha				
26. recollection of moral virtue				
27. recollection of charity				
28. recollection of the gods				
29. mindfulness of death			intellectual	
30. mindfulness of the body			lustful	1 st dhyana
31. mindfulness of the breath			delusive/discursive	1 st -4 th dhyana
32. recollection of peace			intellectual	access
4 immeasurables (<i>appamaññā</i>)				
33. lovingkindness	the hateful the cruel the resentful the lustful	1 st -3 rd dhyana		
34. compassion				
35. gladness				
36. equanimity		4 th dhyana		
4 formless meditations (<i>ārūpa</i>)				
37. perception of boundless space	all personality types	4 th dhyana		
38. perception of boundless consciousness				
39. perception of nothingness				
40. neither-perception-nor-non-perception				

Fig 8.1 The 40 meditation methods (Vism 3.104-133/110-112)⁹⁶

⁹³ In the Suttas, *āloka kasiṇa* is replaced by *viññāṇa kasiṇa* (consciousness kasina), eg A 10.29,4 (SD 16.15).

⁹⁴ On the consciousness kasina, see SD 49.18 (6.2) at 718b n.

⁹⁵ This is sometimes known as “the one perception” (*eka,saññā*). This (21) and the following (22) are each a class of their own.

8.1.2.3 Another useful method of cultivating silent awareness is to recognize the space in between thoughts during period of inner chatter. If we look carefully—and we need to—we will notice that little window of silence. It may be momentary at first, but as we recognize that fleeting silence, we become more accustomed to it. But if we look more carefully into this window of stillness, we will experience an open garden of blissful silence. But beautiful silence is really shy: the moment you say a word, it immediately disappears.

This inner silence is so beautiful, it is very truthful, too: this is where truth and beauty⁹⁷ go seamlessly and painlessly together. It is so beautiful that we realize there are no words for it. We realize that all those thoughts and words we have had are really pointless, after all. This is where our inner healing begins. The more we enjoy this inner stillness, the more healed and healthy our minds become. And this is only **the second stage** of the forest-method breath meditation, known as “silent awareness of the present moment.”

8.1.3 Bringing the mind to focus.

8.1.3.1 “SUSTAINED ATTENTION ON THE BREATH.” Being healthy means we can do a lot of good things. We could go further, even beyond this inner stillness. Instead of being silently aware of whatever comes into the mind, we now choose a silent present-moment awareness of only *one thing*. This one thing can be our experience of the breath, or the feeling of lovingkindness, or a coloured circle (*kasīna*) [9.2].

This single-object meditation is easier if we are already familiar with silent awareness of the present moment [1.5]. Then we can quite easily direct our attention to the breath, and follow it every moment without any break. We can easily do this because we have stopped the mind’s tendency to run back to the past or rush into the future, and silence inner speech.

For the proper effect, we need to *silently know* that the breath is coming in, or going out. We need to go on doing this for, say, a hundred breaths successively, without any break or missing even one. This is **the third stage** of the forest-method breath meditation, known as “sustained attention on the breath.”

8.1.3.2 “FULL SUSTAINED ATTENTION ON THE BREATH.” In the fourth stage of the forest-method breath meditation, we let our attention expand to take in every single moment of the breath. We cannot *make* this happen.⁹⁸ It comes *naturally* when we have properly and patiently done the previous stages. We silently know that the breath is coming in, that it is going out, that is, at the first touch of it, as soon as it arises.

Then we go on to observe the sensations that gradually arise through *the one and same breath*, not missing a moment of it. When the in-breath ends, we *know* that moment: we mentally *see* that last moment of the in-breath. Then we notice there is a pause or gap before the next breath comes. If we are unsure about this, just *feel* the stillness of the pauses, and enjoy them.

Then we go on to notice the very first moment of the out-breath, and we notice every sensation of the process of the out-breath, until it disappears, completing the exhalation. All this is done silently and in the present moment. And we go on doing this for many hundreds of breath in a row. This is why it is called “full” sustained attention on the breath.

Remember: “you” cannot reach this stage; only the mind reaches this stage. This is where the mind takes care of itself, as it were, and it does so very well indeed, if you just let it. You are simply “the knower” who blissfully watches the whole process. And if you have done all this very well, this fourth stage becomes the “door” to full concentration and dhyana.

⁹⁶ See also Gethin 1998:178 (Table 4) & H Gunaratana 1985:219-221 (App 3). On the 38 meditations, see SD 49.18 (6.2) at 718b.

⁹⁷ On Buddhism as truth and beauty, see SD 40.1 (8.1.2); SD 46.5 (2.4.2) as aesthetics; SD 37.8 (2.3) in right livelihood. See also Piya Tan, Reflection, “No views frees,” R255, 2012.

⁹⁸ It is useful here to know the difference between the “doer” and the “knower” in our mind: see (1.5) & also *Saṅkhāra*, SD 17.6 (8.4).

But since we are reading this, we probably want to know how to go about going into the next stage. Before that exciting journey into the deep space of our mind, we need to well equip ourselves with some knowledge and skill so that we are well prepared. We must first be able to recognize and correct any problems in our meditation, especially the mental hindrances.

8.2 THE 5 MENTAL HINDRANCES

8.2.1 Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) to meditation arise mainly through the practitioner’s lack of restraint of the six sense-doors: the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. A set of five mental hindrances are often mentioned in the Suttas:⁹⁹

<u>Mental hindrance</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Prevention & cure</u> ¹⁰⁰
1. Sensual desire	Pulling	Sense-restraint with understanding of the 6 senses
2. Ill will	Pushing	Lovingkindness
3. Sloth and torpor	Sinking	Perception of light
4. Restlessness and worry	Floating	Letting go or disowning suffering
5. Doubt	Circling	Recollection of death

8.2.2 The first mental hindrance is the desire for sense-objects (*kāma-c, chanda*), the most common forms of which are being troubled by physical discomfort, daydreaming, or being distracted by some sense-stimulus (especially sounds and thoughts).¹⁰¹ This is like trying see our reflection on the surface of *water that mixed with all sort of thick colours*.¹⁰²

8.2.3 The second mental hindrance is that of ill will (*vyāpāda*), which is simply the other ugly twin of the first hindrance. As a result of distractions, we find fault with our practice or our teacher, or even becoming upset with others making a noise—such silent complaints are really excuses for not persevering in one’s meditation. This is like trying to see our reflection in *a bowl of water, fiercely boiling over a strong fire*.

8.2.4 Often such perceptions of lack of progress bring about sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*)—the third mental hindrance. The real reason is that our energy is heavy and congested as a result of too much thinking and mental chatter. This is like trying to look for our reflection in water that is overgrown with moss and water plants.

8.2.5 When our minds trail into the past, recalling things done or undone, we are likely to become worried or guilty. When our minds wander into the future, wondering what to do after the meditation, and so on, we are likely to become restless, mentally and physically. Or, we could be over-excited at our apparent progress, or discouraged at our lack of progress: this is restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkucca*), the fourth mental hindrance. This is like looking for our reflection in water that is stirred and tossed about by a strong wind.

⁹⁹ See (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12. For diagram: *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1(2) (Diag 2).

¹⁰⁰ On the antidotes of each of the 5 hindrances, further see SD 32.1 (2.1.3).

¹⁰¹ Comys on *Satipaṭṭhāna S* say that the *dvandva*, *abhijjhā, domanassa*, “covetousness and discontent [displeasure],” signifies the first two hindrances—sensual desire and ill will—the principal hindrances to be overcome for the practice to succeed.¹⁰¹ Although “covetousness and displeasure” is taken by the Comys to refer to only the first two mental hindrances in the early suttas, the *dvandva* is clearly a synecdoche (or short form) for all the 5 hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇā*) themselves, whose removal leads to mindfulness (*sati*), mental concentration (*samādhi*) and dhyana (*jhāna*). For a discussion, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.1 (4.2e).

¹⁰² This simile, and the other four, for the hindrance are found in (**Nīvaraṇā**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126), SD 3.12.

8.2.6 Finally, we may feel very discouraged on account of the various difficulties and distractions, that we begin to simply doubt our ability to meditate or be uncertain about the true purpose of meditating. This doubt (*vicikicchā*) is the fifth mental hindrance. This is like looking for our reflection in a bowl of turbid muddy water left in the dark. [10.1]

8.2.7 The Pali word *jhāna* (Skt *dhyāna*), and its the Pali verb, *jhāyati*, have three meanings: (1) to think, meditate; (2) to search; (3) to burn.¹⁰³ Thus the dhyanas are so called because they closely attend to the mental object, and because they burn up those states uncondusive to concentration.¹⁰⁴ These adverse states are the 5 hindrances. In the Commentaries and later works, each of the 5 dhyana factors¹⁰⁵ are presented as suppressing a specific hindrance, as represented in this table:

Dhyana factor (<i>jhān'āṅga</i>)	→	Mental hindrance (<i>nīvaraṇa</i>)
(1) initial application	suppresses	(1) sloth and torpor
(2) sustained application		(2) doubt
(3) zest		(3) ill will
(4) happiness		(4) restlessness and worry
(5) one-pointedness of mind		(5) sensual desire

Fig 8.2 Dhyana factors and mental hindrances

It should be remembered, however, that the dhyana factors do not function singly, but work in tandem with one another. As such, they do not actually eliminate specific mental hindrances, but even at the first dhyana, all the hindrances are at least temporarily suppressed. We may be distracted by one particular hindrance, but once the first dhyana is attained, it is overcome.¹⁰⁶

8.3 THE 3 FETTERS

8.3.0 The 5 mental hindrances are best overcome in two ways: firstly, by making sure one leads a morally harmonious life through understanding the five precepts and keeping to them [3]. Secondly, either faith in the Buddhist teachings or wisdom in the understanding of the Suttas and related teachings, which are best effected through tutelage under an experienced and compassionate teacher, and through self-study and constant reflection of such teachings [10.1]. The purpose of cultivating these spiritual faculties of faith or of wisdom is to at least understand, if not overcome, the 3 fetters (*saṃyojana*),¹⁰⁷ namely,¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ The Sanskrit cognate of *jhāna* is *dhyāna*, of which there are 3 roots:

√**dhī**, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1a), to meditate, contemplate, think upon, brood over (with acc) (D 2:- 237; S 1:25, 57; A 5:323 f (+ *pa~*, *nī~*, *ava~*); Sn 165, 221, 425, 709, 818 (= Nm 149 *pa~*, *nī~*, *ava~*); Dh 27, 371, 395; J 1:67, 410; Vv 50.12; Pv 4.16.6.

√**dhya**, to think → Skt *dhyāyati*, P *jhāyati* (1b), to search for, hunt after.

√**kṣa(y)** & √**kṣī**, to burn → Skt *kṣāyati*; P *jhāyati* (2), to burn, to be on fire; fig to be consumed, to waste away, to dry up (D 1:50 (= *jāleti* DA 1:151)); caus *jhāpeti* (VvA 38 = *jhāyati* 1a: to destroy by means of *jhāna*).

See Gunaratana 1985:7 f & also **Dhyana**, SD 8.4(3).

¹⁰⁴ See DhsA 410; DhsA:PR 519.

¹⁰⁵ On the 5 dhyana-factors (*jhān'āṅga*), see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (6).

¹⁰⁶ For detailed studies, see **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

¹⁰⁷ A good practical reading here is Ajahn Chah's "Clarity of Insight" (2001). On the 10 fetters, see §10.3n.

- (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*),
- (2) attachment to rules and rituals (*sīlabbata,parāmāsa*), and
- (3) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*).

8.3.1 Self-identity view,¹⁰⁹ in simple terms, is the wrong view that the body is the self, that is, has a substantial, unchanging or eternal essence. One sees the body as a self, or one is attached to the bodies of others as solid selves. Or, one might see only the physical world is real, that good and evil are relative notions without any intrinsic worth, that there is nothing beyond this. Or, that there is eternal life, eternal happiness, eternal suffering. One’s life is ruled by words—but *the word is not the thing*.

The basic remedy here is the constant reflection that the body consists only of the four elements—earth (hardness, or “resistant” aspects of the body), water (flowing or “cohesive” aspects), fire (heat, that is, body warmth, cold, digestion and decay) and wind (wind and motion). For a delightful discourse on these elements, see **the Dhātu Vibhāṅga Sutta** (M 140).¹¹⁰ Another interesting discourse in this connection is **the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62),¹¹¹ where the Buddha teaches the 18-year-old Rāhula “the element-like meditations,” that is, a sort of combination of lovingkindness cultivation (*metta,bhāvanā*)¹¹² and the elements meditation (*dhātu,kammaṭṭhāna*),¹¹³ which serves as preliminary or supporting practice for the breath meditation (*ānāpāna,sati bhāvanā*).¹¹⁴ The Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta closes with these remarkable words:

30 Rāhula, this is how the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing, when cultivated and often developed, is of great fruit and great benefit. Rāhula, when the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing is cultivated and often developed in this manner, **[426] even the last breath leaves with your knowledge**, not without it.¹¹⁵ (M 62.30/1:425 f)

This means that the habit of cultivating the mindfulness of the breath helps to keep one’s mind steady and focused, so that even one’s dying thought is wholesome, acting as a momentum for a wholesome rebirth. The true purpose of the Buddhist life is to at least break these three fetters, and when they are all broken, one would in no time (seven more lives at most) attain awakening—that is, one becomes a streamwinner.¹¹⁶

8.3.2 The second mental fetter is **attachment to rules and rituals**, where everything one does is merely a routine for the sake of immediate needs and as stopgaps to feelings of insecurity. One’s religious beliefs are gripped by blind faith, fear and guilt; one’s life riddled with selfishness and superstition; one’s fate

¹⁰⁸ For a more detailed study, see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 (3).

¹⁰⁹ See **Antā S** (S 22.103/3:157 f), SD 14.1(1) & also “**I**”: **The nature of identity**, SD 19.1.

¹¹⁰ M 140/3:237-247 @ SD 4.17. See also Ledi Sayadaw 1965a:457-467; 1965b:245-250.

¹¹¹ M 62,30/1:425 f @ SD 3.11.

¹¹² For the basic text, see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Sn 1.8 = Kh no 9). For more advanced methods, see **Metta,sahagata S** (or Halidda,vasana S) (S 46.54/5:115-121), SD 10.11.

¹¹³ M 3:240.

¹¹⁴ The locus classicus is **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118/3:77-88), SD 7.13.

¹¹⁵ **Visuddhi,magga** says: “Herein there are three kinds of final (breaths) because of cessation, that is to say, final in becoming, final in absorption, final in death. For, among the various kinds of existence, in-breaths and out-breaths occur only in the sense-sphere existence, not in the form-existence nor the formless existence. That is why there are final ones in existence. They occur in the first three dhyanas but not in the fourth. That is why there are final ones in the dhyanas. Those that arise along with the sixteenth consciousness-moment preceding the death-consciousness cease together with the death-consciousness. They are called ‘final in death.’ It is these last that are meant here by ‘final’” (Vism 8.241/291 f). On the 17 thought-moments, see Abdhs 4.6, rev tr Bodhi 2nd ed 1999:153 ff. For a brief explanation, see GP Sumanapala, *An Introduction to Theravada Abhidhamma*, Singapore, 1998:137 (ch 8). For a comparative study of the closing, see Intro (5)

¹¹⁶ See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

ruled by untested dogmas and unquestioned power. Religion becomes nothing more than a system of rewards and punishments negotiable through prayers and petitions to gods, priests and shamans.

8.3.3 The third mental fetter, **spiritual doubt**, is the feeling that one has no spiritual worth, or one is blinded by a sense of loss. Or, one might feel totally helpless, and utterly dependent on some parent-like other-power, or one's emotional security is only secured by the approval of others. Doubt arises from the wrong notion that the answer to life's problems lies outside of oneself, in other people and in material things. This doubt disappears when one truly looks within and understands the true nature of one's mind.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas (D 22; M 10) has what is known as the "satipathana refrain,"¹¹⁷ a stock passage following every set of meditation instruction, where the practitioner is admonished to note the impermanence (rise and fall) of states within oneself and externally in others and other things, and close with these instructions:

Or else, he maintains the mindfulness that "There is a body," merely for knowing and awareness.
And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in this world.
And that, bhikkhus, is how a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body.

(D 22,2-10 @ SD 13.2; M 10,4-30 @ SD 13.2)

8.3.4 These 3 fetters are intimately related to one another, held together by the false notion of a self. Since there is really no such self, one naturally finds no security in it. Lacking security, one tries to find it in the rut and routine of materialism, superstition and religion. All that this sort of lifestyle does is only to reinforce one's self-doubt and sense of lack. Since the three fetters are connected, breaking one, all are broken:

You could say that the three fetters of doubt, blind attachment to rites and practices and personal-ity view are inseparable and even similes for each other. Once you have seen this relationship clearly, when one of the fetters, such as doubt, for instance, arises and you are able to let it go through the practice of insight, the other two fetters are automatically abandoned at the same time.

(Ajahn Chah 2001:3)

And on fully breaking the three fetters, one could, if one likes, say the Suttas, declare one's streamwinning, thus:

I have destroyed hell, the animal birth, the realm of the departed [ghosts], the plane of misery, the evil destiny, the lower realm. I am a streamwinner, no longer bound for the lower world,¹¹⁸ sure of going over to self-awakening!

(D 16,2.8/2:93; S 12.41,3/2:68, 55.24,13/5:388)

[At this point, you might like to go on to read the essay on **Samadhi**, SD 33.1a, and then return here to resume reading.]

8.4 DHYANA. The proper keeping of the precepts helps one to restrain one's body and speech, which helps in directing the mind to the meditation object. When the sense-doors are well guarded, it is easier for one to rise out of the old habitual states into calmer and clearer states. These states of calm and clarity, when properly developed, temporarily free one from "the sphere of the senses" (*kāma-vacara*): one is no

¹¹⁷ On "satipathana refrain." see SD 13.1(5A.1) & Analayo 2003:92-116 (ch 5).

¹¹⁸ *Avinīpāta*, alt tr "not fated for birth in a suffering state"; opp of *vinīpāta*, "the world of suffering," another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*nīraya*), the animal birth (*tirachāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura, kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are "happy courses" (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19.

more enslaved by the five physical senses, nor dictated by the old habitual mind. One has entered “the sphere of form” (*rūpāvacara*), a world of refined pure world of light-energy.

The sphere of pure form (*rūpāvacara*) comprises four progressively subtle mental absorptions or dhyanas (*jhāna*).¹¹⁹ The dhyanas arise as a result of the overcoming of all the 5 mental hindrances [8.2]. In other words, when the mind is free from sense-desires, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt, it enters dhyana. Instead of these five hindrances, the first dhyana is described as having five “limbs” (*jhān’āṅga*). In summary, we can tabulate (according to the Abhidhamma tradition) the respective **dhyana-factors** (*jhān’āṅgā*) of the four dhyanas in the table below.¹²⁰ From the table, we can see that “one-pointedness of the mind” (*ek’aggatā*) of the mind¹²¹ is present in all the dhyanas. However, unlike the other 4 dhyana-factors, one-pointedness is not always explicitly stated in the dhyana stock formula, except in that of the second dhyana.¹²²

The process of attaining and mastering the dhyanas has been compared to learning to play a musical instrument.¹²³ At the initial level of competence, the mind still needs to think consciously what to do (by way of initial application and sustained application). However, as one becomes more skilled in the process, it becomes increasingly spontaneous and easy—the concert pianist becomes one with the piano, and effortlessly runs his fingers over the keyboard producing beautiful music. This is the 1st dhyana.

	initial application	sustained application	zest	happiness	one-pointedness of mind
1st dhyana	<i>vitakka</i>	<i>vicāra</i>	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	(<i>ek’aggatā</i>)
2nd dhyana	...	...	<i>pīti</i>	<i>sukha</i>	<i>ek’aggatā</i>
3rd dhyana	...	...	...	<i>sukha</i>	(<i>ek’aggatā</i>)
4th dhyana	...	...	...	...	(<i>ek’aggatā</i>)

Diagram 8.4 The dhyana factors

In the 2nd dhyana, there is no more initial application or sustained application: all thinking processes are suspended. One can say that it is pure wholesome emotion: zest (joyful interest), happiness and one-pointedness of mind. This special mention of the mind’s one-pointedness in the 2nd dhyana is because this is the only place where you can actually experience the mind, that is, by way of a *nimitta*, a reflection of the mind.¹²⁴

When the zest subsides, one reaches the 3rd dhyana. Finally, the 4th dhyana is a state of total equanimity. The 4th dhyana is especially important as it forms the basis for the production of the “mind-made

¹¹⁹ This ancient word (Skt *dhyāna*) orig means “meditation,” but came to refer also to “mental absorption.” See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

¹²⁰ On each of the dhyana factors (*jhān’āṅga*), see Abhs:BRS 1.18-20/54-59, 2.2(5)/80.

¹²¹ See Gunaratana 1985:66-68.

¹²² See eg the dhyana stock passage in **Pabbateyya Gāvī S** (A 9.35) [8.6]. Interestingly, however, one-pointedness is actually included in the dhyana stock formula in some suttas, but they are all relatively late works, none of them spoken by the Buddha himself, viz: **Mahāvedalla S** (M 43.19/1:294) & **Anupada S** (M 111.4/3:25), and **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 274). This simply means that they were implicit in the Buddha’s own teachings (for there is no dhyana without one-pointedness), but made explicit in the disciple’s teachings.

¹²³ See Gethin1998:184 f.

¹²⁴ See **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,20(9)/3:83), SD 7.13; also Brahmavamso 2002:73.

body,”¹²⁵ and for the development of psychic powers.¹²⁶ It also forms the portal to the four formless attainments (*arūpa, samāpatti*), which are essential progressively for even more refined dhyana states.¹²⁷

8.5 GOING THROUGH THE DHYANAS. **Brahmavamso**, in his insightful guide, *The Jhānas*, gives the following “summary of the landmarks of all dhyanas”:¹²⁸

- (1) There is no possibility of thought;
- (2) No decision-making process is available;
- (3) There is no perception of time;
- (4) Consciousness is non-dual, but only of bliss that does not move; and
- (5) The 5 senses are fully shut off, and only the sixth sense, the mind, is in operation.

As such, if during meditation, one is wondering whether it is dhyana or not, one can be sure that it is not! The factors of dhyana can only be recognized after emerging from it, using reviewing mindfulness once the whole mind is on the move again. [8.6.3]

Although all dhyanas are states of unmoving bliss, there is, however, some movement discernible in the first dhyana, called “the wobble” (*apilāpana*):¹²⁹

One is aware of great bliss, so powerful it has subdued completely the part of the ego that wills and does. In *Jhāna*, one is on automatic pilot, as it were, with no sense of being in control. However, the bliss is so delicious that it can generate a small residue of attachment. The mind, not the doer,¹³⁰ instinctively grasps at the bliss. Because the bliss of First *Jhāna* is fuelled by letting go, such involuntary grasping weakens the bliss. Seeing the bliss weaken, the mind automatically lets go of its grasping and the bliss increases in power again. The mind then grasps again, and lets go again. Such subtle involuntary movement gives rise to the wobble of the first *Jhāna*. (2003:44)

Another way of looking at this wobble is the back and forth movement between involuntary grasping towards the bliss and automatic letting-go of: this is in fact the process of the dhyana factors of “initial application” (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*). *Vicāra* is the involuntary grasping of the bliss, while *vitakka* is the automatic movement back into the bliss.

While in non-meditation contexts, *vitakka* and *vicāra* may refer to “initial thought” and “sustained application,” or even thinking and pondering,¹³¹ respectively,

¹²⁵ “Mind-made body,” *mano, mayā kāya*, popularly known as the “astral body”; see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.85-86/1:77), SD 8.10. Peter Harvey: “This shows that consciousness is seen as able to leave the physical body by means of a mind-made body. Such a body could be seen as a kind of ‘subtle body,’ for a being with a mind-made body is said to feed on joy (D 1:17), not on solid nutriment (D 1:195): it thus lacks the four great elements of the physical body (solidity, cohesion, heat and motion, D 1:195). As such a body relates to the ‘realm of (pure) form,’ the subtle matter composing it can only be visible and audible matter (Vbh 405). However, the mind-made body is invisible to the normal eye (Pm 2:209). It occupies space, but does not impinge on gross physical matter, for the ‘selfhood’ of a certain god with a mind-made body is said to be as large as two or three fields, but to cause no harm to anyone (A 3:122). With such a body, a person can exercise psychic powers such as going through solid objects, being in many places at once, or flying (D 1:78).” (“The mind body relationship in Pali Buddhism: A philosophical investigation.” *Asian Philosophy* 3,1 1993:8 digital ed.) On *mano, mayā*, see Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:138-168 (ch 7). Cūḷa Panthaka is foremost amongst the monks who are able to create mind-made bodies (A 1:24): see **Kevala-dha S** (D 11,53b/1:215 & n), SD 1.7.

¹²⁶ See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,87-98/1:77-85), SD 8.10.

¹²⁷ See eg **Visuddhi, magga**’s presentation of the 40 meditations (*kammaṭṭhāna*), *Vism* 3.104-32/110-117. [8.1]

¹²⁸ Brahmavamso 2003:43.

¹²⁹ The Pali for this is prob *apilāpana*: see Miln 37. The positive counterpart of *upagaṇhana* (“taking up”), which is *upaṭṭhāna* (“setting up” or focusing) of the mind (MA 1:82 f).

¹³⁰ On def of “doer” (and “knower”), see Brahmavamso 2006:40.

¹³¹ See eg **Sakka Pañha S** (M 21,2.3/2:278), SD 38.1.

it is impossible that such a gross activity as thinking can exist in such a refined state as *Jhāna*. In fact, thinking ceases a long time prior to *Jhāna*. In *Jhāna*, *Vitakka* and *Vicāra*¹³² are both subverbal and so don't qualify as thought. (Brahmavamso, id)

8.6 FINE-TUNING DHYANA: THE PABBATEYYA GĀVĪ SUTTA (A 9.35)

8.6.1. The foolish mountain cow. This Sutta is an exposition on how to properly progress through the dhyanas. The first part of the Sutta gives the parable of the foolish mountain cow, unfamiliar with pastures, and unsure of its way around thinks of finding new pasture, but due to its lack of knowledge and experience is unable to even move about properly, much less taste the grass of new pastures, and furthermore is unable to find its way home. Even so, a meditator who, lacking mastery over the first dhyana, tries to go into higher dhyanas would similarly fail. The parable of the foolish mountain cow colourfully illustrates this:

Suppose, bhikshus, a mountain cow—foolish, inexperienced, unfamiliar with her pasture, unskilled in roaming in the rugged mountains—were to think:

“What now if I were to go into a quarter I’ve never been to before, to eat grass that I’ve never eaten before, to drink water I’ve never drunk before?”

Not having firmly placed her front hoof, she would lift her hind hoof. Surely, she is unable to go into the quarter she has never been to before, nor to eat grass that she has never eaten before, nor drink water she has never drunk before.

And she would not be able to even return safely to that spot where she had placed her hoof, where it occurs to her, “What now if I were to go to a region I’ve never been to before, to eat grass that I’ve never eaten before, to drink water I’ve never drunk before?”

What is the reason for it?

Because, bhikshus, she is foolish, inexperienced, unfamiliar with her pasture, unskilled in roaming in the rugged mountains. (A 9.35,1/4:418 f), SD 24.3¹³³

One who, without having fully mastered the first dhyana, attempts to go into the second dhyana, would fail, just as the foolish mountain cow that fails to find new pasture and would also be unable to find her way home. Such a meditator is said to be “one who has fallen away from both (*ubhayato bhaṭṭho*), who has failed at both (*ubhayato parihīno*).”¹³⁴ The Burmese **Mahā Tikā** (Great Sub-commentary to the Aṅguttara) explains this expression as meaning that he is “one who has fallen from both the dhyanas” (*ubhayato jhānato bhaṭṭho*).¹³⁵

8.6.2 The fivefold mastery. For this reason, seasoned meditation masters often advise the beginner, on attaining dhyana, to keep it up for a sustained period, and not to spend too much time discerning them.¹³⁶ This “stoking” of the dhyanas is kept up until one gains mastery (*vasī, bhāva*) over them. In this connection, the Commentaries and later meditation literature speak of these **fivefold mastery** (*pañca vasī*):¹³⁷

¹³² On the def of these dhyana factors, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4(6).

¹³³ The importance of this passage on the parable of the foolish mountain cow (A 9.35,1-2/4:418 f) is attested by the fact that it is qu at Vism 4.130/153 f.

¹³⁴ A 9.35,3/4:419 @ SD 24.3.

¹³⁵ AAMT:Be 1:178,16 (1960).

¹³⁶ See eg Pa Auk Sayadaw 1999:18, 2003:55.

¹³⁷ Pm 96 f; Vism 4.131 f/154, 6.24-30/124 f; ApA 108; Abhs:BRS 342; VismT:Be 1:312. See Gunaratana 1985: 74-77; Pa-Auk 2003:55-58. Besides these fivefold mastery, the meditator should also cultivate to gradually extend the counterpart sign (*nimitta, vaddhana*) until it fills the whole universe (that is, becomes boundless) or beyond. [9]

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) Mastering the advertence (<i>āvajjana, vasī</i>): | the ability to bring our mind to dhyana; |
| (2) Mastering the attainment (<i>sampājjana, vasī</i>): | entering dhyana quickly and whenever we wish to; |
| (3) Mastering the resolution (<i>adhiṭṭhāna, vasī</i>): | staying in dhyana for the determined duration; |
| (4) Mastering the emergence (<i>vuṭṭhāna, vasī</i>): | easily emerging from dhyana at the appointed time; |
| (5) Mastering the review (<i>paccavekkhaṇa, vasī</i>): | discerning the dhyana factors after emerging from it. |

8.6.3 The intelligent mountain cow

8.6.3.1 The Pabbateyya Gāvī Sutta then gives the parable of an intelligent mountain cow, familiar with pastures, and sure of its way around thinks of finding new pasture, and with knowledge and experience is able to even move about properly, and so taste the grass of new pastures, and furthermore is able to find its way home. The Sutta continues, explaining how one progresses through the dhyanas, implicitly showing how mastery is applied after each dhyana in turn, implied by the refrain, “*He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign so that it is well fixed,*” thus:

DHYANA STOCK PASSAGE:

(1) Even so, bhikshus, here, a certain monk,¹³⁸ wise, experienced, pasture-wise [knowing the right conditions], skillful, detached [secluded] from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, reaches and dwells in the **1st dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.¹³⁹

He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign so that it is well fixed.

(2) Then it occurs to him, “What now, if, with the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, I attain and dwell in **the 2nd dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration?”¹⁴⁰ Without distracting himself, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in the second dhyana,....¹⁴¹

He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign so that it is well fixed.

(3) Then it occurs to him, “What now, if, with the fading away of zest, I remain equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experience happiness with the body, attain and dwell in **the 3rd dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness?’” Without distracting himself, he, with the fading away of zest, remain equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experiencing happiness with the body, attains and dwells in the third dhyana,....¹⁴²

He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign so that it is well fixed.

(4) Then it occurs to him, “What now, if, with the letting go of pleasure and of pain—and with the earlier ending of happiness and suffering—I attain and dwell in **the 4th dhyana**, that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity?” Without

¹³⁸ That is, a meditator.

¹³⁹ Elsewhere, eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.75.2/1:73), this line follows: “He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body [the mental body, Vism 4.175/169] with the zest and happiness born of solitude,” see SD 8.10. On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The laity and dhyana**, SD 8.

¹⁴⁰ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya,tuñhī,bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka,vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī,saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In Ariya,pariyesanā S (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate).

¹⁴¹ Elsewhere, eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.77/1:74 f), this line follows: “He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the zest and happiness born of concentration,” see SD 8.10.

¹⁴² Elsewhere, eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.79/1:75), this line follows: “He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the happiness free from zest,” see SD 8.10.

distracting himself, he, with the letting go of pleasure and of pain, attains and dwells in the fourth dhyana, ...¹⁴³

He enjoys, cultivates, continuously works on the sign so that it is well fixed.

(A 9.35,2/4:419), SD 24.3

8.6.3.2 In similar vein, the Sutta goes on to describe how the meditator progresses through each of the 4 formless attainments in turn. However, this excerpt on these passages on the 4 form dhyanas serves our purpose in understanding how to properly progress through the dhyanas. We should not rush from the first dhyana into the second or further.

First, we should be truly familiar with the first dhyana, and then emerge from it. In reviewing, we should then reflect on its faults, and on the advantages of the second dhyana, that is to say: the first dhyana is close to the 5 hindrances, and has the gross dhyana-factors of initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), thus making it less calm than the second dhyana.

8.6.3.3 So without any desire for these two dhyana-factors, seeking only zest, happiness and one-pointedness of mind, we go back to working on the counterpart sign, leading to the first dhyana. Then, on emerging from it, while reviewing, the two dhyana factors—initial application and sustained application—will appear gross, while the other three factors will appear to be calm. In short, we have applied the fivefold mastery [8.5] over the first dhyana and we go on to attain the second dhyana.

8.6.3.4 One similarly in due course, we go on to apply the fivefold mastery to the third dhyana. After emerging from the second dhyana, we reflect on the faults of zest (*pīti*), that it is still body-bound. Then we reenter the second dhyana, and on emerging, during reviewing, zest will appear gross, but happiness and one-pointedness calm. This second dhyana, too, should be well-mastered before we attempt to attain the third dhyana.

8.6.3.4 Having mastered the third dhyana, we emerge from it, and reviews that even happiness (*sukha*) is gross. We re-enter the third dhyana, and on emerging, and reviewing happiness, will notice it to be gross, but one-pointedness is calm. Having mastered the third dhyana, we are then ready to enter the fourth.¹⁴⁴

8.6.4 The four-storey house. From what we have discussed so far, it is clear that dhyana with a thought-free ultra-calm mental state where all sense-activities, except the mind, shuts down. Whatever we wish to do, can only be done on emerging from the dhyana. Furthermore, we can only enter (or emerge from) the dhyanas *progressively* without omitting any of them. Brahmavamso gives this very apt simile of a four-roomed house (that is, a series of antechambers), that is, each dhyana is within the next:

Imagine a four-roomed house with only one entrance door. Going through that door, one enters the first room. One must go through the first room to enter the second room, go through the second room to enter the third room, and one must go through the third room to enter the fourth room.

Then to go out from the fourth room one must leave via the third room, to go out from the third room one must leave via the second room, to go out from the second room, one must go out

¹⁴³ Elsewhere, eg **Sāmañña.phala S** (D 2,81/1:75), this line follows: “He sits, pervading the body with a pure, bright mind, so that there is no part of his entire body that is not pervaded by a pure, bright mind,” see SD 8.10. On the “pure, bright mind,” see **Accharā Vagga** (A 1.6.1 f): “Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant (*pabhassara*), but it is defiled by defilements from outside. The untutored ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. As such, for him there is no personal development” (A 1.6.1 f/1:10). On reaching the 4th dhyana, the practitioner becomes directly aware of the truly and naturally pure nature of the mind. See also A:ÑB 1999 §4.

¹⁴⁴ See Pa Auk Sayadaw 1999:18-20, 2003:56-58.

via the first room, and to go out from the first room one must leave by the same door through which one came in.

Now suppose that the floor surface in all the four rooms was so slippery that it is impossible to add to the momentum within the house. Thus, if one entered the house with only a little momentum, one will slide to a halt within the first room. With greater amount of entry momentum, one may come to a stop in the second, or even the third room. Then with yet more entry momentum, one may reach the fourth room.

... The entry momentum can only be generated outside of *Jhāna*, when control is possible. The type of “momentum” referred to here, is the momentum of letting go.

(Brahmavamso 2003:57-60)

We could also see the 4 dhyanas as *a four-storey building*, or *an eight-story tower*, in the case of the 4 dhyanas and 4 attainments. We begin on the ground floor and ascend the floors one by one, without missing any, till we reach the top. And to come down to the ground floor, we need to descend one floor at a time until we are on ground level.

In terms of mastery (*vasī, bhāva*) over the dhyanas, experiencing dhyana is like flying on autopilot, but safely. One starts off by “programming” the mind for a predetermined length of time in a specific dhyana: this is called “resolution” or “determination” (*adhiṭṭhāna*), which is the third factor of fivefold mastery of dhyana. Of course, we must first have mastered flying and be fully familiar with the territory.

8.7 HOW TO ATTAIN DHYANA

8.7.1 Leigh Brasington, in his experiential article, “Instructions for entering jhana,” gives this well known meditation maxim:

The likelihood of you experiencing a jhana is inversely proportional to the amount of desire that you have for it. After all, the instructions given by the Buddha in the early texts for practising jhana begin with “Secluded from sense desire, secluded from unwholesome states of mind, one approaches and abides in the first jhana.”^[145] (*Insight Journal*, 2002)

Understandably, dhyana is difficult to obtain without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Self-experimentation here is like learning to drive a car without a qualified driving instructor.¹⁴⁶

8.7.2 If we are doing the breath meditation, we begin by sitting in a proper posture and then direct our attention to **the breathing-process**.¹⁴⁷ As the mind settles and locks in with the breath, we are on our way to access (or neighbourhood) concentration (*upacāra, samādhi*) [9.5]. At this point, we may find our breath very subtle and peaceful. If we are comfortably focused on it, we would in due course attain dhyana.

8.7.3 Otherwise, we could shift our attention to any pleasant sensation in your body—this is a key dhyana strategy. Since such a pleasant sensation is much more subtle than that of the breath, we have to be truly focused to notice it. This is when experienced teachers often remind their students to “smile the Buddha

¹⁴⁵ Eg D 2.75/1:73 (SD 8.10).

¹⁴⁶ Student meditators will anyway find Brasington’s article very helpful in providing effective tips for gaining mental focus.

¹⁴⁷ Understandably, this instruction assumes that one has been learning and practising meditation (ie mindfulness exercises) with an experienced Buddhist practitioner. Self-experimentation here is like learning to drive a car without a driving instructor. Although a few may be able to bliss out with certain experiences perceived as dhyana, it is very unlikely they will benefit spiritually from this (if **Vimuttāyatana S** (A 5.26,2.3), SD 21.5 (2), is their aim in the first place).

smile” or “happily smile in your heart.” This smiling greatly helps one in building up the positive feeling for joyful focus.¹⁴⁸

8.7.4 We could watch the pleasant a tingly or twitching or pulsating feeling in the hands, especially at the thumbs, that is, if our right hand is resting in our left hand with the thumbs lightly touching.¹⁴⁹ Or at the “third eye” spot (*uṇṇa*) on the forehead, the top of the head (*uṇhīsa*), or nose-tip, or the solar plexus (heart level), or anywhere else in the body. It is not the spot that matters, but that we are able to immerse oneself in the pleasant feeling: do just that and nothing else. Similarly, if we are cultivating **lovingkindness**, once we are fully immersed in the feeling (*not* the thought) of lovingkindness, simply attend to the pleasant feeling, and do nothing else.

8.7.5 As the joy deepens in subtlety, we should *en-joy* it, expecting nothing else. In other words, we can only prepare the conditions for dhyana to arise. We cannot “do dhyana” in any other way. When meditating, do not wish for anything: *just sit*, and know the time to shift your attention to the pleasant sensation. When we are able to keep our dhyana experience stable [8.6], then look at it with wisdom [10.3]. Meantime, we must remember that even dhyana is still a worldly experience [9.4] that we must transcend in due course.¹⁵⁰

9 The signs and the stages of zest

9.1 THE MEDITATION SIGN. One of the key features of dhyana experience is profound joy, or more technically, zest (*pīti*), sometimes somewhat crudely rendered as “rapture” (which has a very sensuous or worldly connotation). Zest, in the sense of joyful interest, is perhaps the best translation for *pīti* as it connotes profound joy, spiritual energy and mental focus. Both Upatissa, in his **Vimutti,magga**, and Buddhaghosa (following Upatissa) in his **Visuddhi,magga**, speak of three successive “signs” (*nimitta*)¹⁵¹ and five stages of zest.¹⁵²

Two senses of *nimitta* should be distinguished here. As “meditation object” (*nimitta*), also called *ārammaṇa* in the Commentaries, it refers to a chosen specific mode of meditation, such as the breath, as taught, for example, in **the Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118).¹⁵³ As “meditation sign” (*nimitta*), it usually refers to an intruding thought or distraction that is unwholesome (rooted in greed, hate, or delusion), as described, for example, in **the Vitakka,saṅṭhāna Sutta** (M 20).¹⁵⁴

9.2 KASINA MEDITATION

9.2.1 The meditation sign (*nimitta*) is usually explained in connection with *kasina* meditation, where external objects such as coloured discs¹⁵⁵ are used. **The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) contains definitions of these colour *kasinas* in its section on the 8 bases of mastery (*abhibh'āyatana*), thus:

¹⁴⁸ On joy as a meditation catalyst, see **Vimuttāyatana S** (A 5.26,2.3), SD 21.5 (2).

¹⁴⁹ This gesture helps the meditator to keep his shoulders back and keeping the body upright.

¹⁵⁰ See further **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

¹⁵¹ For a more detailed discussion on *nimitta*, see SD 19.15. See esp Brahmavamso, “The nimitta: the ‘home stretch’ into Jhānas,” 2003:21-39 (pt 2).

¹⁵² For as helpful reading, see Gethin 1998:181-184.

¹⁵³ M 118/7:77-88 (SD 7.13).

¹⁵⁴ M 20/1:199-222 (SD 1.6).

¹⁵⁵ The *kasina* colours listed in the suttas and Comys are blue (*nīla*), yellow (*pīta*), copper-red (*lohita*), and white (*odāta*) (D 16,3.29-32/2:110 f; Vism 5.12-20/172-174). Together with *mañjeṭṭha* (bright crimson) and *pabhassara* (composite), they form the Buddha’s six-coloured aura (***cha-b,baṇṇa raṃsi***, DhA 1:249, 2:41, 4:99; J 5:40): *nīla*, *pīta*, *mañjeṭṭha*, *lohita*, *odāta*, *pabhassara* (M 1:509; J 6:185; Dhs 617): these are the colours of the universal Buddhist flag; sometimes as *nīla*, *pīta*, *lohita*, *odāta*, *mañjeṭṭha*, *pabhassara* (V 1:25; DhA 3:214); simply as *cha-b,baṇ-*

3.29 (5) ... Just as a flax flower¹⁵⁶ that is blue [indigo], of blue colour, blue in appearance, with a blue glow; or just like Benares cloth smoothened on both sides, that is blue, blue in appearance, with a blue glow; even so, not perceiving form internally, one seeks forms externally, blue, of blue colour, blue in appearance, with a blue glow... [111]

3.30 (6) ... Just as a cassia¹⁵⁷ flower that is yellow, of yellow colour, yellow in appearance, with a yellow glow; or just like Benares cloth smoothened on both sides, that is yellow, yellow in appearance, with a yellow glow; even so, not perceiving form internally, one seeks forms externally, yellow, of yellow colour, yellow in appearance, with a yellow glow...

3.31 (7) ... Just as a hibiscus¹⁵⁸ flower that is red [copper-red], of red colour, red in appearance, with a red glow; or just like Benares cloth smoothened on both sides, that is red, red in appearance, with a red glow; even so, not perceiving form internally, one seeks forms externally, red, of red colour, red in appearance, with a red glow...

3.32 (8) ... Just as the morning star¹⁵⁹ that is white, of white colour, white in appearance, with a white glow; or just like Benares cloth smoothened on both sides, that is white, white in appearance, with a white glow; even so, not perceiving form internally, one seeks forms externally, white, of white colour, white in appearance, with a white glow.¹⁶⁰ (D 16,3.29-32/2:110 f)

9.2.2 Later meditation traditions describe the use of a coloured disc, especially that found in **the Visuddhi,magga**,¹⁶¹ for example:

Or, he can make a *kaṣiṇa* disc, either a portable one as described for the earth kasina, or on a wall, with one of the colour elements, such as greenish blue [verdigris]¹⁶² (*kaṁsa nīla*), leaf-green (*palāsa nīla*), collyrium¹⁶³ blue (*añjana nīla*), surrounding it with a different colour element. Then, he should mentally attend thus, “Blue, blue,” in the way described for the earth kasina [Vism 4.21-202/123-169]. (Vism 5.13/173)

na raṁsī. Cf *rajana* (dye), *lākhā* (lac), *haliddī* (turmeric), *nīlī* (indigo), *mañjeṭṭhā* (crimson) (S 12.64.8/2:101); cf Ap 1:2.

¹⁵⁶ *Ummā,puppha*, *Linum usitatissimum*, a plant of the family Linaceae. It is a herbaceous annual, when densely planted for fibre, averages 3-4 ft (0.9-1.2 m) in height, with slender stalks, and with branches concentrated at the top. The flowers, born on stems growing from branch tips, have five petals, usu blue in colour but sometimes white or pink. The Pali *nīla* refers to colours ranging from blue, dark-blue, green, dark green, blue-green, grey, blue-black, and sometimes black; in meditation, however, it refers to the indigo or dark-blue of the linseed or flax flower (*ummā puppha*) (V 4:120; D 16.3.29/2:110; M 2:13 = A 5:61; Ap 258; Tha 1068): see PED: *ummā* & CPD: *ummā-puppha*.

¹⁵⁷ “Cassia,” *kaṇṇikāra* or *kaṇikāra* (Skt *karnikāra*). The *karnikāra*, also called cassia, pudding-pipe, golden show-er tree, or *kinihirimal* in Sinhalese, has long drooping pods and large racemes or clusters of star-shaped yellow flowers. See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.30/2:111), SD 9 n.

¹⁵⁸ *Bandhu,jīvaka* (PED: *Pentapetes phoenicea*, but prob *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) (D 2:111; M 2:14; J 4:179; Vism 174; VvA 43, 161; DhsA 14). See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.31/2:111), SD 9 n.

¹⁵⁹ *Osadhī,tāraka*, lit “the medicine star” (D 2:111; M 2:14; S 1:65; J 1:23). Also tr as “the star of healing.” *Osa-dhīsa* is the moon (Abhp 52; Sadd 380), which Indian mythology regards as the lord of healing. DPL says this is Venus (but without evidence).

¹⁶⁰ According to **Paṭhama Kosala S** (A 10.29), the white kasina is the foremost of the 8 stages of mastery (*abhi-bh'āyatana*) (A 10.29.6/5:61), SD 16.15. Pa Auk Sayadaw stresses on this kasina: see 1999:33-38, 2003:72-76. The sutta, however, earlier on also states that of the 10 kasinas, the consciousness kasina is the foremost (A 10.29.-5/5:60), SD 16.15.

¹⁶¹ Vism 5.12-20/1172-174.

¹⁶² Verdigris is greenish-blue, the colour of the substance that forms on copper, brass or bronze after being left for a long time in wet or damp conditions.

¹⁶³ Collyrium here is the greenish blue colouring applied to the eyelashes and inner eyelids by Indian women.

9.2.3 Ṭhitapuñño, a forest monk of Ajahn Chah’s tradition, gives these instructions for beginners to kasina meditation:

Initially one should find and consult a teacher with experience in kasina meditation, then one should prepare one or several kasina devices (see instructions at the end of this article), and seek a suitable place for practicing. The area of practice must be quiet and well-lit. One must make sure the practice area is also clean and tidy. The background against which the kasina device is placed must not be cluttered or show visually-distracting features.

One’s sitting posture must be comfortable (any arrangement of the legs/arms will do as long as the back is self-supported and straight). The image should be imprinted on a suitable surface such as a plate. Usually a coloured or white circle with a black border centred on a square white surface will do (squares, triangles or other regular polygons could be used as suitable images, as well).

The kasina device¹⁶⁴ should be placed between 1.5 and 3 meters away from the eyes. One then stares at the centre of the coloured image without considering the border or the remaining white area. One may blink one’s eyes to relieve them of tension or fatigue. Focusing on the colour one may initially repeat to oneself (mantra-like) the corresponding name of the colour (e.g. “blue, blue, ...”) for a short while until the initial focus on the object has been established and one is increasingly less distracted. Then all verbalization is abandoned and one focuses exclusively on the “blueness,” with firm intent to subdue or keep at bay other thoughts or sensory experiences.

(Ṭhitapuñño, CKM pp1 f)¹⁶⁵

9.3 THE 3 SUCCESSIVE SIGNS. In this preparatory cultivation (*parikamma bhāvanā*)¹⁶⁶ [9.3], the meditator focuses his attention fully on “the preparatory sign,” that is, a preliminary (but imperfect) mental image of the *kaṣiṇa*. This may also be called “the verbal stage,” as the meditator applies a sub-verbalization (mental noting) of the *kaṣiṇa*, occasionally attaining **momentary concentration** (*khaṇika samādhi*).

When the meditation sign becomes a stabler and clearer mental image, he has reached the “access or neighbourhood cultivation” (*upacāra bhāvanā*), and the image is called “the acquired sign” (*uggaha nimitta*), or “the visualized image,” since he is able to see the mental image in a stabler and clearer manner, that is, **access concentration** (*upacāra samādhi*).

After a period of proper practice, lasting months or even years, he arrives at the stage of “the attainment cultivation” (*appanā bhāvanā*), when “the counterpart sign” (*paṭibhāga nimitta*) or “conceptualized image”¹⁶⁷ finally arises, and he has succeeded in his practice by attaining **full concentration** (*appanā samādhi*).¹⁶⁸

9.4 THE 3 MUNDANE SAMADHIS. Seasoned meditators and meditation buffs often speak of three kinds of samadhi (mental focus), namely, momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), access (or neighbourhood) concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), and full concentration (*appanā samādhi*).¹⁶⁹ **Samadhi** is attained when

¹⁶⁴ Ṭhitapuñño suggests the following dimensions for the kasina device: coloured circle diameter = 9” (23 cm); circle centred on square of side = 27” (0.7 m); black border for circle, thickness = (a generous) 3/4” (2 cm).

¹⁶⁵ For full instructions, see Ṭhitapuñño, “Colour-kasina meditation” (see Biblio), see also SD 49.5b (1.0.2.3).

¹⁶⁶ On the 3 cultivations (*bhāvanā*): *parikamma bhāvanā*, *upacāra bhāvanā*, *appanā bhāvanā*, see Abhs:BRS 1.18-20/54-59; Abhs:SR 203; Abhs:WG 33-39; Vism 4.31/125.

¹⁶⁷ Also called “counter-sign,” “counter-image” or “counterpart image.” This is the purified and stable conceptualized (or internalized) image of the meditation subject which appears at a high point of meditation focus. Once developed, the sign or image can be extended to cover successively larger area of the inner visual space. See Vism 6.31/-130 f & 4.126-128/158 f.

¹⁶⁸ For further details on full concentration, see SD 49.5b (1.0.4.4).

¹⁶⁹ All 3 are mentioned in DhsA 117; Vism 144; only *upacāra samādhi* and *appanā samādhi* are mentioned at Vism 85, 371 (ie besides DhsA 117; Vism 144). **The Abhidhamm’attha Saṅgaha** speaks of *parikamma bhāvanā*,

the meditator keeps his mental focus on an object that calms to a very stable level. “The level of concentration,” says Ajahn Chah, “is determined by the refinement of consciousness as you train the mind to maintain awareness on a meditation object from moment to moment” (2001:3). **Ajahn Chah** defines momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*) as follows:

In *khaṇika samādhi* (momentary concentration) the mind unifies for just a short space of time. It calms down in *samādhi*, but having gathered together momentarily, immediately withdraws from that peaceful state. As concentration becomes more refined in the course of practice, many similar characteristics of the tranquil mind are experienced at each level, so each one is described as a level of *samādhi*, whether it is *khaṇika*, *upacāra* or *appanā*.

At each level, the mind is calm, but the depth of the *samādhi* varies and the nature of the peaceful mental state experienced differs. On one level, the mind is still subject to movement and can wander, but moves around within the confines of the concentrated state. It doesn't get caught into activity that leads to agitation and distraction. Your awareness might follow a wholesome mental object for a while, before returning to settle down at a point of stillness where it remains for a period.

You might compare *khaṇika samādhi* with a physical activity like taking a walk somewhere: you might for a period before stopping for a rest, and having rested start walking again until it's time to stop for another rest. Even though you interrupt the journey periodically to stop walking and take rests, each time remaining completely still, it is only ever a temporary stillness of the body. After a short space of time, you have to start moving again to continue the journey. This is what happens within the mind as it experiences such a level of concentration.

(Chah 2001:3 f; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

The term *khaṇika samādhi* is not found in the Suttas, but in the Commentaries and later works. **The Paramattha,mañjūsā**, Dhammapāla's *Ṭikā* (Subcommentary) to Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhi,magga*, defines it as momentary concentration, or “momentary unification of the mind” (*khaṇika ekaggatā*), as he calls it, as “concentration lasting only for a moment. For that, too, when it occurs uninterruptedly on its object in a single mode and is not overcome by opposition, fixes the mind immovably, as if in absorption” (*VismṬ* 278).¹⁷⁰

Momentary consciousness, however, should not be misunderstood to be merely a poor cousin of neighbourhood concentration, or a distant cousin of full concentration. **Dhammapāla**, commenting on Buddhaghosa's use of the term “preparatory concentration” in connection with the cultivation of the divine ear,¹⁷¹ clearly states that

This is momentary-concentration consciousness, which owing to the fact that the preliminary work contingent upon the sound has been performed, occurs in one who has attained the basic jhana and emerged for the purpose of arousing the divine ear element.

(*VismṬ* 402 ad *Vism*8.23/289; Ñāṇamoli's tr)

In other words, according to Dhammapāla, momentary concentration is simply access concentration interspersed with sense-consciousness, with the counterpart-sign and dhyana-factors as object.¹⁷²

9.5 AJAHN CHAH'S EXPLANATIONS. It is evident from Ajahn Chah's description that momentary concentration is not so much a “level” of concentration, as it is a “break” from a deeper or higher level of concentration. As such, this break is only momentary, like a rest (momentary concentration) we take dur-

upacāra bhāvanā and *appanā bhāvanā* (Abhs:BRS 9.5/331; Abhs:SR 203; Abhs:WG 328), showing their relationships with the 3 kinds of samadhi here. See Fig 9.6 below.

¹⁷⁰ Ad *Vism* 8.232/289. Ñāṇamoli's tr.

¹⁷¹ *Vism* 13.5/408.

¹⁷² See L S Cousins 1996:47.

ing a walk (access concentration, or full concentration). However, momentary concentration is also an “initial level” of concentration when a beginner experiences profound moments of joyful peace when the mind is momentarily focused on the meditation object. This level of concentration is, as it is called, only “momentary.” When the mind is more steadily focused on the object, but there is still a bit of mental movement, it is called access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), it is described by Ajahn Chah thus:

If you practice meditation focussing on an object to calm the mind and reach a level of calm where the mind is firm in *samādhi*, but there is still some mental movement occurring, that is known as *upacāra samādhi*. In *upacāra samādhi*, the mind can still move around. This movement takes place within certain limits, the mind doesn’t move beyond them. The boundaries within which the mind can move are determined by the firmness and stability of concentration.

The experience is as if you alternate between a state of calm and a certain amount of mental activity. The mind is calm some of the time and active for the rest. Within the activity, there is still a certain level of calm and concentration that persists, but the mind is not completely still or immovable. It is still thinking a little and wandering concentration.

It’s like you are wandering inside your own home. You wander around within the limits of your concentration, without losing awareness or moving “outdoors,” away from the meditation object. The movement of the mind stays within the bounds of wholesome (*kusala*) mental states. It doesn’t get caught into any mental proliferation based on unwholesome (*akusala*) mental states. Any thinking remains wholesome. Once the mind is calm, it necessarily experiences wholesome mental states from moment to moment. During the time it is concentrated, the mind only experiences wholesome mental states and periodically settles down to become completely still.

(Chah 2001:3; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

When the mental hindrances [8.2] are fully broken through, even temporarily, full concentration is attained. The mind is fully and harmoniously focused on the meditation sign. Ajahn Chah describes this state as follows:

In *appanā samādhi* the mind calms down and is to a level where it is at its most subtle and skilful. Even if you experience sense-impingement from the outside, such as sounds and physical sensations, it remains external and is unable to disturb the mind... This is because the mind lets go automatically. Concentration is so deep and firm that you let go of attachment to sense-impingement quite naturally. The mind can enter this state for long periods. Having stayed inside for an appropriate amount of time, it then withdraws. (Chah 2001:4; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

Ajahn Chah then goes on to explain how the “bright signs” (*nimitta*) arise during such a level of concentration:

Sometimes, as you withdraw from such a deep level of concentration, a vision of some aspect of your own body can appear. It might be a vision showing some aspect of the unattractive nature of your body that arises into consciousness. As the mind withdraws from the refined state, the image of the body appears to emerge and expand from within the mind. This is just one example of the different kinds of image that can occur.

Images that come up in this way are extremely clear and unmistakable. You have to have genuinely experienced very deep tranquillity for such images to come up. You see them absolutely clearly, even though your eyes are closed. If you open your eyes, you can’t see them, but with the eyes shut and the mind focussed in concentration, you can see such images as clearly as if viewing the object with eyes wide open.

You can experience a whole train of consciousness where from moment to moment the mind’s awareness is fixed on images expressing the unattractive nature of the body. These can appear in many different forms giving you insight into the lack of any real self or essence in the body.

(Chah 2001:4; reparagraphed)

These special ways of knowing at this level provide the bases for wise attention and development of insight, which we will discuss below [10].

9.6 THE 5 STAGES OF ZEST. Here we will have an overview of how the signs and samadhi discussed earlier [9.3-4] are related, and how the various levels of zest (*pīti*) fit in. Buddhist meditation is mental cultivation comprising of five progressively refined and profound states of zest. Even at the stage of preliminary cultivation, when the meditator is directing his attention to the meditation object (the preparatory sign), he might taste the “minor zest” (*khuddaka pīti*), marked by horripilation, literally, a pleasant hair-raising experience. Or, he might even experience a more profoundly pleasant “momentary zest” (*khaṇika pīti*), that arises and disappears like repeated flashings of lightning.

When the meditator, during neighbourhood cultivation stage, begins to visualize the acquired sign, he may be filled with “flooding zest” (*okkantikā pīti*) that descend upon him like tossing sea-waves. This feeling may then intensify into the “uplifting zest” (*ubbegā pīti*), so called because it can literally lift one off the ground momentarily. At its peak of meditation ecstasy, he is utterly drenched in “pervading zest” (*pharaṇa pīti*), or “suffusing zest.” Then he sees the counterpart-sign and attains the full concentration of dhyana. Of special interest are these last two types of zest, which is described by **Paññāwong**, a monk meditator of Lamphun (northern Thailand) as follows:

When uplifting rapture [*ubbegā pīti*] arises it is very strong; it makes the whole body shake and tremble. The meditator will fall to the left or to the right, bow down, clap hands and feet, sit down, stand up, and then run around filled with strange emotions. The meditator will cry and laugh and will not be able to shut their eyes or mouths. The veins will protrude and the blood feels both hot and cold. The body will feel as if it is expanding and will levitate the length of a finger span, a cubit, an arm’s length, or one *wa* (two metres); or, the meditator may (experience the sensation of) diving down into the water.

The signs mentioned above are all a consequence of the fourth uplifting rapture. They are not a cause for worry, not a sign of madness or insanity, and are not disruptive...

When the pervading rapture [*pharaṇa pīti*] arises it fills the body with happiness, pervading the whole body in the same way as water flows into and fills ponds and rivers. Upon the arising of pervading rapture, *upacāra, samādhi* (access concentration) emerges.

(Paññāwong in “The way of meditation,” tr Swearer 1995:212)

The relationship amongst the 3 types of cultivation (*bhāvanā*), the 3 meditation signs (*nimitta*) and the 5 types of zest (*pīti*) can be tabulated as follows:

Cultivation (<i>bhāvanā</i>) ¹⁷³	Meditation sign (<i>nimitta</i>)	The 5 kinds of zest (<i>pīti</i>) ¹⁷⁴
attainment cultivation (<i>appanā bhāvanā</i>)	counterpart-sign (<i>paṭibhāga nimitta</i>)	full concentration (<i>appanā samādhi</i>)
neighbourhood cultivation (<i>upacāra bhāvanā</i>)	acquired sign (<i>uggaha nimitta</i>)	(1) pervading zest (<i>pharaṇa pīti</i>) (2) uplifting zest (<i>ubbegā pīti</i>) (3) flooding zest (<i>okkantikā pīti</i>)
preparatory cultivation (<i>parikamma bhāvanā</i>)	preparatory sign (<i>parikamma nimitta</i>)	(4) momentary zest (<i>khaṇika pīti</i>) (5) minor zest (<i>khuddaka pīti</i>)

Fig 9.6 *Bhāvanā, nimitta and pīti* (the table starts at the bottom)¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ D 33.1.10(48)/3:219. See [2] above.

¹⁷⁴ Vism 4.94-99/143 f.

The meditation experiences described here appear to be that of samatha or calmness meditation. However, in Paññāwong's work, as in the early Buddhist texts, there is no distinction at all between samatha and vipassana. Swearer makes this note in the introduction to his translation of Paññāwong's work:

There is substantial additional evidence that the method espoused in the text represents the type of meditation generally practiced in the Lamphun area prior to the resurgence of vipassanā (insight) meditation in the modern period promoted, in particular, by disciples of the northeastern teacher, Acharn Mun, and Thai students of the Burmese meditation teacher, Mahasi Sayadaw. It has been reported, for example, that prior to World War II, it was customary of monks and novices in northern Thailand to use meditation beads, as essential device in the practice of samatha meditation as taught in the text under consideration...

... Over 30 percent of Paññāwong's text deals with recollecting on or focusing one's awareness on the triple gem (or three jewels), in particular the Buddha... The text therefore, serves as an example of the essential linkage between recollection [*anussati*] and meditation. The tendency of western Buddhist meditators, in particular, to remove meditation from its ritual-devotional context represents what some scholars of Theravāda Buddhism have characterized as a "Protestantizing" of the tradition. (Swearer 1995:207 f)

9.7 TWO KINDS OF ZEST. The Sanskrit cognate for *pīti* is *prīti*, and both mean "joy, delight, pleasure," but the Sanskrit form also means "friendship, love, affection" (SED). We can see here a worldly aspect and a spiritual aspect of *pīti*. In fact, the suttas make a clear distinction between the two. Carnal zest (*āmisa pīti*) is an intense emotion that arises dependent on the five kinds of sense-desires. This is the *rapture* of the concert pianist or a sensual person, that is often confused with spiritual zest. Carnal zest, in its absence, often brings on a profound sense of loss or pain, since it is sense-dependent. [9.1]

Spiritual zest (*nirāmisa pīti*), on the other hand, arises in connection with the first and the second dhyanas, that is, in the absence of the five mental hindrances: sense-desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt.¹⁷⁶ While carnal zest arises from sensual activities, spiritual zest is generally associated with spiritual experience. Spiritual zest (*pīti*) is usually found in the stock *pāmuja* (gladness) sequence—gladness, zest, tranquillity, happiness and concentration¹⁷⁷—"specifically related to the process of the mind's becoming progressively contented and stilled."¹⁷⁸ As Gethin notes,

What seems to be clear is that *pīti* and these associated ideas are intended to convey a sense of the emotional fulfillment that is seen as inherent in the spiritual life. It is to be noted that this process of emotional fulfillment which culminates in the mind's becoming concentrated is consistently seen as the precursor to the more advanced stages of the spiritual path. (2001:154)

10 Insight

10.1 THE HINDRANCES & SAINTHOOD

10.1.1 In themselves, the dhyanas are impermanent, but their effects become permanent with the application of insight. Even in an unawakened meditator, the attainment of dhyana provided momentary release from the mental hindrances [8.2]. The Saṃyutta Commentary speaks of **the 3 kinds of release or escape** (*nissaraṇa*) in terms of dhyana:

¹⁷⁵ Gethin has a similar table (1998:182, Table 5), which is different in many important ways from the one here, which is based on Paññāwong's writing. See also Cousins 1973: 120 f.

¹⁷⁶ **Nirāmisa S** (S 36.31/4:235 f). See also D 1:73, 3:288; M 1:283; S 4:78 f, 351-358.

¹⁷⁷ Respectively, *pāmuja*, *pīti*, *passaddhi*, *sukha*, *samādhi*.

¹⁷⁸ Gethin 2001:154. See **Vimutt'āyatana S** (A 5.26/3:21-24), SD 21.5 (2).

- (1) by suppression (*vikkhambhana nissaraṇa*) on attaining the 1st absorption (*jhāna*),
- (2) by the substitution with the wholesome opposite state (*tad-aṅga nissaraṇa*) by insight (*vipassanā*),
- (3) by cutting off (*samuccheda nissaraṇa*) on attaining arhathood—to each of the hindrances.

In this case, *nissaraṇa* (escape), *pahāna* (abandonment), *nirodha* (ending), *viveka* (solitude), *virāga* (fading away), and *vossagga* (relinquishing) are all synonymous, all of which (for example, the 5 *nirodhā*), have two more factors, totalling five altogether [8.2]—

- (4) by tranquillization (*paṭipassaddhi nirodha*), and
- (5) by escape (*nissaraṇa nirodha*)—are added. (Pm 1:27.220 f; Vism 410)

10.1.2 As regards **the mental hindrances**:

- (1) sensual lust is suppressed by the first dhyana based on foulness and cut off by the path of arhathood (*kāma-c, chanda* here includes desire for any object, not only for sensual pleasures);
- (2) ill will is suppressed by the first dhyana based on lovingkindness and cut off by the path of non-returning;
- (3) sloth and torpor are suppressed by the perception of light (visualization of a bright light like the disc of the sun or the full moon),¹⁷⁹ and cut off by the path of arhathood;
- (4) restlessness and worry are suppressed by calm, worry is cut off by the path of non-returning and restlessness by the path of arhathood; and
- (5) doubt is suppressed by the defining of physical and mental states (*dhamma, vavatthāna*)¹⁸⁰ and cut off by the path of streamwinning. (SA 3:174)

The (Nīvaraṇā) Saṅgārava Sutta (S 46.55) discusses the five mental hindrances in some detail.¹⁸¹ Now let us look at how insight is applied to the dhyanas.

10.2 THE 18 PRINCIPAL INSIGHTS. The *Visuddhi, magga*¹⁸² lists and describes 18 kinds of principal insights (*mahā, vipassanā*) that arise through overcoming wrong ideas and views “by the opposite” (*tad-aṅga*), that is, by way of “overcoming by the opposite” (*tad aṅga pahāna*), thus:

<u>The principal insights</u>	<u>dispels</u>
(1) contemplation of impermanence (<i>aniccānupassanā</i>)	perception of impermanence
(2) contemplation of suffering (<i>dukkhānupassanā</i>)	perception of pleasure
(3) contemplation of non-self (<i>anattānupassanā</i>)	perception of self (as unchanging entity)
(4) contemplation of revulsion (<i>nibbidā'nupassanā</i>)	perception of lust
(5) contemplation of dispassion (<i>virāgānupassanā</i>)	perception of greed
(6) contemplation of ending (<i>nirodhānupassanā</i>)	perception of arising [origination]
(7) contemplation of abandoning (<i>paṭinissaggānupassanā</i>)	perception of clinging
(8) contemplation of destruction (<i>khayānupassanā</i>)	perception of compactness
(9) contemplation of passing away (<i>vayānupassanā</i>)	perception of karma-accumulation
(10) contemplation of change (<i>vipariṇāmānupassanā</i>)	perception that things last [lastingness]
(11) contemplation of the signless (<i>animittānupassanā</i>)	perception of conditions
(12) contemplation of desirelessness (<i>apaṇihitānupassanā</i>)	perception of delight
(13) contemplation of emptiness (<i>suññatānupassanā</i>)	perception of adherence (to views)

¹⁷⁹ It should be clearly noted here that this practice does not entail looking directly into the sun: it is a visualization, ie a mental focus using a mental image. On the perception of light, see **Pacala S** (A 7.58,7), SD 4.11.

¹⁸⁰ Vism 18.3-8/587-589.

¹⁸¹ S 46.55/5:121-126 @ SD 3.12.

¹⁸² Vism 22.113-121/694 f.

(14) insight into states of higher wisdom (<i>adhipaññā, dhamma, vipassanā</i>)	grasping and adherence to the idea of substance
(15) knowledge and vision according to reality (<i>yathā, bhūta, ñāṇa, dassana</i>)	adherence to delusion (about the self and the world)
(16) contemplation of danger ¹⁸³ (<i>ādinavānupassanā</i>)	attachment and adherence
(17) contemplation by way of review (<i>paṭisankhānupassanā</i>)	thoughtlessness [lack of mindfulness]
(18) contemplation of turning away (<i>vivaṭṭānupassanā</i>)	entanglement and clinging.

These 18 principal insights are a commentarial summary of the various ways that wrong view is overcome *temporarily* through its opposite quality (or antidote). Since they take effect in a sequential manner—like dominoes—it is clear that the first insight (the contemplation of impermanence) is the most important. Once this insight is constantly cultivated, the rest of the insights will in no time arise.¹⁸⁴

10.3 APPLYING INSIGHT TO DHYANA. In the **Dīgha, jānu Sutta** (A 8.54), the layman’s accomplishment of wisdom (*paññā, sampadā*) is defined as follows:

Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family is wise, possesses wisdom directed to [noting] the rising and falling away [of phenomena] that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering.
(A 8.54/4:285), SD 5.10

There are some passages in **the Majjhima Nikāya** that show how dhyana can lead to liberating insight. The method comprises two stages: first, one gets into dhyana; then, one emerges from it and reflects on the three characteristics—that the state is impermanent, suffering and non-self—or something similar. Of the two stages, **the Aṭṭhaka, nagara Sutta** (M 52) says:

Here, householder, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in the first dhyana that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of solitude.

He considers and understands thus: “This first dhyana is conditioned and willfully formed.¹⁸⁵ Whatever is conditioned and willfully formed is impermanent, subject to ending.”

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes.¹⁸⁶ If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire for the Dharma, the delight in the Dharma,¹⁸⁷ then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters,¹⁸⁸ he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the pure abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world. (M 52,4/1:351), SD 41.2

¹⁸³ Also tr as “contemplation of misery (as the result of evil actions).”

¹⁸⁴ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.

¹⁸⁵ *Abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetaṃ*. These two terms are stock indicating a conditioned state in which volition (*cetanā*) is the most important conditioning factor.

¹⁸⁶ “With mental influxes,” *s’āsava* = *sa* + *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (i.e. either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as “taints” (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā’sava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) 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*.

¹⁸⁷ “The desire...the delight for the Dharma,” *dhamma, rāgena dhamma, nandiyā*. Comy says that these two terms signify strong desire (*chanda, rāga*) towards calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā*). If one were to let go of this desire, one becomes an arhat; otherwise, one becomes a non-returner reborn in the Pure Abodes (MA 3:13).

¹⁸⁸ **The 10 fetters** are: (1) Self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*silā-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form

The Mahā Māluṅkya Sutta (M 64), using almost the same words as the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Sutta, shows a slightly different manner of self-liberation (in this case, leading directly to non-returning):

Whatever exists by way of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, he sees those states as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void, as non-self.¹⁸⁹ He turns his mind away from those states¹⁹⁰ and directs it to the deathless element [nirvana] thus:

“This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all formations, the letting go of all acquisitions [attachments], the destruction of craving, dispassion [letting go of craving], cessation (of suffering), nirvana.”¹⁹¹ (M 64,9/1:435 f), SD 21.20

In this connection, in **the Pañcāla,caṇḍa Sutta** (S 2.7),¹⁹² the devaputra Pañcala,caṇḍa sings in praise of the Buddha, thus:

269	Indeed, the opening out of the confined, The one of vast wisdom has found. The Buddha has awakened to dhyana— The chief bull in solitude, the sage.	<i>Sambādhe vata okāsaṃ avindī bhūri,medhaso yo jhānam abuddhi buddho patilīna,nisabho munī ti</i>
270	Even in the confined, they find, [O Pañcāla,caṇḍa,” said the Blessed One.] The Dharma for the attainment of nirvana— Those who have found mindfulness, Those fully well concentrated.	<i>Sambādhe vāpi vindanti [Pañcāla,caṇḍā ti Bhagavā] dhammaṃ nibbāna,pattiyā yo satim paccalathamsu sammā te susamāhitā ti</i>

(S 2.7/1:48)

11 The 7 mental purifications

11.1 During meditation, when the mind is utterly still and the bright sign (*nimitta*) has arisen [9.2], one no more sees the body in the manner of everyday virtual reality, but as it really is, by way of true reality, that is, as characteristically impermanent, unsatisfactory (bringing pain), and non-self (without any substantial essence). This understanding is the seeing of suffering as it really is; the letting go of its cause, craving; the ending of suffering, that is, a vision of nirvana; and cultivating the path to this true liberation.

existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orāma,bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*). They are called “fetters” (*samyojana*) because they shackle one to the samsaric world of negative habits and suffering.

¹⁸⁹ Like the prec **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** passage, this too shows the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) on the basis of calm (*samatha*), using dhyana on which the insight-practice is based as the object of insight. The terms “impermanent” (*aniccato*) and “disintegrating” (*palokato*) here show the characteristic of impermanence; three terms—“alien” (*parato*), “void” (*suññato*), and “not self” (*anattato*)—show the characteristic of non-self; the remaining 6 terms—*dukkhato, rogato, gaṇḍato, sallato, aghato, ābādhato*—show the characteristic of suffering (MA 3:146).

¹⁹⁰ Comy: “He turns his mind away from those states” (*so tehi dhammehi cittaṃ paṭivāpeti*) from the 5 aggregates included in the dhyana, which he has seen to be marked with the 3 characteristics” (MA 3:146).

¹⁹¹ The “deathless element” (*nibbāna,dhātu*) is nirvana. First, “he directs his mind to it” with insight consciousness, having heard it praised and described as being “peaceful, sublime,” etc. Then, with the supramundane path, “he directs his mind to it” by making it an object and penetrating it as the peaceful, the sublime, etc. (MA 3:146)

¹⁹² S 2.7/1:48. Ānanda explains in detail the opening verse in **Pañcāla,caṇḍa S** (A 9.42/4:449 f). By “the confined” (*sambādhe*) are meant the various dhyanas and formless attainments, while “the opening out of the confined” is the ending of feeling and perception (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*) and the ending of the mental influxes (*āsava*, ie, sense-desire, existence, ignorance, D 2:84; S 4:256; sense-desire, existence, view, ignorance, D 2:81; Vbh 373), ie the attainment of arhathood.

11.2 After the time of Buddhaghosa (5th century), Theravāda meditation primarily works with a system of “seven purifications” (*satta, visuddhi*). Interestingly, this teaching is found only in **the Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24)¹⁹³ in the canon. **The Visuddhi,magga**, on the other hand, is an encyclopaedic tome based the 7 purifications.¹⁹⁴ **The 7 purifications** (*satta visuddhi*) are as follows:¹⁹⁵

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) The purification of moral virtue | <i>sīla, visuddhi,</i> |
| (2) The purification of the mind | <i>citta, visuddhi,</i> |
| (3) The purification of view | <i>diṭṭhi, visuddhi,</i> |
| (4) The purification by overcoming doubt | <i>kaṅkhā, vitaraṇa, visuddhi,</i> |
| (5) The purification by knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path | <i>maggāmagga, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi,</i> |
| (6) The purification by knowledge and vision of the path | <i>paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi, and</i> |
| (7) The purification of knowledge and vision | <i>ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi.</i> |

11.3 In this section we shall examine **the 7 purifications, their practice and the insight knowledges**, as summarized here:

<u>Purification</u>	<u>Practice (and the insight knowledges)</u> ¹⁹⁶
(1) Of virtue	The keeping of the precepts and training rules
(2) Of the mind	Access and full concentrations
(3) Of view	Understanding the characteristics, etc, of mental and physical phenomena
(4) By overcoming doubt	Discernment of condition for mental and physical phenomena
(5) By knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path	[]. <i>Knowledge of comprehension</i>
(6) By knowledge and vision of the way	1a. <i>Knowledge of arising and passing away (tender phase)</i> 1b. <i>Knowledge of arising and passing away (mature phase)</i> 2. <i>Knowledge of dissolution</i> 3. <i>Knowledge of fearfulness</i> 4. <i>Knowledge of danger</i> 5. <i>Knowledge of revulsion</i> 6. <i>Knowledge of the desire for liberation</i> 7. <i>Knowledge of review contemplation</i> 8. <i>Knowledge of equanimity regarding formations</i>
[Between 6 & 7]	[]. <i>Knowledge of conformity</i>
(7) By knowledge and vision	[]. <i>Change of lineage</i> Knowledge of the four supramundane paths

¹⁹³ M 24/1:145-151 (SD 28.3).

¹⁹⁴ The division of Vism according to the 7 purifications are (ch/pp): (1) 1/1-58; (2) 2-17/59-586; (3) 18/587-597; (4) 19/598-605; (5) 20/606-638; (6) 21/638-671; (7) 22-23/672-710.

¹⁹⁵ M 24/1:145-151. For further analysis of the 7 purifications (incl other insight knowledges), see Āpaṇa S (S 48.50/5:225 f), SD 10.4(3b). See also Gunaratana 1985:154-174, Analayo 2005b, & Moneyya 2005.

¹⁹⁶ Vism 20.93-21.136/630-671. A set of 9 knowledges are mentioned at Pm 1:1. **Abhidhamm’attha Saṅgha** mentions 11 knowledges as the first, and “conformity knowledge” (*anuloma, ñāṇa*) as shown above: Abhs 9.6; Abhs:BRS 344-347, 351-351; Abhs:SR 210 f; Abhs:WG 346. **Paṭisambhidā,magga**, incorporating the 8 knowledges, gives a more comprehensive list of 16 knowledges (*soḷasa, ñāṇa*) (Pm 1; Vism 18.1-22.31/587-678).

1. The purification of moral virtue (*sīla visuddhi*) refers to the proper keeping of the precepts and training rules. For the laity, this refers to the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*) or higher that they have undertaken to observe. For the monastic, it refers to **the fourfold purified virtue** (*parisuddhi, sīla*), namely:¹⁹⁷

- (1) moral virtue that is the restraint in accordance with the Pāṭimokkha (the monastic code);
- (2) moral virtue that is sense-restraint (that is, mindfulness towards sense-objects, not to be swayed by attraction to pleasant ones and repulsion to unpleasant ones);
- (3) moral virtue that is the purity of livelihood (that is, by supporting himself only by way of his spiritual training and life, and not doing anything that would divert or distract one from them; and
- (4) moral virtue that is the proper dependence on the requisites (that is, properly reflection on the use of almsfood, robes, shelter, and medicine).

The purpose of this stage is to maintain a wholesome physical and social environment for the purification of mind.

2. The purification of mind (*citta visuddhi*) refers to the success in one's meditation or mental cultivation, specifically in the overcoming of the 5 mental hindrances [8.2] (through access concentration and through dhyana), and that is the foundation for effecting the remaining 5 purifications. In terms of the 5 spiritual faculties (*indriya*), the purification of moral virtue would be motivated by the faculty of faith; and the purification of mind would be the result of all the 5 faculties—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom—working together. These first two purifications are also the roots of the other five, directly concerned with insight.

3. The purification of view (*diṭṭhi, visuddhi*) is so called because it helps to clear one's mind of the notion of a permanent self, and understanding that a “living being” is nothing more than made up of the aggregates (*khandha*). At this stage, the practitioner begins working at clearing his view of a substantial self by reflecting on any experience in terms of the 5 aggregates, or the 6 senses and their respective objects. The purpose of such exercises is to have a better understanding of things as they, not as a substantial being, but merely mind and body in dependence on one another.

The Naḷa, kalāpiya Sutta (S 12.67) illustrates this with the simile of two sheaves of reeds propped up together, so that when one is removed the other falls down.¹⁹⁸ As such, this stage is also known as “the analytical knowledge of name and form” (*nāma, rūpa, vavatthāna, ñāṇa*). Having turned his back on eternalism (including such hypothetical notions of an immortal soul, creator God, etc), he should moderate his practice so as not to go to other extreme, that of the self-annihilation view.¹⁹⁹

4. The purification by overcoming doubt (*kaṅkhā, vitaraṇa, visuddhi*) is also called “the knowledge of discerning conditions” (*paccaya, pariggaha, ñāṇa*). In the previous stage, the practitioner reflects on the interdependence of mind and body, and here he broadens this understanding diachronically, towards the past, the present and the future. He begins to see the workings of a universal nature of things, namely, conditionality and dependent arising. His understanding deepens as his own direct knowledge widens. Understanding this undeniable truth, he crosses over doubt and becomes a “lesser streamwinner” (*cūḷa, sotāpanna*), that is, one destined for streamwinning in this life itself or certainly at life's final moment.²⁰⁰

5. The purification by knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path (*maggāmagga, ñāṇa, -dassana, visuddhi*). The practitioner continues to reflect on the world in terms of the three characteristics. He regards all materiality—“whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior

¹⁹⁷ Respectively, *pāṭimokkha, saṃvara, sīla, indriya, saṃvara, sīla, ājīva, pārisuddhi, sīla, paccaya, sannissita, sīla*.

¹⁹⁸ S 12.67/2:114.

¹⁹⁹ On the avoidance of extreme views—that something either *exists* or *not exist*—see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18.8), SD 6.13.

²⁰⁰ See the 10 suttas of **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25.1-10/4:25-28) & **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(6).

or superior, far or near”²⁰¹—as comprising groups or aggregates (*khandha*)—that is, the form aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perceptions aggregate, the formations aggregate, and the consciousness aggregate—and as being characteristically impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self. This is his preparation for “the comprehensive knowledge (of phenomena)” (*sammasana, ñāṇa*).²⁰²

11.4 Then he goes on to “the contemplation of the arising and passing away (of phenomena)” (*udaya-b, baya. ñāṇa*). **The Pheṇa, piṇḍa Sutta** (S 22.95) illustrates the practitioner’s experience in this verse.²⁰³

Like a lump of froth is form,
Like a water bubble are feelings,
Like a mirage, perception,
Formations, like a plantain trunk,
And like an illusion is consciousness—
So the Kinsman of the Sun has shown.

(S 22.95,15/3:142; cf M 1:436; Dh 170), SD 17.11.

11.5 Such experiences, according to Buddhaghosa, are profoundly calm as the mind settles down in a dhyana-like state. Quoting **the Paṭisambhidā, magga**, he then describes these “ten imperfections of insight” (*vipassan’upakkilesa*) that one “with young [tender] insight” (*taruṇa, vipassanā*), namely,

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| (1) lights (<i>obhāsa</i>) | — | the meditator sees lights and enjoys it, thus distracting himself; |
| (2) knowledge (<i>ñāṇa</i>) | — | his theoretical knowledge of the meditation states (both of the form dhyanas and the formless attainments) occur in flashes of insight (which may however cause him to be judgemental of others); |
| (3) zest (<i>pīti</i>) | — | he enjoys various levels of zest (joyful interest) [9.3]; |
| (4) tranquillity (<i>passaddhi</i>) | — | his body and mind are deeply relaxed and he does not tire easily; |
| (5) happiness (<i>sukha</i>) | — | a subtle happiness pervades his whole body; |
| (6) resolution (<i>adhimokkha</i>) | — | he has strong faith, even extreme confidence; |
| (7) exertion (<i>paggaha</i>) | — | he puts in balanced effort in his practice; |
| (8) presence of mind (<i>upaṭṭhāna</i>) | — | his mindfulness is strong; |
| (9) equanimity (<i>upekkhā</i>) | — | he is equanimous in his insight and in attending to sense-experiences; |
| (10) attachment (<i>nikanti</i>) | — | he is attached to all these wonderful states, failing to see this as a defilement. ²⁰⁴ |

²⁰¹ Eg, **Anatta, lakkhana S** (S 22.59/3:66-68 (SD 1.2)). This classification of the aggregates is expl in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **Visuddhi, magga**: “internal” = physical sense-organs; “external” = physical sense-objects; “gross” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “subtle” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “inferior” = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; “superior” = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; “far” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986: 41). See **Khandha**, SD 17.1.

²⁰² **Abhidhamm’attha Saṅgaha** gives this as the first insight knowledge: see chart above.

²⁰³ More colourful imageries are found in Vism 20.104/622 f.

²⁰⁴ Pm 2:100; Vism 20.105-130/633-638.

11.6 The practitioner may live for years thinking that on account of his ecstatic or exhilarating experiences, he has attained sainthood, or even that he is an arhat, until he realizes that such emotions as strong anger or fear arise in him. Noticing this, he begins to distinguish what is and what is not the true path, and progresses on to the next level of spiritual purification.

6. The purification by knowledge and vision of the way (*paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi*). Having cleared away the ten defilements of insight, the practitioner returns to his reflection on the arising and passing away of phenomena. Here he goes through a succession of insights into the three characteristics, called the 8 knowledges (*attha ñāṇa*),²⁰⁵ namely:

(1) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF ARISING AND PASSING AWAY (*udaya-b-baya, ñāṇa*). This is the same knowledge that arises before the imperfections of insight [11(5)]. With the overcoming of these imperfections, it matures in clarity. (Vism 21.2-9/640)

(2) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF DISSOLUTION (*bhaṅga, ñāṇa*). When the meditator's knowledge sharpens, he no more directs his attention to the arising or presence of formations, but directs it only to their passing away. (Vism 21.10-28/641-645)

(3) THE KNOWLEDGE OF FEARFULNESS (*bhaya, ñāṇa*). As the meditator carefully observes the dissolution of formations over the three periods of time, he recognizes that they are really fearful as they do not last more than a moment.²⁰⁶ (Vism 21.29-34/645-647)

(4) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF DANGER (*ādīnavānupassanā, ñāṇa*). Noticing the danger in the dissolution of formations, the meditator sees no advantage, but only danger, in them. True security lies only in the unconditioned, where there is no arising and passing away. (Vism 21.35-42/647-650)

(5) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF REVULSION (*nibbidā'nupassanā, ñāṇa*). He finds no delight in any of the formations, that is, in any kind of birth, whether of the sense worlds, the form worlds or the formless worlds, seeing danger in all of them. He delights only in his contemplation of the three characteristics.²⁰⁷ This earthshaking stage in one's spiritual life is well illustrated by Buddhaghosa's simile of the fisherman and the water-snake: a fisherman puts his hand into the mouth of the net under the water and seizes a snake, happily thinking it is a fish, but as soon as he realizes that it is a poisonous water-snake, he immediately flings it far away and gets out of the water, feeling relieved (Vism 21.43 f/650 f).²⁰⁸

Such a special way of knowing at this level provides the basis for wise attention and development of insight or direct knowledge. At this point, **Ajahn Chah** advises thus:

You should bring this kind of insight right inside your heart: as you do this more and more, it becomes the cause for insight knowledge to arise by itself. Sometimes, when you turn your attention to reflecting on the subject of *asubha* [the impurities],²⁰⁹ images of different unattractive aspects of the body can manifest in the mind automatically. These images are clearer than any you could try to summon up with your imagination and lead to insight of a far more penetrating nature than that gained through the ordinary kind of discursive thinking.

²⁰⁵ Vism 20.93-21.136/630-671; or, according to **Abhidhamm'attha Saṅgaha**, 9 knowledges. See chart in §10 "Practice" n above.

²⁰⁶ See eg the youth Yasa's spiritual experience: V 1:15-18 @ SD 11.3(7.1-6). See **Udāna S** (S 22.55, 18/3:57), SD 17.16; also Vism 21.29/645.

²⁰⁷ Vism 21.43/650 f.

²⁰⁸ For a discussion on *nibbidā*, see SD 20.1.

²⁰⁹ *Asubha* [the impurities], here, as used Ajahn Chah, probably refers to the perception of foulness (*asubha, sañ-ñā*), ie the meditation on the 32 parts of the body (see D 22,5/2:293 f; M 10,10/1:57 @ SD 13).

This kind of clear insight has such a striking impact that the activity of the mind is brought to a stop, followed by the experience of a deep sense of dispassion. The reason it is so clear and piercing is that it originates from a completely peaceful mind.

Investigating from within a state of calm leads you to clearer and clearer insight, the mind becoming more peaceful as it is increasingly absorbed in the contemplation. The clearer and more conclusive the insight, the deeper inside the mind penetrates with its investigation, constantly supported by the calm of *samādhi*. This is what the practice of *kammaṭṭhāna* [meditation] involves. Continuous investigation in this way helps you to repeatedly let go of and ultimately destroy attachment to personality view [*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*]. It brings an end to all remaining doubt and uncertainty about this heap of flesh we call the body, and letting go of blind attachment to rites and practices. Chah 2001:4; Pali normalized & paragraphed)

Ajahn Chah then explains how this level of insights allows one to see a clear distinction between the mind and the body,²¹⁰ which means that you are seeing the true nature of the body, and which leads one to experience a strong sense of revulsion (*nibbidā*) towards it.²¹¹

(6) THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE DESIRE FOR LIBERATION (*muñcitu, kamyatā, ñāṇa*). Noticing all this fearfulness, danger and revulsion, the meditator profoundly desires for liberation from them. (Vism 21.45 f/651)

(7) THE KNOWLEDGE OF REVIEW CONTEMPLATION (*paṭisankhānupassanā, ñāṇa*). The meditator redirects his mind to examining the formations in the light of the three characteristics in various ways. He clearly reviews them to be impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self. (Vism 21.47-60/651-656)

(8) THE KNOWLEDGE OF EQUANIMITY REGARDING FORMATIONS (*sankhār'upekkhā, ñāṇa*). After his review contemplation, the meditator sees that there is really nothing to be taken in terms of “I,” “me” or “mine,” and so abandons both the fearfulness and danger, and becomes equanimous towards all formations. (Vism 21.61-127/656-669)

In this connection, **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58), the Buddha admonishes Moggallāna “nothing is worth clinging to,” and in a similar passage in **the Avijjā Pahāna Sutta 2** (S 35.80),²¹² the same is said of “the all” (*sabba*)²¹³ “differently” (that is, with insight): “Bhikshu, when a monk knows and sees thus, ignorance is abandoned by him and true knowledge (*vijjā*) arises.”²¹⁴

(9) THE KNOWLEDGE OF CONFORMITY (*anuloma, ñāṇa*) is so called because one begins to conform or adapt oneself to the spiritual path. In simple terms, it is the switch or radical turning of the consciousness from the worldly to truly the spiritual. This is termed “change of lineage” (*gotra, bhū*, literally, “become one of the lineage”), that is the transition between being a worldling and a noble disciple, more specifically, a streamwinner.²¹⁵ (Vism 21.128-136/669-671)

7. The purification by knowledge and vision (*ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi*). Here his insight ripens, as he is fully on the supramundane path to awakening. This insight is also known as “the insight leading to emergence” (*vuṭṭhāna, gāminī, vipassanā*), so called because objectively, it emerges from formations and takes nirvana as his object, and because subjectively he emerges from the defilements. Thenceforth, he “becomes one of the lineage” (*gotra, bhū*), that is, a streamwinner: he has given up being a worldling (*puthujjana*) and become a member of the noble family (*ariya, gotta*).

²¹⁰ This mind-body distinction although explicitly stated here is implicitly evident in such discourses as **Roga S** (A 4.157.1.2:142 f); see SD 5.4(3), **Nakula, pitā S** (S 22.1/3:1-5), SD 5.4; cf Sn 1120-1123: see SD 5.4 (3).

²¹¹ On *nibbidā*, see SD 20.1.

²¹² S 35.80.6/4:50.

²¹³ Here the “all” (*sabba*) refers to the 6 senses and their respective sense-objects (**Sabba S**, S 35.23/4:15 @ SD 7.1), here the respective consciousnesses are also included.

²¹⁴ S 35.80/4:50. See **Pacala S** (A 7.58), SD 4.11.

²¹⁵ On the nature of a streamwinner, see **Entering the Stream**, SD 3.3(6).

12 The 7 purifications: a historical note

12.1 AN EARLY DOCTRINE. The formula of the 7 purifications (*satta, visuddhi*) is found only in **the Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24)²¹⁶ in a dialogue between Sāriputta (the teacher) and Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta (the respondent),²¹⁷ where Sāriputta gives the famous parable of the relay of chariots. **Bodhi** makes this note on the purifications in his translation of the Sutta:

Although these seven purifications (*satta visuddhi*) are mentioned elsewhere in the Pali Canon (at D 3:288, with two added: purification by wisdom and purification by deliverance), it is curious that they are not analysed as a set anywhere in the Nikāyas; and this becomes even more puzzling when both these great disciples [Sāriputta and Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta] seem to recognize them as a fixed group of doctrinal categories. The sevenfold scheme forms, however, the scaffolding for the entire *Visuddhimagga*, which defines the different stages by means of the fully developed commentarial traditions on concentration and insight meditation. (M:ÑB 1214 n288)

Of “the remarkable Rathavinīta comparison,” **G C Pande**, in his *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, remarks:

That this [the progressive stages of spiritual development] was central in the sutta is indicated by the almost concurrent titles in the Pali and Chinese versions of it.²¹⁸ The comparison speaks of King Pasenadi as journeying from Sāvattthi to Sāketa by seven relays of chariots. This intimate and original simile has the appearance of being taken from life. That it should have occurred, in those days of short historical memory, to a latter-day monk does not seem very likely.

The doctrinal position of the sutta is in full agreement with this appearance of earliness. There is as yet no question of stereotyped formulae,²¹⁹ and unlike the later discussions between the monks²²⁰ the subject of interest is not some technical nicety, an unresolved contradiction or a new problem demanding answer; it is, on the other hand, the central problem of what may be regarded as the true end of the religious quest.

Finally it may be noted that the sutta has been supposed to be one of the texts referred to by Aśoka.²²¹ (Pande 1974:121 f)

Although the set of seven purifications rarely appears in the Canon, it is evidently an early teaching, taking its final form perhaps late in the Buddha’s life, but certainly before Asoka’s time. Another similar set, but simpler, is the set of “seven grounds for recommendation” (*satta niddasa, vatthu*).

12.2 THE 7 GROUNDS FOR COMMENDATION. Perhaps earlier than the seven-purification formula, even serving as its prototype, could be the even less technically defined set of “seven grounds for com-

²¹⁶ M 24/1:145-151. The purifications are mentioned in **Das’uttara S** (D 34) as “the 9 states to be cultivated” (*nava, dhammā bhavetabbā*), adding (8) purification by wisdom (*paññā, visuddhi*) and (9) purification by freedom (*vimutti, visuddhi*) (D 34.2.2(2)/3:288).

²¹⁷ **Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta**, is by way of his mother Mantāni, Añña Koṇḍañña’s nephew, and is the foremost of those monks who are Dharma teachers (A 1:23; cf (**Caṅkamana**) **Kamma S**, S 14.15.6/2:155). He is instrumental in the spiritual attainment of a number of novices monks (*navaka*), as testified by Ānanda in **Ānanda S** (S 22.83), who says he made his “breakthrough to the Dharma” (*dhammo abhisameto*), ie became a streamwinner, as a result of his teaching (S 22.83/3:105).

²¹⁸ Pande qu Anesaki, JRAS 1901:897. The Āgama versions are at MA 9 = T1.429c-431c & EA 39.9-10 = T2.-733b9-735b10. See Analayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya* (forthcoming): M 24.

²¹⁹ Pande: As in the catechetical dialogues between the monks.

²²⁰ Pande: As, eg, in the Vedalla Ss [**Mahā Vedalla S**, M 43/1:292-298; **Cūla Vedalla S**, M 44/1:199-305].

²²¹ Pande: eg DC Sircar, *Select Inscriptions I*, Calcutta, 1942:78 n2.

mentation” (*satta niddasa, vatthu*), found in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33),²²² **the Niddasa, vatthu Sutta** (A 7.18)²²³ and **the (Sāriputta) Niddasa, vatthu Sutta** (A 7.39).²²⁴ The second of these discourses, the Niddasa, vatthu Sutta (A 7.18), shows the relationship between the seven purifications and the seven grounds for commendation. This relationship is represented in this table:

<u>The 7 purifications</u> (<i>satta visuddhi</i>)	<u>The 7 grounds for commendation</u> (<i>satta niddasa, vatthu</i>)	
(1) The purification of moral virtue (<i>sīla, visuddhi</i>)	{	(1) taking up the training (<i>sikkhā, samādāna</i>)
(2) The purification of the mind (<i>citta, visuddhi</i>)		(2) careful observation of phenomena (<i>dhmma.nisantī</i>)
(3) The purification of view (<i>diṭṭhi, visuddhi</i>)		(3) pushing away desires (<i>icchā, vinaya</i>)
(4) The purification by overcoming doubt (<i>kaṅkhā, vitarāṇa, visuddhi</i>)		(4) spiritual solitude (<i>paṭisallāna</i>)
(5) The purification by knowledge and vision (6) of the path and the not-path (<i>maggāmagga, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi</i>)		(5) putting forth effort (<i>vīriy’ārambha</i>)
(6) The purification by knowledge and vision of the path (<i>paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi</i>)	{	(6) mindfulness and mental discrimination (<i>sati, nepakka</i>)
(7) The purification of knowledge and vision (<i>ñāṇa, dassana, visuddhi</i>)		(7) the penetrating of views (<i>diṭṭhi, paṭivedha</i>)

Fig 12.2 The 7 purifications and the 7 grounds for commendation

The simplicity of the seven grounds for commendation is evident in its simple terminology, which lacks common term; whereas we find the common term “purification” (*visuddhi*) in all the 7 purifications, betraying an early attempt at systematizing the teaching. Furthermore, we can see that the seven grounds give greater emphasis on its initial half, while the purifications apparently is more detailed in its latter half, defining the higher stages in more terms. Four of the ground (2-5) clearly emphasizes mindfulness and meditation, which are referred to only by one term, “the purification of the mind” in the 7 purifications.

At the start of this study, it is said that early Buddhism is all about awakening. It is not just about “a happy life,” or “a healthy mind,” or “learning to be wise and saying smart things to your friends around the coffee table.”²²⁵ Spiritual development is about the direct experience of reality and about liberation from suffering.

13 Is dhyana necessary for awakening?

13.1 THREE POSITIONS. The role of dhyana as a condition for spiritual insight is one of the most controversial issues in the Theravada tradition.²²⁶ Three basic positions have been presented in modern Buddhist writings:

²²² D 33,2.3(7)/3:252.

²²³ A 7.18/4:15 @ SD 19.9.

²²⁴ A 7.39.4/4:36 @ SD 19.10.

²²⁵ Brahmavamso 2000:4.

²²⁶ This section is a reflection and response to **Thanissaro**’s passage on “Concentration & Discernment” (1996: 248-251).

- (1) “Dry insight.” The Commentarial tradition asserts that dhyana is not necessary for any of the 4 stages of the path and that there is a class of individuals—called “dry insight” meditators (*sukkhā, vipassāka*)—who are “released through insight” based on a level of concentration lower than that of dhyana.
- (2) “Non-returning.” A second position centres around a passage from **the (Mattaso, kārī) Sikkhā Sutta** (A 3.85)²²⁷ which states that higher concentration is mastered only on the level of non-returning, that is, dhyana is necessary for the attainment of non-returning and for arhathood, but not for the two lower levels of awakening.
- (3) “The first dhyana.” A common position is that the attainment of at least the first dhyana is necessary for all 4 stages of the path.

Based on textual evidence alone, the Suttas strongly support the third position, but not the other two. **The Mahā Cattārīsaka** (M 117), for example, states that “the learner on the path is endowed with 8 factors,”²²⁸ meaning that the attainment of streamwinning has 8 factors, one of which is right concentration, defined as dhyana. Thanissaro comments as follows

In fact, according to this particular discourse [**the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta**], jhana is the heart of the streamwinner’s path. Secondly, there is no passage in the Canon describing the development of transcendent discernment [insight] without at least some skill in jhana. The statement that concentration is mastered only on the level of nonreturning must be interpreted in the light of the distinction between mastery and attainment.

A streamwinner may have attained jhana without mastering it; the discernment [insight] developed in the process of gaining full mastery over the practice of jhana will then lead him/her to the level of nonreturning. As for the term “released through discernment [released through insight],” [**the Kīṭāgiri Sutta**] (M 70)²²⁹ shows that it denotes people who have become arahants without experiencing the four formless jhanas. It does not indicate a person who has not experienced jhana. (1996:248 f)

13.2 FACTORS FOR STREAMWINNING. The Nikāyas contain no direct statements asserting the necessity of dhyana for the attainment of streamwinning. The Suttas mention two sets of conditions in connection with streamwinning. The first is called “the factors for streamwinning” (*sotāpatti-y-aṅga*) and the second the 4 limbs of streamwinning” (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*). The first set, the preconditions for the attaining of streamwinning, is defined in **the (Sotāpatti) Phala Sutta** (S 55.55),²³⁰ and is known as “**the factors for streamwinning**” (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*), thus:

Bhikshus, these 4 things when cultivated, often developed, lead to the realization of the fruit of streamwinning. What are the four? **[411]**

Association with true persons.²³¹

Hearing the True Teaching.

Skillful attention.

Practice of the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.

²²⁷ A 3.85/1:231 f @ SD 8.5(9). Thanissaro qu Sikkhā S 1 (A 3.88/235), which does not contain the passage he refers to.

²²⁸ M 117,34/3:34 (SD 6.10).

²²⁹ *Ie paññā, vimutta*, M 70,16/1:477 f (SD 11.1).

²³⁰ *Sotāpatti-y-aṅgāni*, alt tr “limbs of streamwinning” (D 33,1.11(13)/3:227; Pm 2:189 f). These are preliminary practices that lead to the attainment of streamwinning. In **Paññā, vuḍḍhi S** (A 5.246) these same 4 qualities are called *vuḍḍhi, dhamma*, “virtues conducive to growth” (A 5.246/2:245); cf the 5 Factors of Noble Growth (*ariya, -vuḍḍhi*), A 3:80.

²³¹ “True persons,” *sappurisā*, also “virtuous persons,” “ideal persons.” The qualities of a *sappurisa* are given at D 33,2.2(6)/3:252, **34**,1.8(7)/3:283; **M 113**; **A 7.64**/4:113, 8.38/4:144 f & **M 110**,14-24/3:23 f.

These 4 things when cultivated, often developed, lead to the realization of the fruit of streamwinning. (S 55.55/5:410 f; A 5.246/2:245)

The Pañca,bhera,bhaya Sutta (S 12.41)²³² expounds the second set of teachings concerning streamwinning, that is, the qualities of a streamwinner, known as **the 4 limbs of streamwinning** (*sotāpatti-yāṅga*), namely:

- (1) Wise faith in the Buddha;
- (2) Wise faith in the Dharma;
- (3) Wise faith in the Sangha; and
- (4) Moral virtue “dear to the noble ones,²³³ ...giving rise to concentration.”²³⁴ (S 12.41/2:68-70)

It is clear from this second passage that the first three limbs here are an expression of wise faith (*avecca-pasāda*) and the fourth is the consummate practice of the five precepts, in other words, this entails the respective cultivations of **faith** (*saddhā*) and of **moral virtue** (*sīla*), the first two stages of the graduated teaching.²³⁵

13.3 MUNDANE AND SUPRAMUNDANE DHYANAS. The fourth and last of the “limbs of streamwinning,” that is, the qualities of a streamwinners, consists in “moral virtue ‘dear to the noble ones, ... giving rise to concentration.”²³⁶ An important point is found in the last phrase, “giving rise to concentration” (*samādhiṃ saṁvattanikaṃ*), that is, the streamwinner has moral virtue (*sīla*) that conduces to mental concentration, or more exactly, it leads to dhyana.

This means that if the streamwinner makes an effort, he will be able to attain dhyana, and that dhyana is known as a “supramundane dhyana” (*lok’uttara jhāna*), since is he a saint of the supramundane path (*lok’uttara magga*). **Gunaratana** gives an instructive summary of this point:

The four *jhānas* and four *āruppās* [formless dhyanas] appear initially as mundane states of deep serenity pertaining to the preliminary stage of the Buddhist path. On this level they help provide the base of concentration for wisdom to arise. But the four *jhānas* again re-appear in a later stage in the development of the path, arising in direct association with wisdom. They are then designated the supramundane (*lokuttara*) *jhānas*. These supramundane *jhānas* are the levels of concentration pertaining to the four degrees of enlightenment-experience called the supramundane paths (*lokuttaramagga*) and the stages of deliverance resulting from them, the four fruits (*phala*). Finally, even after full liberation is achieved, the mundane *jhānas* can still remain as attainments available to the liberated person, part of his untrammled contemplation experience. (*The Path of Serenity and Insight*, 1985:5)

As such, as far as streamwinning is concerned, there is no pre-condition that one should have dhyana to attain it. As already mentioned, one becomes a streamwinner with the destruction of the three fetters of self-identity view, attachment to rituals and vows, and spiritual doubt [8.3]. All this is achieved through a basic level of right understanding (*sammā,diṭṭhi*), with or without dhyana. The pre-streamwinning dhyana is of course a mundane dhyana (*lokiya jhāna*).

The streamwinner is equipped with better tools for higher mental development, namely, wise faith in the 3 jewels, and moral virtue conducive to samadhi. If he directs his mind towards mental focus, he can

²³² Uddāna title reads *Saṭayham* (?). This sutta reappears at S 55.28/5:387-389 & A 10.92/ 5:182-184. See SD 3.3.

²³³ “Virtues dear to the noble ones,” *ariya,kantāni sīlāni*. The virtues of the noble one are explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the Five Precepts; hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74).

²³⁴ “Unbroken, ... giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññū-pasaṭṭhehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi,samvattanikehi*. See UA 268. For details, see Vism 1.143 ff/51-58.

²³⁵ “Graduated teaching,” *ānupubbi,kathā*. See “The Laymen Saints,” SD 8.6.

²³⁶ **Pañca,bhera,bhaya S** (S 12.41/2:68-70).

then easily attain dhyana, which would expedite his attaining higher stages of sainthood even in this life itself. If not, he would surely attain awakening within seven lives.

13.4 THE CANONICAL POSITION

13.4.1 There is clearly no mention of dhyana in connection with the attainment of streamwinning, certainly not in the way dhyana is defined by the Commentaries. As **Thanissaro** further comments:

Part of the controversy over this question may be explained by the fact that the commentarial literature defines dhyana in terms that bear little resemblance to the canonical description. *The Path of Purification* [Visuddhi,magga]—the cornerstone of the commentarial system—takes as its paradigm for meditation practice a method called *kasina*, in which one stares at an external object until the image of the object is imprinted in one’s mind. The image then gives rise to a countersign [counterpart-sign] that is said to indicate the attainment of threshold [access] concentration, a necessary prelude to dhyana.

The text then tries to fit all other meditation methods into the mold of kasina practice, so that they too rise to countersigns [*paṭibhāga nimitta*], but even by its own admission, breath meditation does not fit well into the mold: with other methods, the stronger one’s focus, the more vivid the object and the closer it is to producing a sign and countersign; but with the breath, the stronger one’s focus, the harder the object is to detect. As a result, the text states that only Buddhas and Buddhas’ sons find the breath a congenial focal point for attaining dhyana.

None of these assertions have any support in the Canon. Although a practice called *kasina* is mentioned tangentially in some of the discourses, the only point where it is described in any detail [**Kakacūpama Sutta**, M 21] makes no mention of staring at an object or gaining a countersign. If breath meditation were congenial only to Buddhas and their sons, there seems little reason for the Buddha to have taught it so frequently and to such a wide variety of people.

If the arising of a countersign were essential to the attainment of dhyana, one would expect it to be included in the steps of breath meditation and in the graphic analogies used to describe dhyana, but it isn’t. Some Theravadins insist that questioning the commentaries is a sign of disrespect for the tradition, but it seems to be a sign of greater disrespect for the Buddha—or the compilers of the Canon—to assume that he or they would have left out something absolutely essential to the practice.

All of these points seem to indicate that what dhyana means in the commentaries is something quite different from what it means in the Canon. Because of this difference we can say that the commentaries are right in viewing their type of dhyana as unnecessary for Awakening, but Awakening cannot occur without the attainment of dhyana in the canonical sense. (1996:249)

13.4.2 Thanissaro’s advice on reading the Pali Canon is very refreshing:

Try to read it without referring to any Commentaries.²³⁷ You may give rise to new “insights and understandings.” You will see that the Canon Dhyanas are not so difficult to attain compared to Commentary Dhyanas. If you are unable to develop any countersigns (nimittas) in your practice, you still can develop Canon Dhyanas by following the methods provided by the Buddha (breath meditation, mindfulness regarding the body, and the four foundations of mindfulness, etc)!²³⁸

²³⁷ Incl Abhidhamma.

²³⁸ <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/wings/part3.html#part3-f>. The names of meditation methods have been normalized.

13.4.3 In closing this brief study on mental cultivation in early Buddhism, let us close by reflecting on Bodhi's timely advice on meditation:

Hence what is essential from the Buddhist perspective is not simply to practice meditation rather than to theorise, but to practice on the basis of right understanding. Thus, in contrast to the speculative systems delineated in the Brahmajāla Sutta, the Buddhist system of meditation applies to all experiences, whether meditative or not, contemplation in terms of the three characteristics of existence—impermanence, suffering and non-self. Whatever is experienced is to be seen as impermanent, as painful, and as non-self. Or alternatively, it is to be subjected to the cognitive pattern: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (*n'etaṃ mama, n'eso'ham asmi, n'eso me attā*). In this way the Buddhist meditator pulls the ground out from beneath the very tendency to identify with these experiences and to appropriate them in terms of the concept of a self. Thereby he tears asunder the web of speculations woven by the intellect in the darkness of ignorance. (Bodhi 1997:57)

13.4.4 Brahmali has written a careful study of the fact that dhyana is indispensable for the attaining of arhathood. This important paper should be carefully studied.²³⁹

14 Living the moment: Tips for effective meditation

14.0 TIPS ON EFFECTIVE MEDITATION. The best and direct way to know Buddhism is to meditate, or more correctly, to cultivate mindfulness to the point of mental calm and clarity. Meditation is also a powerful tool for introspection, for looking into our own mind.

There are, however, two common problems here: first, there is the beginner's problem, that is, difficulties in sitting and finding focus. Secondly, even at the early stages of effective meditation, we may not see a very flattering picture of our mental self. If this is the case, then it is likely that we have not approached meditation with the right motivation or attitude. Summarized here are some points and pointers to help our meditation journey go more smoothly and fruitfully.²⁴⁰

14.1 DO NOT COLLECT MEDITATION. Meditation is like medicine: they are meant to be applied or taken, not collected, nor observed like a spectator sport. What physical exercise is to the body, meditation is to the mind: we have to *do* it, not merely read or talk about it. We may meet many good meditation teachers or read much about them, but without our practising what is taught, we are like a spoon that carries the soup but not tasting it.²⁴¹

Or worse, we are simply making an ego trip, pinning another shiny badge on our proud coat, behaving as if we have actually mastered the practice. Meditation methods are like signboards: follow them if we need to, disregard them if they do not apply, but there is no need to hold anything against them. Meditation is not about “which” meditation—“insight,” or forest, or Zen, or whatever—it is about learning from the past, being the present, and letting the future be where it is.

14.2 DO NOT RUN AWAY FROM LIFE. Attention itself is very conditioned. We may only be watching what we like, rather than what is beneficial. If we do not like lovingkindness meditation, it means that we need it even more. Get some calm energy from a method we like, and bit by bit build up our lovingkindness. Maybe, our meditation has been bogged down by passivity and dependence so that the practice becomes

²³⁹ Brahmali, “[A response to Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi's paper on paññāvimutta](#).” 2011. See also Bodhi, “The Susīma-sutta and the wisdom-liberated arahant,” *Journal of the Pali Text Soc* 29, 2007:51-75.

²⁴⁰ A good reading here is Jack Engler's “The unconscious motivations for meditation practice” (1997). Parts of this section draws freely from Engler's insightful paper.

²⁴¹ Dh 64.

self-punishing because of some guilt or some bad feeling about ourselves. If we do not forgive ourself, no one can.

Then, there is the fear of intimacy and social involvement: we meditate perhaps because we do not wish to meet people, not to get into awkward situations. Sometimes, we may use the practice to immunize ourselves from feeling (from fear of being hurt again). Good meditation makes us more mindful of ourselves, like a doctor who is aware of his own body. Meditation should help us feel more connected to others and the environment. All this greatly helps us exude a radiant and healing ambience. At least, it keeps us cool in a crisis.

14.3 WE ARE AS WE FEEL. Meditation can be a great way of servicing our quirks and neuroses. The practice, for example, could be a form of narcissistic wish: “Through meditation I’m going to become self-sufficient and invincible; I’m not going to get hurt any more; I’m going to be perfect.” Difficulties we have faced can weigh heavily upon us; or they can act as ballast for us to sail smoothly through life: from suffering arises faith.²⁴² Smile at our pain: we are not the first to suffer it, nor certainly the last. Pain means we have feelings, and that things can be better if we work at them. A rose is not a rose without its thorns. Pain is our mirror: clean it well and we can see ourselves better in it. We can’t really change our behaviour until we change our feelings.

Live the meditation. Try smiling and greeting others first and do so spontaneously. Smile to cheer up. Start with a soft smile, then slowly broaden it so that our eyes show chicken-feet. Smile with the mouth and eyes. We must become what we do: even a forced smile (but with sincerity) is better than a sulk or glare. See how the Buddha smiles (as depicted in the Buddha images and pictures).²⁴³

14.4 DON’T TRY TO DO SOMETHING, JUST SIT! In meditation, the path itself is the goal. In meditation, there is no aim, no goal, no destination: if you have one, you are not meditating. When great things happen during meditation, don’t stop there: it is a sign of even *greater* things to come. Simply noting or labelling such experiences can help strengthen clear recognition and understanding. “**Labelling** introduces a healthy degree of inner detachment, since the act of apostrophizing one’s moods and emotions diminishes one’s identification with them” (Analyo).²⁴⁴ When we are more comfortable, let go of even the noting. Let it come, let it go: it reduces, even dispels, anxiety and fear.

Meditation instills good posture: when you look your relaxed best, it helps boost your self-confidence. Meditation is a journey to self-awakening: it’s all right to move slowly, only don’t stop. It’s not how long we sit: it’s how *happily* we sit. No hen hurries her hatching.

14.5 NON-JUDGEMENT DAY IS HERE. As beginners, noting and labelling thoughts and sensations help to keep us objectively focused so that negative ones do not intrude. But do not let the mind die. That would be like a butterfly collector who sticks a pin through its heart and a neat label underneath. The Buddha speaks of the mind “changing while it stands.” “He is not a butterfly collector, but an observer of nature. He wants us to watch the flight and flutter of the butterfly, to understand how it behaves in its natural environment, and to follow it gently, delicately, quietly until it settles down to rest and be still according to its nature—which he called ‘samadhi.’” (Sujato).²⁴⁵ Our eyes blind us: close the eyes and truly see.

14.6 CLOSE OUR EYES, SEE MORE. Sometimes we could be driven by the fear of reasoning and thinking. Conversely, we might find feeling painful. Either way, we may look inward for a convenient way of escaping from the real world. A proper balance of reasoning and feeling is vital for healthy living: a bird needs two wings to fly. When we really look within, we will see that the mind often goes on autopilot on

²⁴² Upanisā S (S 12.23,15/2:31), SD 6.12.

²⁴³ See CA 287 = *The All-embracing Net of Views* (tr Bodhi), 1978: 268.

²⁴⁴ Analyo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The direct path to realization*, 2003: 113-117.

²⁴⁵ Sujato, *The mystique of the Abhidharma*,” p7. <http://www.santiforestmonastery.com/writings>.

a course set by the “old mind” or “the doer,” that is, habitual tendencies or “habitual mind” built up from long time past but still controlling us.

Brahmavamso warns humorously, “You are deluded to assume that you are reading this of your free will. My friend, you had no choice but to read this! Will is not the action of a being, it is the end product of a process.”²⁴⁶ This “will” is what keeps us growing old, but never growing up. Meditation helps us see into this will so that we truly see. Do not be pushed by the past nor pulled by the future: live now.

14.7 MEDITATION AS PROGRESSIVE RENUNCIATION. When we seriously make an effort to meditate, we are effectively getting into the state of a renunciant. The very first thing we do in meditation is to find a conducive place and sit as comfortably as we can so that we can forget about our body after a while. This is a bodily renunciation.

After sitting for some time, we might begin to feel some discomfort. Again here, we should simply ignore it if possible. Otherwise, try to observe with an open mind, “What is this pain?” We would notice that it is a process of rising and falling of feeling. If we do not let our negative mind to return and colour the pain, then this is a feeling renunciation.

Once we are physically comfortable, we go on to work with our thoughts as they arise. The usual way is to simply ignore them and keep our focus on the meditation object (say, the breath or lovingkindness). If thoughts do arise, it is best to simply let them come and let them go. Never follow them. If we can do this comfortably over time, then this is a mental renunciation.

Another kind of renunciation is that directed to blissful feeling or an experience of some mental brightness, often known as “the sign” (*nimitta*). This sort of feeling or experience, if it is truly blissful, should be silently enjoyed for as long as we like. When we feel some sense of familiarity with it, then it is time to let it go gently, so that a higher state would arise. This is a higher renunciation.

Finally, when we are fully free of bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings, we might go on to attain deep concentration, even dhyana. Then, whether we are monastic or lay, we have truly “renounced the world.” This is true renunciation.²⁴⁷

14.8 MEDITATION BRINGS YOU EMOTIONAL INDEPENDENCE. If we patiently bear the initial pains when starting meditation, the fruits will come in due course. Good meditation begins by a total acceptance of ourselves just as we are. Then we leave the past where it should be, and we do not cross the bridge of the future until we reach it. We need to renounce the past, and reject any desire to jump into the future.

Gently keep bringing the mind back to the meditation-object; constantly extend the horizon of our lovingkindness. We are laying the foundations of emotional strength. As our inner happiness grows, we need less worldliness, less religion—and we no more need a parent-figure or a guru-figure or any kind of power-figure. Our locus of control stays within us: we become emotionally self-reliant, without any need for the approval of others or any measuring ourselves against others. We have realized our true self.²⁴⁸

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²⁴⁶ Brahmavamso, *The Jhānas*, 2003:37. See also *Saṅkhāra*, SD 17.6 esp (8.4). On the doer, see SD 17.6 (8.4).

²⁴⁷ For a fuller reflection, see “Truly renouncing” (R226, Reflection 120208): see <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/72-Truly-renouncing-120208.pdf>.

²⁴⁸ See SD 17.8c: (8.2) Downside of meditation (the danger of cults); (8.3) Who should not meditate.

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