



The context of calm abiding (shamatha) and clear seeing (vipashyana)

- ❖ Review the *Eightfold Path* and explore how shamatha and vipashyana relate *Right View* (the four noble truths, karma, etc) and *Right Intention* (generosity not clinging, kindness not ill-will).
- ❖ *Shamatha* is not suppressing sensations, feelings, thoughts. Bliss, clarity, stillness are signs of progress, but are not the point of shamatha.
- ❖ *Vipashyana* is not *thinking about* sensations, feelings, thoughts. Mere conceptual understanding is a start, but isn't the realization of nonconceptual wisdom.
- ❖ *The point* of shamatha is vipashyana. The point of vipashyana is freedom. The point of freedom is helping beings.

Building capacity in stable clear attention (shamatha)

Shamatha and vipashyana are skills that must be developed, practices to be cultivated, eventually a way of experiencing everything. Attention is ordinarily passive, scattered and drawn from one stimulus to the next. But we can change that because we have two inherent abilities: the focal attention and global awareness that we use every day. With sustained practice they can be developed into extraordinary stability, clarity, and power. *Focal attention* can be directed to and sustained upon any object or experience we choose. *Global awareness* means that even when we're focused upon an object, we can also have clear inclusive awareness of everything else that is arising.

Practice every day in *many short sessions*. Pick an object or a sensation or feeling; aim your attention and gently sustain it upon the chosen object. Simply breathe and attend. When you discover you've been distracted, simply come back. Gently modulate your attention so that it is not too dull nor too busy. Cultivate steady, even, vivid attention.

Remembering and staying with the chosen object is **mindfulness** (sati). Knowing whether your attention is stable or distracted, busy or dull, is **clear comprehending** (samprajanya). The ability and willingness to modulate is **wise attention** (yoniso manasikara). Shamatha integrates mindfulness, clear comprehension, and wise attention. Shamatha is a skill that takes weeks and months of adjusting increasingly subtle efforts. If you devote yourself to it, shamatha will come. And when shamatha arises at will and is stable for as long as you choose, that's *samadhi*.

Vipashyana is clearly seeing relative truth and ultimate truth. The "relative" truth is the dynamics and characteristics of phenomena. The "ultimate" truth is the actual nature of phenomena. We gain insight by simply observing and noticing how things are. Don't pick and choose; see whatever arises. There's also insight from looking deeply into specific phenomena: sensations, feelings, thoughts, impulses, etc. We must look directly and freshly. In both cases, "see what is as it is." Seeing how things are "empty" doesn't deny existence or self; phenomena are "empty of" permanence and independent fixed self. There are three aspects of wisdom (prajna, shes rab). (a) Knowing the *relative truth* of how things work:

how everything arises in dependence upon causes and conditions, karma, etc. (b) Knowing the *ultimate truth* of the nature of things: how everything is empty of permanence, empty of being an independent fixed thing. (c) Knowing how to genuinely *benefit* oneself and other beings.

Traditional “preliminaries” that support shamatha and vipashyana

- ❖ Set up a clean quiet place to practice, perhaps with a Dharma text or Buddha image.
 - ❖ Reflect on one or more of the [four thoughts that turn the mind](#).
 - ❖ Relax and align your [physical posture](#).
 - ❖ Recite the [seven branch prayer](#).
 - ❖ [Take refuge and generate the spirit of awakening](#).
 - ❖ Touch into [four kindness, compassion, joy, or equanimity](#).
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The “primary practice” of shamatha-vipashyana

Calm abiding (*shamatha, shinay*)

1. Rest attention in the physical sensations of the breathing body.
2. Without losing body sensations, also open to hearing and seeing.
3. While resting aware of breathing, hearing, and seeing, also open to the arising of pleasant and unpleasant feelings.
4. When you can rest awake to breathing, hearing, seeing, pleasant and unpleasant feelings, then open to mental activities (thinking, storytelling, memories, images, impulses).

Just open and rest in the whole jumble of experiences as they come and go. Practice resting in awareness, without picking and choosing, without antidotes or analysis. Just the subtlest adjustments to support resting awake. It's like building a house of cards; whenever awareness collapses, gently return to sensations, then open to feelings, then open to thoughts.

Clear seeing (*vipashyana, lhatong*)

5. Occasionally notice how sensations, feelings, and thoughts come and go, ever changing, over and over, they arise, persist a moment, and then fade away.
Don't bother analyzing or describing -- just notice the ever-changing nature of every experience.
6. Occasionally pose this question: *What experiences all this?*
Just pose the question and see what you see. Like dropping a pebble into a pond and seeing the ripples spread. When the mind tries to take over with analyzing and describing, let the inquiry go! Return to resting in awareness, open to sensations, feelings, and thoughts.

“Short sessions, many of them.”