

Yogācāra śamatha practice

In a formulation originating with Asaṅga (4th CE), *śamatha* practice is said to progress through nine “mental abidings” (S. *navākārā cittasthiti*, Tib. *sems gnas dgu*), leading to a tenth stage, an exceptional state of meditative concentration called the first *dhyāna* (Pāli: *jhāna*; Tib. *bsam gtan*) which is often said to be a state of tranquility or bliss. Thus, it furthers the right concentration aspect of the noble eightfold path.

The successful result of śamatha is also sometimes characterized as meditative absorption (*samādhi*, *ting nge 'dzin*) and meditative equipoise (*samāhita*, *mnyam-bzhag*), and freedom from the five obstructions (*āvaraṇa*, *sgrib-pa*). It may also result in the *siddhis* of clairvoyance (*abhijñā*, *mgon shes*) and magical emanation (*nirmāna*, *sprul pa*).

Asaṅga delineates the nine mental abidings in his *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and the *Śrāvakabhūmi* chapter of his *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*. It is also found in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* of Maitreyaṇātha. The system of the five faults and eight antidotes originates with Maitreyaṇātha's *Madhyānta-vibhāga*. The whole system is elaborated further in the three *Bhāvanākrama* texts (particularly the second one) of Kamalaśīla, a later author, and by generations of Tibetan commentators. Thus the following śamatha formulation derives originally from the Yogācāra tradition.

To practice *śamatha*, one must select an object of observation (*ālambana*, *dmigs-pa*). Then one must overcome the **five faults** (*ādinava*, *nyes-dmigs*):

1. laziness (*kausīdya*, *le-lo*)
2. forgetting the instruction (*avavādasammosa*, *gdams-ngag brjed-pa*)
3. laxity (*laya*, *bying-ba*) and excitement (*audhatya*, *rgod-pa*). Laxity may be coarse (*audārika*, *rags-pa*) or subtle (*sūksma*, *phra-mo*). Lethargy (*styana*, *rmugs-pa*) is often also present, but is said to be less common.
4. non-application (*anabhisamskāra*, *'du mi-byed-pa*)
5. [over]application (*abhisamskāra*, *'du byed-pa*)

Using the **eight antidotes** (*pratipakṣa*, *gnyen-po*) or applications (*abhisamskāra*, *'du-byed pa*):

for laziness:

1. faith (*śraddhā*, *dad-pa*)
 - i. contemplate faults of distraction (*vikṣepa*, *rnam-par gyen-ba*)
2. aspiration (*chanda*, *'dun-pa*)
3. exertion (*vyayama*, *rtsol-ba*)
4. pliancy (*praśrabdhi*, *shin-sbyangs*)

for forgetting the instruction:

5. mindfulness (*smṛti*, *dran-pa*)

for laxity and excitement:

6. awareness (*samprajañña*, *shes-bzhin*)

for non-application:

7. application (*abhisamskāra*, *'du byed-pa*)

for overapplication:

8. non-application (*anabhisamskāra*, *'du mi-byed-pa*)

Six powers (*bala*, *stobs*) are also needed for *śamatha*:

1. hearing (*śruta*, *thos-pa*)
2. thinking (*cintā*, *bsam-pa*)
3. mindfulness (*smṛti*, *dran-pa*)
4. awareness (*samprajañña*, *shes-bzhin*)
5. effort (*vīrya*, *brtson-'grus*)
6. familiarity (*paricaya*, *yong-su 'dris-pa*)

Four modes of mental engagement (*manaskāra*, *yid-la byed-pa*) are said to be possible:

1. forcible engagement (*balavāhana*, *sgrim-ste 'jug-pa*)
2. interrupted engagement (*sacchidravāhana*, *chad-cing 'jug-pa*)
3. uninterrupted engagement (*niśchidravāhana*, *med-par 'jug-pa*)
4. spontaneous engagement (*anābhogavāhana*, *lhun-grub-tu 'jug-pa*)

The Nine Mental Abidings (*navākārā cittasthiti*, *sems-gnas dgu*) are:

1. placement of the mind (*cittasthāpana*, *sems 'jog-pa*)
2. continuous placement (*samsthāpana*, *rgyun-du 'jog-pa*)
3. re-placement (*avasthāpana*, *slan-te 'jog-pa*)
4. close placement (*upasthāpana*, *nye-bar 'jog-pa*)
5. disciplining (*damana*, *dul-bar byed-pa*)
6. pacifying (*śamana*, *zhi-bar byed-pa*)
7. thorough pacification (*vyupaśamana*, *nye-bar zhi-bar byed-pa*)
8. one-pointedness (*ekotīkarana*, *rtse-gcig-tu byed-pa*)
9. placement in equipoise (*samādhāna*, *mnyam-par 'jog-pa*)