**CONCENTRATION-*SAMADHI BOJJHANGA***

The Pali word *samadhi* is usually translated as concentration, but the more fundamental meaning is “unification of mental formations”. In this regard, it is ethically neutral, that is, the mind can unify around unwholesome factors or wholesome factors. As applied to the factors of awakening (and the eightfold path), the mental conditioning factors (sankhara) are organized through wholesome intentions.

Now what, monks, is noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions? Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, & right mindfulness—is called noble right concentration with its supports & requisite conditions—MN 117

There are two sorts of concentration: fixed concentration (*appana samadhi*), and momentary concentration (*khanika samadhi*); for the latter I prefer “moving concentration”. Both applications involve a stable, intentional focus, and both can either be very precise and one-pointed, or more broadly focused without “wobbling”. I often use a simile based on how a how a theatrical spotlight operator functions: With fixed concentration, the lighting tech is directed by the stage manager to keep the light clearly focused on one player, wherever she or he moves around the stage; with momentary concentration, the tech moves the light from one player to another, with the intention to illuminate the plot of the scene. The light can also be very limited in focus (as is the case with jhana practice) or very broadly focused (as with the practice of vipassana).

The broader focus of unified mental factors is intended to illuminate the process of Awakening as one of the seven Awakening Factors. The stage manager is the Awakening Factors of *Mindfulness* and *Investigation of Mental Phenomena*, while *Energy* is the light of the beam and *Effort* is the intentional activity of the tech. The resulting illumination is vipassana, whether involved with fixed or momentary concentration. The Awakening Factor of *Joy* is the ongoing enthusiastic satisfaction of a job well done. *Tranquility* is the smoothness and lack of “jitter” in the movement of the spot. *Equanimity* is the result of the balanced coordination of the routine, regardless of whatever emotion is revealed through the plot.

**SKILLFUL MEANS FOR CULTIVATING CONCENTRATION**

1. As with tranquility, organizing a relatively stress-free, uncomplicated lifestyle is quite beneficial. The Buddha said that the supporting factors for cultivating concentration included living in a place that is quiet, protected from the elements, with a moderate temperature and few interruptions. It’s ironic that we live in well-insulated dwellings (quiet, with moderate temperatures), with plenty of conveniently arranged food, water, light and sewage facilities, and yet we can’t find the time to meditate!
2. Balancing optimally between energy and tranquility, with steady focus on a simple object like the breath to avoid distracting thoughts.
3. This may seem counter to the task, but the more urgently one tries to force the mind to stay on task, the more the associated agitation creates intrusive thoughts and expectations. The most productive practice is to *rest attention* (vitakka-aiming) on the touch sensation at the rim of the nostrils *persistently* (vicara-sustained attention), the more likely it is that concentration will build. It is an “effortless effort” (thank you Joseph Goldstein!)
4. Associating with people who value simplicity and non-distraction is quite helpful. This is why it is so beneficial for dedicated meditation students to sit in each other’s presence on a regular basis.
5. Of course, one of the best ways to cultivate concentration is during an intensive residential meditation retreat. The focus of the event is to provide the optimal opportunity to dedicate every waking moment to cultivating concentration, as well as the other awakening factors.