

Concerning Concentration

(*samadhi*)

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Piyadassi Maha Thera in *The Seven Factors of Enlightenment* (1960) explains the factor of (*samadhi*) concentration :

“It is only the tranquillized mind that can easily concentrate on a subject of meditation. The calm, concentrated mind sees things as they really are (*samahito yatha bhutam pajanati*). The unified mind brings the five hindrances (*pañca nivarana*) under subjugation.

“Concentration is the intensified steadiness of the mind, comparable to an unflickering flame of a lamp in a windless place. It fixes the mind aright and causes it to be unmoved and undisturbed. Correct practice of *samadhi* maintains the mind and the mental properties in a state of balance like a steady hand holding a pair of scales. Right concentration dispels passions that disturb the mind, and brings purity and placidity of mind. The concentrated mind is not distracted by sense objects; concentration of the highest type cannot be disturbed under the most adverse circumstances.

“One who is intent on *samadhi* should develop a love of virtue, *sila*, for it is virtue that nourishes mental life, and makes it coherent, calm, equable and full of rich content. The unrestrained mind dissipates itself in frivolous activity.

“Many are the impediments that confront an aspirant for enlightenment, but there are five particular hindrances that hinder concentrative thought, *samadhi*, and obstruct the way to deliverance. In the teaching of the Buddha, they are known as *pañca nivarana*, the five hindrances. The Pali term *nivarana* denotes that which hinders or obstructs mental development (*bhavana*). They are called

hindrances because they completely close in, cut off and obstruct. They close the doors to deliverance. The five hindrances are:

1. *kamacchanda* — sensual desires
2. *vyapada* — ill-will
3. *thinamiddha* — obduracy of mind and mental factors
4. *uddhaccakukkucca* — restlessness and worry
5. *vicikiccha* — doubt

“*Kamacchanda* or sensual desires or intense thirst for either possessions or for satisfaction of base desires, is the first that binds man to *samsara*, repeated wandering, and closes the door to final deliverance. What is sensuality? Where does this craving (*tanha*) arise and take root? According to the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana Sutta*), 'where there is the delightful and the pleasurable, there this craving arises and takes root.' Forms, sounds, smell, taste, bodily contacts, and ideas are delightful and pleasurable; there this craving arises and takes root. Craving when obstructed by some cause is transformed to frustration and wrath.

The Dhammapada 216 says:

Tanhaya jayati soko — tanhaya jayati bhayam
Tanhaya vippamuttassa — natthi soko kuto bhayam.

From craving arises grief, from craving arises fear;
To one who is free from craving there is no grief, whence fear.

“The next hindrance is *vyapada*, ill-will, hatred, or aversion. Man naturally revolts against the unpleasant and disagreeable, and is depressed by them. To be separated from the loved is painful, and equally painful is the union with the loathed. Even a disagreeable dish, an unpleasant drink, an unlovely demeanor, and a hundred

other trifles, may cause indignation. It is wrong thinking, unsystematic reflection, that brings about hatred. Hatred breeds hatred and clouds vision; it distorts the mind and its properties and thus hinders awakening to truth, blocks the way to freedom. Lust and hatred, based on ignorance, the crowning corruption of all our madness (*avijja paramam malam*), indeed are the root causes of strife and dissension between man and man and nation and nation.

“The third hindrance consists of a pair of evils, *thina* and *middha*. *Thina* is lassitude or morbid state of mind, and *middha* is morbid state of the mental properties. *Thinamiddha*, as some may think, is certainly not sluggishness of the body; for even the arahats, the perfect ones, who are free from this pair of evils, also experience bodily fatigue. *Thinamiddha* retards mental development; under its influence mind is inert like butter too stiff to spread or like molasses sticking to a spoon.

“Laxity is a dangerous enemy of mental development. Laxity leads to greater laxity until finally there arises a state of callous indifference. This flabbiness of character is a fatal block to righteousness and freedom. It is through *viriya* or mental effort that one overcomes this pair of evils.

“The fourth hindrance also comprises twin drawbacks: *uddhacca* and *kukkucca*, restlessness and brooding, or flurry and worry. As a rule, anyone who commits evil is mentally excited and restless; the guilty and the impatient suffer from this hindrance. The minds of men who are restless and unstable are like flustered bees in a shaken hive. This mental agitation impedes meditation and blocks the upward path. Equally baneful is mental worry. Often people repent over evil actions they have committed. This is not praised by the Buddha ... Instead of brooding over such shortcomings one should endeavor not to repeat unwholesome deeds. There are others who worry over the good deeds omitted and duties left undone. This, too,

serves no purpose. It is as futile as to ask the further bank of a river to come over that we may get to the other side. Instead of uselessly worrying over what good one has failed to do, one should endeavor to perform wholesome deeds. This mental unsteadiness (*kukkucca*) also hinders mental progress.

The fifth and the last hindrance is *vicikiccha*, doubt. The Pali term *vi* + *cikiccha* literally means medicineless. One who suffers from perplexity is suffering from a dire disease, and until and unless one sheds one's doubts one will continue to suffer from it. So long as man is subject to this mental itching, so long will he continue to take a cynical view of things which is most detrimental to mental development. The commentators explain this hindrance as the inability to decide anything definitely; it also comprises doubt with regard to the possibility of attaining the *jhanas*, concentrative thought ...

“The yogi who attains the *jhanas* inhibits all five hindrances by the five *jhanangas*, characteristics or factors of *jhanas*; *kamacchanda* is inhibited by *ekaggata* (one-pointedness or unification of the mind); *vyapada* by *piti* (joy); *thinamiddha* by *vitakka* (applied thought); *uddhacca-kukkucca* by *sukha* (happiness) and *vicikiccha* by *vicara* (sustained thought). The attainment of *jhanas*, however, is not the end aimed at. *Jhanas* should be made to lead to *vipassana*, intuitional insight. It is through insight that the yogi eradicates the latent corruptions (*anusaya kilesas*) and attains perfect purity.

“So long as impurities or taints (*kilesas*) exist in man's mind latent, so long will the arising of *papa* (evil) in him continue. The practitioner of *jhana* whose purpose is to attain *vipassana*, commits no ill action because the hindrances are inhibited, but he has the impurities latent in his make-up and, therefore, he is not yet in a state of absolute security. But the Arahant, the perfect one, wipes out all the latent impurities with their rootlets and brings this repetitive

wandering, *samsara*, to a standstill. He is one whose *samsara* is indubitably ended; for by him the noble life has been perfected and the task done. For him there is no more rebirth.”

Reference

Piyadassi Maha Thera. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment. 1960. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.