

And maintaining equanimity without action—
 These methods of cessation, taught by the sages,
 Are the nine stages of mental abiding.

From collecting the mind in the beginning stages of practice to attaining right concentration, there are nine abiding minds—nine stages in practicing the abiding mind.

1. Inward abiding: The minds of ordinary people are always scattered—directed toward external things—a state that the Confucians call “the mind let loose.” This state is analogous to chickens and dogs that will not return home after being let loose. Practicing cessation means to collect this dispersed mind and make it abide on an internal object of focus without letting it run toward external things.

2. Continuous abiding: When the mind initially becomes collected, it continues to buck like a horse unwilling to surrender. After one practices for a long time, the active mind slows down more or less and then abides continuously in an internal state without being scattered.

3. Calm abiding: At this stage, although the mind is said to abide continuously, it still momentarily forgets to be mindful and becomes scattered. However, the practices that have led to this stage have trained one to immediately detect the forgetfulness or scatteredness of the mind as soon as it begins to happen. Thus one can collect the mind in order to return to the object of focus. Only at this stage can the mind be described as calm and settled.

4. Abiding nearby: This stage marks the continued progress of one's efforts. Now one succeeds in not forgetting mindfulness and avoids being scattered. When such things are about to happen, one realizes it and can subdue the distraction before it occurs. Thus the mind calmly abides on the object of focus and does not become dispersed. That is why this stage is called abiding nearby.

5. Harmonized abiding: The five desires—for form, sound, odor, taste, and tangible things; the three poisons—greed, anger, and ignorance; and the two types of person—males and females—are the ten objects that cause the mind to be scattered. When the mind is in equanimity and has definite knowledge of the virtues of concentration, one realizes the faults of desires. So, using stillness to subdue desires, the mind becomes gentle and harmonized and is no longer tempted by these ten objects.

6. Quietude: The ten objects are chiefly temptations of the external environment. There is also unwholesomeness coming from one's own mind: attachment to one's country, relatives, immortality, desire, anger, harm to others, and so forth. There are also the five hindrances—greed, anger, sleepiness, restlessness, and doubt. All these can be subdued by tranquil concentration. Such concentration cannot be disturbed and the mind becomes quiet. This quietness is like the silent serenity in the middle of the night, but it is not the extinction of Nirvāṇa.

7. Supreme quietude: The preceding quietude is achieved by subduing the various attachments that arise at times. At this more advanced stage, as soon as the attachments arise, one immediately dispels and eliminates them.

The first four abiding minds are the stages of abiding calmly on the object of focus. But one practices cessation and achieves concentration primarily for the purpose of departing from unwholesomeness such as desire. Once the power of concentration has become stronger—in the fifth to the seventh stages—one is at the point of subduing the afflictions. Only when the mind is quiet and pure can one proceed toward right concentration.

8. Single-pointed concentration: At this point, the mind is able to abide calmly and not be disturbed by internal and external bad elements. One has reached the stage of keeping the mind even and straightforward. From here one can diligently concentrate one's mind on a single object continuously.

9. Maintaining equanimity: This is a more advanced single-pointed concentration. With both skillful effort and without the need for more effort, one takes no action, lets the mind operate naturally, and continuously abides without scatteredness. Having practiced cessation up to this stage, one is close to attaining concentration.

The methods for practicing concentration vary, as does the time required to achieve it. Although the abiding mind is taught in various ways, the complete course of skillfully practicing cessation, from the initial step of collecting the mind to accomplishing right concentration, coincides with this doctrine of the nine abiding minds. Those who practice cessation should follow this skillful course and recognize their stages of progress. Doing so will keep them from arrogance, which could impede their progress.

*The Way
to Buddhahood*

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