

ĀNĀPĀNA SATI

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Ā N Ā P Ā N A S A T I

MEDITATION BASED ON MINDFULNESS
WITH REGARD TO BREATHING

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INTRODUCTION

THE Supreme Master of Clear-worded Exposition, the Buddha, has defined the ambit of his Sublime Norm thus: Sorrow only do I point out; and sorrow's ending—*dukkhañceva paññāpemi; dukkhassa ca nirodham*.

With that it becomes plain that the world of the Buddha is the world of sentient life, where alone the problem of suffering exists. The other worlds, the purely physical, with which natural science deals are not the direct concern of any teaching of salvation worth the name, because through a knowledge of these worlds neither can the highest truth be known nor liberation from Ill achieved.

Just as the art of the carpenter has to be realized in wood, and of the smith in metal, so the art of the yogin, the producer of liberating wisdom, has to be realized in mind. Mind is his material; mind must he understand and fashion to gain his end. Mind is the world he has to explore and conquer, for mind it is that suffers and is in need of deliverance.

All objects of the world without, the external, are known only vicariously. The mind alone, the world within, is directly experienced. Only in the mind do we come into immediate impact with actuality. And no knowledge of actuality can be complete that does not grasp this one thing that can be truly known, the mind with its womb-products: feelings, perceptions, ideas, through right understanding. That is, in the specific way of penetrative wisdom discovered and proclaimed by the World Knower—*Loka Vidū*—who plumbed the deepest depths of life.

It is just because we do not rightly understand things mental that we have for long been, and still are, wandering on and on, bewildered, confused, strangers in the world within us. Really, that wandering within us, not knowing, not discerning, in distress, and deceived by the guise of things: by evanescent pleasures and seeming security—that, is the the Wheel of Painful Becoming—*Samsāra*. Hence it is said in the Commentary to the *Samyutta*: “Here is the state of woe; here is heaven.”

And here too, in this mind, is the ground for training—*yog-gabhūmi*. Here has one to fit oneself through practice to win the safe shore, the Territory of Light, Peace and Perfection that lies beyond the dark and tempestuous sea of *Māra*.

To accomplish that work of getting beyond *Māra*'s power, by knowing reality, the Perfect One teaches thus: “Concentration, brethren, practise concentration. A brother who is concentrated, brethren, knows a thing as it really is.”

Now concentration, is primarily that effort which gives placidity, quiet, and stillness, through isolating the mind from passion and obsessive thought-conceptions.

Said the Elder Nāgasena to Milinda the King: "When, Maharajah, a brother has adorned himself with this jewel of concentration, then, thought-conceptions of sensuality, anger and cruelty, the passionate bases of pride, flurry, wrong understanding, scepticism, and all false thought-conceptions, all these, on approaching the presence of concentration, run off, scatter, and are dispersed. They stay not with that brother: they cling not to him."

Just as a lotus seed rooting itself in the slime beneath the waters of a lake, grows in privacy and silence, and reaches light and air, so the seed of wisdom penetrating into the mud of the Khandhas—the aggregates of the mind and body—grows in the claustral calm of the waters of concentration, and reaches the light of understanding and the air of liberation.

By the elimination of beclouding thought, concentration gives the proper environment for initiating the work of keen insight into the nature of phenomena. Through concentration is got the proper atmosphere within for developing that line of thought which unbiased by likes and dislikes, is capable of sensing the *thus-is-ness* of things and seeing the Truth clear as an āmalaka on the outstretched palm.

When a man sees thus, he becomes one who is no more moved by the stirrings of primeval kamma. Such a man is a master of life through perfect vision which like an alchemy changes the base metal of passion to dispassion's pure and shining gold. And verily giving up.

"The aging for the ageless
And the burning for coolness, supreme peace,"
"..... he abides,
For truly he is dead to all that is."

Among the methods of concentration set forth by the Buddha, the concentration on respiration-mindfulness is spoken of as *The Ariyan Way of Life, the Best of Ways, the Tathāgata's Way of Life*, and described as *peaceful, choice, unadulterate, happy living*—*santo ceva paṇīto ca asecanako ca sukhō ca vihāro*. Further it is said that it *causes to disappear, instantly, every arisen evil and unskill of mind*—*uppannuppane ca pāpake akusale dhamme thānaso antaradhāpeti*. In its sixteen-fold practice* it comprises the Four Arousings of Mindfulness which form the Sole Way for the Attainment of the Highest Goal.

* As taught in Discourse No. 118 of the Middle Collection and in certain other parts of the Canon.

The exposition of this method here is by one thoroughly versed in the lore of meditation and long steeped in the practice of it. All the details necessary for a beginner are fully given.

It is a book of simple, strong, direct and live instruction which can arouse keenness for meditation and the practice of the higher life of holiness that is lovely, in every respect, and which is separate and apart from worldly life, the lower.

Abroad, in countries both of the East and the West, as well as here at home, in Lankā, the repository of the Law of the Highest Yield, this work like a sower has, into many a heart, cast the Good Seed which striking root will surely burgeon forth and find fulfilment in rich fruit.

As such this work belongs to the bright group of clear interpretations which has in our times helped to *girdle the globe*, with the Stainless Teaching of the Master's Incomparable Way of Salvation.

Comforting it is to know that this work of worth is going out on a new missionary journey, through its second edition, carrying the Gift of the Teaching which cheers, strengthens and wisely guides.

While to those already familiar with the Norm and practising it it will be a reminder for greater striving, this book, will make known to the others with lofty minds that in the Pure Word of the Buddha, the Pāvācana, is the true, effective and only way out of sorrow to happiness; out of the stranglehold of hate to the freedom of love; out of the fearful, the peril-ridden, and the unsafe, to Perfect Security. And is it too much to hope that when they know this, they will join action to thought, that they will marshal energy—*virīya*—and live the life of purity and harmlessness, striving for perfect virtue, concentration and wisdom?

Long may the River of the clear Buddha-Law bear mankind on!

BHIKKHU SOMA

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Preliminary Remarks

Subjects of meditation

ACCORDING to the Doctrine of the Supreme Buddha, there are forty subjects of meditation in which the mind may be set to work for developing calm through absorption (jhāna).

These are called *kammatthānas*, a term formed of the words *kamma*=work, action or exercise, and *thanam*=place, basis or station. The particular work intended here is concentration-work (*samādhi-kamma*).

Absorption

Absorption is not the same thing as auto-hypnosis. The subject, in the latter state, is in an artificial sleep with more or less unconsciousness, whereas, in absorption, the mind attains the acme of awareness, in keen concentration.

Prerequisite for success in meditation

As a preliminary to the successful practice of these *kammatthānas*, whatever the basis, it is essential that the *pogāvacara* or practiser of meditation, be a very virtuous person. Purity of virtue (*sīla visuddhi*) is absolutely necessary for profitable, or indeed safe practice of a *kammatthāna*.

One must needs shave the periderm and so forth before one can begin to polish the heartwood. And there is danger. The path leads to sublime heights, where the rarefied atmosphere will only support a refined mind and body.

Those dizzy heights can be trod with equanimity only by aspirants in perfect training, by persons firmly established in virtue (*sīla*). Without a measure of this equipment, it is imprudent to begin the practice of meditation, for that way madness lies.

Turning away from and renunciation of the world

But when the world appals, when one is disgusted with life's fickleness and uncertainty, and wants to escape, one must perforce tread this path of meditation (*bhāvanā*), and concentration (*samādhi*). For the more ardent one's belief is, in the absolute truth of the Buddha's Norm, the more quick is one's sense of the futility of the ways of this world, with its mad intoxication and its desperate this-worldliness.

One realizes the uselessness of behaving, as most men do, using up time in running behind transient sense-stimuli, with vain monkey-like restlessness. A time comes when one becomes impossibly other-worldly. Then comes renunciation. And the man-of-the-world quizzes another "failure," another "disordered" intellect.

The seeker remembers that the Buddha, the Christ, and all great seekers of the past, were themselves spoken of as eccentrics, fools, and madmen, by the hypocritical and the worldly-minded of their time, and these gibes become terms of praise; one ceases to heed them, and soon understands that they are cheap, puerile and irrelevant—as boorish facetiousness and rude personalities usually are. The fool's censure is the wise man's vindication. So one turns the more readily and resolutely toward the high search.

Defilement and purification

The Norm (dhamma) tells us that mind is clean at birth, and is only soiled later, by thoughts of craving, hatred and delusion. These soiling thoughts defile a body, and the taint remains even after those ill thoughts have passed away, just as putrid flesh soils a wrapper, and the wrapper is polluted and stinks even after the contents are thrown away. Rain, wind and sun will cleanse that wrapper; liberality (dāna), virtue (sīla), and meditation (bhāvanā) will purify that body. The fruit of concentration (samādhi) is wisdom (paññā), but the seed for concentration is virtue.

Virtue and its potencies

So one first determines to attain purity of virtue. One remembers what the Holy of all time have said anent virtue, and strives for it. One remembers that concentration, without virtue, is as incapable of subsisting as a headless trunk.

It would be like a beautiful-seeming house that, foundationless, will topple with the first strong wind that blows. For virtue is the basis for rearing all skilful action (kusala kamma), and is the root of good.

But by virtue is not mean merely the repeating, nor even the observing of precepts. Virtue is a resultant volitional mind-colouring (cetanā-cetasika) that comes from guarding deed and word “doors”; that withdraws one from defilement and urges one on toward passionless mental states. This, the true virtue, is the ship that traverses life's ocean. It is the rain that puts out the flames of life's pain. It is the golden ladder to the heavens. It is the seal that stamps the Hyper-cosmic Treasures of the Saints. It is the incomparable mantra to protect. It is the firm rock from which issue the unfailing springs of compassion and love. It is the æon-living tree that bears the fruit of high honour and honours. It is the bouquet of flowers that attracts the bees of respect and reverence. Of ornaments, the most ornamental, of sweet scents, the sweetest—it is the great fair lotus that adorns the Buddha-lake. He who has virtue goes to higher, never to lower states, for he lives in a fortress unassailable by enemy corruptions (kilesa); and, as the wide earth gives a

victor all those uncertain troublous treasures that men prize so much, so shali the Virtue-mother, fertilized by victorious Meditation, yield one the ambrosial power of Concentration. With virtue for shield, the yogāvacara thrusts back covetousness, cravings, hatreds, cruelty, harshness and vanity. Dissociating from the light-headed and the vain and unmindful, remembering that he seeks *samādhi*—*sam*=good and *dhi*=standing— or skilful one-pointedness of mind (*kusala citt'ekaggatā*), he associates only with steady and mindful folk.

Divisions of the subjects of meditation

Of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* ten are the artifices or devices (*kasina*); ten are the impurities (*asubha*), or corpses in various stages of decomposition; the Recollections (*anussati*) constitute a group of ten, of which *Anāpāna Sati* is the last; then there are the four Sublime States (*brahmavihāra*) of love (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*); the four formless states (*ārūpa*); the one idea, that is, the perception of the loathsomeness of food (*āhāre patikūla saññā*); and last, the one analysis of any compound into the four elements (*catudhātu-vavaṭṭhāna*).

Unifying of consciousness

The practice of any of these will yield a measure of concentration, more or less. Ashes are dispersed by the wind, but if one sprays water over the ashes, the wet ash is no more scattered about. The yogāvacara sprays the mind-ash with the water of a chosen *kammaṭṭhāna*, and attains a degree of concentration on one clean thought, according to the water, the skilfulness of its use, and the quality of the ash.

The simile of the wild calf

The ordinary mind that, for a long time, has been attached to the senses and sense-objects, is not easily controlled by any *kammaṭṭhāna*. It is, to use the ancient simile, like the training of wild cattle. One removes the wild calf from its wild mother, the wilderness and its rank pasture. One secures this calf. Turbulent, it struggles to escape, tires and, with the rope ever drawn closer, it eventually lies down, near by the post to which it is tethered. In like manner, the yogāvacara severs himself from home, and indulgent life and the sense-objects thereof. He goes to a retired spot. He binds himself, with the rope of mindfulness (*sati*), to a chosen *kammaṭṭhāna* post, till the distracted thoughts calm down and become capable of control. Gradually exerting more mindfulness, pure concentration is attained.

Three

How Hindu practices differ from the Buddhist

It must be understood that the Buddhist Meditation of Ānāpāna Sati, based on the breaths, is not a "breathing exercise." The object is not chest-expansion or physical vigour. Neither is this meditation in any way similar to the breathing "gymnastics" advocated in Prānayāma exercises of Hindu Yoga systems.

The exhausting practices of Rāja and Hatha Yoga aim at the suppression of the breath, clairvoyance, supposed union with an alleged Supreme Being and so forth. For successful accomplishment in these, the frenum linguae—the fold of mucous membrane under the tongue—must be cut; the tongue has to be "milked," and otherwise physically treated, and "purgatory" processes, some of a loathsome character, are necessary preliminaries.

The results gained by the Hindu yogi, obsessed as he is with the delusions of Individual and Supreme "Soul" (jīvātman and paramātman or brahman), however high they may be, must always necessarily remain *mundane*.

The same results as to supernormal faculties and the production of phenomena, are gained by the Buddhist, as incidental and non-prized "gifts by the way," even at the close of the fourth stage of his "Meditation on the Breaths." And this, without any resort to torture or repulsive asceticism.

But the Buddhist is taught to turn his back on these trifles, for his Goal lies beyond, and comes with the successful termination of four more stages, when the Ultramundane (lokuttara) is reached, when:

"Greater than Kings, than Gods more glad;
The aching craze to live ends."

The Buddhist practice forbids any sort of abnormal breathing. Indeed the normal breathing is not in "any way to be forced or voluntarily suspended. One is only required to "watch the breaths," and, noting their variations, closely, attain to one-pointedness of mind (citass' ekaggatā).

For whom this meditation is recommended

Ānāpāna Sati, or "Mindfulness on breathing in and breathing out," is a process recommended for dull (moha) and imaginative (vitakka) temperaments (carita).

But by "dull temperament" here is meant the mind that is unable to appreciate the working of cause and effect in the moral plane. Such "dull" minds might otherwise be of much more than average intelligence. For the Blessed One has said: *N'āham bhikkhave muṭṭha'ssatissa asampadānassa ānāpāna sati bhāvanam vadāmi.*

“Monks, I do not proclaim the meditation of mindfulness on in-and-out-breathing to the clouded mind, the foolish.”

Indeed, no kammaṭṭhāna whatever might be practised, with success, without some measure of intelligence and penetration, and Ānāpāna Sati is said to be the favourite practice of the Buddhas. It would appear to have been also the cherished exercise of all those who were enlightened solitarily (paccekabuddha) and the Great Saints (mahā arahanta), who called it their special “support” and “oasis.”

As it is true that without concentration (samādhi) there is no wisdom (paññā), so also, without a modicum of wisdom there can be no concentration worth the name.

Especially is this so in the practice of this particular bhāvanā, where the object of concentration is inconstant and evanescent. The more one advances the more difficult it becomes, for respiration becomes fine almost to vanishing point, and the “object” of meditation is thus lost, to the bewilderment of the inexperienced practiser.

Here, a fine silken fabric is to be sewed; the needle must be fine, and keen the needle’s point. Ānāpāna Sati being the fabric, mind is the needle, and intelligent penetration its point.

Specific Hints and a Synopsis

The place suited for the practice of this meditation

NOISES are inimical to this Ānāpāna Sati practice, even more so than to the other kammaṭṭhānas. Noise is said to be to absorption what a thorn-prick is to a wild-calf. It irritates and renders restive all the controlled and repressed wayward thoughts. So move off from the usual hunting-ground of the corruptions. A retired spot in a jungle, is the best sort of place for meditation: 1. The jungle: about a thousand paces within its depth. 2. Under a secluded shady tree. 3. Some quiet spot: mountain, sheltered valley rock-cave, cemetery, virgin forest, open plain and so forth.

It is said that the jungle is most suitable for the hot season, phlegmatic folk and for those of dull temperament: those who are ignorant anent cause and effect in the moral sphere.

For the cold season (hemanta), for irritable (bilious) people, and for those of angry temperament (dosa carita), the foot of a tree is considered best. And a fitting "quiet spot" is thought advantageous for the rains; for the nervously unstable and sensitive—aerial-humoured—folk; and for the passionate character or temperament (rāga carita).

Position to adopt in the practice of this meditation

Left foot crossed on to right thigh, and right foot on left thigh, the sitting down of one with the thighs bent by way of interlocking (ūrubaddha āsana), was the favoured position of the ancients, in meditation, because, being used to it, they found it comfortable; the back was maintained erect, and respiration unimpaired.

Whatever sitting position one adopts must fulfil these three conditions: comfort, a straight back, and easy breathing. Lying down is unsuitable as it favours drowsiness. Standing and walking are postures with a bias towards restlessness, or flurry.

How to overcome the difficulties of the practice of this meditation

Difficulties of the practice of this meditation are to be overcome by: 1. Study (uggaha). 2. Questioning about what is not understood (paripucchā). 3. Contemplation on the "sign" or "object" of meditation (upaṭṭhāna). 4. Experience of full absorption (appanā). 5. Reflecting on the nature of the subject of meditation, and recognizing the various phases of the practice as actually experienced (lakkhana).

In all these ways the subject of meditation should be pursued and mastered.

A summary of the practice

The practice comprises eight stages:—

1. Counting the inhalations and exhalations (ganana).
2. Following the breaths mentally, (anubandhana).
3. Mindfulness on breath-contact at the “nose-door,” or the upper lip (phusana).
4. Placing the mind well, concentrating, on the “object” of meditation (thapana).
5. Realizing the transitoriness and so forth of the breaths (sallakkhana).
6. Realizing the Path (vivaṭṭana).
7. Realizing the Fruit (pārisuddhi).
8. The seeing again and again of these, reflection (paṭipassana).

It is not proposed to deal with the last four steps, or stages, of the practice. One stage leads on to the next, and, when the fourth stage is reached, and perfected, the yogāvacara is a highly accomplished person, having attained lofty states of absorption (jhāna), and capable of producing powerful phenomena at will. Further progress leads, along the remaining four stages, to Sainthood and Nibbāna's Peace. The last four stages appertain to the Path (magga),—the purely Ultramundane (lokuttara)—and one feels that their study would be more fruitful, were one to blossom first into the very flower, and attain the utmost heights, of the mundane. And it is precisely this pre-eminence that is attained by the practice of but the first four stages, and perfection therein.

The master of the much pursued, but baffling, fourth dimensional powers will, with diligence, achieve the Ultramundane, if the Way is shewn, and the futility of the mundane, even in such surpassing degree, is explained and understood.

Setting to Work

How to begin

So, having taken one's food, and rested awhile to get rid of subsequent drowsiness and so forth; having washed, trimmed hair, beard and nails; in clean comfortable clothing; thrusting back the distracting thoughts of business, disease, relatives, worry and doubt, one retires to the chosen place of meditation.

Facing east, one sits down on the prepared seat. Then, wishing well towards all beings, lofty or lowly, great and small, near or far, visible and invisible, putting aside pride and self-delusion, with compassionate, calm, trustful and devoted mind, one reflects on the incomparable virtues of the Triple Gem: The Blessed One, the Hypercosmic Law, and the Hierarchy of Saints, and goes for refuge (sarana) to These.

Thinking over the details

Now one calls to mind all that has been studied of this Ānāpāna Sati kammaṭṭhāna, its glory, greatness, stages, and the outcome thereof.

Remembering the Master's extolling of this 'practice

One remembers that, of it, the Blessed One has said: "O Monks! if one who is ordained in this Order but for a short while practises Ānāpāna Sati, because of fear of the life-process, he, O Monks! dwells with concentration. He is behaving in conformity with the ancient good teaching and the practice of the Well-farer (Tathāgata). He 'eats good fruit'. If such be its value, when practised for a short time, how great would its value be if practised for a long time!"

The preliminary object of meditation

Although one concentrates on the breathing, noting whether the breaths be long or short, rapid or slow, the "preliminary object of concentration" (parikamma nimitta) is the entrance to the nose, or "nose-door," in the long-nosed, and the upper lip, against which the breath "strikes," in the short-nosed, for breathing itself gradually becomes quick, short, delicate and finally apparently ceases.

Counting the Breaths—The First Stage

THIS is the stage where the practice is associated with counting. One counts "One," for inspiration—"Two," for expiration, and so forth. One does not count less than five, or more than ten. The yogāvacara fixes on a terminal number: five or any other up to ten, and having chosen, he sticks to the one count. When he reaches his terminal number, he begins again, from "One."

Farmer's count

Less than a five count, disturbs; there is insufficient *count-space*—"like counting many cattle in a small pen." A greater than ten count might divert attention from breaths to counts. Non-adherence to one kind of count: a fixed terminal number, might arouse the superstitious doubt whether this or that terminal number is best.

AT FIRST, let the count be at the close of the breaths: register "One," at the end of an inspiration, "Two," at the end of an expiration, and so forth, *as a farmer would count his measures of grain.**

Cowherd's count

LATER, when familiar with the first method, let the count be at the start of an inspiration, and the start of an expiration, *as a cow-herd counts his cattle, just as they get to the enclosure entrance, when going forth or returning.* For this, one must concentrate at the nostrils, the "doorway" (dvāra) of the breaths, counting the breaths there. Why? Because if, at this stage, one follows the breaths too far, internally, the mind is apt to be distracted with speculation as to internal air processes of a physiological nature, and the practice fails. If followed, externally, the attention is diverted to what

* By one counting it should, at first, be counted by way of the slow count of the grain-measurer. For the grain-measurer, after filling the measure, pours out (the grain), having said "One."

Further, he, while filling, having seen whatsoever refuse, throwing it out, says, "One, one." It is the same as saying, "Two, two," and so forth.

Thus, indeed, just by this method, having taken that which stands out among inhalation and exhalation, it should be counted saying, "One, one," and so forth up to "Ten, ten," having discriminated what is proceeding.—Visuddhi Magga.

Having taken that which stands out among inhalation and exhalation, refers to him for whom just one, among inhalation and exhalation, stands out. Concerning him was it said.

But for whom indeed both stand out, by reason of that, it is proper for him to count, having taken both.

And by just this saying, *that which stands out*, it is meant that among the two nostril-breaths, the one that is more clear should be taken.—Scholium to the Visuddhi Magga.

happens outside: "The out-going breath strikes my skin," and so forth, and the practice fails. So, at this stage, one concentrates at the "nose-door," and stops there till perfect, for this is the prelude to the elimination of the count.

Duration of counting

How long should one count? Till such time: minutes, hours, days, months or years, as, without the aid of any counting, concentration can be focussed on breath alone.

Breathing should not be interfered with

In this, as in the remaining stages, no forced breathing of any sort is to be practised, nor artificial suspension of the breath. The respiration naturally has a tendency to become rapid, when counting by this second method. This should neither be slowed voluntarily nor hastened. Merely note that such acceleration has normally occurred.

Following the Breath—The Second Stage

In the track of the breath ,

WHEN one can dispense with counting the second stage is reached. Rejecting counts, one now concentrates on breath alone. But because the mind is apt to wander, now that counting is omitted, the mind is, in this stage, to follow the breath from the nose-door limit through the middle: the breast, to the end of its course, the level of the navel, and back again.

The nostrils and the level of the navel are the limits (sīmā), and are not to be overstepped. One does this till perfect. This stage corresponds with the first period of the counting stage, where the breath is followed as here; but now a count is not registered at either end.

Simile of the lame man and the swing

ILLUSTRATION:—A lame-man has made a swing, with a square seat, for his child. Squatting by the seat he swings the child. As it passes to and fro, he easily sees the back, then the middle, and then the front of the seat. Thus, he follows the full swing.

In this way, easily, should one, seated immovable in meditation, follow the full swing of the breath: starting-point, middle, end, and then, through the middle to starting point again. When this stage is accomplished, the observation becomes automatic.

Concentrating on Breath-Contact—The Third Stage

Watching at the gate

THIS stage corresponds to the second period of the counting stage. Mindfulness is focussed on the contact of breath at the nose-door, and once again one concentrates on the breath just as it is entering or leaving this “door,” like a watchman at a city gate, who examines those entering or departing, but worries not about those inside or out.

The mind is not permitted to “follow” the breaths. The contact of breath with the nose-door, or the nose-door itself becomes the “object” of the concentration. One notes the entrance and the exit of the breaths at the door; one does not concentrate on, but is automatically conscious of, middle and terminus too, of these breaths. This automatic consciousness of the whole swing of the breath, even though one concentrates on the nose-door, only, is the fruit of perfection in the second stage.

Simile of the sawyer

ILLUSTRATION:—It is as if a man should with a saw cut a log placed on level ground. The man’s attention is fixed by way of the saw’s teeth that cut into the log. He does not mind the teeth of the saw that move past the log away from or towards him, though he is aware of them. The energetic effort (*padhāna*), the log-cutting action, is seen. The work (*payoga*) he accomplishes.

Like the sawyer is the *yogāvacara*. Like the log on level ground which helps easy movement of the saw is the nose-door or the upper lip, the *closely-helpful object* (*upanibandhana nimitta*). Like the serrated edge of the saw is the breath. As the sawyer’s attention is fixed by way of the saw’s teeth that cut into the log, so the yogin’s mindfulness is established on the breath that contacts the nose-door or upper lip. The sawyer is aware of the teeth passing beyond the log on either side, but he does not mind them. Even so the yogin though conscious of it, does not attend to the breath that goes in or out beyond the place of contact on the upper-lip or at the nose-door. Like the log-cutting action of the sawyer is the mental and bodily dexterity of the yogin who sets energy afoot. Like the accomplishing of sawyer’s work is the vanishing of the yogin’s passions and the allaying of his obsessive thought-conceptions.

This work of suppression, however, is completed with the successful termination of the fourth stage of the meditation. It is the suppression of the hindrances (*nīvarana*): sensuality, anger, sloth and torpor, flurry and worry, and scepticism. In short, it refers to the state of absorption (*jhāna*).

Twelve

The profit of the practice

The profit (visesa) which is yet to be gained, is the utter destruction of the Ten Fetters (saññojana) through the method of the Pure Path. This occurs during the progress of the last four stages of the meditation, and is absolutely attained with the last stage, when the Bliss of Emancipation (vimutti sukha) is reviewed.

But long before that "profit" is gained, the "practice" has been perfected. The mind, no longer concentrating on the nose, or the breath, is calm in absorption. Fitness, with energy, is there: a flawless refined thing of power, and the "profit," only, remains to be drawn.

Concerning the Sign or Object that is Acquired in this Meditation

Disappearance of the sign

Now the great difference between Ānāpāna Sati and other kam-maṭṭhānas is that whereas, in other practices, the object of meditation or the sign on which one concentrates, the nimitta, gets more vivid with practice; in this meditation, the object: breathing, tends to fade. This does not happen all at once, like a collapse into a syncope, for instance.

A weak and weary man drops into a chair or bed, and the chair or bed yields suddenly, and creaks. But the strong and the perfectly fresh man sits softly and neither chair nor bed is strained.

Because the yogāvacara has trained body and mind, by his perfect virtue and previous meditation, into a state of purity and "lightness," now he slides gently into finer and finer breathing, of which he is yet aware, till at last he slips into a state where he is at a loss to find that the breath has become imperceptible, and he cannot say whether he is breathing or not. It all occurs as gradually as the lessening reverberation of a bell-sound; so gradually that it is difficult to say at what precise moment the practiser has entered the next stage.

What should be done when the sign disappears

But absorption is not yet gained, and one does not relinquish the practice; only one ponders thus: "Who is it that breathes not?" "Who breathes?" "Where does the breath reside?"

"The foetus breathes not. One immersed in fluid cannot breathe. In asphyxia there is no breath. In the Fourth Absorption (catut-thajjhāna) there is suspension of breath. The dead are void of breath. Beings of the Form (rūpa) and Formless (arūpa) heaven states do not breathe, nor the Saint in the Attainment of Cessation (nirodha samāpatti)."

Then one charges oneself thus: "You are not now in any of these states. Therefore you do have breathing. Only, because of your want of refinement, you are not aware of it."

Getting to a single thought

The thought of inspiration is one, of expiration another, and of the nose-door a third. The help of all three is needed for the attainment of neighbourhood concentration (upacāra samādhi), or partial

absorption, and for full concentration (appanā samādhi) or complete absorption.

But *three* thoughts do not tend to “concentration,” and *one* thought cannot be āna, inbreathing, and apāna, outbreathing, which constitute this meditation. So, now that breathing has apparently ceased, the *three* thoughts are *merged into one*, till the meditation leads to the acquirement of what is called the reflex-image (paṭibhāga nimitta).

Therefore one reflects thus: “Where does the breath strike?” “At the nose-door.” Then one adopts *that place of striking* as “object” and reinstates the meditation.

Simile of the tired ploughman

ILLUSTRATION:—A ploughman who, tired, has loosened his oxen and lain down to rest, wakes to find the oxen strayed. He does not vainly waste time in tracing their tracks, but goes straight to the water-hole, where he knows they will be. There he nooses them.

So, the yogāvacara goes to the nose-door for his “object,” of meditation. He concentrates on *that*, to the exclusion of all else. Then, with mindfulness for rein, and penetration for goad, he resolutely gets his purpose out of the apparently missing breaths.

Acquired sign

Thus, at this point, there is no absolutely suspended breath, as in the Fourth Absorption. Only the breathing is so delicate and refined, that it is imperceptible to our coarse senses, and we are unaware of it. This condition, of seemingly suspended breaths, is equivalent to the “acquired sign” or “object” (uggaha nimitta) of the other kammaṭṭhānas.

The practiser is still at “preliminary concentration” (parikamma samādhi) though he has risen above his “original sign” (parkamma nimitta), the breaths. The “acquired sign” is thus attained, and soon, perchance before many days elapse, the reflex-image, sign or object (paṭibhāga nimitta) is also attained. But the latter acquirement begins the next stage, the fourth.

Placing the Mind on the Object or the State of Absorption in Breathing— The Fourth Stage

Varieties of the reflex-image

THE reflex-image with the gain of which the fourth stage begins, has not the same appearance to every one. The phenomenon comes to some with a fine sense of comfort and an ease of silken softness, or as balmy winds.

Commentators have compared the phenomenon of the Ānāpāna Sati reflex-image to star-shine, a round jewel or pearl, to a silver girdle-chain, a garland of flowers, a lotus, a column of smoke, a spreading cloud, a cart-wheel, the full-moon, the sun and so forth.

The aspect of the phenomenon depends entirely on the ideas and cognizing powers of the practiser, for it is the cognizing faculty that gives rise to these various semblances taken by the reflex-image.

The discourse-simile

ILLUSTRATION:—Many monks listen to a sermon or discourse, and are afterwards asked for individual opinions about it. One remembers it fully, and says it is like a mountain torrent, because of its unceasing flow and its giving rise to thought afresh and afresh. A second, who is struck with the meaning and beauty of the words used, describes the discourse as a charming grove, with beautiful trees, lovely fruit and sweet flowers. A third notes the various avenues to which the discourse led: charity, virtue, meditation, and the like, and he compares the discourse to a grand tree-trunk whose spreading branches are loaded with valuable fruits and flowers. So do people cognize, each according to his own light.

When the reflex-image, with neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) that accompanies it, is gained, the *yogāvacara* has passed the “preliminary concentration” stage, but is still in the Sensuous Sphere (*kāmāvacara*). He is advised to go to his teacher in meditation and report what has been experienced.

What a teacher should say

Preachers of the Long Collection of Scripture (*dīgha bhāṇaka*) hold that the teacher should not straightway say: “This is the reflex-image.” But that he should say: “Yes, this occurs; go on with the meditation.” Why? Because if the teacher were to say: “This is the reflex-image that you have attained,” the *yogāvacara* might possibly think, “Ah! I’ve gained somewhat!” and his exertion might relax. Again, if the teacher says: “This, that you have seen, is not the reflex-image,” the *yogāvacara* might lose heart, and thereby too relax exertion.

Preachers of the Middle Collection of Scripture (majjhima bhānaka), on the other hand, do not agree with this. They hold that the teacher should say: "Friend, you have gained the reflex-image, strive on now and the rest will follow." And this kindly encouragement gives zest to the yogāvacara's future practice.

It would appear that both attitudes might be correct. Only the teacher should reply according to his understanding of the temperament of the yogāvacara.

At the stage of absorption

Now the practiser is in the full swing of the last of the four lower stages of this meditation. The reflex-image itself is the "object" of concentration, and not the breaths or the "nose-door." With this acquirement, and its associated neighborhood concentration, the five hindrances (nīvarana) are temporarily suppressed, as also all craving, and the mind is calmed. These events are simultaneous.

How the reflex-image should be protected

The yogāvacara must not reflect on colour, shape, transience and so forth of this reflex-image that he has gained. He must constantly keep it before the mind's eye, but is not to go into the minutiae of it. As a queen great with a child destined to be a world-ruler, takes all precautions, though she knows not the shape, colour and so forth of her child, just in this way is the practiser to cherish the reflex-image.

Going into absorption

Now all obstacles and worldly cares (palibodha) being put aside, sitting on the prepared seat, the reflex-image must be fostered and advanced. It must be made to grow at will even till it seems to fill all space. And, as concentration progresses, full concentration (appanā samādhi) or the First Absorption (pathamajjhāna) is attained with its limbs (anga) of initial and sustained application (vitakka vicāra), joy (pīti), happiness (sukha), and focussed thought ekaggatā). This complete absorption (appanā jhāna) transcending the Sensuous Sphere (kāma-vacara, brings the yogāvacara to the Form Sphere (rūpāvacara).

Why absorption should be developed

Complete absorption is to be cultivated with reference to perfecting five special accomplishments:—

1. For power of instant reflection.
2. For power of instant attainment.
3. For power of instant emergence from an attainment.
4. For power of making any desired thing to come to pass, by sheer will-force.
5. For the power of contemplation or reviewing and investigation.

How to safeguard one's skill for absorption

When the meditation is thus perfected, one does not need to start at counting, and go through all the stages, to attain absorption. One can go about one's other business, and slip into full absorption whenever desired. Only, and this essential, one's absolute purity of virtue (*sīla visuddhi*) must be maintained intact; there must be no killing, dishonesty, lusting, falsehood, addiction to intoxicants, cruelty, anger, harshness or envy, on the part of one who desires to preserve these powers unimpaired.

Duration of absorption

One can prolong the state of absorption (*jhāna samāpatti*) as long as desired, though the Buddhist sees no real use in extending the absorption for more than seven days. One needs all along to maintain a perfect equalizing of the mental forces (*indriya samatta paṭipādanatā*). The mental forces: confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom (*saddhāa, viriya, sati, samādhi, paññā*). These must be well-balanced.

Reaching the formless sphere

Thus pursuing the practice, and gradually transcending the absorption-factors of initial and sustained application, joy, and happiness, till, retaining only perfectly focussed thought and equanimity, one gains the higher absorptions, up to the Fourth. Should the *yogāvacara* so desire, he can—prior to practising the remaining four stages of this *kammaṭṭhāna*, that lead to the Hypercosmic—attain also the four yet higher absorptions of the Formless Sphere (*arūpāvacara*), though that road leads to a profitless cul-de-sac.

The Path of Insight

Penetration

Now the explanation of the first four stages of this kammatṭhāna is complete, up to the attainment of absorption. This, if still only mundane, is yet supernormal. One can switch on this keen absorption-mind to penetrate the nature of "things as they really are," by means of the meditations on transience, suffering and non-self (anicca, dukkha, anattā), and in a fleeting moment of insight (vipassanā), the yogāvacara gains his first glimpse into the ultramundane (lokuttara) in the Knowledge of Him who has entered the stream (sotāpatti magga ñāna).

Stream-winner's state

Thereafter gone for ever are false views, doubts, belief in rule and rite (sakkāyadiṭṭhi, vicikicchā, sīlabbataparāmāsa); no more will hell-states (apāya) yawn for this Saint, whose onward path is now open and free. As the books sing:

"Greater than emperorship, than god-state, than overlordship of all the worlds, is the Fruit of this first step of Sainthood."

But just now, something, never in this life even imagined as possible, has been actually experienced. For in truth, while yet on earth, even in the First Absorption, one has tasted the high happiness of a Brahma god. For the attainment of the Ultramundane, by the Insight Method, the yogāvacara has to come back, out of full concentration (appanā samādhi), to neighbourhood concentration (upacāra samāhi).

What is insight?

What is this Insight (vipassanā) that the Buddhist is urged to strive for, and whose achievement is so difficult? It is the Threshold of the Hypercosmic (lokuttara), for it leads out of the cosmic (lokiya) to the changeless Peace.

Unreality of life

In dreams there occur occasional flashes of what is, in waking life, called "reality," or what is, in waking life, deemed useful or of intellectual moment. This does not prove that dream-life, as a whole, is real. No more does this solid-seeming waking life deserve the name, "real," when judged from the view-point of Buddhist psychology, though Flashes of Value (vipassanā), for the appreciation and realisation of that view-point, can and do occur, in this truly unreal waking life.

It means that notwithstanding the fact that the instrument, or the medium, is unreal in both dream and waking life, intuitive flashes can illumine each, which are not of them, though their interna

development, on correct lines, can call forth these “flowers of thought.”

Life fantastic to the wake

Those grotesque dreams, real-seeming enough whilst being experienced, are fantastic only to the wake. The Buddha tells us that, when the “Great Awakening” comes, all this seeming reality about us shall prove to be but of much the same stuff as dreams are made of.

Intuition

Four flashes of intuition precede the “Great Awakening.” This is what the Buddhist calls “Insight”—the seeing of existence as it really is. Much of these ostensible forms, sensations, perceptions, experiences, and consciousness itself, we even now reject, and refute as immediate witness of actuality, in the light of truth as revealed by mere mundane science. The intense illumination of penetrant Insight dissipates the whole Illusion. To attain that Light a Buddha shows the Way.

So the yogāvacara, wisely realizing the transitory nature of all phenomena, even the highest, determines to attain the Permanent. He progresses then, by the four higher stages of this meditation, to his sublime Goal.

Stages of purification

He has already cultivated to perfection two visuddhis, or states of purity—those of virtue (sīla), and of mind (citta). Five more states are consummated in the course of the last four stages of this practice. These are: the purity of views (diṭṭhi), of the transcending of doubt (kankhā vitarana), of discernment of the true path (maggāmagga ñānadassana), progressive discernment (paṭipadā ñānadassana), and of insight itself (ñānadassana).

Awakening

Step by step the yogāvacara rises, even to the Light of the Great Awakening, and the destruction, once for all, of craving Thirst.

Attainment of the Bliss of Cessation

He passes on to the enjoyment, at will, of the Attainment of Cessation (nirodha samāpatti)* and experiences the Bliss of Nibbāna’s Absolute Freedom, the Unconditioned, the Hypercosmic, while yet a Man who breathes Earth’s atmosphere.

Still, still, he sits—nor does he turn a hair

Tho’ lightnings flash, and thunders crash aloud;

For now the mind has won that conquest rare—

And Ignorance shall ne’er again enshroud

Where Insight frees from changeful Fetters fair.

* Total suspension of mind, mental properties and material qualities born of mind (Comp. of Phil. Intr. page 71).

