

Meditation of Divine Dwelling in Elements and Colours

Basic practice of the Dibba-Vihāra-Jhāna explained by Venerable Thera Āyukusala

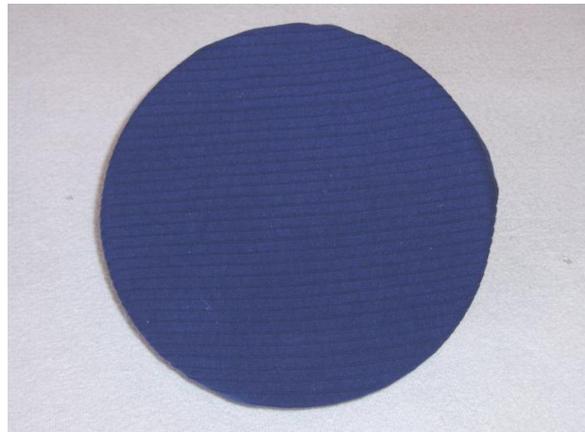
Buddha has taught three types of meditation, which he named “*Tīni-Uccā-Sayana-Mahā-Sayanāni*” or the “Three Luxurious Dwelling in Comfort” in the Venāgapura-Sutta. Amongst these three, the first one is the meditation called “*Dibba-Uccāsayana-Mahā-Sayana*” or in short “*Dibba-Vihāra*” that leads to the development of divine or parapsychological powers such as telepathy (*dibba-cakkhu*). The second one is the “*Brahma-Vihāra*” or “Unlimited Dwelling” in love, compassion, joy, or equanimity. The third type of meditation is the “*Ariya-Vihāra*” or “Noble Dwelling”, which is the supramundane way to the final goal of Buddha’s Dhamma. However the “*Dibba-Vihāra*” is important as the means to develop concentration necessary for the meditation practice of mindfulness and insight, *satipatthāna-vipassanā*, which is the means of the “*Ariya-Vihāra*”.

The ancient Sri Lankan tradition of *Dibba-Vihāra* practice begins with the earth-element (*pathavi-dhātu*) and proceeds to the devices (*kasina*) of other elements before taking up the colours — this way gives it the unsurpassed instruction manual for meditation and Dhamma teachers, *Visuddhi-Magga*. Nowadays some rare meditation teachers give instruction how to meditate on colours, however no contemporary Buddhist school is known to teach systematically all the various techniques of *Dibba-Vihāra*. In our Āyukusala tradition, the *Dibba-Vihāra* instruction begins with colours (*vanna*) and proceeds to the elements (*dhātu*), forms, images of Buddha, deities and ritualized situations (*buddha-rūpa*, *deva-anussati*, *cāga-anussati*, *sīlabbata-nimitta*, *yantra*); we win thus in successive steps the multimodal images (*uggaha-nimitta*), which integrate all sense qualities (*pañca-kāma-guṇa*).

The most common objects of the Dibba-Vihāra meditation are the colours of blue and yellow...



This is an example of a good preparatory image (*parikamma-nimitta*) based on the *nīla-kasina* or blue device made of cloth.



The *kasina* like this one is not so convenient because of its “too regular” irregularities.



An advanced practitioner may use any object of “his” colour to trigger the meditation attainment.



Getting preparatory image (*parikamma-nimitta*) involves actions of body, speech and mind.



Important part of meditation is to mentally reduce the irregularities of colour and form.



The irregularities in a preparatory image should, however, not be too excessive.



The glossy surface is not convenient either...



Despite of the meditator's decision to work upon the white, it may be difficult to figure it out here.



The background should be neutral.



This is a good *parikamma-nimitta*.

Here are some quotations from the book by Mirko Frýba: *The Practice of Happiness* (Boston, Shambhala Publishers 1995, chapter “*Nīla-Kasina: The World in Blue*”), in which more instruction on *Dibba-Vihāra* is available:
...Traditionally, a *bhikkhu* or *samanera* is first introduced to *kasina* meditation when his supportive basis of *sīla* has been faultlessly preserved for a long time and his relationship to his teacher has been firmly established. Then he receives the complete instructions, withdraws into retreat, and during his entire waking life keeps the meditative object that has been given him at the peak of the hierarchy of his objects of consciousness. At the same time, he keeps mindfully and with clear comprehension to a strictly regulated daily routine. All phenomena of the worlds that open during this strict meditation he regards purely as hindrances (*nīvarana*) and pays them no further heed. When he has advanced to complete *jhāna*, he talks over the whole experience with his meditation master. ...

...As soon as you have made the necessary preparations and have sat down to meditate, speaking softly to yourself, make the following resolve:

“Now I am sitting down in order to cultivate the perception of blue for the next fifteen minutes.”

...At the end of the decided time, stretch your arms upward with a deep inhalation and exhalation and say mentally:

“Now I have set aside the meditative object "blue". Fresh and happy, I will return to everyday things.”

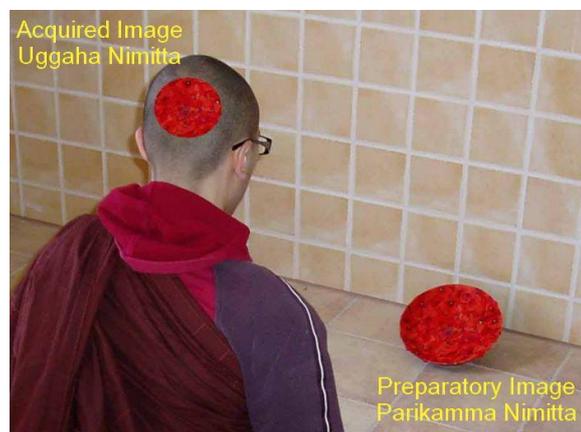
... During the exercise, sit erect, relaxed, and comfortable so that you have the blue disk three to five feet in front of you, not too low and no higher than your head. The perception of the blue disk, to which — without effort, sitting comfortably and calmly — you turn your attention, is called *parikamma-nimitta*, the "preparatory image." The process at this stage of the exercise is similar to that illustrated in *Diagram 5*. Speaking softly to yourself, label the inner arisings and clearly comprehend that the perception of the blue disk is the most interesting and rewarding one at this time. If your eyes become tired, this is a sign that you have been looking in a way that was not entirely composed and relaxed. In such a case, close your eyes for a while and recover your composure — for example, by means of mindfulness of breathing. If you feel heavy and lethargic, then it is a good idea to check your sitting posture, sit up straight, and stretch your arms above your head with a deep inbreath a few times. Then go back to the meditative object. If the preparatory image begins to shimmer or changes in other ways, this only means that the mind is a bit agitated. Calm yourself again with a few minutes of mindfulness of breathing or, if you cannot do it sitting up, practice *sayāna* for a while. There should be no changes in the preparatory image (*parikamma-nimitta*); the most that is allowable is that with time it can become clearer and more vivid.

After having practiced in this way "a hundred or a thousand times or more," as the *Visuddhi-Magga* says, perhaps it will happen at some point that with your eyes closed you see the same image as the *parikamma-nimitta*. This image seen with closed eyes is called *uggaha-nimitta*, or the "apprehended image"; it should be just as clear as the preparatory image. At this point comes a crucial transition, which is marked by a spatial displacement. The *Visuddhi-Magga* describes it in the following words: "Beginning from the instant of its arising, one should no longer remain sitting in that same place, but remove to one's own dwelling place and sitting there, unfold the exercise further." In other words, we take the image home with us — we have it now. However, the apprehension and transfer of the *uggaha-nimitta* can fail repeatedly — the preparatory image can fall apart before we sit down again.

When we finally succeed in being able to sit down or possibly even lie down and develop the unitary image of blue with better detachment (*viveka* — cf. the eight stages of establishing ecstasy beginning on page 127). Then through the gesture of a spatial displacement, which represents an extension of the element of psychodrama, we also leave behind at the old spot our hindrances (*nīvarana*) and all other mental impurities. We now sit in a previously prepared place, which is better protected from outside light and noise than the old one, and work on the mental "corresponding image" (*patibhāga-nimitta*) through apprehension by means of thought (*vitakka*) and reflection (*vicāra*), as illustrated in *Diagram 6*. At this stage, all details of the background or the preparatory image have disappeared, that is, we no longer perceive the irregularities of the blue disk, the weave of the cloth, and so forth. We are now aware only of the unity of blue, which has clarified to a crystal-radiant vividness. We have now reached neighboring concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*). We now cultivate the five constituents of ecstasy and harmonize them until we attain the full concentration of *jhāna*. Later we can experiment with expanding and diminishing the unitary image and with diving under and popping up in the "world of blue."



Sitting not further than a yard away...



The acquired image includes all of the poppies.



Comfortable posture in pleasant surroundings...
To acquire the image, any posture is good.



Yet the tray with corn poppy flowers may be a better choice than some strawberry cake.

There are many conditions determining the name-concept of the object in the *Dibba-Vihāra*, which are derived from the surroundings, the locality of the object's origin, the associated meanings, etc. Here are some quotations from the *Visuddhi-Magga, The Path of Purification* (4th chapter "Pathavī-Kasina"): ...The colour should not be reviewed. The characteristic should not be given attention. But rather, while not ignoring the colour, attention should be given by setting the mind on the [name] concept as the most outstanding mental datum, relegating the colour to the position of a property of its physical support. That can be called by any one he likes among the names for earth (*pathavī*), such as "earth (*pathavī*)", "the Great One (*mahī*)", "the Friendly One (*medinī*)", "ground (*bhūmi*)", ...whichever suits his manner of perception. ...it can be developed by saying "Earth, earth". It should be adverted to now with eyes open, now with eyes shut. ...in this way a hundred times, a thousand times, and even more than that...



Touching is more important than seeing...



Hardness, roughness, heaviness...



The completed earth-device (*pathavī-kasina*)



...has also the characteristic of impermanence.

The fire element (*tejo-dhātu*) and the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*) are, from the very beginning of practice, viewed either as an unlimited or a limited image, for which a special device with a hole is used.

Here are some quotations from the *Visuddhi-Magga, The Path of Purification* (5th chapter):

...He should make a hole a span and four fingers wide in a rush mat or a piece of leather or a cloth, and after hanging it in front of the fire, he should sit down... (in those ancient times no metal sheet was used)

...One who is learning the air kasina apprehends the sign in air. He notices the tops of growing sugarcane moving to and fro; or he notices the tops of bamboos, or the tops of trees, or the ends of the hair, moving to and fro; or he notices the touch of it on the body. ...

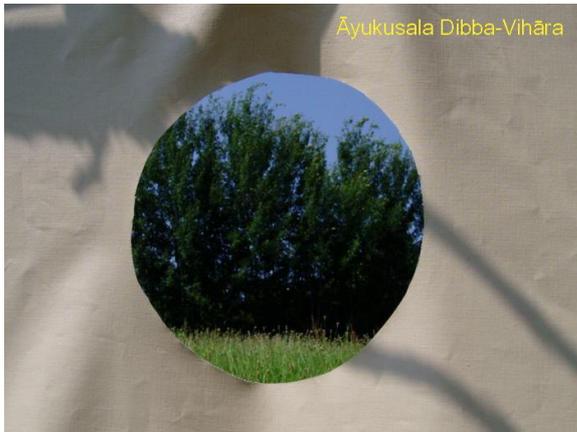
...Here the learning sign (*uggaha-nimitta*) appears to move like the swirl of hot steam on rice gruel just withdrawn from the oven. ...



The cloth screen through which can be viewed...



a limited image of wind moving in the corn field.



The tops of trees and grass moving to and fro...



Robes and flags are moving in the wind...



According to its placing, the metal sheet screen can be used to view the elements of wind (*vāto*), limited space (*paricchinākāsa*) or light (*āloka*)...



The element of fire is not only viewed as colour and movement, but also smelled and — as most important! — felt in its immense heat.



The vision of fire may reflect one's own face or various other appearances... which though do not belong to the *tejo-kasina*.



Only the contact (*phassa*) between the fire on the outer sense base and the experience of the inner sense bases (*āyatana*) is perceived.

Here again a quotation from the *Visuddhi-Magga, The Path of Purification* (5th chapter):

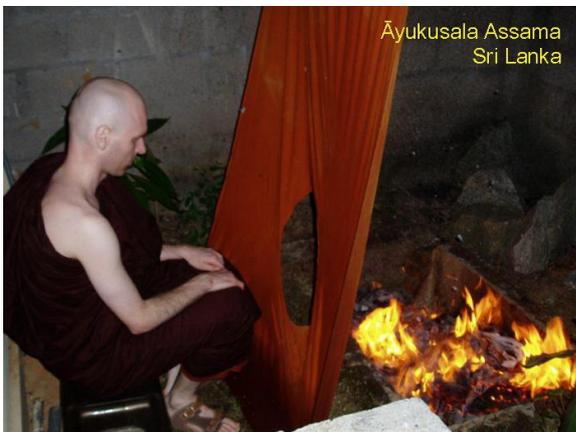
...The fire kasina is the basis for such powers as smoking, flaming, causing showers of sparks, countering fire with fire, ability to burn only what one wants to burn, causing light for the purpose of seeing visible objects with the divine eye, burning up the body by means of the fire element at the time of attaining nibbana. ...



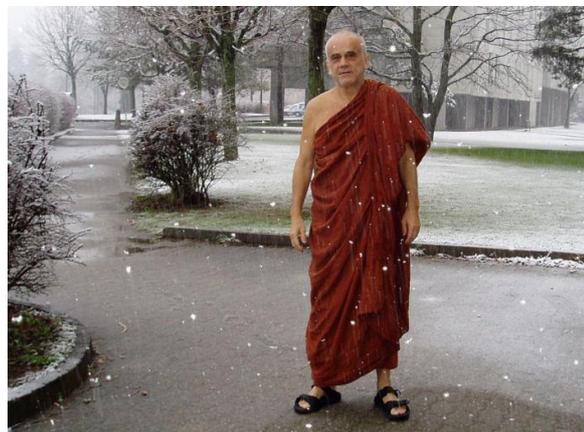
The memory imprint of the clear cut limited sign of fire serves as the trigger to attain absorption (*jhāna*) anytime at will.



The non-limited perception of the fire element is remembered as a multimodal image of situation.



While using the cloth for the fire kasina, one has to water it to prevent its burning away.



touching snow and ice has in it more of the hard earth element than of the liquid water. However the most prominent is the negative fire element.



The standard setting of *āpo-kasina* meditation – ready to move to the second workplace.



Drinking, pouring, washing, splashing... The main water's characteristic is the cohesion.



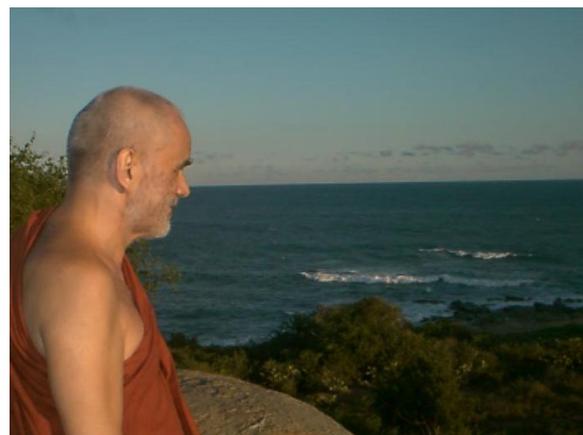
Water in movement viewed outside there...



Experience of being inside the stream of moving water element.



Water in monk's bowl is the best preparatory image... ...the waters of Ocean are unlimited.



All practice of the *Dibba-Vihāra* aims at the attainment of the full concentration of *jhāna*, which has five factors: naming through directed thought (*vitakka*), evaluative discerning (*vicāra*), ecstatic rapture (*pīti*), simple feeling of pleasure (*sukha*) and unifying one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ekaggatā*).

The Buddha's followers assembled in the Āyukusala Central European Sangha (ACES), hold the Dhamma to be skillful (*kusala*) living (*āyu*). The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path provides for character cultivation and handling everyday situations (*sīla-sikkhā*), meditation training (*samādhī-sikkhā*) and developing wisdom (*paññā-sikkhā*). This applies to both the lay and monastic orders (*sangha*). The ACES are not compliant to any particular sect (*nikāya*) of the various contemporary national Buddhist institutions. The ACES are following the original Buddha-Dhamma recorded in the Pāli Canon and kept alive in the unbroken tradition of Theravāda.

Pañcangika–Sutta (Anguttara–Nikāya V, 28)

The five factors of concentration (*jhānanga*) – the English quotation from: www.accesstoinsight.org

The Blessed One said: "Now what, monks, is five-factored noble right concentration? There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities — enters and remains in the first *jhāna*: rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal.

"Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder — saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without — would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal. This is the first development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

"Furthermore, with the stilling of directed thought and evaluation, he enters and remains in the second *jhāna*: rapture and pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation — internal assurance. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of composure.

"Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and with the skies periodically supplying abundant showers, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of composure. This is the second development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

"And furthermore, with the fading of rapture, he remains in equanimity, mindful and alert, and physically sensitive to pleasure. He enters and remains in the third *jhāna*, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding.' He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture.

"Just as in a blue-, white-, or red-lotus pond, there may be some of the blue, white, or red lotuses which, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those blue, white, or red lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture. This is the third development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

"And furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure and stress — as with the earlier disappearance of elation and distress — he enters and remains in the fourth *jhāna*: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.

"Just as if a man were sitting wrapped from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating his body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness. This is the fourth development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

"And furthermore, the monk has his theme of reflection well in hand, well attended to, well-considered, well-tuned (well-penetrated) by means of discernment.

"Just as if one person were to reflect on another, or a standing person were to reflect on a sitting person, or a sitting person were to reflect on a person lying down; even so, monks, the monk has his theme of reflection well in hand, well attended to, well-pondered, well-tuned (well-penetrated) by means of discernment. This is the fifth development of the five-factored noble right concentration.