SAMADHI AWAKENING FACTOR

Cultivating samadhi 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 by *an undistracted flow of consciousness*. Concentration 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.

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**

**Setting aside the five hindrances**

**Stable, inclusive, broadly focused attention**

**Samadhi/Passadhi—Access Concentration**

**Vipassana Practice**

**Exclusive, sharply focused attention**

**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.

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. I will attach an article by Leigh Brasington, a well-respected jhana teacher, that provides and overview of various perspectives on what constitutes a jhana state.

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.

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.