

Śamatha and Vipāśyanā in the Mahāmudrā Tradition

Main Topics



1. Listening, Contemplating, and Meditating
2. About The Text
3. Reasons for Meditating
4. Types of Meditation
5. Ordinary Meditation
6. Stages of Tranquility

Listening, Contemplating, and Meditating

Listening

- When we have doubts, we cannot totally focus our mind
- Listening to the Dharma helps clear our doubts

Contemplating

- Without contemplation, we easily forget what we have heard
- Digesting the information helps us to retain knowledge

Meditating

- Meditation means getting used to the practice
- Getting used to the practice leads to realization

About the Text



Dakpo Tashi Namgyal
(1511-1587)

About the Text



This text contains everything there is to know about meditation:

- It explains the importance of meditation
- The two main approaches to meditation
- The direct and gradual approaches are explained
- The advice is given in a clear and simple way

Resolution to compose this work:

- Most practitioners do not have experience in the practice of meditation and some have only a vague idea of the vital aspects
- The author explains the practice of meditation in an easily understood manner

About the Text



The text explains two important aspects:

1. The reasons why meditation on the nature of the mind is important
2. The stages of meditation

The Reasons For Meditation

Reasons for Meditating



- The sole purpose is to tame the wild mind
- Temporarily allows us to be calm and happy
- Ultimately to attain liberation

Three Reasons Why Meditation on the True Nature of Mind Is Essential:

1. All Realities Are But Mental Phenomena
2. The Deficiencies Arising from Not Meditating on the True Nature of the Mind
3. Benefits Arising from Meditation

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

“Everything is the creation of the mind. There is no external object that is not mind.”

- *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*

All things encompassing the phenomena of existence and enlightenment, samsara and nirvana, are the creation of the mind.

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

- The deluded mind, unaware of its true nature, perceives duality of self and others from beginningless time
- Clinging to this builds up an impression that causes external phenomena to appear, which in reality do not truly exist
- Being unaware of the true nature of our mind, our strong tendency for dualism builds up, and the confused mind starts to see everything as external

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

All things, external and internal,

Are designated by the mind.

Apart from the mind, nothing else exists.

- *Samputa Tantra*

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

All things appear as perfect reality to the mind.

Apart from the mind no reality as such exists.

To perceive external reality is to see wrongly.

- *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

The illusion of an external reality that appears to be concrete is caused by the accumulating sediment of delusion, the way earth and rock are formed out of wind-stirred water.

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

Saraha says:

“Even though water is soft
It turns solid like a rock if stirred by wind.
An ignorant mind, if stirred by thoughts
Turns the formless into a solid entity.”

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

How does the mind fall into samsara or attain nirvana?

A deluded mind does not know that the nature of duality is samsara and the opposite is nirvana.

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

The *Hevajra Tantra* teaches:

Ignorance gives rise to existential form.

Purged of ignorance samsara becomes nirvana.

Reasons for Meditating



All realities are but mental phenomena

The mind is like an artist: It creates.

All the existential realms,

All these are created by the multifarious mind.

- *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

Three Reasons Why Meditation on the True Nature of Mind Is Essential:

1. All Realities are But Mental Phenomena
2. The Deficiencies Arising from Not Meditating on the True nature of the Mind
3. Benefits Arising from Meditation

Reasons for Meditating



The deficiencies arising from not meditating on the true nature of the mind:

- Without meditation, dharma acquired is ineffective.
- If one does not meditate, one will succumb to defilement
- Listening and contemplating alone will achieve only a temporary benefit and will fail to realize ultimate liberation.

Reasons for Meditating



The deficiencies arising from not meditating on the true nature of the mind:

The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* says:

- Like a weak person carried by the waves and dying of thirst
- Like a generous wealthy person dying of hunger
- Like a dying doctor who is unable to cure himself
- Like a banker who has not a penny
- Like a palace maid who has everything but does not own anything
- Like a blind artist who cannot be made to paint a market scene
- Like a boatman on a great lake who transports many across but dies in the lake himself
- Like someone who praises the prosperity of others yet does not achieve anything himself

Reasons for Meditating



The deficiencies arising from not meditating on the true nature of the mind:

Listening and contemplation alone will not help us solve our problems, similar to how merely seeing and smelling food does not satisfy hunger.

Three Reasons Why Meditation on the True Nature of Mind Is Essential:

1. All Realities are But Mental Phenomena
2. The Deficiencies Arising from Not Meditating on the True nature of the Mind
3. Benefits Arising from Meditation

Reasons for Meditating



Benefits arising from meditation:

Meditating on reality for a very brief moment is more beneficial than listening and contemplating the dharma for many eons.

- *Tattvaparakāśa Sūtra*

Reasons for Meditating



Benefits arising from meditation:

Meditating for one day is more beneficial than listening and contemplating for many eons.

- *Mahoshnisha Sūtra*

Meditation practice is the source of our wisdom which frees us from rebirth and death.

Reasons for Meditating



Benefits arising from meditation:

Meditating for one session daily is more beneficial and more meaningful than protecting beings of the three realms.

- *Tokpa Gye Sūtra*

Reasons for Meditating



Benefits arising from meditation:

Meditation is the only practice that helps us to abandon attachment to worldly objects. It cuts and washes away our doubt. The *Dasacakra-ksitigarba Sūtra* says:

Doubts may be cleared by meditating upon tranquility. Nothing else can do that except the understanding of tranquility. Therefore, to meditate upon tranquility is the best of all.

Reasons for Meditating



Benefits arising from meditation:

Meditative tranquility eliminates forbidden sensory pleasures and enables one to achieve the highest virtues, perfect cognition, and mental tranquility.

-Prajñāparamitā-samcayagatha

Reasons for Meditating



Benefits arising from meditation:

Merely through contemplation all sentient beings will reach the three kinds of enlightenment.

- *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*

Types of Meditation

Types of Meditation



There are thousands of methods of meditation but the Buddha summarized them into two main types:

1. Tranquility Meditation (Śamatha)
2. Insight Meditation (Vipaśyanā)

Types of Meditation



Tranquility Meditation

- One pointed meditation
- The exercise is to develop a focus
- Without focus meditation is not possible

Insight Meditation

- Analytical meditation
- The key method to understand the true nature of reality
- Many types: conceptual, non-conceptual, with external objects, internal visualized object, non-visualized, etc.

Ordinary Meditation of Tranquility & Insight

7 Aspects of Ordinary Meditation:

1. The Cause of Tranquility & Insight
2. Elimination of hindrances to tranquility & insight
3. Identification of true nature of tranquility & insight
4. Distinction of tranquility & insight
5. Examination of the stages in tranquility & insight
6. Meditation on joint tranquility & insight
7. Results of tranquility & insight

The Cause of Tranquility and Insight

“What are the causes of tranquility and insight?

Tranquility arises from pure moral discipline.

The cause of insight is the pure view based on listening and contemplating.”

- *Samdhanirmocana Sūtra*

The Causes of Tranquility according to the Middle Length *Stages of Meditation*

- A harmonious environment
- Curbing desire
- Contentment
- Limiting activities
- Maintaining moral discipline
- Eliminating discursive thoughts

The Causes of Tranquility

A harmonious environment:

- a place where proper nourishment is obtained
- a secured place free from diseases
- free from enemies
- a quiet place by day and night
- a place with like minded friends

The Causes of Tranquility

“The environment where a wise man seeks realization
Is one where proper nourishment is obtained,
Where shelter is secure, the land suitable,
Where friends are good,
And where the yogin finds favorable conditions.”

- *Sūtrālaṃkāra*

Tranquility & Insight



Curbing Desires

- No attachment to food, clothing of quality or quantity.
- Avoiding a luxurious life.

Contentment

- Be satisfied with simple food and clothing.

Limiting Activities

- Abstain from harmful deeds and the practice of astrology, etc.

Moral Discipline

- Maintain moral discipline of Vinaya, Bodhisattvayāna, and Vajrayāna
- Abandon desire and other discursive thoughts

The Cause of Insight

- Association with holy gurus
- Acquisition of knowledge
- Proper contemplation

Tranquility & Insight



Association with holy gurus:

The holy guru advises you on your meditation practice, bodhicitta, and about helping others.



Acquisition of Knowledge

- To seek extensive knowledge through hearing
- Listen to discourses whose ultimate meaning is flawless
- One cannot achieve insight by listening to teachings with only conventional meanings.

Proper Contemplation

- to ponder the definitive (ultimate) meaning of the discourse
- to apply inferences and realize the perfect view of reality
- We will then have great progress in dharma knowledge

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2. Elimination of Hindrances to Tranquility & Insight
3. Identification of True Tranquility and Insight
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Tranquility & Insight



According to the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*:

Hindrances to Tranquility

- Mental agitation
- Regret
- Doubt

Hindrances to Insight

- Dullness
- Sluggishness
- Sleepiness

Hindrances to both Tranquility & Insight

- Desire
- Malice

Tranquility & Insight



According to the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*

Mental agitation

- A type of attachment that hinders tranquility
- Caused by seeing pleasant, beautiful objects
- The mind is distracted by it all day

Regret

- Arises out of dullness
- Regret disturbs the stability of mind
- Can be timely or untimely, reasonable or unreasonable

Hindrances to Insight

- Sluggishness
- Sleepiness
- Doubt
- Craving
- Malice

Sluggishness

- Sluggishness helps & supports all defilements
- Makes the body & mind very heavy
 - When the body feels heavy, we sleep longer
 - We become restless and want to move about
 - Can't meditate even for a short while
 - Even when the mind is determined to meditate, the body is unable to respond

Sleepiness

- Sleepiness results in the loss of sensory function and mental focus
- Causes all activities to stop

Doubt

- This is the worst hindrance
- Doubt can cause the practitioner to give up
- Consult the guru before it gets worse

Craving

- Creates a determination to fulfill the specific craving
- This disturbs tranquility and insight

Malice

- An intent to hurt others because of jealousy or hatred
- Another form of agitation keeping the mind very active and disturbs our meditation
- This is harmful to both others and ourselves
- We should recognize this and deal with it immediately

Tranquility & Insight



Instructions on the removal of hindrances

Hindrance	Antidote
Mental agitation	Practice impermanence
Regret	Don't think about the cause
Sluggishness	Visualize joyful events
Dullness	Change visualization, motivate oneself
Sleepiness	Visualize something bright; open eyes
Doubt	Develop resoluteness
Craving	Contemplate the negative effects. Develop contentment
Malice	Practice compassion and loving kindness

Tranquility & Insight



Instructions on the removal of hindrances

5 Problems	8 Antidotes
1. Laziness	1. Faith 2. Aspiration 3. Striving 4. Pliancy
2. Forgetfulness	5. Mindfulness
3. Dullness & Mental Agitation	6. Vigilance
4. Non-application	7. Application
5. Over-application	8. Equanimity

The removal of laziness

1. Faith: three types
2. Aspiration: which these help regeneration of effort
3. Striving
4. Pliancy: two types

3 Types of Faith

1. Pure Faith

- Feeling of being touched by a person or thing

2. Liking Faith

- Generation of faith and belief in someone

3. Convinced Faith

- Strong conviction and belief that never changes

2 Types of Pliancy

1. Physical Pliancy

- The ability to meditate for long periods without feeling tired
- No feeling of body aching and in great comfort

2. Mental Pliancy

- The ability to meditate anywhere
- Visualizing whatever we want comes spontaneously

Śamatha is achieved when we have Perfect Ease

The Removal of Forgetfulness

- Mindfulness will overcome forgetfulness
- Listening alone will not do
- We need to revise what we have heard or read
- Mindfulness keeps reminding us
- Keeps us alert and on guard to avoid mistakes

The Removal of Dullness & Excitement

- We need to practice mindfulness and awareness
- Mindfulness constantly reminds us of our actions
- Awareness is like an eye watching us to ensure that we do not make mistakes
- Mindfulness and awareness are our best teachers

Non-Exertion

- The mind is far away instead of meditating
- At this time we require Mental Exertion

Equanimity

- Letting the mind rest in its true nature
- When the mind is overactive, it is unable to rest in peace
- Practicing both śamatha and vipaśyana will calm the mind by removing all hindrances
- Equanimity will develop naturally

Specific Means for Removal of Dullness & Mental Agitation

Most veils clouding contemplative absorption may be summarized as dullness and mental agitation. These arise from harmful acts of body, speech, or mind.

Tranquility & Insight



The Sa'ingoshi says:

Dullness arises from the uncontrolled senses, gluttony, the avoidance of meditation at dawn and dusk, from living without vigilance or in mental torpor, from excessive sleep or an unskilled meditation. Sloth, which undermines eagerness, industriousness, contemplation, or investigation is another cause of dullness. Meditation on a fragment of tranquility without mastery of the whole, leaving the mind in darkness, and taking no delight in focusing it on a perceptive image—these actions foster dullness.

Refraining from Causes of Dullness & Mental Agitation:

Source of dullness

- Not controlling body, speech, and mind due to ignorance
- Not controlling diet due to ignorance
- Not meditating at dawn and dusk due to ignorance
- Laziness and lack of effort due to ignorance

Source of mental agitation

- Same as above, but due to attachment and an unsettled mind

Elimination of Dullness & Mental Agitation:

- Dullness should be removed by contemplating its causes: sluggishness and sleep.
- It can be cleared by strolling, watching the moon and stars, or washing one's face.
- It can also be cleared by recalling the qualities of the Buddha or the Buddha's face
- Visualize a bright light

Remedy for Mental Agitation:

- Meditate on impermanence
- Think of consequences of not meditating
- Recall all the suffering created by sensory pleasures
- Refrain from vigorous activities
- Avoiding perception of objects that arouse passion
- Engage in multiple prostrations.

7 Aspects of Ordinary Meditation:

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Tranquility & Insight



Tranquility

Fixing the mind on any object and maintaining the focus without distraction

Insight

Wisdom that analyses the reality of knowledge

Tranquility and insight are actually very similar.
Eventually, both practices merge into one

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Distinguishing Tranquility

1. Two divisions based on nature: mundane and supramundane
 2. Three divisions based on function: blissful, etc.
 3. Nine divisions based on method: 9 stages for achieving tranquility
- (the 9 stages will be dealt with later in the presentation)

Distinguishing Three Types of Insight:

1. That which originates from conceptual judgment
 - When an object comes to our focus, we commence investigating the object that appears before us
2. That which is attained through perfect inquiry
 - After investigating the object, we try to understand the nature of the object
3. That which originates from analytical examination
 - Having understood the nature of the object, we further investigate it in order to attain realization

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Tranquility & Insight



As a first step, it is essential to commence with the practice of Śamatha before Vipāśyanā

- Śamatha stabilizes the mind
- Without stability, analytical meditation is not possible

7 Aspects of Ordinary Meditation:

1. The cause of tranquility and insight
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Two reasons why we need to combine both practices

- Without tranquility, it is not possible to practice analytical meditation
- Śamatha alone will not liberate us
- One could be in a state of bliss and so attached to it that one could sit in meditation for thousands of years
- The blissful state is not a state of realization
- We need to practice vipaśyanā to attain realization

Two reasons why we need to combine both practices

- Śamatha makes the mind unshakeable
- Vipāśyanā makes the mind unmovable
- Vipāśyanā gradually removes all the hindrances and poisons, including the subconscious attachment to samsara, until they are completely gone
- Most importantly, vipāśyanā is the main remedy to destroy the cycle of rebirth, old age, sickness, and death

The method to combine both practices

- Śamatha and vipaśyanā are actually the same practice with two different names
- It is like two rivers flowing from different directions into the same ocean

7 Aspects of Ordinary Meditation:

1. The cause of tranquility and insight
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7. Results of Tranquility & Insight

Results of Tranquility (Śamatha)

- It purifies the mind of defilements
- Refers to all the 3 yanas
- Prevents clinging to sensory pleasures
- Reduces desire and attachment to worldly objects
- Achieve total peace
- Brings forth supreme knowledge
- Ability to reach deepest meditation, but this may hinder progress due to rebirth in the supreme realms

Results of Insight (Vipaśyanā)

- You are able to bring about the happiness of all sentient beings
- When attainment is achieved, we will be totally liberated from samsara
- The combined benefit of śamatha and vipaśyanā is the attainment total realization

Summary of Tranquility (śamatha)

- **Cause:** purity of moral discipline
- **Function:** gradually liberate seeker from the bondage of the dualistic mind
- **Obstacle:** attachment to one's body or belongings
- **Obscuration:** mental agitation, regret, and doubt
- **Purification:** abandon sluggishness & drowsiness

Summary of Insight (Vipaśyana)

- **Cause:** wisdom acquired through listening and contemplation
- **Function:** liberate beings from samsara
- **Obstacle:** lack of appreciation for the work of the awakened ones (arhats, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas)
- **Obscuration:** sleepiness and sluggishness
- **Purification:** abandon mental agitation & regret

Tranquility & Insight



When we are able to eliminate the obscurations of both
śamatha and vipaśyanā

	Obscuration
śamatha	Mental agitation, regret, and doubt
vipaśyanā	Sleepiness and sluggishness
both	Desire and malice

We will then be able to attain the Dharmakaya
TOTAL LIBERATION

Stages of Tranquility

Stages of Tranquility



There are 3 aspects to tranquility

1. The preparation for achieving tranquility
2. The elucidation of its mental images
3. The method of realizing tranquility

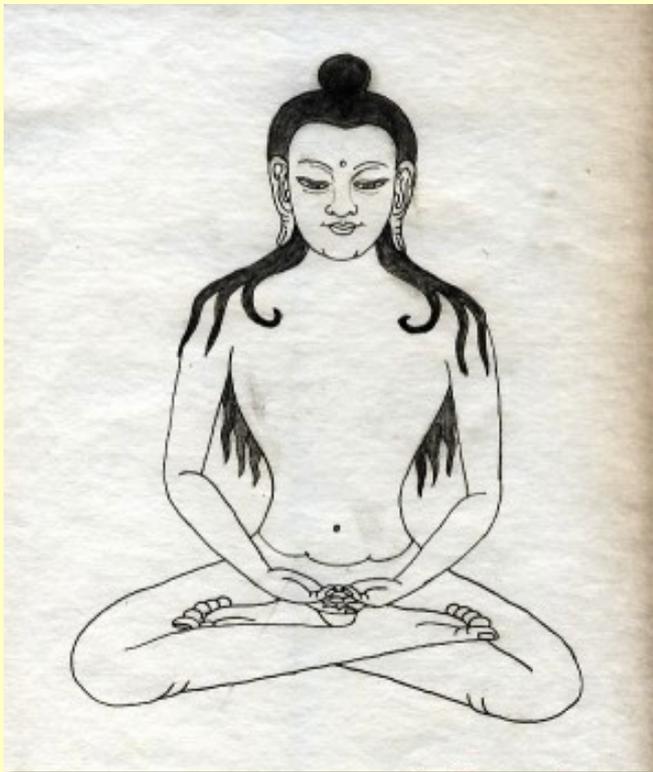
Stages of Tranquility



The preparation for achieving tranquility

- Overcome dullness & mental agitation
- Do not overeat
- Meditate in a quiet environment (for beginners)
- Follow correct meditation posture
 - Correct posture enables “vital energy” to flow, stabilizing one’s visualization
 - Correct posture involves 7 aspects

Seven Sitting Postures of Vairocana



1. Sitting in the vajra position
2. Right palm over the left with thumbs touching each other and vice versa for women, 4 finger widths below the navel
3. Straight spine
4. Shoulders straight and equally balanced
5. Chin slightly pointing downwards
6. Tongue lightly touching the upper palate
7. Eyes focusing at a point in front of the tip of nose

Stages of Tranquility



Effect of Wrong Sitting Posture

1. If our body bends towards the right, we may initially feel calm, but grasping to sense objects arises.
2. If our body bends towards the left, our mind may initially be tranquil, but discursive thoughts will arise.
3. If we bend our head downwards too much, our mind may initially have clarity, but it will then become agitated.
4. If raise our heads upwards, our mind may initially be lucid and relaxed, but it will then become distracted.
5. If we keep changing our focus, many thoughts will start to arise and our meditation will become unstable.

Stages of Tranquility



Countless Benefits of Meditation

- Meditation helps to neutralize and smooth the flow of “wind” inside the channels of our body.
- That helps generate more energy and better focus
- The posture helps to harmonize the four elements of the body and improves health and makes one more graceful
- Reduces the number of thoughts in the mind
- It reduces the effects of dullness and mental agitation.

Stages of Tranquility



There are 3 aspects to tranquility

1. The preparation for achieving tranquility
2. The Elucidation of its Mental Images
3. The method of realizing tranquility

Stages of Tranquility



Elucidation of its Mental Images:

1. Elucidation of general concentration
2. Different meditation to meet differing needs
3. Visualization of initial stages of practice
 - Achieved through inward concentration
 - e.g. visualizing oneself as the Buddha or skeleton, etc.
 - Achieved through outward concentration
 - e.g. counting breaths, visualizing a small object, etc.
4. Maintaining a visualized image through mindfulness and vigilance

Stages of Tranquility



Elucidation of General Concentration

This has four sections:

1. Comprehensive visualization
2. Analytical meditation
3. Skillful investigation
4. Meditation on the elimination of mental defilements

Stages of Tranquility



Comprehensive Visualization

It is comprised of 4 sections:

1. Focusing the mind on a perceived image with discrimination
2. Focusing the mind on a perceived image without discrimination
3. The object of insight meditation is the ultimate nature of phenomena
4. Focusing the mind on realizing its spiritual aim

Stages of Tranquility



Analytical Meditation

Analytical meditation to eliminate desire and defilements, and to prevent their reoccurrence, has 5 parts:

1. Visualization of the revolting rotting corpse, bodily waste, etc.
2. Visualization of compassion that promotes happiness
3. Visualization of the interdependence of cause and condition through contemplation on the twelve links of this law
4. Critical analysis of the nature of the six elements, e.g. earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness
5. Practice of watching and counting and rhythm of one's breath to guard against distraction of the mind

Stages of Tranquility



Skillful Investigation

Skillful investigation to remove the concept of self has 5 parts:

1. Understanding the 5 elements gives insight into the non-existence of self (“I”)
2. Understanding the 18 elements gives insight into the inter-relationship of causes and conditions of each
3. Skillful analysis of the 6 sense faculties gives insight into the fact that the 6 sense consciousness derive from the sense faculties and their objects.
4. Contemplating dependent arising gives insight into the 12 links
5. Contemplating cause and effect gives insight into karma

Stages of Tranquility



Meditation on the elimination of mental defilements

- The antidote for mental defilements has two relative levels - coarse and subtle.
- It is of utmost importance to understand the Four Noble Truths
- Understanding the first two noble truths weakens the root of mental defilement, while the last two eliminate it.

Stages of Tranquility



Visualization

According to Bodhibhadra, tranquility can be achieved by inward or outward concentration.

Inward concentration refers to visualization of the body and the things associated with it. This includes:

- Visualizing oneself as a Buddha, deity, or skeleton
- Focusing on the breath, a symbol, or bliss

Outward concentration refers to ordinary things as well as sacred things such as syllables.

Stages of Tranquility



There are 3 Aspects to Tranquility

1. The preparation for achieving tranquility
2. The elucidation of its mental images
3. The Method of Realizing Tranquility

Stages of Tranquility



Method of Realizing Tranquility

- 8 points of mental processes for stability (discussed earlier)
- 9 stages of settling the mind
- 6 powerful methods for achieving these stages

Stages of Tranquility



9 Stages of settling the mind

1. Stabilizing the mind
2. Maintaining concentration
3. Revitalizing concentration
4. Firmly stabilizing the mind
5. Mastery of concentration
6. Pacification
7. Complete pacification
8. One pointed concentration
9. Settling the mind in tranquil equipoise

Stages of Tranquility



6 Powers which help us to achieve these stages

1. Power of listening
2. Power of contemplation
3. Power of mindfulness
4. Power of vigilance
5. Power of effort
6. Power of practice

