



# **The Seven Factors of Enlightenment**



**Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva  
Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya  
Sri Lanka**

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*Sabbadānam dhammadānam jināti.*

The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.

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Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya

Sri Lanka

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# Contents

## Acknowledgment

## Translator's Foreword

## About the Author

- 1. Mindfulness** **1**
  - The character of mindfulness*
  - The function of mindfulness*
  - The manifestation of mindfulness*
  - The proximate cause for mindfulness*
  
- 2. Investigation** **8**
  - Investigating Dhamma in the practice*
  - Reporting the investigation to your teacher*
  - Investigating subtle manifestations of Dhamma*
  - Investigating shared and common characteristics of phenomena*
  
- 3. Energy** **18**
  - Threefold aspects of energy*
  - Effort during walking meditation*
  - Exerting effort in the Ānāpānasati meditation practice*
  
- 4. Rapture** **28**
  - Āmisa pīti and nirāmisā pīti*
  - Joy in moral restraint*
  - Joy through concentration*
  - Experience of joy and rapture in the practice*
  
- 5. Tranquillity** **38**
  - Tranquillity through cessation of the breath*
  - Supporting the development of tranquillity*

<b>6. Concentration</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>The benefits of concentration</i>	
<i>Samatha Samādhi and Vipassanā Samādhi</i>	
<b>7. Equanimity</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>Factors supporting equanimity</i>	
<i>Equanimity in the practice</i>	
<i>Unfolding of Dhamma in a state of equanimity</i>	
<i>The character and manifestation of equanimity</i>	
<i>The function of equanimity</i>	

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## Translator's Foreword

This book contains the essence of the Buddha's teachings on the *Seven Factors of Awakening*. In a rare exposition on the *Bojjhanga Dhamma*, Venerable U. Dhammajīva offers an uncompromising and intuitive clarification of their unfolding and instructs how the seven factors of awakening align to give fruition to a yogi's spiritual quest. Traditionally, Sri Lankan culture associates the chanting of the *Bojjhanga Sutta* as a panacea for any ailment, malaise or adversity. For many, the power of the *sutta* exposition has a healing effect. In this book, Venerable Dhammajīva's exposition transcends the conventional sphere to heal the suffering that the *Satipatthāna* meditation practice offers. It maps the specific points of the journey and the experiences that a yogi could expect when each of the seven factors of awakening unfold and reciprocally support one another for the attainment of path and fruition consciousness.

The noble meditation teacher's dexterity and precision is drawn from his own direct experience and dedicated practice. His clarity of communication is evident from the vivid and descriptive explanations offered on the nature and experiences that accompany each of the factors of awakening in the practice. Venerable Dhammajīva concludes his exposition by entrusting the yogi with the seven factors of awakening as a tool set - a full arsenal of weapons to steer through to the final bliss of liberation.

It is simply impossible to communicate the magnetism of the meditation teacher's presence and his radiance in words, but it is hoped that at least a glimpse of his detailed understanding of the

Buddha's wisdom and his eloquent style of teaching is conveyed through this translation. Although, attempts have been made to impart the necessary meaning offered in the Sinhala medium, some parts of the discussion have been omitted to preserve the flow of the editing process.

Venerable Dhammajīva's instructions provide invaluable guidance and offer a rare wake up call that liberation is timeless and possible in this life itself!



## About the Author

Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Maha Thero (also known as Sayadaw U. Dhammajīva) is an experienced meditation teacher. He is presently the Chief Preceptor of the Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya, a monastery in the strict forest tradition in Sri Lanka. It is one of Sri Lanka's most respected meditation monasteries. It was found in 1968 and was led under the guidance of the great Venerable Matara Sri Nānārama Mahāthera.

Venerable Dhammajīva also spent several years of training under Ovadacariya Sayadaw U. Panditābhivamsa, a leading Burmese meditation master who follows the lineage of the great Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw.

Venerable Dhammajīva is fluent in Sinhala, English and Burmese and has translated many meditation guide books from Burmese to English and to Sinhala. He is also the author of numerous books, both in English and Sinhala languages.

## Chapter 1

# Mindfulness (*Sati Sambojjhanga*)

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*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa*

*Cattaro Satipatthāna katham bhāvithā bahulikathā satta bojjhange  
paripūrenti<sup>1</sup>*

*Bojjhanga Dhamma*, the factors of enlightenment or the factors of awakening consist of two Pāli terms: '*bodhi-anga*': *bodhi* meaning, 'enlightenment or awakening'; and *anga* meaning, the 'factors'. Accordingly, *bojjhanga* can be translated as the requisite factors for enlightenment.

Fulfilling the four foundations of mindfulness is the most proximate cause for the arising of the factors of awakening (*cattaro satipatthāna bhāvithā bahulikathā, satta bojjhange paripūrenti*). A dedicated yogi, steeped in the establishment of mindfulness will develop them. Although it is beneficial to have a theoretical understanding of how they unfold in the practice, one can really only understand and see their development through the practice.

There are seven factors of awakening. The first is *sati sambojjhanga*. The Buddha enumerates that the firm establishment of *sati* (mindfulness) is the proximate cause for developing the factors of awakening. In practice, mindfulness has to be well developed to reach the stage of *sambojjhanga*.

It is at the stage of the fourth *vipassanā* insight, *udayabbhaya ñāna*, where a yogi begins to see the momentary and rapid arising and passing away of objects, that *sati sambojjhanga* develops. In Burma, according to the commentarial exposition, mindfulness is explained according to its character and function, its manifestation

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<sup>1</sup>. *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

and the proximate cause for its development<sup>2</sup>. Mindfulness should be regarded to be like a pillar, because it is firmly founded; or as a door keeper because it guards the sense doors.

## The character of mindfulness

The *character* of mindfulness is non-superficiality (*apilāpana lakḥhanā*); to not be of 'wobbling' in nature or the steadying of an object in our awareness.

In our daily lives, many objects pass through our awareness, but we fail to note them as our attention is rather superficial.

When we are mindful, we become clearly aware of the objects arising at each sense door. Only then can we discern and separate one object from the other as and when they enter our stream of consciousness.

We commence breath meditation (*ānāpānasati bhāvanā*) in a forest (*ārañyagatovā*), under a tree (*rukḥhamulagatovā*) or any other secluded place (*suññyāgāragatovā*). We keep our body erect, close our eyes and direct our attention towards the body and away from any smells or sounds that enter our stream of consciousness. When we focus on the body and contemplate upon it (*kayānupassanā*), we reduce the frequency of objects entering our stream of consciousness and prioritize our awareness towards the object that has captured our attention.

As you sit comfortably, you become aware: “here, now, I am sitting” and simply arrive at the present moment. Simply remaining in the present, and becoming aware of your body, you will not day-dream, wander or indulge in any sounds or odors that

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<sup>2</sup>The discussion on the character; the function; the manifestation and the proximate cause for the development of mindfulness draws from the commentarial explanation available in Bhikkhu Nānamoli's translation of the *Visuddhimagga*: Bhikkhu Nānamoli, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, p524 [142].

enter your stream of consciousness.

Breathe naturally and you will observe that your upper body is the most involved in the breathing process. Observe the expansion and contraction as you inhale and exhale. Gradually, you can observe the most prominent part of the body, where the breath manifests. Don't force your attention on the breath. Let it manifest naturally.

Mindfully, become attentive towards the process of breathing. When you observe an 'in-breath', your attention will not be on 'hearing' or on 'bodily pains' or the rest of the body, but simply on the inhalation. If your attention is on the rising and falling of the abdomen, you will be with both the rising and falling phase. By continually becoming aware of the breath, you can discern when your attention is on the in-breath and when it is on the out-breath. Intermittently, you will experience bodily pains. Or, your attention will be taken to the hearing process and the thinking process of the mind. Whatever arises, the mind becomes aware of it and notes it. It is like 'book keeping' where one simply records the information without analyzing it.

The Buddha describes the mind as superficial. It is like a piece of cork immersed in water. It simply wobbles around and never penetrates to the bottom. But, if a stone is thrown into water, it will penetrate, exactly at the point it touches the water and sinks to the bottom. Similarly, when mindfulness is effective and penetrative, it will direct itself clearly towards the object to see its characteristics. This is the character of mindfulness.

### **The function of mindfulness**

The *function* of mindfulness is to keep the object directly in line with your attention; and to not fail in noting the object. When you are mindful, the mind's attention is retained on each in-breath and out-breath.

When you meet someone on the street, you identify him or her by looking at his or her bodily features and the individual characteristics. First, you recognize the person by looking at the face.

As you retain your focus on their physical appearance, you separate that person from the others walking along the street. Similarly, with pains, sounds or the primary object (in-breath or out-breath) that you experience during meditation, you confront them and directly meet them with steadfast attention.

### **The manifestation of mindfulness**

Confronting the object is the *manifestation* of mindfulness. When confrontation occurs with diligent attention, you directly meet all objects entering your stream of consciousness. You keep the object immovable in your awareness, as if it were a stone penetrating to the bottom of a glass of water, instead of allowing the object to float like a cork immersed in water.

You develop confidence when continuous confrontation of the object is possible. When the practice develops to a stage of *bojjhanga*, your attention directly meets the object and is face to face with it. You are a diligent yogi if the mind's attention is continually with the in-breath and the out-breath and your attention is directly aligned with the primary object.

Initially, it is difficult to retain mindfulness on the primary object. But, when the practice matures, you realize that whilst your attention remains with the primary object, bodily pains may arise and sounds may enter your stream of consciousness, yet, your attention is not taken to them. Inner thoughts may pass like cross-currents, but they don't disturb you.

As mindfulness gathers momentum, you develop even more confidence. Whilst keeping the primary object in view, you can see other objects entering your stream of consciousness. Because your attention remains directly on the primary object, they don't disturb you. When mindfulness is established with precise aiming, you develop the confidence to continue with your meditation. Whilst noting the arising of other secondary objects, you no longer indulge in them, but simply note their arising and continue with your attention on the primary object.

During walking meditation, establishing mindfulness or noting its manifestation is far more dramatic. The eyes are open, the wind may be blowing and you hear the singing of birds, together with experiencing thoughts that enter your stream of consciousness. The opportunities for distraction are far more apparent during walking meditation. When continuity of attention on the movement and the touch of the feet is developed, the external sounds and the objects viewed through the eye will not hinder your awareness of the touch, the experience or the movement of the feet. As long as your attention remains with the movement and the touch of the feet, thoughts are unlikely to distract you.

### **The proximate cause for mindfulness**

Mindfulness is the most *proximate cause* for establishing continuous mindfulness. In the commentarial expression available in the *Path of Purification*, it is stated that the most proximate cause for the development of mindfulness is strong perception; or mindfulness concerning the contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*).<sup>3</sup>

Attempts to retain mindfulness during the early stages of your practice, although not continuous, gives rise to steadfast

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<sup>3</sup> Bhikkhu Nānamoli, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, p524 [142]

mindfulness later. Much depends on your effort. Everyone finds it difficult to retain continuous mindfulness at the beginning of their practice, although when it is steadfast, you can see all objects arising and passing away continually and rapidly. This is the stage where a yogi experiences the fourth *vipassanā* insight - *udayabbhaya ñāna*. At this stage, *sati sambojjhanga* develops. Within each in-breath, a yogi will see many in-breaths. Within each out-breath, a yogi will see many out-breaths, passing away. You observe the same with bodily pains and any other mental or physical objects that arise in your consciousness. With steadfast mindfulness, you will see objects arising and passing away, rapidly and continually, but you remain unshaken by what unfolds before you.

Mindfulness is often referred to as 'choiceless' awareness or detached attention, because you maintain a distance from what manifests in your awareness. Without indulging in the phenomena, you penetrate it with steadfast mindfulness. But, you must not interfere with it.

When mindfulness is sharp, continuous and gathers momentum, you are at the stage of *sati sambojjhanga*. At this stage, a yogi is clearly undertaking insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. With steadfast mindfulness, a yogi can develop both tranquil concentration (*samatha samādhi*) and insight (momentary) concentration (*kanika samādhi*). When mindfulness is developed to a stage of *sati sambojjhanga*, however, a natural transition to insight meditation occurs in your practice.

Early mistakes must be noted as they are valuable lessons. They instruct a yogi's development towards steadfast mindfulness. All mistakes must be confronted, noted and reported to your teacher to be corrected. As the great scientist, Einstein says, you must first understand the mathematical query before attempting a solution. Once you comprehend the question, drafting a response is simple.

Whatever the object, have a clear perception of it (*tirasaññā padhattāna*). By noting the phase of each in-breath or out-breath or the rising and falling of the abdomen clearly and continuously, you strengthen your perception. When the phase of each process is noted with continuous mindfulness, your attention remains with the primary object and your awareness is not impinged by sounds, thoughts or bodily pains.

When your practice matures to experience the fourth *vipassanā* insight and *sati sambojjhanga* develops, you appreciate the benefit of previously noting all the objects that impinged on your awareness.

On a pragmatic level, avoid absent minded people in your daily life if you are keen to develop steadfast mindfulness. Mindfulness is an indiscriminate development that is not dependent on a person's sex or ethnicity. It is something that can be experienced by all humans. So you understand the value of the human brain and its discerning capacity. Our human lives are invaluable. Always associate with those who are mindful. Be diligent and strive towards continuous mindfulness so that you develop the confidence and the security to progress in your practice.



## Chapter 2

# Investigation of Dhamma (*Dhammavicaya Sambojjhanga*)

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*So tathāsato viharanto tam dhammam paññāya pavicinati pavicarati  
parivīmamsam āpajjati*

*Yasmin samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhu tathāsato viharanto tam  
dhammam paññāya*

*pavicinati pavicarati parivīmamsam āpajjati*

*Dhammavicayasambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āraddho hoti<sup>4</sup>*

When you are mindful, you are able to investigate the primary object. Investigation (*dhammavicaya*) is what differentiates *samatha* from *vipassanā*. *Dhamma* is mind and matter and *vicaya* is investigation. *Dhammavicaya* is investigation into the operation of mind and matter.

In the *samatha* practice, you dwell on the concentration that is being developed, but there is no exploration or penetration into the phenomena. So the mind superficially observes the objects without much investigation or understanding of their true nature.

To work with investigation of the *dhamma*, you must penetrate into the phenomena. A yogi must directly note all mind objects and matter (*nāma* and *rūpa*) that arise at each of the six sense doors during the practice. Become familiar with them, investigate them and penetrate into their true characteristics. This is the *vipassanā* practice.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

When steadfast mindfulness is present, the mind directly meets the object and investigates the operation of mentality and physicality. This is why the Buddha first discusses the importance of *sati sambojjhanga*, as it enables the mind to directly meet and investigate the phenomena as soon as it arises.

## **Investigating dhamma in the practice**

When practicing *ānāpānasati* meditation or the rising and falling of the abdomen, a yogi gives priority to the primary object and focuses on it.

Mindfulness gives the alignment to observe and directly meet the object. With each in-breath and out-breath, a yogi experiences the contact between physicality and mentality.

What is it that differentiates an in-breath from an out-breath? A yogi must observe and note all the individual characteristics of the in-breath. When you gather information that is unique to the object, you familiarize yourself with it.

In each in-breath, the four elements are present - so you observe the movement, contraction, expansion or the rubbing sensation. You can also observe temperature (a coolness or heat), when you continually observe and investigate the breath (the phenomena) during the practice. Observe the manifestation of phenomena - the movement as just movement and the rubbing as just rubbing. Just observe the attributes of the elements. This observation is devoid of a self and is not propelled by an "I". It is just an observation of the process. If there is no penetration or close association with the object, the investigation is rather superficial and fruitless.

At the beginning, a yogi must mindfully observe the in-breath and the out-breath, separately and discretely (*so sathova assa sathi, sathova passa sati*). Then, the Buddha instructs us to observe the

characteristics of the breath, whether it is long or short. In addition we are instructed to observe the breath from the beginning, through the middle and to the end (*sabba kāya patisamvedhī assa sissā mīti sikkhati*). This observation is a crucial transition for the development of insight (*vipassanā*).

A yogi is instructed to investigate all physical characteristics and the processes involved in the in-breath and the out-breath, from the beginning, through to the end. Your attention must directly meet the object and continue with it, from the beginning through to the end.

Although it is difficult at the beginning, to be attentive towards the whole process, it is necessary for you to exert the necessary effort to see the whole process unfolding as deeply as possible. There must be clarity of awareness in the object that is observed and the mind that observes it. When a yogi diligently practices in this manner and investigates the unfolding of the physical process and the mental process of the mind that observes it, this experience can be clearly reported to the teacher.

During sitting meditation, the nature and the process of the breath is an observation of the inward and outward movement. The nature of an in-breath could be described as blowing a balloon, where the air gradually fills it up. A closer observation of the form, shape or the nature of the breath would enable a yogi to see its individual characteristics or attributes: whether it is an inward gush or an outward rush, a heat, coolness or coarseness or softness (etc). This closer observation is possible when the faculty of investigation is present.

During a session of walking meditation, a yogi can observe the shape of the foot, the lifting and the moving forward of the foot or the coarseness or softness as the foot touches the ground. This is not done visually by looking at the foot. When a yogi observes the

primary object in this threefold manner, he or she has clarity of the phenomena which unfolds.

When such astute attention is present, a yogi is able to recollect the experience and the process involved in the movement and touch of each foot, clearly to his or her teacher.

In the *Satipatthāna Vipassanā* meditation system as taught by the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw, the focus is on the natural manifestation of phenomena. When you observe the coolness or the heat, the rubbing sensation, tension or movement, there is no personality involved in it. This is the discernment and discrimination that the factor of investigation aids a yogi to see the true nature of phenomena. This is an aloof observation. You become aware of an in-breath compared to an out-breath. When an out-breath occurs, you discern and know that it is not an inward exhalation.

A yogi dwelling in mindfulness can observe the natural characteristics of all phenomena during meditation (*so tathāsato viharanto tam dhammam paññāya pavicinati pavicarati parivīṃsamsam āpajjati*). When the natural characteristics are observed, you are engaged with the object. The *Satipatthāna Vipassanā* meditation system is geared towards giving priority to the natural characteristics of phenomena. When you see the stiffness, tension, and contractions, you penetrate deeper into the object. You transcend conceptualization to progress towards a stage devoid of time and space. You become engrossed with the phenomena. You will just see stiffness, tension, heat and cold and there will be no qualitative discrimination. It is a 'choiceless' observation. You just observe what unfolds naturally and engage with it.

At the beginning, there will be distractions. The mind may wander. You will day-dream. As your observation tends towards the natural characteristics of the object and your awareness

becomes consumed by them, you are able to meditate for a longer time. You will depart from the conceptual realm to be with the natural characteristics. All phenomena have their own attributes. All matter consists of the four elements: the air element, the water element, the fire element and the earth element. They all possess their unique attributes, which are independent and separate from one another.

If your mindfulness is continuous, the discrimination between the in-breath and the out-breath reduces. At the beginning, it is possible to differentiate between the in-breath and the out-breath. As the practice matures, the two phases of the breath will merge and the breath becomes subtle and less discernible. Although this is a more advanced stage of the practice, it is still common for sounds, pain and thoughts to proliferate and distract the yogi. Yet, if continuity of mindfulness is present, you have the security to develop your practice further, in spite of the monotonous and somewhat uneventful nature of your awareness at this stage of mental development.

### **Reporting the investigation to your teacher**

Yogis should clearly report the investigation and the knowledge gained through investigation to their meditation teacher. All observations and mistakes that you encounter must be reported to your teacher. Don't leave anything out.

My teacher, Sayadaw U. Pandita once recollected an encounter with his teacher during a meditation interview. During the initial stages of his practice, he used to report everything to his teacher, omitting his observation of the natural characteristics of the primary object. He used to report on the frustrations he experienced due to his room mate snoring at night, people walking around and disturbing him and that some yogis were misbehaving and were not really practicing. He never reported his experience

of the primary object or what he observed through investigation. So his teacher tactfully asked him to simply look inward and to sit in during his interviews with other yogis. As he listened, he realized that Mahāsi Sayadaw was listening to only one matter: the yogi's investigation of the primary object. He instructed yogis to report on the primary object (that an in-breath occurred), how it was noted ("I noted it as in-breath") and finally, the experience (the coolness, the vibration, the stiffness, the hardness (etc)).

When you attend an interview, you must recollect your object of meditation, how you noted it and what you observed or experienced. The final aspect is investigation of the object. I too had to learn this skill and it took me about eighteen months to master it. I had to report how I noted an in-breath - that it was an inward rubbing sensation; and then an out-breath occurred and I observed it as an outward gush; and then there was pain and it felt like a stabbing sensation (etc). When I reported in this manner, my teacher was aware that *dhammavicaya* (investigation) was clearly present in my practice.

When a yogi's attention penetrates into an object, there is no space for thoughts to arise. There is security in the practice, when there is engagement with the primary object. The observation is non-superficial and thoughts and pains are unlikely to distract you. If investigation is present, the grip on the object is strong. When you observe the natural characteristics of the object, you have continuity of mindfulness. When the primary object becomes less discernible or disappears from your awareness, you must have heroic effort to maintain continuity of mindfulness.

In his practice, Venerable *Sāriputta* investigated all living and non-living beings in India. Venerable *Moggalāna* however, only investigated the primary object and therefore, became enlightened within a week. Venerable *Sāriputta* took an extra week due to the broader task that he undertook.

When investigation is present in your practice, you can explain the object and its manifestation clearly. Continuity of mindfulness on the object and investigation gives stability in your practice. When a pain arises, you must investigate it to see its characteristics. As you penetrate into it and discern its nature and characteristics, the pain will gradually subside. Whatever the object, become aware of it and investigate it.

### **Investigating subtle manifestations of dhamma**

It is much easier for a yogi to retain mindfulness on an object when there is variety in the manifestation. When the observation reaches a stage of neutrality however, the observation is rather mundane and monotonous. It is important that you report your lack of motivation at this stage of the practice to your teacher. Your teacher will then guide you to increase the energy aspect of your practice to progress further. You need heroic effort at this stage of the practice.

Yogis could experience doubt when the breath disappears from their awareness. If you have sufficiently exercised the faculty of investigation from the beginning, you remain calm at this stage of the practice. It is like boiling rice. At the beginning, it is possible to see the rice and the water, separately. But, as it boils and the rice is gradually cooked, the water becomes infused into the grains and it is difficult to separate the water from the rice. But, you know that boiled rice is comprised of both water and rice (as you observed them separately at the beginning of the cooking process).

Similarly, during *ānāpānasati* meditation, with continuous awareness of the breath, a yogi gradually loses the ability to separate the in-breath and the out-breath as separate processes. If the investigation faculty is adequately exerted, when the breath becomes fine and subtle and then inconspicuous, it is not necessary to become bewildered, as you would know that it was the same breathing process that has gradually become finer.

## Investigating shared and common characteristics of phenomena

When we watch the individual characteristics and manifestations of all objects, their shared or common attributes can be observed. The earth element operates separately to the water element and the heat element operates separately from the air element. The four elements have their individual characteristics and they operate separately. There is no friction in their co-existence and they share a common platform. The elements just arise and pass away, separately and independently, one from the other. With each manifestation, whether it is a rubbing sensation, a vibration or a contraction, heat or hardness, they just manifest, persist and gradually fade away. The fading nature is a shared characteristic of all phenomena. When you see their shared attributes, there is no space for greed (*tanhā*) to manifest.

The awareness of the object is not propelled by any attachment. A choice or preference could not be attributed to them. There is no longer a need to group them or to separate them. A yogi will just see the fading nature of mind and matter.

As the practice gathers momentum, with steadfast mindfulness, you penetrate deeper into the object. To observe the shared attributes of phenomena, a yogi must first investigate their separate and unique attributes. With such close observation, a yogi develops steadfast mindfulness and gradually directs the mind to see their common characteristic of impermanence. Then you see the rapid arising and passing away of objects. You see the flux. But, you must be equipped with forbearance to observe the arising and fading nature of phenomena, continuously as it can be quite tiring.

For example, when you watch television, you are consumed by the tragedy or the drama that unfolds. If you move closer, you see the rapid movement of dots on the screen. The visual of the drama,



the comedy or the news presentation is no longer available to you. Instead, you just have dots appearing throughout the screen. This can be a rather disenchanting experience. Continually looking at it can cause suffering. Similarly, during a session of meditation, when you see the flux, it is painful to observe the rapid arising and passing away of the phenomena that unfolds before you.

When you see the arising and passing away of the earth element, water element, the fire element or the air element, you observe their "non-governing" nature and realize that within that process, a self is absent. They have their own intrinsic characteristics, separating one from the other. As you observe closely, you see their common characteristics their arising and passing away nature. When you observe these common characteristics, you see their impermanence.

As you continually become aware, you see their suffering nature, which, in turn is different to the non-governable or selfless nature of phenomena. You must see this in all mental and physical processes. When you see their common characteristics, you will see that the "self" was based on the illusion of *nicca* (permanence) and *sukha* (pleasure).

According to Buddhist commentary, the path of the *vipassanā* practice is one of suffering. At the beginning, you must put forth effort. Then, as the meditation gathers momentum and your investigation is penetrative, you become a 'choiceless' observer.

To develop the aspect of investigation, yogis must undertake longer periods of sitting meditation and associate with wise people. First however, you need to develop wisdom within you so that you can identify those who are wise.

Read books on profound *dhamma* and listen to *vipassanā* instructions, aimed towards gaining direct knowledge through

investigative awareness. Of course, theoretical or deductive knowledge is incomplete. The *dhamma* is live and present and you must go in search of it. When you continue with investigative awareness, you will move towards final liberation. Investigative awareness is a crucial stepping stone that leads towards final liberation.

## Chapter 3

# Energy (*Viriya Sambojjhanga*)

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*Yasmin samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno tam dhammam paññāya  
pavicinato pavicarato parivīmamsam āpajjato āraddham hoti viriyam  
assallīnam*

*Viriyasambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āraddho hoti  
Viriyasambojjham tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti  
Viriyasambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhāvanāparipūrim  
gacchati*<sup>5</sup>

Each of the factors of awakening cumulatively supports the development of the others. They form a cause and effect relationship.

When mindful, a yogi discriminates and investigates to penetrate into the processes underlying physicality and mentality. Whilst this occurs, if a yogi exerts the required level of energy, the energy factor of enlightenment is developed. An adequate level of energy is required for the fulfillment of learning.

In the spiritual sphere, unlike in worldly affairs, the benefits that result from your effort are not directly tangible. When you are engaged in a spiritual quest, you must listen to *dhamma* talks and participate in discussions. Otherwise it is difficult to know whether you are clearly progressing on the path.

Generally, people tend towards generosity (*dāna*) because the results are material in nature. When exercising moral restraint by

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<sup>5</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

maintaining precepts (*sīla*), they are less enthusiastic as the result is more immaterial. If you are organizing your life according to the precepts, you need wisdom based energy to exercise moral restraint. Among those who preserve their *sīla*, only a few will undertake concentration restraint (*samādhi sikkha*). Mindfulness (*sati*) guards and protects the mind from defilements as objects arise continuously, one after another, and each one is noted with sustained effort. When momentary concentration (*kanika samādhi*) develops, the mind becomes unified. It doesn't scatter and is not distracted. Obsessive defilements are kept at bay and the mind is no longer agitated by them.

This is the quality of *samādhi sikkha* training – suppressing obsessive defilements, so that the mind becomes pure. Insight meditation can only be developed upon a foundation of moral restraint and concentration restraint.

About forty years ago, the practice of insight meditation was not very common. Many people had a defeatist attitude towards meditation. The practice of insight meditation flourished in Burma and was subsequently, introduced to Sri Lanka. Now it is an opportune time to develop insight meditation. Some countries focus on concentration meditation and some others on insight meditation. In most meditation centers, the focus has become scholarly pursuits such as writing books or the giving of *dhamma* sermons, with less attention paid to meditation. This has resulted in a realization of short sighted goals.

To have heroic effort, your goal should be nothing short of enlightenment. Then, your objectives are straightforward. From the beginning, the objective must be clear. When the mind directly and continuously meets the object, steadfast mindfulness is developed and an investigation of *dhamma* is possible. When mindfulness is aligned and there is continuous investigation, the

energy aspect of the practice is also adequately directed and exerted to further develop the practice.

### **Threefold aspects of energy**

In the *Ānāpānasati sutta*, the energy aspect is described at three levels: initial application; sustained application; and fulfilling application.

When driving a car, you start with the first gear and then shift to the second or the third gear. Similarly, during each session of sitting meditation, you must consider yourself to be a beginner. Never assume your past successes in mental development and experiences.

Always start with a beginner's mind. Commence with the first gear. The initial energy is the most important and quantitatively demanding form of energy. In any enterprise, company or academic course, the beginning is the most difficult. So it is said that in Economics, the relationship between marginal input and marginal revenue, at the beginning is very narrow. It is the same with meditation. The Buddha always appreciated the application of initial energy as this is the crucial transition in one's meditative life.

Daily, we must commence our practice at a beginner level. During sitting meditation, whenever you go to the sitting posture, never assume that you are an experienced yogi. Commence by focusing on the breath as if it was the first day of your practice. Focus on the body and come to the present moment – “here, now I am”. The engine of the car is now running. If your focus is properly aimed, then the mind is no longer engaged with day-dreaming, fantasizing and wandering. The body is comfortable, not troubled by pains. Just be with the sitting and experience it.

Before manipulating the car into the first gear, observe that the breathing process is manifesting, naturally. Then the focus will direct itself towards the upper part of the body.

Try to discern the most prominent point at which the breath manifests. If your inclination is on mindfulness of the inhalation or the exhalation, observe whether the breath manifests at the tip of the nose or at the top of the lip. Following the Burmese method, the rising and falling of the abdomen may become most prominent. Let it unfold naturally and observe the most prominent manifestation. Your focus should be where the breath manifests. The initial energy aspect is necessary to observe this manifestation. Just follow the in-breath and the out-breath, continuously. Don't do forced breathing. Just let it manifest naturally.

You need faith and energy to continuously observe the in-breath and the out-breath, manifesting in your stream of consciousness. If there is insufficient energy, then, external distractions or secondary objects will interfere with your awareness of the primary object. When initial energy is developed, there is continuity of mindfulness on the primary object, be it the in-breath and the out-breath; or the rising and falling of the abdomen.

It is like launching a boat into the sea. At the start, the rugged waves make it difficult to set off on the journey. If the two people getting in to the boat start rowing and directly confront the waves, gradually, they can leave the shore. As the boat progresses to the deep ocean, the waves subside and there are fewer distractions. From then onwards, it is smooth sailing!

You are not striving for quick results, but to train towards the establishment of concentration. All skills in life are relevant to meditation, but the difference is that this is a spiritual exercise. The practice will be trial and error and in time, you will know for

yourself the best time during which you could develop concentration - whether it is the afternoon, morning (etc). Daily, you must exert energy and practice to develop your own rhythm and momentum of practice.

### **Effort during walking meditation**

In the *Satipatthāna sutta*, the Buddha, after introducing *ānāpānasati* meditation, discusses the four postures and instructs yogis to become mindful of walking (*gaccantovā gacca nom hīti pajānāti*). During retreats, walking meditation is recommended as a preliminary practice, prior to commencing sitting meditation. This is to energize the session of sitting meditation that follows. It is like charging a battery of a run down car. The mobilization of energy is vital for the continuity of mindfulness during the sitting meditation that follows. In the practice of *ānāpānasati* meditation, the breath naturally manifests in your awareness and is not caused intentionally.

During a session of walking meditation, you must intentionally cause the feet to move, so you exert energy for the action of the feet as well as the noting. As a result, the exertion of energy is double-fold.

After sitting, after a meal or after sleep, you are recommended to undertake walking meditation. First, you must select the walking path. It should be around thirty to forty feet long and must be medium thickness in the soil. Once you select the walking path, make the body symmetrical and focus your attention on the standing posture. Pace up and down the path, just simple walking. If you are happy with the pitch of the walkway and the environment, you can commence walking meditation. The focus must be on the lower part of the body. Keep your hands in front or behind and let the walking pace occur naturally. When the right leg moves, focus your attention on the movement of the right foot.

Then, your attention will shift to the left foot. Observe the experience as the foot touches the ground. In this way, the energy aspect of the body is mobilized.

When compared to the experience and the sensation of the in-breath and out-breath, the experience of the feet is gross and rather vivid. The difference in the movement and the experience of the two feet is quite discernible. Within twenty minutes, a yogi can become continually attentive of the walking. Generally, in one session, yogis are recommended to undertake at least one hour of continuous walking meditation.

Warming up by doing walking meditation supports the sitting meditation that follows. As the energy is well mobilized, the focus on the primary object is continuous and you can directly experience the characteristics of phenomena as they unfold. If you develop your practice further, you can separately observe the phenomena in terms of mentality and physicality. You must discern the object that manifests and investigate it with discriminative awareness (*pavicinati parivīmsam āpajjati*).

Observe the difference between the left foot and the right foot and the rising and the falling of the abdomen to directly observe the physicality and mentality involved in all phenomena. All phenomena involve contact between mentality and physicality. The eye needs to make contact with the external object and if that experience is prominent, when compared to the contact of the ear and a sound, then the focus is directed to the eye. During this process, the ear continues to receive sounds and the nose continues to experience smells, but the priority is taken to the eye and therefore, eye-consciousness becomes the prominent point of touch in that instance.



## Exerting effort in the Ānāpānasati meditation practice

The Buddha's instructions are for the beginner yogi to not be too worried about aspects of mentality, but to focus on the physical aspect - the body (*kayānupassanā*), first.

So we commence our meditation with a focus on the air element, the in-breath and the out-breath (*satovā assa sati, satovā passa sati*). Someone experiencing a rough inhalation is generally an emotional character. Those with balanced inhalation and exhalation are balanced in their emotions. There are many features to the breath that occurs in your body. Sometimes it is short or long or manifests as heat or coolness. Sometimes you will observe the heat element, the solid element or the liquidity and you will then focus on the materiality of phenomena.

During *ānāpānasati* meditation, a yogi can experience eleven facets of the air element: the past, the present, the future, the gross, the subtle, desired form and undesired form, close, distant, inner, outer (etc). As a beginner, you observe when the breath is subtle or gross. Sometimes the breath may appear as if it is fading away or is far away (distant). All of these eleven facets provide detail into materiality.

Each and every aspect of the breath must be observed during meditation. This is an observation of materiality. When a yogi masters the observation of the various facets of the breath, the mind directs itself to mentality. The breathing becomes subtle, failing to generate any vivid information in the form of character, attributes (etc). It is very common for yogis to feel bored at this stage of the practice as they are unable to discern and differentiate between the in-breath and the out-breath. So, at this stage of the practice, a yogi must exert sustained effort.

If there is insufficient energy, you will change your posture or get up from your sitting posture. Thoughts and pains will proliferate in your stream of consciousness. Many yogis react to this stage of the practice and sometimes become short tempered. Forbearance (*uthsāhana lakṣhanā viriyan*) is therefore essential. The requisite amount of energy at this stage is sustained energy (*nikkhamā dhātu*). Sustained energy enables a yogi to continue with the practice amidst any hindrances.

Whatever the manifestation of the breath, your focus must be retained on the continuity of mindfulness - be it that the breath appears close, distant, pleasant or unpleasant. Whatever the phenomena, observe the beginning, the middle and the end. Do the same with all objects, including secondary objects such as pain, sounds and thoughts. When you see the beginning straight through to the end of all objects, you begin to master the practice.

Without initial energy, one cannot commence a spiritual or meditative life. If you are at a retreat, you have already exerted the initial aspect of energy.

A yogi needs to do various adjustments to sustain mindfulness and to support concentration that is developed, as the practice develops. The common example is the taming of a wild buffalo and tying it to a pole.

Like the restless wild buffalo, the taming of the mind is met with resistance. During the early days at a retreat, it is common for yogis to make various adjustments to their posture and practice. Try to find the most conducive posture that supports your meditation. At the beginning, it would be difficult to go to the full lotus posture and you may think of sitting on a straight back chair. Gradually, with sustained energy, aimed towards the development of mindfulness and concentration, a yogi will find the most conducive posture and what supports the practice. The more you can penetrate into the object, the less are the distractions.

When mindfulness is continuous, you realize that although there are distractions such as thoughts or sounds, you can continue with the meditation. If you are focused on the primary object, it is unlikely that secondary objects will disturb you. The Buddha recommends that yogis observe the object from the beginning, through to the end. Meet the object directly and without delay. If you observe the primary object in this manner, your energy aspect is well aligned. When the energy aspect is aligned, you will see each episode clearly, without missing anything. Concentration is a broad spectrum observation upon which wisdom develops. You are a spectator of the events that unfold before you, as the *vipassanā* insights develop, stage by stage. Be alert and attentive to witness the drama that unfolds. Retain a distance from the phenomena.

Don't import an "I" to this process - just have a detached observation. This is how sustained energy reaches maturity. When the sustained energy aspect is well developed, a yogi can develop the practice in any environment and under the guidance of any good teacher. In the Zen tradition, it is said that a good yogi's character is like water - it takes the shape of the pot or vase to which it is poured. It is fluid and can adapt to any situation. As long as you are mindful, you inspect and investigate *dhamma*, then, you know what you are observing, clearly.

Observe the breath from the beginning to the end. This is wise investigation or reflection (*yoniso manasikhāra*) - when you investigate the object closely and understand its attributes, nature and form. At times, you will observe the length of the in-breath and the out-breath. Sometimes, you feel the temperature - the heat or coolness; you may feel stiffness or tension. Discriminately observing these aspects and striving towards continuous mindfulness is the application of sustained energy.

When you observe the process of the in-breath and the out-breath, you will see that they are sensory transactions occurring at the sense bases.

All sensory contact occurs with the involvement of the striker element, base element and the ignition element. With continuous mindfulness, you will observe these transactions clearly.

The air draft is the striker element and the point at which the experience occurs is the base element and the resultant experience - the heat, coolness or the movement is the ignition element. The striker element strikes on the sensitivity of the body. Without body sensitivity, it is not possible to experience the touch of air.

Throughout your practice, you have to have diligent effort and precise aiming. It is with sustained energy that your goal could be fulfilled. With sustained energy, you will develop the *vipassanā* insights, one by one. As the practice develops, you will continue with sustained observation to expend fulfilling energy to develop path and fruition consciousness - *magga phala ñāna*, to reach your goal towards liberation.

## Chapter 4

# Rapture (*Pīti Sambojjhanga*)

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*Āraddhaviriyassa uppajatti pīti nirāmisa*

*Yasmin samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno āraddhaviriyassa uppajatti pīti  
nirāmisa*

*Pītisambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkuno āraddho hoti*

*Pītisambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkuno bhāvanāparipūrim gacchati*

*Pītimanassa kāyo pi passambhati cittam pi passambhati*<sup>6</sup>

We experience *nirāmisa pīti* (non-sensual pleasure) in the form of joyous rapture and contentment on this spiritual journey. The two types of *pīti*, being *āmisa* and *nirāmisa* separate between spiritual and sensual pleasure. Sensual pleasure is based on or is derived from conceptualization or philosophy. It involves an external search. *Nirāmisa pīti* is an internalized form of pleasure. It is delight based upon immaterial experience.

### **Āmisa pīti and nirāmisa pīti**

The search for *āmisa pīti* is insatiable. When the eye delights at the sight of a beautiful object, we experience joy. When you taste delicious food or hear pleasant sounds, you experience a material form of joy. We spend an inordinate amount of time in search of pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, touch, smells and thoughts. Yet, there is never any contentment. We experience great stress and anxiety in this search for joy in the material realm. Of course, we need to be satisfied that our basic necessities are fulfilled. But, we must know the limits and pause when faced with desire, to note

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<sup>5.</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

and know the limits of the material realm and the dangers of the craving that follows in our pursuit of material objects. Transgressing the boundary of limits can only cause one to be immersed in sense pleasures and to become a slave to their delights.

This is why the Buddha prescribed that material joy is inferior to immaterial joy. You can experience immaterial pleasure, only if you accept and understand *kamma* and *vipāka*. If you don't have a basic view of cause and effect, you have no restraint. The correct or right view preached by the Buddha is based on a foundation of cause and effect. Both Buddhism and Hinduism accept cause and effect - that good reaps good and that unwholesome deeds lead to unsatisfactory results. So we realize the benefit of moral restraint, moral shame and the fear associated with all mind and bodily activities. Without an understanding of cause and effect, your life will be a roller coaster of birth and death. Without any reflection or contemplation, you will continue to reap the results of all your good and bad actions. There will be no end.

### **Joy in moral restraint**

In this onward spiritual journey, we can experience rapture due to moral restraint, concentration restraint and also through the development of wisdom. In *bojjhanga dhamma*, the factors of enlightenment, we discuss how rapture arises due to wisdom training. Moral restraint leads to an absence of regret. If you fail in moral conduct, you are bound to have remorse and regret in your life.

All animals go in search of food, they delight in sleep and live in fear and experience sexual pleasure. These attributes are common to animals and humans, alike. The difference is that humans can undertake moral training, concentration training and wisdom training. If you undertake this training, the *dhamma* seeps into

your character and you live without regrets. Due to a lack of regret, you develop a form of rapture, which makes your mind very peaceful and joyous. You feel lightness in your mind and your life will be viewed in a positive light.

Observing the precepts is not easy. But, it is the foundation for developing the practice. Moral restraint is what demarcates between the human and the animal realm. As humans we have the opportunity for mental discernment. Whatever the urge to lie, to steal or to engage in sexual misconduct, you pause and restrain yourself from committing it, as you are endowed with the right view of cause and effect. Without moral restraint, you will experience a restless mind and ongoing anxiety. If you wish to embark on this spiritual journey, you must strive for moral restraint.

As set out in the Mahāsi Sayadaw Treatise, the Buddha does not recommend a duration or extent of *sīla* that is required to commence the practice. The Venerable Sayadaw logically assumes that one who makes a strong determination to exercise moral restraint at a given moment is able to commence the *Satipatthāna* meditation practice. This is how *Angulimāla* or the Chief Minister *Santhati* was able to realize such profound *dhamma* in spite of their heedless lives. So, make a strong determination to observe and maintain the precepts and from then onwards, you are able to commence the practice. When your *sīla* is in tact, you experience an immaterial form of joy as you recollect and acknowledge your efforts at moral restraint.

When I was at Panditarama, I read the book, 'Pollyanna'. In this book, Pollyanna's father teaches her to try and find a reason to be glad in any circumstance. Once, she asked her father for a doll. As they were poor, her father said that she should wait for another fifteen years. They lived on what the missionary bags contained. One day, the missionary bag arrived, but there were no toys.

Pollyanna complained to her father, querying how she could find a reason to be glad under such a circumstance?

Her father responded, saying that she should be happy that her limbs were in tact, her leg was not broken and that she still had a healthy body. Pollyanna contemplated and realized that although there were no toys in the bag, she had a healthy body and felt joyous at this realization. As my teacher, Sayadaw U. Pandita once said, *metta* is finding a reason to be glad under any circumstance.

As the Buddha says, until you become an *arahant*, you must try to see the silver lining that surrounds the darkest of clouds. In all phenomena, just see the positive aspects. There is joy hidden in sorrow! In your practice, whatever the obstacle, whatever the disappointment, continue with a positive attitude. If you experience well developed *samādhi* today, but fail to have a similar experience tomorrow, don't be disheartened. Just continue to strive in the practice to reach your destination. When your *sīla* is in tact, you will have the inner confidence of your own purity and the ability to face any obstacle with inner peace and straightforward candor. The immaterial joy and rapture that you derive from well developed *samādhi* and *sīla* will enable you to progress along the path with a positive attitude and unshakeable confidence.

Take the example of the Buddha who embarked on this journey amidst uncertainty of any prospect of enlightenment, in solitude but, with inner contentment to meet all obstacles with one compassionate embrace and unwavering virtue. The Buddha underwent enormous hardship; but, always triumphed with a positive attitude, without any animosity or hate.

In this practice, we experience good and bad, the pleasant and the unpleasant. When we were small children, I clearly recollect how we used to collect 5 cent pieces and we were delighted when we collected 37 cents. We were content and joyous. Now, the more



we have, the more we want and we have become victims of an insatiable journey of *tanhā* - a pursuit of sensual pleasures.

For rapture or joy to become a factor of awakening, we must be content within ourselves and develop a positive attitude, whatever life presents to us! In this path, we meet suffering, impermanence and non-self. When faced with these truths, we embrace them with immense joy and strength in our hearts.

### **Joy through concentration**

When you have well developed concentration and your mind is secluded from the hindrances, you experience an immaterial form of joy. You also experience immense immaterial joy through *jhānic* experience. But, to realize the Buddha's truth, we must go further in our practice and not settle with just *jhānic* bliss and rapture. We need to strive towards an experience of joy, gained through *vipassanā* insights. This joy is far more precious than the experience of moral restraint; concentration restraint and the experience of a mind, separate from the hindrances. So, how do we discern the rapture we experience, when *vipassanā* insights develop in our practice?

### **Experience of joy and rapture in the practice**

According to Buddhist commentary, *pīti* manifests in five ways. Each of these forms of joy or rapture can be experienced as the practice gradually matures and develops. In the beginning, you experience *kūthika pīti*, a minor form of joy. During a session of sitting meditation, you may experience goose bumps or a tingling sensation on your skin for a momentary period of time. This usually occurs when the mind is directly meeting the object and the body begins to relax. Sometimes, when you recollect the virtues of the Buddha, a previous act of generosity or the preservation of virtue, you experience joy in the form of tingling

sensations occurring in your body. Sometimes, you experience tiny titillations or shaking in various parts of the body. These experiences are a good sign of progress in your practice.

As the practice matures further, you experience *kanika pīti* - a form of quick and momentary rapture. The experience could be a sudden shake or you may feel as if you are on air. The body experiences a sensation which is like lightening. Just like lightening, the experience will quickly come and go. When lightening strikes, there is no sign of it in the sky before it occurs and it disappears soon thereafter without leaving a trace. Similarly, *kanika pīti*, an experience related to *kanika samādhi* will give you an experience of a sudden thrill in the body. Whenever such joy strikes, it is a clear indication that you have well established mindfulness; that the investigative factor is in operation and that energy is well mobilized. The mind retains its alignment with the object both before such joy occurs and also after it disappears. It is a result that you experience, when mindfulness, investigation and energy are aligned.

As the practice gathers momentum, you experience *okkanthika pīti*, which manifests as continuous waves and thrills across the body. The body continues to experience this rapture, moment after moment. This experience is not in the form of a jolt or shake that occurs in a particular part of the body or a movement, tingling or titillation which manifests in an individual part of the body as is the case with *kanika pīti* or *kuthika pīti*. Rather, it is a continuous experience of rapture, occurring in leaps and bounds.

If your effort is aligned to progress further in the practice, you realize that you have the strength to reach your goal whilst developing inner confidence. These are still preliminary forms of rapture. You are in a positive state of mind and you are endowed with a strong inner confidence, clearly knowing that your *sīla* is in tact; your mindfulness is well developed and directly aligned with the primary object.

The mind is peaceful and unshaken, ready to forge ahead with the practice. As long as the mind remains unshaken, you can continue with immense contentment and confidence. You have trust in your ability and in the practice.

If your aim is enlightenment, you will progress further in the practice to experience *ubbegha pīti*, where the whole body experiences rapture in leaps and bounds in the form of exhilarating joy. You feel like you are in a boat in the deep sea, and you are floating along with the waves. Or your body will experience rapture in the form of an overflowing pot of milk or the overflowing of the fizz of a bottle of soda that has been opened with a quick jerk. Amidst this experience, you can continue with your mindfulness upon the object. It is an experience which pervades the whole body.

Next, you progress to experience *parama pīti*, an all pervading or suffusing form of joy, which manifests across the whole body - an uplifting experience which is felt across the whole body. This is the climax of *pīti sambojjhanga*. When you experience *parama pīti*, you feel like sharing the experience with those dear to you. At this stage of the practice, you observe that all actions are a product of a preceding intention; that *rūpa* causes *rūpa*; that *nāma* cannot operate or exist without *rūpa* and vice versa; or that *nāma* causes *nāma*. A yogi develops the second *vipassanā* insight - *paccaya pariggaha ñāna* and gains knowledge into cause and effect. You will also see that there are many continuous breaths within one inhalation or exhalation. It is like observing a line of ants. Initially, you think that there is a straight line or a rod, but as your observation becomes closer, you see that the line consists of individual ants. The joy that pervades your body is so strong that you don't want to stop the session of sitting or open your eyes.

You observe that everything is just mind and matter and is a collective whole, especially as you gain insight into all aspects

involved in the operation and the process of mind and matter. This uplifting joy and rapture will continue until you reach a stage of *sammassana ñāna*, where you develop knowledge that all forms of mind and matter have their unique and individual characteristics, arising and passing away. It is their nature to arise and pass away. Whatever *nāma* and *rūpa* that arises, passes away. You see that arising and passing away are the common characteristics of impermanence, underpinning all existence. Noting all objects, you discern the unique characteristics as well as the common characteristics. The arising and passing away can be discerned as a flux and in a fast manner. At the stage of *sammassana ñāna*, you note all objects, clearly and consistently.

There is a danger here. When the practice is developed by separating mind and matter and investigating phenomena, some may consider themselves to be enlightened and risk overestimating their development in the practice.

Taking pride in the insights that are gleaned from their practice, it is common for yogis to relax in their effort. Teachers therefore instruct that they continue to note the primary object, whatever the extraordinary experience. When yogis receive such instructions, it is possible for them to feel rather discouraged, having been corrected that they have not yet reached their final destination or feel that their achievement has been tempered by their teacher. But, overestimation is a hindrance to the yogi's progress. Just continue with the practice and don't be overwhelmed by these experiences. If you stay with the primary object, you can progress towards the deeper and the finer stages of mental development. At this stage, the mind is neither in the past nor the future. It is alert as the effort is balanced.

As the Buddha has instructed, joy and rapture are signs of progress. You must stay with the primary object whatever the overwhelmingly pleasant rapture that arises in your body.

Clearly report your experiences to the teacher. If you overestimate your progress, you will stagnate within and if thoughts of pride proliferate, your mind will wander to the external world. Whatever the profit gained in the practice, just take it in stride and continue along a steadfast continuum of mindfulness of the primary object or that subtle point at which the breath disappeared from your awareness.

In our daily lives, we experience joy that arises due to material objects, sounds or smells. But, now your eyes are shut, the ears are not disturbed by sounds and you are not able to smell anything and you are completely outside the sensual sphere. You are experiencing an immaterial form of joy. Although you feel a great sense of joy, it is important that you don't share the experience with those close to you.

When your practice develops to a stage of *upacara samādhi* (neighborhood concentration) you experience *kuthika pīti* and *kanika pīti*. When you are in the stage of *arpanā samādhi*, you experience the deeper stages of rapture. You will feel that there is a magnetic force, pulling you inward. This inward pulling must also be investigated. During insight meditation, the more developed forms of rapture occur from the stages of *sammassana ñāna* to *udayabbhaya ñāna*, when insight into the arising and passing away of all mind and body objects is developed.

At the stage of *udayabbhaya ñāna*, the mind is automatically directed to the object. It is like shooting a target with a bow and arrow. When these realizations bear fruit, you feel great joy and rapture, pervading the whole body. The joy accompanying the stage of *udayabbhaya ñāna* is extreme bliss. The noting of objects becomes easy and the current of defilements are stopped. You just feel like continuing with your sitting meditation. When the practice matures to these stages, you experience *dhamma* happiness that excels worldly and sensual happiness many times over.

This happiness is praised by the Buddha and is described as *amānusi rati* – an unalloyed form of happiness.

According to Buddhist commentary, to experience such refined forms of joy and rapture, you must recollect the virtues of the Buddha. There are nine attributes that must be venerated.

Of particular relevance is the attribute of *sugatha*, how the Buddha undertook the journey with great joy and happiness, whatever the obstacles that he faced. Contemplating the values of the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha* plus your good deeds will give cause for joy to arise in your heart. You experience a lack of regret, when you exercise moral restraint.

With concentration training, you experience immaterial joy. In insight training, you have 'choiceless' awareness. When moral training and concentration training is supported, wisdom training is possible. It is like disinfecting the utensils and anesthetizing a patient before a surgical procedure. The preliminary processes must be fulfilled before the surgery can be performed.

If sounds or thoughts interrupt your practice and you wait for it to cease, you will not commence your practice. Identify your personality traits and progress with your awareness of the primary object and forge ahead in your practice. In this practice, we aim towards immaterial joy and strive towards *avedha ittha sukka* to reach our final destination. Without an experience of immaterial joy or rapture, it is impossible to progress towards this destination. When you encounter great experiences of joy, bliss and rapture, become aware of them, but, continue to stay with the primary object and make these experiences a vehicle or a stepping stone towards a further development of the practice.

## Chapter 5

# Tranquillity (*Passaddhi Sambojjhanga*)

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*Pīṭimanassa kāyo pi passambhāti*

*Cittam pi passambhāti*

*Yasmin samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno pīṭimanassa kāyo pi passambhāti  
cittam pi passambhāti*

*Passadhisambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āraddho hoti*

*Passadhisambojjhangam tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti*

*Passadhisambojjhangano, tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhāvana  
paripūrim gacchati<sup>7</sup>*

The tranquillity factor of awakening (*passaddhi sambojjhanga*) illustrates the calmness and stilling of the mind in the practice. This calmness is possible due to the already developed factors of mindfulness, the investigation of *dhamma* and the effort (being the energy aspect of the mind). When joy (*pīti*) arises, it gives rise to calmness and tranquillity of the mind. When mindfulness, investigation of the *dhamma* and sufficient energy are mobilised, the results - *pīti* and *passaddhi* are possible. Only a yogi who experiences joy and rapture can develop the tranquillity factor of awakening.

Whenever you perform a wholesome act; exert moral restraint; develop concentration and wisdom, you experience joy and rapture in varying forms and quantity. If one does not delight at their wholesome acts, then it seems that their merit has not as yet matured or developed. This is because one does not know how to reap the results of their meritorious activities. Gandhi once stated

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<sup>5</sup>. *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

that if one considered all the suffering that one endures from birth to death, then one can survive and embrace all aspects of life, unconditionally. We must always focus on the noteworthy qualities of all activities and circumstances and enjoy the benefits of a job well done! This is a skilful exercise. When a wholesome act is completed well, you can delight in it. When you have moral restraint, you rejoice even more. Developing the practice to stages of concentration and wisdom gives cause for joy and rapture to arise in the practice.

When one experiences calmness in the body and the mind, the Buddha says that such a person develops the tranquillity aspect of awakening. In the *Ānāpānasati sutta*, the Buddha describes that the breath manifests in sixteen difference ways. In our practice, we are able to observe the breath as short, long, as the whole breath and finally as a calming of the breath body (*passambayan kāyasankhāran*).

Observe the breath from the beginning, through to the end. It is with the cessation of the breath that we progress towards tranquillity and calmness.

### **Tranquillity through cessation of the breath**

To see a calming of the breath, one must continually note each in-breath and out-breath. When the mind falls calm and collected on the primary object, you begin to see the breath gradually becoming more and more subtle. If you fail to note the breath, through the "in" and "out" process, during the initial stages of the practice, you may become confused when it disappears from your awareness. As a result, uncertainty and bewilderment could arise, impacting on the progress made by the yogi.

As long as mindfulness is continuous and concentration gradually sets in, yogis are able to persist with their practice, when they reach a stage of the practice, where the breath disappears from their



awareness. The perception of the breath is the discernment between the in-breath and the out-breath. To enable us to become investigative and discerning during this subtle stage of the practice, we are instructed to discriminatively observe the process of the in-breath and the out-breath during the preliminary stages of the practice. When the out-breath occurs, discriminatively become aware of its form, characteristics and attributes, when compared to the experience of the in-breath. During the initial stages of the practice, the breath manifests clearly and yogis are able to experience it. As the practice matures and the breath becomes subtle, it is difficult to see the individual characteristics and separately note the phase of the in-breath and the out-breath.

So, instead of reacting to this subtle stage of the practice, train the mind to observe the gross manifestation of the breath and how it gradually becomes subtle. When your observation is continuous, you develop steadfast mindfulness. Gradually, the perception of the breath and its feeling (*citta sankhāra*) disappears as the in-breath and the out-breath becomes inseparable and inconspicuous and you feel as if there is no longer any feeling or sensation of the breathing process. At this stage of the practice, the untrained mind thinks that the breath has come to a stop.

Whenever the discrimination of the in-breath and the out-breath becomes inconspicuous, the perception of the breath disappears from your awareness. Then, you are unable to feel the movement of air. As the practice develops further, you lose perception of the time or space dimension and you lose track of time, not knowing whether you are sitting. At times, you may feel as though only the left side of the body can be felt in a gross form or that the bottom part of the body has disappeared. As the breath becomes subtle, your perception towards the primary object, the body and the time dimension, gradually fades away.

Those who have a firm belief in the permanent nature of the soul may feel concerned when they experience a cessation of perception.

We develop an ego upon perception, so when it ceases, many become overwhelmed by fear as we are no longer capable of judgement or discriminative awareness. There is no longer an opportunity for recognition.

Unless you correct your perspective, *passaddhi* cannot set in. Instead, you will experience restlessness and agitation. Your mind should be pliable (*kāla cittam*); and not fixed (*udanga cittam*) and without hindrances (*nīvarana cittam*). Your attitude should be of an evolving nature. It should not be fixed in a hard and fast manner. Whenever, the mind is filled with joy or gladness, the body can also be prepared for calmness and softness. As the mind is associated with joy, the body also becomes soft, malleable and adjustable, like a lump of clay which can be potted.

If you are not prepared to foster the calming of the breath and protect it and instead do forced breathing or try to open your eyes, you will divert from the progress you have made in your practice. If doubt sets in, it would be difficult for joy, gladness or tranquillity to develop. To progress at this stage of the practice, you must clearly and continuously note the in-breath and the out-breath, as and when it occurs. If you are a skilful yogi, you know that there is a cessation of the breath. Become aware of the distinction between the in-breath and the out-breath. Early mistakes must be reported to the teacher, so that the appropriate instructions could be received. Be brutally honest and be true to your mistakes. Don't pretend that you have progressed, when you have not and report all mistakes to your teacher, so that they can be corrected. Admitting to your mistakes is not something to be shameful of. When you experience anger, jealousy and hate, become aware of them and know that you are experiencing them.

When thoughts impinge on your awareness, note them as “thinking, thinking” and become aware that you are no longer with the primary object. You must note that the mind is no longer at the tip of the nose or at the top of the lip. Note where your attention was and the natural characteristics that you observed. If pain has arisen, note the characteristics, that it is a burning sensation, a heat patch or a moving sensation.

If you forcefully take your attention from the pain to the in-breath and the out-breath, then you interrupt the investigation. Whenever sounds occur, note it as "hearing, hearing". Don't treat these distractions as your enemies. Instead, take them as a tool for investigation. Gradually, you must become accustomed to noting the breath amidst disturbance, keeping track of the in-breath and the out-breath. Although sounds and pains impinge on your awareness, you continue to observe the breath and note that gradually, there is a calming down of the breath.

The breath always manifests amidst disturbance. Do not react. Whatever takes your attention away from the breath must be investigated. The energy aspect must also be present. As you mobilise energy, there will be a maturing of the awakening factor of mindfulness. With continued investigation, you will gradually experience joy and rapture. To have the security of mindfulness, you must identify and recognise the in-breath and the out-breath, separately and distinctively. This *dhamma* is only for those who are wise and skilful. When you master the art of directing towards the target, you feel encouraged.

Whenever joy or rapture arises, whatever the occurrence, you don't lose track of the primary object. If you are a spy, although there are many people on the street, you retain your attention on the person you are after and you will follow and keep them in your view as long as the investigation continues. Objects have their past, present and future form. Without any preconceived ideas,

you must continue to note the objects, their nature and characteristics. There is a drama unfolding on the platform and you are an attentive observer. Whatever that unfolds, you must retain your attention, observing the theatre and the performance, from the beginning, through to the end and the change from the gross to the subtle.

It is upon cessation of the breath (*kāya passaddhi*) and its perception (*citta passaddhi*) that a yogi is able to experience the tranquillity factor of awareness. My teacher, Venerable Nānarāma used to instruct us that if we feel discouraged in the practice one day due to a slip and give up, the next day, we must persevere even harder and strive to be vigilant in our observation to progress towards even finer subtlety. You may give up again. But, the following day, you progress by taking one more step and refine your focus. So it is a trial and error method. Daily, you progress. It is a law of nature that joy and rapture can develop and that tranquillity sets in. If we practice, we will reap the results. But accepting the results and nurturing them requires immense courage.

When boiling rice, at the start, we are able to separately see the water and the rice in the pot. Over time, it produces rice porridge. If you were vigilant and observed the process, you would know that the rice porridge was initially just rice and water. So, when there is a fusion of the water and the rice, you no longer query what the porridge contains or what has happened. Similarly, if you discretely observe the in-breath process separately from the out-breath process, continually, in your practice, you will not be perplexed when the breath ceases in your awareness.

It is when you observe this cessation in your practice that you realise the futility of the conventional realm.

As a yogi, it is very important that you clearly note the point to which you can note the primary object and from which point

onwards you are no longer able to note it. Previously, you would note as: "I experienced an inhalation"; "I experienced an exhalation" (etc). As the breath ceases, you begin to see the natural characteristics of materiality - the movement, stretching, heat, coolness and so forth. There is no personality in this observation - just the true nature of phenomena. Observing all manifestations, including a cessation of the breath, continue to develop your practice with a positive attitude and inner contentment. Then you allow for joy and rapture to develop and a calming of the body and the mind to develop your practice towards deeper stages of concentration and insight.

### **Factors supporting the development of tranquillity**

According to the commentary, seven factors support the development of tranquillity: delightful or agreeable food (butter, sesame, oil, honey, molasses, meat, fish and curd); agreeable climate (in Sri Lanka most meditation centres are located in the dry zone and hardly in the wet zone - this is to ensure that your energy is well mobilized and is conducive to the practice); balance walking meditation with sitting meditation and maintaining good health; balance the factors of wisdom, faith and energy with concentration and mindfulness; avoid rough and restless people (associating such people and their vibration will affect your practice). When you associate with calm and contented people, even if their meditation is somewhat restless, their grace will help to calm the mind. When these factors are aligned and tranquillity is developed, you are able to tolerate anything and everything becomes pleasant. If you are skilful in navigating your mindfulness of the in-breath and the out-breath, then, even if it is very sunny and warm outside, internally, you experience coolness.

Once, during the time of the Buddha, about thirty monks travelled to a nearby village, where they were greeted by a lady by the name

of Martika. She asked them where they wished to reside and the monks responded that they wished to be close to water; have some form of dwelling and to be located in a place where they could receive some food and medicine. Martika directed the monks to a suitable area and decided to offer them *dāna* on a daily basis. She became very busy, supporting their practice and attending to their needs.

Whilst attending to the monk's *dāna*, Martika also continued to practice at home. Due to her spiritual deeds and as a result of her dedicated practice, Martika's practice progressed to stages of great joy and rapture and she attained the third stage of sainthood. One day, she recollected the virtues of the thirty monks on whom she attended to on a daily basis. As a result of her dedicated practice, she had developed, amongst other attainments, the capacity to read the minds of others. She wished to see the spiritual progress of the monks and to know the development of their practice.

When she found that they had not developed even to the first stage of sainthood, she became rather disappointed. She probed into the reason for their lack of mental development and found that the cause was due to a lack of suitable or appropriate food. Each of the monks had differing tastes - some liked fried food, whilst some others preferred oily food and so forth. Martika made a firm commitment to cater to their individual desires and tastes and busily started to prepare the food, ensuring that their individual preferences were met. After the monks received food from Martika, catered to satisfy their individual desires, they were able to attain path and fruition knowledge.

A monk from a nearby village heard of this story and decided to reside with these monks, so that he also could be presented with Martika's delicious food on a daily basis. After he arrived, silently, he wished for all sorts of cuisine. Each day, Martika, reading his mind, continued to deliver them. One day, the monk wished for

Martika to make a personal visit. Having read his mind, Martika decided to visit the monk. When she arrived, the monk asked her whether she could read the mind's of others because everything that the monk silently wished for was provided to him by Martika on a daily basis.

Without demonstrating any of her spiritual attainments, Martika, inadvertently responded that such benefits and spiritual attainments were possible through dedicated practice. Listening to her response, the monk became rather ashamed that Martika had such humility and that she did not wish to demonstrate her special powers or spiritual attainments. He decided to immediately leave the village as he realised that she could see the barrage of defilements, occupying his mind. The Buddha however instructed that he return to the village and strive in his practice. So, he returned. Upon his return, he continued to receive food from Martika, to satisfy his personal taste. Within a short period of time, the monk was able to attain path and fruition consciousness.

In your practice, you must have balanced effort and not seek after quick results. With mindfulness, you must balance effort, concentration, faith and wisdom. As you progressively become more and more tranquil, an inner feeling develops that you are supported by the whole world. Wherever you go, you can adapt. When concentration develops, whatever the situation, you know how to make the maximum use of it. The highest form of development is of course, insight knowledge. Progressively, as the practice matures, you progress towards your goal - towards liberation.

Be patient and wait for gladness and tranquillity to develop in the practice. Associate with those who are content in their hearts. Try to encourage a mind that bends towards tranquillity. Take time to attend meditation centres and to associate with those who are gentle and calm.

When the factors supporting tranquillity are present and we have mindfulness, investigative awareness and sufficient energy mobilised, we can develop gladness, joy and tranquillity.

Even amidst any suffering experienced in the practice, you can experience gladness, joy and contentment. Never regret or be disappointed about the past. Having invested valuable time for the practice, we must look forward for this gladness or tranquillity to arise, so that the factors of awakening can develop. Be positive and don't rush or expect quick results. A shift in attitude is imperative. Once you develop the factor of tranquillity, the benefits that you gain are immeasurable. Then, gradually, you progress to develop the factors of concentration and equanimity.



## Chapter 6

# Concentration (*Samādhi Sambojjhanga*)

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*Passaddhakāyassa sukhino cittam samādhiyati*

*Yasmin samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno passaddhakāyassa sukhino cittam  
samādhiyati*

*Samādhisambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āraddho hoti*

*Samādhisambojjhangam tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhāveti*

*Samādhisambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhāvanāparipūrim  
gacchati*<sup>8</sup>

Developing the concentration factor of awakening (*samādhi sambojjhanga*) involves a cause and effect relationship of the five factors of awakening that we have already discussed. When mindfulness, discriminative investigation and energy are present, a yogi can reap the results of joy, rapture and tranquillity. When the mind and body are tranquil, and a yogi has astute awareness, investigation and well mobilised energy, it is possible to develop the concentration factor of awakening. When tranquillity develops, it is possible to progress to a deeper state of concentration.

Meditation practice has always been associated with the development of concentration. This has been the accepted norm for quite some time. Whenever someone develops concentration, that person is deemed a good yogi. Many meditation centres operate with the objective of developing concentration. Prior to the time of the Buddha, the accepted norm was that meditation equated with concentration. The Buddha revolutionised this belief, stating that concentration was the platform upon which one

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<sup>5.</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

develops the insight meditation practice. Following the Buddha's instructions, we do not consider concentration to be the ultimate goal of this noble quest.

Until relatively recently, there was also a belief in Sri Lanka that one must become a monk or a nun before one could undertake the *Satipatthāna* meditation practice, thus, distinguishing one's meditative life from one's lay life and duties. This resulted in a postponement of the meditation practice onto another birth. This is because meditation was equated to concentration. The contemporary thinking is that one is not able to develop to deep stages of their practice whilst they continue with their lay life. *Vipassanā* meditation is not a command from above; rather it is an autonomous practice, which could be undertaken by anyone dedicated to the practice. So, we must make the maximum of this rare human birth and strive in our practice.

Generally, those steeped in tranquillity meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*), experience great joy, gladness and tranquillity in their practice. *Vipassanā* yogis however, will experience only a refined form of joy and tranquillity as they progress deeper into their practice. Whilst concentration based on tranquillity (*samatha samādhi*) is good, insight (*vipassanā samādhi*) or momentary concentration (*kanika samādhi*) is what leads to *Nibbāna*. The Buddha's invitation is to aim towards the more beneficial form of concentration - momentary concentration, which allows you to keep a distance from the object, enabling you to observe its natural characteristics.

## **The benefits of concentration**

If you know the theoretical aspects of concentration, then, in practice, you can navigate towards developing the concentration factor of awakening. In the practice of *samatha bhāvanā*, concentration has four benefits. First, we experience an immaterial

form of pleasure in the immediate moment. Our pursuit of pleasure usually tends towards sensual pleasure. So, we also experience, jealousy, stinginess, hatred, anger and so forth, based on material forms of pleasure. With immaterial joy, there is no conflict. It occurs in the spiritual sphere and in association with meditation practice. If we postpone the nurturing of immaterial pleasure it will be too late to consider it on your death bed. It may be that you leave it for that day when your doctor diagnoses that you have a fast growing cancer, and need to reconfigure your life to make the practice a priority before death knocks at your door! Practice now when you are well and experience this immaterial joy, as you gradually develop concentrated states of mind in your practice.

The second benefit is the broadening of sensory awareness – clairvoyance, the capacity to read the minds of others and to go back to past lives. Although such knowledge is still confined to the worldly sphere, it is an outcome of developing concentration. The third benefit is the development of clear comprehension - to see the natural attributes of phenomena. You observe the object of meditation and see it as it is. We call this insight meditation. With concentration, you penetrate into the object of meditation to see its natural characteristics and to finally, eradicate all forms of latent defilements in order to reach the goal of final liberation.

When the body experiences tranquillity, the mind becomes concentrated in a pleasurable and happy state. When the noting mind falls calm and quiet on the object, you feel gladness, joy, rapture or inner contentment. Experiencing states of joy and tranquillity associated with concentration is a development of the concentration factor of awakening. If you sequentially consider the development of the factors of awakening (which is not how they occur in the practice), you may think that concentration is the sixth factor that develops.

However, successful yogis know and understand that the practice is not linear and sequential and that moments of concentration were also present in the early stages of the practice and supported the development of the other factors of enlightenment.

### **Samatha Samādhi and Vipassanā Samādhi**

In the practice of *Ānāpānasati* meditation, a yogi inclined towards the *samatha* practice is instructed to focus on the length of the breath and its movement. If a yogi is able to focus on the coolness, the heat, an inward gush or rubbing sensation, then that yogi is inclined towards the *vipassanā* practice. If you are dextrous and can observe the whole experience of the breath, then you will direct your practice towards developing momentary concentration (*kanika samādhi*). Momentary concentration has the capacity to meet each object directly, as and when it arises. If you are able to note the primary object only and the mind is retained on the primary object, then you will develop *samatha samādhi* (concentration associated with tranquillity).

A *vipassanā* yogi is able to note all objects as and when they arise. Whatever the object that the mind meets, the yogi will continue with uninterrupted mindfulness. Distractions are not a hindrance to the *vipassanā* yogi. You are aware of the secondary objects that impinge on your awareness, whilst your attention continues with the primary object. When pain arises, a *vipassanā* yogi will not change posture, but will observe the natural characteristics of the pain, the stabbing sensation, the heat, the throb or the movement (etc).

If the practice tends towards a contemplation of the elements, then you develop momentary concentration to directly meet all manifestations of the elements. The mind naturally directs itself to a contemplation of the elements, or else, you will develop the practice towards deeper concentration, focusing the mind on one object. In your practice, you arrive at this crucial intersection, as

the breath gradually becomes finer and disappears from your awareness.

When concentration develops in the practice, it operates in an accelerated manner. In the beginning, when you meditate on the primary object, the mind is not concentrated and when the breath becomes subtle in your awareness, you may panic, feeling that there is no longer any breathing. The Buddha instructs us to not give up our effort and return to the same experience, again and again to gradually develop to the more refined stages of the practice.

As the practice matures, you will not be shaken by external sounds. The concentration that you develop will have a magnetic effect. Your mind will remain directed towards the object of meditation. In the *vipassanā* practice, you will remain in a stage of neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra samādhi*). Without absorbing into the object, you will retain a distance from it, so that you can observe it. If you absorb into the object, you experience the *jhānic* factors. When the mind experiences *jhāna*, it will be calm and collected on the object. Whatever the peripheral object, the mind remains with the primary object. The mind will be tranquil and alert and will not entertain any doubt or agitation. The five hindrances would be replaced by the *jhānic* factors.

For insight meditation, *jhānic* concentration is not necessary. Neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) is sufficient. As you retain a distance from the primary object, the mind is free to go to any object. When pain arises, you are able to note its natural characteristics: a heat patch; a stabbing; a cutting pain; a throb; a movement and so forth. With the pain, you observe the beginning, the middle and the end. Sometimes, it will manifest as excruciating pain. This is the more impromptu and adventurous form of concentration developed during meditation.

About forty or fifty years ago, many of the authoritative Buddhist masters refused to accept that insight meditation was possible without absorption. Although the object is changing, you retain focus and your concentration is continuous. You continue with 'choiceless' awareness. The mind is agile. The mindfulness is steadfast and the investigation is sharp. In the *samatha* practice, this is not possible because you penetrate the object and remain absorbed in it. The energy aspect during insight meditation is demanding. Insight meditation is based on momentary concentration - whatever the object that arises, you note it, but you don't absorb into it. With momentary concentration, you are ready to meet whatever object that comes, as and when it arrives. When the in-breath and the out-breath occurs you see it as coolness or a vibration, you can observe everything without importing an "I" and instead, just observe the natural characteristics. Note all the objects as and when you see them.

If your focus is sharp enough to note the object as and when it arises with momentary concentration, then you can see the natural characteristics and progress deeper into the practice to observe the common characteristics (impermanence, suffering and non-self) in all phenomena. When you continuously observe the impermanence however, you could feel bored and feel as if you are going nowhere. Then, the suffering becomes quite prominent. When the practice matures, the impermanence of phenomena is the first and foremost truth that is revealed to you. When you see the impermanent nature of phenomena, you realise suffering. Within this observation of the individual and shared characteristics of phenomena, you gain an understanding into selflessness - that there is no governing body, controlling mind and matter, which arises and passes away on their own accord.

Concentration alone is not helpful to the inquiring mind - investigation must always be present. Your mind must be directed to all objects, as and when they arise. Momentary

concentration (*kanika samādhi*) must be geared towards clear comprehension (*sampajañña*). As explained by the Buddha, the immaterial causes immaterial, material causes material, material causes immaterial in a continuous cause and effect process. This is *anatta* (non-self). You can't govern what arises and passes away. Don't analyse and rationalise (and thus, miss out) developing concentration in your practice to observe the true characteristics underpinning all phenomena. Otherwise, you only enter the conceptual sphere.

It is important that faith is balanced with wisdom; and for concentration to be balanced with effort. If you don't have sufficient energy, then you become lazy and will lack right attention. It is mindfulness that is essential to balance the faculties and to ensure that they are aligned, to reach your goal in the practice.

It is part of the Sri Lankan culture to recite the *Bojjhanga sutta* at times of illness. This was also the case during the time of the Buddha. The tranquillity factor of awakening is considered to have a healing effect. In my own practice, whenever I felt sleepy, I used to recite the *Bojjhanga sutta*, in particular the section relating to energy (*virīya*) to invigorate my practice. In the *vipassanā* practice, it is common for you to experience isolation and alienation, when the concept of self is dismantled. So, the Buddha has instructed yogis to recollect his virtues and heroic effort. Also, in the *samatha* practice, yogis can feel lost and bewildered when they develop their practice to a stage of neighbourhood concentration. When you recollect the Buddha and his effort, you seek refuge in the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*.

No one (person or self) accumulates the middle path that you have created through your own practice. Gather momentum and then allow for momentary concentration to develop. Don't aim towards the divine eye or the divine ear or clairvoyant powers.

Just aim towards clear comprehension, noting all objects as and when they arise in your awareness. With continued practice, you can reach your destination.

Associate with those who strive in the practice and have a positive attitude towards the *dhamma* and the possibility of liberation in this life itself. Develop your practice to a stage of deep concentration and inner spiritual contentment. Mindfulness or astute awareness is the panacea for emotional ailments. Be humble and try not to exude pride at your progress in the practice. We share a rare moment of *samsāra* when we experience these invaluable states of mind. Value all experiences and protect them with mindfulness as you would guard a treasure trove from your enemies!



## Chapter 7

# Equanimity (*Upekhā Sambojjhanga*)

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*So tathāsamāhitam cittam sādhuḥkam ajjupekkhitā hoti  
Yasmim samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno tathāsamāhitam cittam  
sādhuḥkam ajjupekkhitā hoti  
Upekhāsambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno āradḍho hoti  
Upekhāsambojjhangam tasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti  
Upekhāsambojjhango tasmim samaye bhikkhuno  
bhāvanāparipūrim gacchati<sup>9</sup>*

For the benefit of conventional training, the seven factors of enlightenment are explained as a linear equation. We say that due to mindfulness, (*sati sambojjhanga*), there is discriminative awareness (*dhammavicaya sambojjhanga*); when the investigation comes to maturity, the energy aspect is mobilised. Then joy and tranquillity arise with the concentration factor of enlightenment. When concentration is developed and reaches maturity, the equanimity factor of enlightenment pervades the mind. Although, we describe this development as a linear relationship, in practice, they unfold in a three-dimensional and interdependent manner. For example, equanimity (*upekhā*) supports mindfulness and boosts the energy aspect. Similarly, due to investigative awareness, there is a bolstering of mindfulness. There is a reciprocal relationship among the factors of enlightenment.

On a gross level, when we have neither a liking nor a disliking towards an object, we state that we are indifferent. With feelings, we have pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings and indifferent feelings. The indifferent feeling is equanimity. The quality of

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<sup>5</sup>. *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, M.N. 118

equanimity is indifference.

You must have an open mind in the practice. Whatever the factor of awakening that unfolds, it is beneficial and will support your efforts towards liberation. With concentration, the mind becomes soft and malleable. Allow for concentration to develop and become acquainted with it. Throughout this long journey of *samsāra*, we pursued many moments of excitement. In this practice, we strive for a different purpose – towards a state of indifference and liberation. So, developing equanimity (an indifferent state of mind) is going against the grain!

### **Factors supporting equanimity**

A mind that is fixed or dwells in the past will not experience equanimity. Whenever the mind is in the past, you have regret. If your attention is in the future, the mind is agitated due to planning and excitement. Although you could be making affirmative future commitments that appear to be constructive, the result is excitement and agitation of the mind. If the mind is alert and continues to note all objects, as and when they arise, hindrances will be kept at bay. A mind that is excited or expecting results will be scattered. Making firm commitments towards quick liberation such as becoming enlightened during this retreat itself, could agitate the mind and steer it away from calmness. If you are over enthusiastic and over committed to noting the object, you feel elated and the focus is lost.

On the other hand, if you are disinterested in the object, you lose track of mindfulness. If you are a diligent yogi and there is continuity of mindfulness, the mind falls calm and collected on the object and you experience gladness. At times, you may reflect that your family and friends are striving for material success and achievements, whilst you remain focused on the immaterial in-breath and the out-breath. So, you may feel discouraged. It is

common to experience these pitfalls in the practice. You must be aware when they occur as they detract from the development of equanimity. When these experiences are present it is difficult to develop equanimity.

Your faith must be balanced with wisdom and the effort should be balanced with concentration. Always ensure that your faith, effort and concentration are geared towards liberation. Do not reflect on mundane pursuits. This is how you progress along the middle path. Whether you hear a sound; or experience a pain, you continue with mindfulness and investigative awareness. Without any reaction, you take a balanced and indifferent approach towards all experience – towards all mentality and physicality. When the faculties are balanced, you are ready to experience equanimity. Just experience it and do not manipulate the experience of equanimity, when it develops.

Maintaining well developed mindfulness and concentration is difficult. You need to mature in your practice to maintain these developed states of awakening. Seven circumstances need to be present. Firstly, when you go on your alms round, you must visit the same area and seek the support of the same village. The core group of yogis must not change and the atmosphere must also remain the same as much as possible. You must not change your accommodation. Avoid those who are disinterested in the practice and who pursue worldly issues such as politics and economics. Do not change your food. Try to remain in the same posture as much as possible so that mindfulness and concentration can develop. You must think of everything in terms of mindfulness. Be patient and considerate towards the development of concentration and mindfulness. Only then can you develop equanimity.

The Buddha's instructions are to avoid situations which are not conducive to the practice. Do not entertain too much

entrepreneurship or work. Although you become an industrious person, your engagement in too much activity will undermine the concentration that you develop. Avoid chatter. Sometimes, you may feel lazy and wish to sleep. This gives rise to sloth or torpor. Avoid socialising as much as possible as this too is not conducive to the practice. This is why the Buddha recommended that you go to a forest, be under a tree or a vacant house to undertake the practice. With chatter and socialising, you experience mental proliferation. If you are going to entertain these thoughts, then mindfulness will be scattered. This is the nature of the mind.

You must regularise your practice. Whether the session of sitting meditation is bad or good, you continue to undertake sitting meditation at the appropriate time. You must do the same with walking meditation. At other times, keep to yourself. If you are a lay practitioner, try to undertake at least one hour of meditation each morning and evening. If you can't do the full hour due to some commitment or illness, try to practice for at least half an hour. Always remember the time for meditation, whether you are travelling or undertaking other activities. Whatever you do, don't postpone the practice!

So, try to develop and maintain mindfulness and concentration. The other factors of enlightenment will support these factors of awakening and one another. When the practice deepens and the mind experiences indifference, you experience equanimity. At this stage in the practice (*sankhāra upekhā nāna*), the mind experiences an indifference which has the qualities of an enlightened *arahant*. But, you have not even progressed to the first stage of sainthood. If you support the equanimity that has developed with balanced effort, you can gradually progress towards your goal.

## Equanimity in the practice

Don't manipulate the factors of enlightenment or exert too much effort to steer them towards further development. Then equanimity will not develop. You must be very skilful in understanding the concentration of the mind to foster the factors of enlightenment. The tranquillity form of concentration gives rise to *jhānic* experience. Then you develop *jhāna upekhā*. The five hindrances are kept at bay when the *jhānic* factors are present. When you entertain *jhāna* (absorption), the mind is calm and tranquil. It is important for the mind to be agile and pliable, like a piece of clay that could be potted or moulded into any form or shape. When the applying mind continues to note the objects in your awareness, you will not experience sloth and torpor. You will be alert as long as noting is present. Whenever the noting mind goes to the object (for example, when the mind distinctly inspects the characteristics of the in-breath and the out-breath) the mind is alert.

Similarly, when you observe the movement and the touch of the left foot, you discriminately know that your attention is with the left and not the right foot. Note the sensations of each foot and the movement. When the noting changes to the right foot, discriminately know that the mind is with the right foot and observe the characteristics and the attributes in the sensation of the right foot. As long as there is investigation, you will not entertain doubts. With continuous noting, the mind falls calm and collected on the object. You experience joy when concentration sets in and the mind continues with the object of the meditation. In this state of awareness, hindrances do not have an opportunity to arise. When the mind remains fixed on one object of meditation and in a state of one-pointedness, you experience *samatha* (tranquillity) concentration.

## Unfolding of dhamma in a state of equanimity

When equanimity is present, the mind maintains its own balance. The mind is alert and attentive. Maintaining the proper balance and alignment is an art. To master the art of balance, you must know the circumstances and the conditions which are conducive to the practice. Repeat the practice again and again. As the mind remains concentrated and in equanimity, the noting mind is directly aligned with the object. In all experience, there is synchronicity of mind and matter. Both mentality and physicality are necessary for experience. Mind cannot operate without matter (and *vice versa*). Because of mental noting, we know the presence of the object. For the mind to be activated there needs to be an object. Materiality cannot arise without a proper cause. Mentality will not occur by accident. Both materiality and mentality have their respective cause. You will also begin to see the intricate details of each in-breath and out-breath. There are many in-breaths within each inhalation. With continuous mindfulness and steadfast concentration, you realise that all phenomena exists as a conglomeration of individual activities and attributes.

Then you see the disintegration of all phenomena, their arising and passing away in an incessant manner. To observe this, you must see the same phenomena many times, over and over again. Pain appears as a conglomeration of dots and movements and heat patches. Because momentary concentration (*kanika samādhi*) is present, although the object changes, you retain the capacity to penetrate into the nature of matter: the earth element, the heat element, the fire element and the water element and their individual manifestations. When the factors of awakening are present, the mind is sharp and focused.

In this rare human birth, we must strive in our practice. The famous poet, Tagore once exclaimed: "I grieved over a pair of lost shoes until I witnessed another without any feet to wear such

shoes"! We complain about such trivial things in life. As long as we have intense greed towards materiality, we will not develop equanimity. Because our minds are habitually seeking pleasure and are in pursuit of material success, when equanimity develops, we struggle to maintain it. We try to manipulate. How often are we aware of the indifferent feeling? When we experience a pleasant or an unpleasant feeling, we are very well aware of their presence. But, we ignore indifference!

When we ride a see saw, we like to sit at the edges. This is because we like eventful experiences. Instead, if we sit towards the middle of the see saw, the impact of the ride is far less dramatic. The more eventful the experiences, the more we feel the impact of the fall. We must minimise our pursuits towards material gain and strive to become frugal in our ways. Aim towards basic necessities in life, so that the mind is in control and we react far less to the disappointments in life. If we seek after moderate pleasures, then we face far less disappointments. We can maintain a distance from life, its triumphs and adversities. Operating with detachment or less attachment, naturally gears our reaction towards indifference. A frugal life based on simplicity is essential for the practice and the development of the equanimity factor of enlightenment.

### **The character and manifestation of equanimity**

When equanimity is present, there is an even flow of the circumstances and the internal and external concomitants. In an equipoise mind, there is an unhindered balancing of faith, energy mindfulness and concentration. When the mind is balanced and in a state of equanimity, everything steers in one direction. It is not difficult to arrive at a decision. It is like making a court order once the jury reaches a unanimous verdict. There is very little for the judge to say or do. Similarly, when the mental concomitants and the external circumstances are balanced, the conclusion is obvious.

## **Function of equanimity**

When the mind experiences equanimity, there is no fluctuation or extremes in emotions. There is no hatred or anger - just balanced emotion. It has a healing effect on the mind. In any environment, one who has developed equanimity is a shock absorber, capable of absorbing any circumstance and able to always provide a wise and lasting response. When the mind is naturally in a calm and quiet state, your heart is gentle. You are not biased and in any decision, you arrive at a moderate and impartial decision without favouritism or self aggrandisement.

A person with equanimity will treat all beings in an equal manner; not differentiate between enemies and loved ones. An equal approach will be taken towards enemies and those you endear. This is difficult in practice.

If equanimity comes to play in any conflict, there is no backlash because the decision is not based on favouritism or self motivation. A dogmatic person is not capable of experiencing equanimity. Too much judgment and prejudice will also be a hindrance. Our own conditioning, views and idealism has given cause for judgment, prejudice and disagreement.

Confine your life to basic needs. Don't seek after luxuries or extravagant things. If you lead a moderate life, there is very little conflict. Luxuries could be used to your advantage; but should not be used to make yourself look better than others. Avoid those with inherent prejudice and are inflexible in their approach. Associate with those who are impartial. Prejudice or adornment is gross in appearance and the mind is colored when you experience them. Impartiality on the other hand is transparent and tasteless in nature. You could be viewed as apathetic or callous, when you are not reacting or responding, either way. But, this is wise reflection. Whatever you investigate, there should be 'choiceless' awareness.



When your approach is balanced, your energy will not fluctuate as you are impartial. In between the in-breath and the out-breath, equanimity is always present. But we are too rushed and only observe the peak of the in-breath and the out-breath. When the breath becomes subtle, you can gradually see the indifferent feeling associated with the breath. It is like the middle of the see saw - there is no fluctuation. When equanimity is present, you are malleable and flexible and you can appreciate the aesthetic value in everything and find a reason to be glad in every moment.

The seven factors of enlightenment are a yogi's tool set. Together, they are a full arsenal of weapons to steer you to victory and towards your destination. Just as the wheel turning monarch has seven jewels, a yogi should have the seven factors of enlightenment present in the practice. When the factors of enlightenment are present, you have a content meditative life and the foundation to realise your goal towards liberation.



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