SAMADHI AWAKENING FACTOR

Cultivating samadhi (sah-mah-dee) is a core skill to master in the practice of mindfulness of breathing meditation. The traditional translation is *concentration*, but the more comprehensive translation is *unification of mental factors* and is manifested as *an undistracted flow of consciousness*. Concentration is involved in every moment of consciousness and is an ethically neutral function of the mind; a person can be highly concentrated led by desire or by hatred; as an Awakening Factor, samadhi is always associated with wholesome mind conditioners. It, like other Awakening Factors such as Energy/Effort, Mindfulness and Equanimity, is represented in multiple other conceptual categories, such as the Noble Eightfold Path (as Right Concentration), the Five Powers and the Five Faculties. Here is a quote from Wikipedia regarding this quality of attention:

The Theravada Pali texts mention four kinds of samadhi:

* Momentary concentration (*khanikasamadhi*): A mental stabilization which arises during [vipassana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vipassana).
* Preliminary concentration (*parikammasamadhi*): Arises out of the meditator's initial attempts to focus on a meditation object.
* Access concentration (*upacarasamadhi*): Arises when the [five hindrances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_hindrances) are dispelled, when [jhana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhy%C4%81na_in_Buddhism) is present, and with the appearance the 'counterpart sign' (*patibhaganimitta*).
* Absorption concentration (*appanasamadhi*): The total immersion of the mind on its meditation of object and stabilization of all four jhanas.

There is another term that is practically synonymous with samadhi: *ekagatta* (eh-kah-guh-tah), which has a quality of *excluding attention from any “ineffectual” mind conditioners,* represented as the “peak performance” of unification of wholesome conditioning factors in the mind.

Samadhi and Passadhi (the Tranquility Awakening Factor) are seamlessly coordinated in their functions. Samadhi provides a stability of focused attention and Passadhi manifests as the absence of turbulence in the flow of experience. The example I find most useful in conveying the function of Samadhi is that of the cone of light energy that results from using a magnifying lens on a sunny day. The radiant energy from the sun is disorganized and not unified in its function. When the magnifying lens is perpendicular to the sun, a cone of coherent radiant energy is formed. This graphic can illustrate this:

**SUNLIGHT**

**(unprocessed primary stimuli)**



**Setting aside the five hindrances**

**(*parikammasamadhi*)**

**Stable, inclusive, broadly focused attention**

**Samadhi/Passadhi—(*upacarasamadhi*)**

**Vipassana Practice**

**Exclusive, sharply focused attention**

**(*appanasamadhi*)**

**Jhana Practice**

The exclusive, sharply focused attention develops into jhana states, which are highly refined and stable flows of consciousness. The stable, inclusive, broadly focused attention is more characteristic of vipassana practice, that is, insight into the fundamental characteristics of subjective experience. The common aspect of each of these processes is freedom from the distractions and burdens of the Five Hindrances.

Over the last 100 years or so, a distinction has been made between the levels of samadhi necessary for sufficient cultivation of vipassana for the experience of Awakening. The more traditional teachings insist that the meditation student must cultivate the very high levels of samadhi experienced in jhana states, quoting the Visuddhimagga, which provides different renderings of jhana than the rather vague descriptions from the suttas. Current commentaries make a distinction between what are called the Sutta jhanas and the Visuddhimagga jhanas. The Sutta version is not clearly designated. Richard Shankman, in his book “The Experience of Samadhi”, pp33-34, quotes a standard phrasing of jhana:

Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and abides in the first jhana [which is characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, and accompanied by thought and examination. With the stilling of thought and examination, he enters and abides in the second jhana [which is

characterized by] rapture and pleasure born of concentration, and accompanied by inner composure and singleness of mind, without thought and examination. With the fading away of rapture, he abides in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware, feeling pleasure with the body, he enters and abides in the third jhana, of which the noble ones declare: “Equanimous and mindful he abides in pleasure.” With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters and abides in the fourth jhana, [which has] neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness and equanimity.

Over the centuries of practice and debate after the original Pali Canon suttas were passed on through the generations, two large volumes of commentary were developed and copied for posterity: the Vimuttimagga (The Path of Freedom) by Upatissa and the Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification) by Buddhagosa. In most of Southeast Asia, the latter is considered to be the authoritative commentary regarding Buddhist practice. The criteria for achieving jhana in that commentary is much more specific and demanding than the sutta jhana formulation.

Recent students and teachers have debated what constitutes a jhana state. Here is the URL for an article by Leigh Brasington, a well-respected jhana teacher, that provides an overview of various perspectives on what constitutes a jhana state: <http://www.leighb.com/jhanantp.htm>. Here is the URL for his instructions for cultivating jhana: <http://www.leighb.com/jhana3.htm>

I have experienced what I suppose would be the same level of jhana taught by Leigh, which seems quite similar to what Ayya Khema taught. The Visuddhimagga jhana is indeed very difficult to master. Regardless, the goal of jhana practice is to develop the Seven Awakening Factors towards full Awakening. This is reflected in the Noble Eightfold Path in the cultivation of Samma Samadhi, Right Concentration.

In the essay by Henepola Gunaratana entitled “Should We Come Out Of Jhana To Practice Vipassana?” the author lists the characteristics of Right Concentration:

Right concentration is the unification and consolidation of all the wholesome mental factors into one harmonious balance. In fact all the thirty-seven mental factors of enlightenment (the four foundations of mindfulness, the fourfold right efforts, the four roads to power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, the noble eightfold path) are consolidated in right concentration. The factors that work together as a team are: confidence, effort, mindfulness, wisdom, friendliness, compassion, joy, happiness, concentration, contact, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness, desire, decision, equanimity, attention, letting go of greed, the seven factors of enlightenment and the factors of the noble eightfold path. Each of them supports one another thus maintaining the delicate balance of all.

Other well-respected teachers from SE Asia developed practices termed dry vipassana, which does not require jhana attainment to successfully liberate the mind. They describe the cultivation of khanikasamadhi, that is, the moment-by- moment unification of samadhi/passadhi along with the other mind conditioners associated with insight into the fundamental characteristics of subjective experience. The stability provided by Samadhi allows for recognizing any disturbances in the flow of energy. The tranquility provided by Passadhi allows for a quality of quietude and non-reactivity to any urgent feelings that are associated with the disturbances. This sets the stage for effectively practicing vipassana, which has several additional characteristics. The following descriptions represent what are called the “beautiful pairs” of cetasikas (cheh-tah-see-kahs), and they produce extraordinary qualities of attention when present and developed; they are most often noticeable and workable on retreats:

**TRANQUILITY OF MIND CONDITIONERS**: The Pali word *passadhi* is most often translated as tranquility. It is one of the seven awakening factors and represents the absence of turbulence in the flow of subjective experience. It’s function is so similar to the manifestation of concentration that I often use the term “Samadhi/passadhi”. This is the antidote for the unwholesome mind conditioner of restlessness.

**TRANQUILITY OF MIND**: As the wholesome mind conditioners affect consciousness, then consciousness becomes stabilized and clarified as well. The “flow” of recurrent and coherent self-states becomes smooth and harmonious. This pairing is the manifestation of the factor of tranquility in the 7 factors of awakening.

**LIGHTNESS OF MIND CONDITIONERS**: This mind conditioner supports the other wholesome, universal and particular conditioners in overcoming sloth and torpor. There is an agility as the mind is less burdened by the hindrances associated with greed, aversion and ignorance. As a result, the focus of attention is less prone to “enchantment”, that is, craving and clinging to a particular aggregation of mind conditioners. This is an important quality to be cultivated through the practice of vipassana.

**LIGHTNESS OF MIND**: As the wholesome mind conditioners affect the arising of a moment of consciousness, the consciousness is characterized by lightness when that is the object of attention. Subjectively, this can be noted as a sense of inner mental buoyancy, a “lightness of being”.

**PLIANCY OF MIND CONDITIONERS**: This conditioner of consciousness is the antidote for mental rigidity, i.e., the unwholesome mind conditioners of wrong view and conceit. It is open-mindedness as to what is good and wholesome. I once heard vipassana described as “The ability of the mind to go to a mental object, wrap around it and then return to breath awareness.” A benefit of this capability is that it minimizes the likelihood of “enchantment” so the mind is clear and receptive to the next moment of consciousness (see below).

**PLIANCY OF MIND**: As the mind conditioner affects the arising of consciousness, the consciousness becomes pliantly receptive to the next moment of experience. A strong component of clinging is the residual “afterglow” that predisposes the mind to become attached to what has arisen; pliancy of the mind is the minimal effect of that component.

**WIELDINESS OF MIND CONDITIONERS**: This mind conditioner is the antidote for the hindrances of sensual desire and aversion, both of which are difficult to divert attention away from. It supports the pliancy and proficiency of other wholesome mind conditioners. The classical simile is that of the malleability of gold. When purified, gold is soft and cannot be tarnished. Therefore it can easily be shaped into beautiful objects. A simile that I find useful is skill at using a tool. An example of this might be being wieldy with an ax or with a tennis racquet.

**WIELDINESS OF MIND**: This represents the ability of consciousness to accept and be fulfilled by wholesome conditioning without disturbance and with clarity. The mind is responsive and reflects what has arisen in awareness readily.

**PROFICIENCY OF MIND CONDITIONERS**: This mind conditioner supports competency, and "goodness of fit" regarding the co-arising mind conditioners. It is reportedly the manifestation of good mental health. For example, a woodsman is proficient at using an ax with wieldiness to cut down a tree efficiently, and a tennis player is proficient at using the racquet with wieldiness to serve the ball accurately and at a high velocity.

**PROFICIENCY OF MIND**: A healthy mind-moment, free of disability.

**UPRIGHTNESS OF MIND CONDITIONERS**: This supports forthrightness and is the antidote for deceit and fraud conditioned by wrong view, conceit, desire and ill-will. It supports moral shame and fear of blame. It also conditions the mind to accurately assess what the appropriate response to a situation is.

**UPRIGHTNESS OF MIND**: A clear conscience that is a manifestation of the wholesome mind conditioner of confidence.

These conditioning factors, combined with vitakka and vicara, provide dhamma vicaya, investigation of mental phenomena, which is at the core of vipassana practice.

I teach a form of vipassana that emphasizes the importance of cultivating samadhi/passadhi and regard this as equivalent to upacara samadhi, access concentration. With samadhi/passadhi, the hindrances are set aside, the focus of attention is stable and inclusive of phenomena other than breath sensations and there is a calmly non-reactive quality of the mind.

For more information about cultivating samadhi, I suggest these two recordings:

Richard Shankman’s dhamma talk on “Samadhi and Insight”: <https://dharmaseed.org/talks/audio_player/146/54750.html>

Donald Rothberg’s dhamma talk on “Skillful Effort In Concentration Practice”: <https://dharmaseed.org/talks/audio_player/55/51762.html>

Next week’s talk will explore the Equanimity Awakening Factor.