



Ratnasambhava and Positive Emotion

2: Celebrating the Positive

Jhana Factors:

Piti as pleasurable physical vedana
Sukha as pleasurable mental vedana
Vitakka/Vicara as initial/sustained attention
Ekagrata as one-pointedness

Positive Spiral

There is a positive spiral that we can engage in through delighting in the pleasant vedana in experience:

Pleasure -> Interest/Curiosity -> Presence/Absorption/Concentration

Centring the attention and relaxing

Meditation initially involves centring the attention on its chosen object

It then deepens by relaxing

The positive spiral above is described in terms of bringing attention to pleasurable vedana. In itself, this can bring about a deepening intensity, and/or a deepening refinement.

Relaxing in to the experience is also a way of deepening.

As attention deepens, piti is absorbed in to sukha. This is characteristic of the move from 2nd to 3rd Jhana, but is also an indication of deepening absorption more broadly, and of the initial move from distraction in to absorption: sukha often emerges with awareness relaxing around piti, and this emergence is often characteristic of the unfoldment of the full set of jhana factors as one enters jhana.

Negative Spiral

There is a negative counterpart to be avoided in endeavouring to keep painful experience out of awareness.

Pain -> Aversion -> Avoidance, turning away, endeavouring to keep out of experience -> dullness

Or with a disengagement with neutral experience:

Lack of Pleasure/Enjoyment -> Boredom/Dullness -> Distraction

In all there are four possibilities: we can respond either creatively or reactively to experiences of pleasure or pain:

Two other possibilities

Creative engagement with experience in meditation is not contingent on pleasurable experience. Where painful mental states of hindrance are present, we can work creatively with these by turning towards them, and bringing a wise, mettaful attention to them, as described last week.

Also, pleasant experience is not always met creatively. Even the jhana factors of piti and sukha can be the object of sense-desire. In the tradition this is referred to as Bhava Tanha: the thirst or craving (tanha) for particular states of being (bhava) – in particular for meditative states of absorption with their accompanying pleasurable qualities. This is a sort of turning towards, but it is not wise attention: it does not have the qualities of openness/non-grasping and of sensitivity that is involved in creatively turning towards states of hindrance.

