

# Tranquility Meditation

## Introduction

The purpose of Tranquility (*Samatha*) Meditation or Concentration (*Samadhi*) Meditation, is subduing the defilements known as the five hindrances (*Panca Nivarana Dhamma*) so that wisdom and insight can arise when one begins the practice of Insight (*Vipassana*) Meditation. The five *Nivarana Dhamma* are: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor (sleepiness), restlessness and remorse and doubt. The method of subduing these five hindrances is available even outside the teachings of the Buddha. The meditation the Buddha taught to subdue the five hindrances is known as Tranquility Meditation. This type of meditation leads to tranquility and one pointedness of the mind.

The Buddha taught forty objects that can be used for Tranquility Meditation based on the nature of the person. Breathing Awareness Meditation (*Anapana Sati Bhavana*) is the most popular and is what the Buddha himself used to attain Enlightenment. It is also the best type of tranquility meditation to use to subdue the restless and diffused (monkey) mind. The practice of this meditation results in the realization of the mental absorptions (*Jhanas*). However, these (*Jhana*) are temporary states of mind. To eradicate the five hindrances permanently and to eliminate the remaining defilements known as the latent defilements (*Anusaya Dhamma*) one also needs to practice Insight Meditation (*Vipassana Bhavana*).

## Breathing Awareness Meditation (*Anapanasati Bavana*)

Today we will be focusing on the most widely used form of Tranquility Meditation known as Breathing Awareness Meditation. With effort and determination, one works at developing mindfulness with the help of the breath. One focuses on a small area near the nostrils and upper lip which is the point of focus or primary object for mindfulness (*sati nimitta*). This is the point where one feels the breath touch when it enters and leaves the body. While primarily focussing on the *sati nimitta*, one needs to be aware of the breath.

The Buddha gave an example to illustrate this clearly. When a carpenter cuts a log using a straight saw he does not follow the saw, instead he keeps his focus at the cutting point (*sati nimitta*). Yet he is aware when the saw takes a long pass or a short pass (compared with long or short breath).

Venerable Mankadawala Sudassana gave this additional example. He said, “See how I keep my eyes downcast looking at my fan (*vata patha*) when I give this talk? At times I see people walk in front of me from one side to the other. I do not take my eyes away from the fan or try to identify who it is. But I am aware that someone moved across from one side to the other (compared to the breath going in and the breath going out)”.

When you start meditating, your mind will run wild because of the strength of the defilements. Each time the mind runs away from this point of primary focus (the point of touch); one must gently bring it back. One must be patient and compassionate to oneself because it is the nature of the mind to wander. As such, one should not be agitated or judgemental about the unruly mind. Over time, little by little as the defilements weaken, the mind will calm down. One continues with this practice until the mind is

quiet and anchored to the *sathi nimitta*. One needs a one-pointed (sharp) and tranquil (quiet) mind to cut through delusion and ignorance by investigation. Only then can insight and wisdom arise.

The importance of Tranquility meditation for insight to arise can be illustrated by a simile given by the Buddha in the *Cappanaka Sutta* (discourse on six animals). If you tie six ropes to the tail of six animals with varied affinities such as a dog, fox, snake, alligator, monkey and a bird and tie the other ends of the ropes in a knot together, the six animals will each pull at their respective rope in different directions as they each try to get to their refuge. The dog will try to go to the village, the fox will try to run to the jungle, the snake will try to go to his den, the alligator will run towards the water, the monkey will run towards the jungle and the bird will attempt to fly to a tree top. Each of the animals will pull in a different direction. The stronger one will succeed pulling all in his chosen direction until another takes over the lead and pulls in a different direction.

But what will happen if you tie all of them to a post instead? They will still try to get away but after a while, tired of their effort, they will quieten and lie down to rest.

Our six senses are like the six animals. In our day-to-day life, they are all competing with each other and running in all directions like a bunch of animals tied together. In one instance sound will take the lead (e.g., you think of your favourite song and go to listen to it) and we will be distracted by sound, the next instance it may be taste (e.g., you think of your favourite food and go looking for it). In contrast, in meditation your senses are like the animals tied to the post. When you keep at it and anchor the mind to the post (the breath), then with time the mind will quieten and be still. This will take time, but if you are persistent and determined and practice consistently, you will gain sufficient calmness to practice Insight Meditation.

### **The Four Protective Meditations (*Chathuraraksha Bhavana*)**

When you begin the practice of Breathing Awareness Meditation you may find that the defilements are very strong. You may find that anger, desire, sloth & torpor (sleepiness) or doubts are distracting you away from your point of focus. In fact at times it has distracted you completely from the Breathing Awareness Meditation. The Buddha gave the four protective meditations to assist with the subduing of the other four hindrances. On such occasion you should switch to the appropriate protective meditation. You can use Loving Kindness Meditation (*Metta Bhavana*) for anger, Impurities of the Body (*Asuba Bhavana*) for desire, Meditation on Death (*Maranaussathi Bhavana*) for sloth and torpor, and Virtues of the Buddha (*Buddhanussathi Bhavana*) for doubt. In fact if the defilements are very strong you should begin your practice with the appropriate protective meditation. Some may even need to use a word from one of these four as the appropriate object (Buddho, sukiho etc.) as opposed to the breath for Tranquility Meditation. If you are having consistent issues with one of the hindrances discuss this with your meditation teacher.

We also need to protect our minds during other times of the day when we are engaged in daily activities. We need to use the appropriate one of these protective meditations as required, to prevent any new defilements arising in the mind and for reducing existing defilements in the mind.

Mindfulness should not be restricted to the meditation cushion. Whether you are reading, driving, eating or cooking, do it mindfully. When you are reading you should be reading, when eating it should be eating, when driving it should be only driving. One should focus on the primary object and work at cutting down the mental chatter. Then you will find that mindfulness in your daily life helps with your Awareness of Breath and your Awareness of Breath helps you to be more mindful in your daily life. Effort should be made to sustain mindfulness and awareness from the moment of awaking to sleep.

### **Tranquility – Insight Tandem or Dual Combination (*Samatha - Vipassana Yuganadda*)**

For those that are intermittently disturbed by thoughts and are having trouble with the “internal chatter”, the Buddha gave the option of the dual combination of Samatha – Vipassana for subduing the five hindrances and “internal chatter”. Begin by training the mind using Breathing Awareness meditation until the mind and body are relatively calm. Then, when the next strong thought arises in the mind, examine with investigative insight (*Vipassana*).

I will give you an example to explain what I mean by “examine with investigative insight”. If a thought arises about your home or child, then contemplate or reflect upon it and understand that it is only a mental object arising within the mind and passing away in the mind. This mind object is not real and it is not outside the mind. Continue observing the phenomena of arising and passing away of mental objects that are prominent in your mind for a few minutes. Then forcefully go back and practice Breathing Awareness again until the next time you are distracted by thoughts. If the mind objects that arises in your mind is a strong attraction to form, contemplate on the impurities of the body by investigating the 32 undesirable components such as blood, flesh, mucus, teeth, phlegm, hair, skin etc. that make up this body. Observe the attraction to form dissolve and pass away. Then forcefully go back and practice Breathing Awareness again until the next time you are distracted by thoughts. Continue alternating between Breathing Awareness and Insight Meditation. One moves to *Vipassana* only when the mind is distracted by a strong thought. After watching the thoughts objectively, without entanglement and mental proliferation, bring the mind forcefully back to the breath. This is only an initial level of the Vipassana practice used in Tranquility meditation to subdue the five hindrances. This method is known as *Samatha - Vipassana Yuganadda* (Tranquility – Insight dual combination).

All these four methods of protective meditation (described above) should be associated with the *satinimittha* (point of touch of breath) if they occur during Tranquility meditation. Then you will also be able to see your day by day progress by seeing that the “internal chatter” of the mind is declining with time.

The Buddha selected the appropriate object for tranquility meditation based on the nature of the person. As we do not have this ability, it is important that you discuss your progress with your meditation teacher. Also, observe your mind and get to know your own nature. Sometimes one will know best what is right for one. However, when you select a method, give it time to work. Training the mind takes time. Changing the object of meditation from breath at the nostrils to the rise and fall of the abdomen or the word *Buddho* to counting is not productive. It is like digging a well for water and giving up and changing the place after digging a few feet into the ground. You will have holes all over your land and no water. Choose what is right for you carefully, and then remain with the method you have chosen and

dig deep until you get water. Determination, effort and confidence (*sraddha*) will result in the calm and concentrated mind that is required for wisdom and insight to arise.

### **Concentration (*Samadhi*)**

Often meditators question as to when they should move from Tranquility Meditation to Insight Meditation. One needs to be aware that the purpose of Tranquility meditation is to subdue the defilements and weaken the enemy (false view). As such a calm and concentrated mind is essential for insight and wisdom to arise

When you should move depends on the individual meditator's preference and his nature. Some realise *Appana Samadhi (Jhana)* and then move to Insight Meditation, some realize *Upacara Samadhi* and then move to Insight Meditation, some realizes *Kshanika Samadhi* and move to Insight Meditation

**Attainment Concentration - (*Appana Samadhi*)** – Those who have a natural affinity towards Tranquility Meditation and have the freedom and time to meditate for long hours generally work with effort at realizing the Mental Absorptions (*Jhana*). One has subdued the five hindrances when one realizes the *Jhana*, which results in a strong protective platform for wisdom and insight to arise. The Buddha himself realized the *Jhana* and it is the safest method and is compared to the protection of a brick house as the five hindrances have been subdued. Ordained monks and nuns, and serious meditators such as eight and ten precept novices (*Anagarika* and *Sil mathas*) prefer this option.

One should be cautious and aware that the bliss of *Jhana* is so great that sometimes the meditator is lulled into a false sense of security and does not want to work towards enlightenment. Our goal is not *Samadhi*. It is cessation of suffering (*Nibbana*). Virtue and Tranquility are weapons used to weaken the enemy of false view so that right view can arise. Be aware that the method of attaining this mental state existed in India prior to the teachings of the Buddha. The Bodhisatta left his former teachers (Alara Kalama and Uddakarama Putta) because he realised that this was not *Nibbana*.

Those that pass away after attaining *Jhana* take rebirth in the Brahma realms. However, these blissful mental states are impermanent. Even though the life span in the Brahma realms is very long they eventually come to an end. Meditators that chose the *Jhana* route should make every effort to realize at least the first stage of Enlightenment – *Sotapanna* - in this very birth. This will ensure enlightenment within seven more births. It will also ensure that rebirth does not take place in one of the four unhappy planes of existence.

Generally it is difficult for lay people with busy lives to devote to long hours of meditation. As such meditators that cannot devote more than an hour a day tend to choose Access *Samadhi (Upaccara)* so that they can access the benefits of Insight Meditation in this very life.

**Access *Samadhi* – (*Upacara Samadhi*)** – These devotees are generally stronger on insight meditation. They practice Breathing Awareness Meditation until the body feels light like a cloud or cotton ball and the breath is subtle. In other words they approach the first *Jhana* but do not attain it. They then switch to Insight Meditation. Those who have a natural affinity to Insight Meditation and lay devotees prefer this option. Usually it is recommended that the meditator has a daily practice of 1-2 hours a day and attends at least one 7-10 day residential retreat a year.

Whilst some protection from the defilements is obtained one has not subdued the five hindrances completely. As such the protection is compared to that of a wood house. The advantage is that one has the opportunity to realize the benefits of Insight Meditation which may not be an option as they do not have the long hours required for practice to realize *Jhana*. Meditators that chose this option should ensure that every effort is made to realize at least the first stage of Enlightenment, *Sotapanna* in this very birth. They should also be aware that the hindrances are only partially subdued with Access Samadhi. The defilements can erupt when the mind is weak and care should be taken to associate sincere Dhamma friends (*Kalyana Mitta*) for support.

**Instantaneous Concentration - *Kshanika Samadhi*** – These devotees are very strong in Insight Meditation. They move to insight quickly as soon as they obtain stability and calmness in their mind. They tend to be able to separate the knowing mind from the feelings in the mind and mind objects easily with no entanglement. The protection from the five hindrances is minimal and compared to a grass or straw house. Meditators that choose this option should make every effort to realize at least the first stage of *Sotapanna* in this very birth. As the protection from hindrances is minimal realising the first stage of Enlightenment is the only way that one can have the security and stability of mind from the gross defilements. As always, associating sincere Dhamma friends is also prudent, as the protection from gross hindrances is minimal.

These instructions are only guidelines. It is recommended that one speaks with one's own meditation teacher and seek instruction and guidance in issues that arise during meditation and these decisions.

Radhika Abeysekera  
February 2012