



Shamatha Meditation

A retreat led by Venerable Tenzin Tsapel

Calm Abiding - Nine Stages

1. **[Stage 1]** Setting the mind on its object.
2. Bringing the mind back to the object. (mindfulness)
3. Watchfulness (vigilance, introspection)
4. The six bends in the road represent the six powers (forces). The first represents the power of hearing the instructions. Based on this, one achieves the first mental state.
5. The elephant represents your mind, and his black colour represents dullness (laxity).
6. The monkey stands for distraction, and his black colour represents agitation.
7. The presence of the flames, and their relative size, from this point up to the seventh mental state represent the relative amount of effort needed to bring your mind back to the object and the degree of watchfulness needed.
8. The power of contemplating (reflecting) the instructions. You use this to reach the second mental state.
9. **[Stage 2]** Keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity.
10. The gradual increase in the white patch from this point on, starting with the elephant's head, represents a gradual increase in the clarity and fixation (stability) of the mind.
11. This symbol stands for the five objects of the senses, which themselves represent the various objects that agitation focuses upon.
12. The power of bringing the mind back to the object (mindfulness). This allows you to obtain the third and fourth mental states.
13. **[Stage 3]** Keeping the mind on the object, with patches where you lose the object.
14. Subtle dullness. From this point on, you are able to recognise the distinction between obvious and subtle dullness, and other such details.
15. The monkey looking back represents the ability both to tell when your mind is wandering, and to re-focus it upon the object of meditation.
16. **[Stage 4]** Maintaining the mind tightly on the object.
17. The power of watchfulness. This allows you to reach the fifth and sixth mental states.
18. Agitation is the first of the two (agitation and dullness) that loses its power to appear in your mind.
19. When you are trying to develop quietude, even allowing your mind to be distracted to a virtuous object becomes an obstacle, and you must seek to stop it. When you are doing other practices though, you do not have to stop it. And so we see the monkey reaching for the fruit of the second activity.
20. Watchfulness will not let your mind get distracted, and uplifting your heart leads you to a state of one-pointed concentration.
21. **[Stage 5]** Controlling the mind.
22. **[Stage 6]** Quieting the mind.
23. The power of (joyous) effort. This allows you to reach the seventh and eighth mental states.
24. **[Stage 7]** Completely quieting the mind. At this point, it is difficult for even subtle forms of dullness and agitation to occur. Even if they do come, you are able to eliminate them immediately with a minimum of effort.
25. Here, the fact that the elephant has lost all the black, and left the monkey behind, represents your ability to engage in one-pointed concentration in an uninterrupted stream: if you apply just a little effort to bring your mind to the object and maintain watchfulness, then dullness, agitation and distraction can no longer interrupt your meditation.
26. **[Stage 8]** Attaining single-pointedness.
27. The power of complete habituation (thorough acquaintance), which enables you to reach the ninth mental state.
28. **[Stage 9]** Reaching deep meditation.
29. Achieving quietude (*shamata*).
30. Physical meditative pleasure.
31. Mental meditative pleasure.
32. Special insight (*vispashyana*) and quietude (*shamata*) marry together, focussing on emptiness, and allow you to cut the root of suffering in this life.
33. One goes on to seek the correct view of reality, with great ability to bring the mind to the object, and to maintain watchfulness.



Calm Abiding (*zhi.na/shamatha*) Stages Diagram Explained

1. Mental Placement: The first stage of meditation is attained through the force of hearing. Fix the mind on the object of concentration. The force of recollection (mindfulness) is indicated by the rope. The force of introspection is indicated by the hook. From here until the seventh stage is a flame; decreasing in size until it becomes conspicuously absent. The difference in size, presence and absence of the flame denotes the measure of effort, and the strength of recollection and introspection. The elephant represents the mind, its dark colour the mental factor of sinking or laxity. The monkey represents interruption or distraction, and its dark colour the mental factor of scattering or excitement.

2. Continuous Placement: The force of reflection achieves the second stage, and there is uninterrupted and continuous concentration (lengthening up to a minute!). The five sensual desires are the object of the mental factor of scattering. From here, the dark colour, beginning from the head, changes to white. It denotes progress in the clear grasping of the object of meditation and attention continually set on the object of concentration.

3. Patched Placement and 4. Close Placement: The third and fourth stages are attained through the force of mindfulness. Return and fix the strayed mind on the object of concentration. The rabbit appears and represents the subtle aspects of mental sinking. At this stage one recognises the distinct nature of gross and subtle sinking. Looking back, means that having perceived the diversion of the mind, it is again brought back to the object of concentration. Maintain a clear comprehension of even the minutest detail of the object of concentration.

5. Taming and 6. Pacification: The force of introspection or vigilance attains the fifth and sixth stages. The arising of the mental factor of scattering, preceding the actual state of absorption, is greatly reduced. During *shamatha* meditation, if thoughts of virtue arise, these have to be eliminated to prevent interruption, in spite of their virtue, and the mind held tenaciously on the object of concentration. Such elimination is not necessary at other times. The force of introspection arrests the mind from drifting astray, and because of its sheer loftiness, the mind is drawn towards absorption. The mind is controlled; the mind is pacified.

7. Complete Pacification and 8. One-pointed Attention: Stages seven and eight are accomplished through joyous effort. The mind becomes perfectly pacified. At this stage the arising of the subtlest sinking and scattering will not be possible. Or, if some occurs, it will be immediately removed with only the slightest effort. On the eighth stage the dark colour of the elephant has completely faded out, and the monkey has also gone. This indicates that without the interruption of scattering and sinking, the mind can be settled continuously in one-pointed absorption with perfect ease and steadfastness, with a slight amount of mindfulness and introspection at the beginning.

9. Balanced Placement and Shamatha: The ninth stage is attained through the force of thorough acquaintance, perfect equanimity. The flying renunciate represents ecstasy of body, and riding the elephant the attainment of *shamatha* or calm abiding, with mental ecstasy. The renunciate now has a wisdom sword and is riding in the reverse direction. This shows that the root of samsara, or becoming, is destroyed with the union of calm abiding and special insight with emptiness, as the object of concentration. The flame represents the dynamic forces of mindfulness and introspection. Equipped with this power, one examines the nature and sublime meaning of emptiness - the knowledge of the ultimate reality of all objects.

EIGHT APPLICATIONS ANTIDOTES					
Faith in calm abiding	Aspiration for calm abiding	Effort in calm abiding	Pliancy workability	Mindfulness	
Laziness				Forgetfulness	
				Vigilance / Introspection / Alertness	
				Intention	
				Equanimity	
FIVE FAULTS		Laxity and Excitement		Non-application	
				Over-application	

THE STAGE OF MENTAL ABIDING					
1. Mental Placement Thoroughly withdrawing your attention from all external objects and directing it inward to the object of meditation.	2. Continuous Placement Your attention, initially directed to its object, does not stray elsewhere, but is continuously set on the object of meditation.	3. Patched Placement If your attention is distracted by forgetfulness, recognise it and again fix it on the object of meditation.	4. Close Placement You have eliminated distraction and with effort place attention on the object of meditation.	5. Taming Reflecting on the advantages of concentration you delight in concentration.	6. Pacification Regarding distraction as a fault you quell any dislike for concentration.
			7. Complete Pacification Fine pacification of attachment, mental unease, lethargy, sleeplessness, etc.		
			8. One-Pointed Attention Exerting effort so you engage the object of meditation effortlessly (on 9th).		
			9. Balanced Placement The equanimity of balanced mind. Spontaneous natural attention and self control by familiarity with a single flow.		

THE EXPERIENCES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STAGE OF MENTAL ABIDING								
You have the sense that discursive thought has increased.	You have the sense that discursive thought is resting.	You have the sense that discursive thought is worn out when you encounter adverse circumstances.	The mind withdraws from a broad range of things to a more narrow focus (head or eyes).	Regard the 5 sense objects, 3 poisons and man and woman as disadvantages from the outset. Do not let them scatter your mind.	Regard thoughts of sensory objects and secondary afflictions as disadvantageous from the outset, and do not let attention be drawn to them.	If thoughts and secondary afflictions arise due to forgetfulness you do not assent to them but eliminate them.	By application you have no hindrance and since you continuously establish a flow of concentration you make a single flow.	You can place your mind in whatever way you please without effort.
				You take joy in the good qualities of concentration.	You stop the fault of distraction.	With exertion you abandon afflictions like attachment.	You achieve continuous concentration.	Your attention stabilises effortlessly and spontaneously. For equipoise no effort required.

SIX FORCES/POWERS					
Hearing:	By following instructions you merely heard you fix attention on the object. Not due to your repeated reflection.	Reflection:	By repeatedly reflecting on the continuation of the initial fixing of attention on the object gain first continuity.	Mindfulness:	Accomplishes both 1. <u>Patched placement</u> - When attention is distracted from its object, you redraw it in. 2. <u>Close placement</u> - by generating mindfulness from the beginning that prevents your attention from being distracted.
		Vigilance:	Accomplishes taming and pacification, for with vigilance you recognise the faults of being scattered to thoughts signs of the second afflictions, and by regarding them as faults you do not let scattering to these two occur.	Joyous Effort:	Accomplishes both <u>close placement and single pointed attention</u> . By striving to stop even subtle thoughts and 2nd afflictions, you do not submit to them; laxity/excitement cannot interfere and you gain continuous concentration.
		Thorough Acquaintance:	By great familiarity you develop effortless, natural concentration.		

FOUR ATTENTIONS			
Tight Focus: (Engagement/attention holding) Attention must be strenuously tight (Distinguish by having no interrupted focus)	Intermittent Focus: There is interference from laxity and excitement so you are able to maintain long sessions. So there is intermittent focus. (Tight focus and interrupted focus apply to both. So why the names? In the first two stages, at times, the mind is concentrated but more often not; in these five stages concentration is much longer so the term "intermittent focus" is used here only)	Uninterrupted Focus: You can maintain long sessions. No laxity/excitement	Spontaneous Focus: No interruptions by laxity/excitement and no need for effort.

Developing One-pointed Concentration

The great benefit of Buddhism lies in the unmistakable graduated training Buddha presented, that allows us to discover our true nature. In practice we need to develop our wisdom by first hearing the teachings, investigating their meaning and meditating on them. By training in a systematic path of meditation, that helps develop our concentration while also observing the components of our very being, the Dharma dawns as personal experience.

This retreat will utilise three main objects:

- 1) the breath as it relates to the tactile field, the body,
- 2) resting the mind in its natural state, observing mental events, including feelings and other events and
- 3) awareness of awareness.

The Stages of Concentration

9th - Like those reciting scripture when very familiar if the initial motivation to recite arises and they begin even if the mind is on occasion distracted the recitation continues effortlessly. Similarly, once your mind is settled with mindfulness and vigilance your concentration is able to focus continually for long periods of time without being interrupted by scattering. Since effort is not needed to maintain a continuous stream of mindfulness and vigilance this is said to be without application or effort.

8th - For that to arise, earlier you continually and energetically cultivate mindfulness and vigilance. You need a concentration that can be sustained throughout long med sessions without it being able to be disturbed by laxity and excitement.

Stages 8 and 9 are similar in that they cannot be hindered by laxity and excitement that are incompatible with concentration; however in the 8th stage you must uninterruptedly cultivate mindfulness and vigilance so the 8th stage is associated with application or effort.

7th - For this to arise you must stop even subtle laxity and excitement as soon as they occur without submitting to them.

6th and 5th - For this to arise you must recognise that the distraction of thoughts and the secondary afflictions are a disadvantage; you must have the intense vigilance that monitors your attention so that it does not disperse to them,

4th - ...and mindfulness that prevents distraction from the object of meditation from the very outset.

3rd - For that to arise you must have the mindfulness that swiftly recalls the object of meditation when you are distracted from it,

2nd - ...and you must have undistracted continuity of this fixation

1st - For that to arise your attention must first be fixed on the object of meditation.

- First follow the personal instructions that you have heard and correctly apply the method for setting your attention in a balanced fashion.
- Then repeatedly reflect on the way of setting your attention and as you are able to bring a little continuity, sustain a continuous stream of attention.
- Then if your mindfulness declines and you become distracted swiftly draw your attention back in and quickly become mindful that you have forgotten the object of meditation.
- Then generate powerful mindfulness and bring forth the mindfulness that prevents distraction away from the object of meditation from the outset.
- By accomplishing forceful mindfulness and by seeing the faults of laxity and excitement which distract the attention away from the object of meditation develop intense vigilance to monitor your attention.
- Then when you are distracted by even subtle forgetfulness, recognise this immediately and stop it short.
- And upon eliminating it generate the power of effort to lengthen the flow of attention that is uninterrupted by hindrances.
- Once that has arisen you master familiarity by meditating with effort and you accomplish the ninth mental state in which your concentration becomes effortless.
- Even if the 9th stage is attained, if pliancy is not achieved, then you do not have calm abiding; how much less are you defined as having insight. (Not to be confused with the culmination of the completion in HYT).

