

Two Kinds of Concentration

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I will talk about concentration and there are two kinds of concentration: wrong concentration and right concentration. Wrong concentration is the concentration that accompanies unwholesome mind or that arises together with unwholesome types of consciousness. For example, when a man is fishing, his mind is intent on catching the fish. He has a kind of concentration, but that concentration is wrong concentration because it accompanies the consciousness that is again accompanied by ill-will or hate.

When you do something good, when you practice *dāna*, when you keep precepts and so on, concentration is also involved. That concentration is called right concentration because it accompanies a wholesome mind or wholesome mental states. When you practice meditation, there is this right concentration, which you probably know as one of the factors of the Eight Fold Path. In Pāli the eight factors are called "*Magga-ga* – Factors of the Path or Parts of the Path." Among these factors, three are inactive factors and five are active factors. Inactive factors means they are not working at the time (they not present in the mind). Active factors are those that are working at the moment that are participating in the practice and that are doing their functions properly and in harmony with each other.

The three factors that are inactive are Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Strictly according to Abhidhamma any one of the three are not present in your mind when you practice meditation. They arise only when you abstain from some wrong doing, when you abstain from killing, when you abstain from lying, when you abstain from selling weapons and so on. When there is no abstention, these factors do not arise. So these three factors are not present in the mind of a meditator. Even at the other times they are said to be present, they are present only one at a time – not three at the same moment. These three factors constitute what is called *Sīla* or morality. You accomplish these three factors when you take the precepts at the beginning of the practice. So they are said to be already accomplished when you practice meditation after taking the precepts. When you are taking the precepts, one of them may be present in your mind. But when you are practicing vipassana, they are not present in your mind. So they are called inactive factors.

The other five factors are called active factors because they are working actively at every moment of meditation. The first is the Right Effort. You make Right Effort; you make the effort to be mindful and then you become mindful by effort. So there is Right Effort, there is Right Mindfulness. And when your mindfulness becomes stronger and more intense, there is Right Concentration. That means your mind seems to go deep into the object and stick there. As you gain concentration, the knowledge of the true nature of things comes by itself. In order for the mind to be on the object there is one more factor that takes the mind to the object and put the mind on the object. That mental factor is called Right Thought. The Right Thought among the eight factors is not

actually thinking (in the usual sense) but a mental factor that takes the mind to the object and puts it on the object. Without this mental factor mind will not be on the object. So we get five active factors – Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration, Right Understanding, and Right Thought. These five factors must be working together and in harmony with each other toward your meditation to be good.

Although these five factors are important in the practice of meditation, Buddha once picked up one factor and said: "Monks, develop concentration. A person whose mind is concentrated understands things as they are."

This is the exhortation of the Buddha to His disciples. He said, "Monks, develop concentration." Practice meditation to get concentration. When your mind is concentrated, then you will penetrate into the nature of things. That means right knowledge will arise when your mind is concentrated. It is important that yogis get concentration in order to see things as they truly are.

We can take a simile. Suppose there is a glass full of muddy water and some small things in the water. Because the water is muddy, we cannot see what is in the water and also we cannot see through the water or the glass. Suppose there is some chemical we can put into the muddy water and make the mud particles settle down. When the mud particles have settled down, the water becomes clear and we are able to see what is in the water and also we are able to see through the water or through the glass.

When mind is concentrated, mental hindrances are subdued or they settle down. Although at that moment a yogi cannot abandon them altogether, he can keep them in check so that they do not come up. When these mental hindrances settle down, mind becomes clear and it is time when yogis are said to gain concentration. With concentration comes the seeing of the true nature of things. Concentration is a very important factor in the practice of meditation. Without getting concentration we cannot hope to get into the true nature of things. Understanding the true nature of things is again very important in the practice of vipassana because the understanding of the true nature of things or knowing things as they truly are is the basis for vipassana knowledge. Vipassana knowledge can arise only when there is this understanding of things as they truly are. Understanding things as they truly are means seeing things clearly and knowing what they are and what are their characteristics and so on.

Concentration is of three kinds: the second kind of concentration is called *Jhāna* concentration. In order to get *Jhāna* you have to practice samatha meditation. There are forty subjects of *samatha* meditation but only thirty of them can lead to the attainment of *Jhānas*. You can choose any one of these thirty subject of *samatha* meditation and practice. If your practice is successful, then you will get *Jhāna*. Suppose you take *Kasina* meditation using a disk made of earth. You look at the disk and memorize it and a time will come when you are able to memorize it, you are able to see it clearly even when your eyes are closed. That image is called Remembered Image. You dwell on this remembered image again and again so that it becomes polished. The remembered image is

the exact replica of the disk. If there are impressions of finger prints on the disk, then they will also appear in the remembered. But when you reach the next stage, the blemishes or the impressions of finger prints and others will disappear and the image will be smooth and polished. At that time the mental hindrances are subdued; no mental hindrances arise and so it is a time when you are said to gain another kind of concentration. Since that concentration is in the neighborhood of *JhĒna* concentration, it is called neighborhood concentration. You dwell upon neighborhood concentration again and again and next you get *JhĒna* concentration. That is when you practice *samatha* meditation.

After you get either neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration, you may practice vipassana. You practice vipassana taking one of these concentrations as object. That means taking the see neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration as object and seeing it as impermanence, suffering and no soul. You will go up through the stages of vipassana knowledge and ultimately you will gain enlightenment. In this meditation there are two kinds of concentration: neighborhood concentration and *JhĒna* concentration.

What if you do not want to practice *samatha* meditation? You just want to practice vipassana right away. What we are doing is like that. We do not practice *samatha*. That is also possible. In this case you do not try to get neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration. You just begin with vipassana. And as you go alone, you will get another kind of concentration. You practice vipassana and you try to see the objects clearly and so on. When you go on practicing, a time will come when your mind is almost always on the meditation object. There will be no mental hindrances, there will be no wandering of mind out to the other objects. Your mind will be on the meditation object only. Whatever object appears evident at the moment, you are able to be mindful of it. It is the time when you are said to gain the momentary concentration. In vipassana this momentary concentration is very important.

This momentary concentration is like the neighborhood concentration; it is similar to neighborhood concentration. Neighborhood concentration can keep mental hindrances away or subdue the mental hindrances so that mind can be squarely on the object. In the same way momentary concentration can keep mental hindrances away and be on the object. So it is like neighborhood concentration or we may say it is as strong as neighborhood concentration. But it is not called neighborhood concentration because it is not in neighborhood of *JhĒna*. When we say the neighborhood concentration, the concentration is in the neighborhood of *JhĒna* concentration. Since there is no *JhĒna* in vipassana, we do not call the concentration in vipassana neighborhood concentration; instead it is called momentary concentration.

When you gain momentary concentration, that means when your mind is almost always on the meditation object, you are able to be mindful of every object that comes. Your mind does not wander at all or maybe it may wander just once in a while. You may even be able to prevent it from going out. Such time is a time when you get

momentary concentration. When you get momentary concentration, the mental hindrances settle down and your mind becomes clear. That is a time when you see the objects clearly, more clearly than before. In the beginning your concentration is not so good. Although you may think that you see the objects clearly, you do not see them clearly actually. But when you gain the momentary concentration, you see the objects clearly.

When you see them clearly, you see what they are, what their features are, what their characteristics are. When you see them clearly, what they are, and what their characteristics are, you are said to gain the knowledge of things as they are. You are able to see things as they truly are without any subjective additions to the objects. If you go on, you will see that the objects appear and disappear. They come and go. As though on a screen you see them because you are alert and you are taking the objects that become prominent at the moment as the object of meditation. You will not fail to see that these objects come and go.

When you see the objects come and go, you know that these things are impermanent. You are getting into real vipassana. Before you reach that stage, you are not in the vipassana yet. You are going towards vipassana. You may say "I am practicing vipassana", but only when you see the objects as impermanence, suffering, and no soul, can you really say that "I am practicing vipassana"? In order to gain that knowledge you need concentration. We cannot skip concentration. We cannot say that concentration is not important. It is not correct to say, "You can just practice and you will gain knowledge."

Only when mind is concentrated, can you see things clearly. Only when the mud particles settle down, can you see the water and what is in the water. In the same way, only when mental hindrances settle down -- only when you get concentration -- can you see the true nature of things. So gaining concentration is important in the practice of meditation whether it is *samatha* meditation or vipassana meditation. That is why almost every meditation teacher emphasized on the important of concentration. Concentration can be gained only by the practice of mindfulness and you can be mindful only when you can make an effort. If you lack effort, if you do not make effort, you cannot be mindful. Most of the time we are not mindful because we do not make effort to be mindful.

You need effort to be mindfulness to gain concentration and you need concentration to see the true nature of things. Only when you see the true nature of things, can you see that things are impermanent and so on. So you will want to get over them; you will want to get out of them. That is to achieve the purification of mind. So in this practice concentration is an important factor and it is one of the five factors that are working diligently and harmoniously at every moment of practice. These five factors are called Active Factors of Path.

There are two kinds of factors: mundane and supramundane. Strictly speaking only those that arise at the moment of enlightenment, that arise simultaneously with

path consciousness are called True Path Factors. But those path factors at the moment of enlightenment are actually the outcome of or the result of the preliminary practice. Because you practice vipassana, you get the path consciousness. Although path consciousness is not termed the resultant consciousness, it is actually the result or the outcome of the practice of vipassana. In order to gain the real path factors you have to develop the preliminary path factors. They are also called path factors. You have to develop the mundane path factors. Without developing the mundane path factors you cannot get the true path factors.

That is why we practice vipassana meditation, we are trying to develop these factors which belong to the mundane level. These factors during the vipassana practice are called preliminary factors or preliminary stage. Without the preliminary stage you cannot get into the state of enlightenment. In this practice we need to see to it that these five factors are working at every moment of our practice and they must work in harmony with each other. No one of them must work more than it should.

Just as in a machine there are many parts. Each part should do its own work. If one part overworks, then the machine is put out of order. In the same way the factors are like parts in the machine and each part in the machine has its own function. Each part must do its own function properly so that the whole mechanism of the machine is in proper form. In the same way when you practice meditation, these factors must be working properly. They must be working doing their own function. They have separate functions. Effort has one function, and mindfulness has another and so on. They must do their respective functions properly and also when they do their respective functions, they must do just enough and not too much or too little. When these factors work harmoniously, then success can be expected. All five factors are important, but as Buddha pointed out or as Buddha exhorted His monks, His disciples, concentration is important. And Mahēsi Sayadaw talked about concentration many times in his talks and also in his books. Actually every meditation teacher must not under-estimate the importance in value of Right Concentration.

Right Concentration means what? Neighborhood concentration, *Jhāna* concentration and momentary concentration. Neighborhood concentration and *Jhāna* concentration are for *samatha* meditation. Momentary concentration is for vipassana meditation because there are people who practice vipassana only and not mixed with *samatha*. Formerly during the time of the Buddha and maybe many centuries later people practice both *samatha* and vipassana. They practice *samatha* meditation first and then they change to vipassana.

You can go either of these two ways. One way is to practice *samatha* meditation first and then go to vipassana. The other way is to go right into vipassana and as you go alone, you develop concentration. When that concentration becomes strong enough and when that becomes momentary concentration, then you can see the true nature of things.

Right Concentration is an important factor in the practice of meditation. No meditation would under-estimate or give little to the importance of Right Concentration. Through Right Concentration, we can attain Right Understanding and that Right Understanding of the true nature of things will lead us to the Right Understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

SĒdhu! SĒdhu! SĒdhu!