THE TRANQUILITY AWAKENING FACTOR

Tranquility is an interesting phenomena; it is not the same as sedation or lethargy, and a mild experience of the hindrance of sloth/torpor is often misperceived as tranquility. One of my resources for this analysis is “The Seven Factors of Enlightenment” by Piyadassi Thera. Here is what he writes about this smoothly flowing experience on page 19:

Passaddhi — calm or tranquility — is the fifth factor of enlightenment. Passadhi is two-fold. Káya passaddhi is calm of body. Káya here means all the mental properties rather than the physical body; in other words, calm of the aggregates of feeling vedanákkhandha), perception (saññákkhandha), and the volitional activities or conformations (samkhárakkhandha). Citta passaddhi is the calm of the mind — that is, the aggregate of consciousness (viññáóakkhanda).

The experience we call tranquility is often what Culadasa in “The Mind Illuminated” calls *subtle dullness*. Tranquility has a quality of clarity as well as calmness, while subtle dullness lacks the clarity. As suggested in the above quote, there are two elements of tranquility: One is the wholesome integration of sensations and mental formations (feelings, perceptions and mind conditioners), interacting harmoniously with the reflective capacity of the mind. This comes about through the cooperative coordination of the preceding Awakening factors: *Mindfulness* combines with *Investigation of Mental Phenomena* and *Energy/Effort*. As a result, the enthusiastic engagement --- the Joy Awakening Factor facilitates increased harmony between the Factors and this produces Tranquility. The cultivation of tranquility allows the mind to be calm, clear and coherently effective regardless of environmental circumstances; this provides entry into the manifestation of Equanimity, the 7th Awakening Factor.

When the thoughts and emotions are making meaning out of initial sensations are unwholesome, the unwholesome qualities “imprint” the mind with craving and clinging regarding whatever the circumstances are. This imprint, over a period of time, becomes a mood, like anger, lust, etc. Similarly the energy levels are changing in the mind—alert/drowsy, scattered/collected, etc. and this also affects mood.

We live in a hyperstimulating environment through the media, the fast pace of work and traffic, etc., and as the mind/body process adapts, the whole sense of self can seem dull/drowsy (sloth/torpor) or restless/agitated (restlessness and worry). Most people don’t realize how energetically conflicted they are, particularly regarding subtle dullness. In the middle of a one-week retreat, there comes a noticeable increase in “lightness of being” (Joy) and calm serenity (Tranquility) that is significantly more accessible to awareness.

People often say they are too tired to meditate; actually, it is likely that they’re experiencing subtle dullness or full-blown sloth/torpor. We are truly fatigued after vigorous activity. Most of what we call tiredness is really an indicator of mental stress perhaps accompanied by the residual effects of sleep deprivation (Thanks to late night tv or internet binging). Cultivating true tranquility involves adequate rest, not being exposed to ongoing stressful situations and lining in a quiet peaceful environment. it might also include cutting back on or eliminating foods that cause physical lethargy (often the result of Thanksgiving Day dinner!)

Tranquility is closely supported by Samadhi (the unification of the activated mind/body processes, more often termed Concentration); in fact I often teach that the cultivation of samadhi/passadhi is the appropriate foundation for the development of vipassana, the insight in the three characteristics, anicca, dukkha and anatta.

While focusing on the breath with some uninterrupted continuity, the agitation that manifests as bodily tension and mental conflict gradually reduces over the course of routine daily meditation practice. Additionally, investigation of the breath creates more potent internal awareness and clarity. The result is “a unified mental field” that allows the mind/body process to be more relaxed while the mind becomes increasingly less agitated and more alert.