

## Thīna,middha

Sloth and torpor

Theme: The third of the five mental hindrances

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### 1 *Thīna,middha* as a hindrance

**1.1 DEFINITIONS OF THĪNA,MIDDHA.** *Thīna,middha* is usually translated as sloth and torpor, and sometimes as hyphenated sloth-and-torpor.<sup>1</sup> They are the lethargy of body and dullness of mind. It is like walking in the dark while we are feeling really tired, not really seeing anything clearly or knowing where we are going. The lack of clarity and the uncertainty of direction weigh down heavily on us with a sinking feeling of being stuck right where we are.

**The Saṅgārava Sutta** (S 46.55) compares the effect sloth and torpor on the mind to that of a bowl full of water used as a mirror to see the reflection of one's face. When the water in the bowl is overgrown with water-plants and moss, we would be unable to see any reflection in the water.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, if the mind is taken over by sloth and torpor, it would not be able to see things clearly or stay focussed.

It is possible that the term was originally *thīna-m-iddha*, meaning “increase of sleepiness,” but at a very early date came to be taken as a dvandva, *thīna,middha*, “sloth and torpor.” Sloth-and-torpor is the placed third in the stock list of the five hindrances [1.2].

**1.2 IMAGERIES OF THĪNA,MIDDHA.** We have already noted the comparison of sloth and torpor to a bowl of water overgrown with water-plants and moss. The water in the bowl is so fully covered over that we are unable to see the water, much less our reflection in it. Sloth and torpor blurs the mind and tires the body with a sense of being stuck with mental heaviness, sleepiness, even falling asleep.

On the other hand, says **the Mahā Assa,pura Sutta** (M 39), to be free from sloth and torpor is like being released from a prison.<sup>3</sup> This liberating simile reflects how sloth and torpor could “imprison” the mind, that is, stifle or limit its capabilities.

The suttas often describe the limiting effects of sloth and torpor on the mind. **The Iddhi,pāda Vibh-aṅga Sutta** (S 51.20), for example, describes how sloth and torpor weaken or hinder the five bases of spiritual power (*iddhi,pāda*)—enthusiasm (*chanda*), energy (*virīya*), mind (*citta*), and investigation (*vī-mamsā*)—that is, the mental strategies for successful meditation. Sloth and torpor prevent the effective working of the five bases by *narrowing them internally* (*ajjhataṃ saṅkhittam*).<sup>4</sup> [3.1]

The *Vibhaṅga*, the second and perhaps earliest Abhidhamma work, and the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, another Abhidhamma work, both define sloth and torpor as “mental unreadiness and unwillfulness” (*cittassa akalyatā akammaññatā*).<sup>5</sup> As such, while the Suttas describe the *nature* (or *form*) of sloth and torpor, the Abhidhamma points to their functionality or lack of it.

### 2 Nature of *thīna,middha*

**2.1 THĪNA,MIDDHA AS DVANDVA.** As already noted, it is possible that *thīna-m-iddha* originally meant “increase of sleepiness” [1]. This was noted by **K R Norman** in his translation of single-verse **the Suyāmana Thera,gāthā**.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The hyphenated term is taken as singular.

<sup>2</sup> (**Nīvaraṇa**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55.6/5:122 f) = SD 3.12; (**Manta**) **Saṅgārava S** (A 5.193.5/3:231 f) = SD 73.3. For comy on the similes of the 5 hindrances (MA 2:3 18-321), see SD 10.13 Appendix. See also Nyanaponika, *The Five Mental Hindrances*, BPS Wheel no 26, 1961:27-34.

<sup>3</sup> M 39.14/1:275 = SD 10.13.

<sup>4</sup> S 51.20.14/5:279 = SD 28.14. On the other hand, these 5 bases of spiritual power are distracted externally (*bahiddhā vikkhitto*) on account of the five cords of sensual pleasures (*kāma,guṇa*). See **Kāma-c,chanda** = SD 32.2 (2.2).

<sup>5</sup> Vbh §546/253 f = Dhs 1156 f/204. While Vbh uses *akalyatā*, Dhs here has the reading *akallatā*.

<sup>6</sup> See Cousins 1973: 118.

<i>Kāma-c, chando vyāpādo</i>	Sensual desire, ill will,
<i>thīnamiddhañ ca bhikkhuno</i>	sloth and torpor, in a monk, and
<i>uddhaccaṃ vicikicchā ca</i>	restlessness <sup>7</sup> and doubt,
<i>sabbaso 'va na vijjatū ti</i>	all of which are not found. (Tha 74)

At a very early date, however, the tatpurusha *thīna-m-iddha* came to be taken as a dvandva, *thīna,-middha*, “sloth and torpor.” This is understandable because sloth and torpor arise as a result of being assailed by the first two hindrances (sensual desire and ill will), or attending to an unsuitable (as such, uninteresting) meditation object, giving rise to boredom or sleepiness. **The (Āhāra) Kāya Sutta** (S 46.2), too, identifies the conditions for the arising of sloth and torpor as to discontent, boredom, laziness and mental depression.<sup>8</sup>

That *thīna,middha* are taken as two distinct mental factors is found in **the (Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga) Pariyāya Sutta** (S 46.52), which differentiates between sloth and torpor as separate hindrances (S 5: 110).<sup>9</sup> These two distinct mental factors may have been subsumed under the heading of a single hindrance due to their similar effect on the mind.

The *Vibhaṅga* explains that while sloth (*thīna*) is a mental unreadiness (*cittassa akalyatā*), torpor (*middha*), refers to its bodily counterpart (*kāyassa akalyatā*) (Vibh 254) [1.2]. Torpor as a form of bodily inability (resulting in mental impliability) is reflected in a verse in the *Dhammapada*, which relates gluttonous over-eating to the arising of torpor, a deplorable condition comparable to that of a fat pig wallowing and lolling about (Dh 325).

So far we see both twins—sloth and torpor—as being the sides of the same hindrance coin, one reflecting the other. Sloth reflecting more of the mental aspects while torpor more of the bodily aspects, but their sense often overlap. However, as they sometimes appear on their own in the suttas, let us now examine each of them separately.

**2.2 THĪNA AS A MENTAL FACTOR.** Of the twin, *thīna* appears less frequently on its own. *Thīna* (Skt *sthyāna*) was originally the past participle of *sthyāyate*, “to harden, congeal.” As such, the Pali-English Dictionary (PED) defines it as “stiffness, obduracy,<sup>10</sup> stolidity,<sup>11</sup> indifference.” The Abhidhamma defines it as mental unwieldiness or impliability (*cittassa akammaññatā*).<sup>12</sup> Buddhaghosa even says that it is a “mental sickliness” (*citta, gelaññam*, DA 1:211).

**The Sutta Nipāta** has a verse that helps us better understand the meaning or meanings of *thīna*, and even the evolution of the dvandva *thīna,middha*:

<i>Niddaṃ tandiṃ sahe thīnaṃ</i>	He should overcome sleep, drowsiness, sloth,
<i>pamādena na saṃvase</i>	he should not cohabit with heedlessness.
<i>atimāne na tiṭṭheyya</i>	He should not prolong arrogance [conceit],
<i>mibbāna, manaso naro</i>	the man whose mind is set on quenching (Sn 942)

The first two lines are relevant to our present discussion. Line a has three related words: sleep (*niddā*), drowsiness (*tandi*) and sloth (*thīna*) which can mean sleep, all of which should be overcome, *sahe*, which is the potential or optative mood (*sattamī*) of *sahati*, “to overcome, defeat.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Norman tr this as “conceit”: see Tha n74, where he quotes Dhs 86 f; Vbh 255; Vism 469; & Brough (Dh:G 280). See **Uddhacca,kukkuca** = SD 32.7 (2.1).

<sup>8</sup> A 1.2.3/1:3 = SD 16.3; see also **(Āhāra) Kāya S** (S 46.2.6/5:64) = SD 62.9. For **the 5 shackles**, see **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1 (3.2.7).

<sup>9</sup> S 46.52.17/5:110 = SD 62.6. See **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1 (3.4).

<sup>10</sup> Resoluteness by virtue of being unyielding and inflexible.

<sup>11</sup> Apathy demonstrated by an absence of emotional reactions.

<sup>12</sup> Nc 290 = Dhs 1156, 1236 = Nett 86.

<sup>13</sup> M 1:33; S 4:157; Sn 942; Dh 333; It 84; J 1:74, 2:386, 3:243; as *saheyya* (M 1:33). It can also mean “to bear, endure” (Sn 20; Pug 68). Gerundive *sayha*, “that which can be endured, able to be done” (Sn 253); opp *asayha* (Miln 1148).

Now *tandī* means “weariness, laziness, sloth,”<sup>14</sup> and is as such a synonym of *middha*. However, as its sense here is clearly non-technical, at least less technical than “sloth” (*thīna*) in the dvandva, *thīna, middha*. As such, it is best not to translate it as “sloth” here.

This is evidently an ancient verse pre-dating the formation of the dvandva, *thīna, middha*, as a technical term. We might fairly surmise that the senses of *niddā* and *tandī*, given separately here, later combined as *middha* when the dvandva *thīna, middha* was in the vogue.

It is well known that the five hindrances are factors that prevent mental concentration. Here, in **Sn 942**, however, the context is clearly broader, that is, that of attaining nirvana itself. As such, I think, it is better to *take line a as qualifying line b*, where we are exhorted not to be heedless (*pamādena*), that is, to be mindful in a general way (not just meditating). Furthermore, the mention of arrogance (*atimāna*) here is a clear allusion to the attaining of arhathood, which frees us from conceit, which includes arrogance and other forms of people-measuring.<sup>15</sup>

The point of all this hair-splitting is that, in the study of the early Buddhist texts, we must always examine and understand *the context* of key terms. Technical terms are not as common in the early texts as they are in the Abhidhamma and the Commentaries, but they are easily recognized when they appear in a set (such as the five hindrances), but their individual factors appear by themselves, we must check the context, from which we can tease out its import.

**2.3 MIDDHA AS A MENTAL FACTOR.** The PED thinks that *middha* (ts)<sup>16</sup> is derived from √MID or √MIND or √MED, “to be fat.” The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, in fact, glosses it so: “*middha* means to be fat” (*medhatī ti middham*, DhsA 378). However, adds the PED, *middha* is more likely connected with the Sanskrit *methi*, meaning “pillar” (cf Latin *meta*): the Prakrit form is *medhi*. The common sense here is that of “stiff.” Thus, semantically, *middha* is here synonymous with *thīna*.

Edgerton’s Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (BHSD) notes that “sometimes simply [means] *sleep*, with neutral or at least unobjectionable connotation, as in *middham avakrāntaḥ*, went to sleep”<sup>17</sup> Of course, it is possible that this sense is mainly found in the BHS texts, or is a later usage. **K R Norman**, in his note on **Tha 74**, says that here it “should be taken as referring to one defect only.”<sup>18</sup>

The BHSD, under the entry, *styāna-middha*, says that the compound was originally a *tatpuruṣa*, meaning “increase in sloth,” with *-m-* a *sandhi*-consonant. Whatever the original meaning of the word, there is no doubt that in later times the word was taken as a dvandva, from which *middha* was extracted as a separate word.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the sense of *middha* as specifically referring to “sleep” evolved later. However, we must first carefully check the context to determine whether the sense should be “torpor” or “sleep.”

Take the **Ceto, khila Sutta** (M 16) and the **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), for example, in the list of the five mental shackles (*cetaso vinibandha*), an alternative set of five hindrances.<sup>20</sup> The fourth shackle relates directly to torpor (*middha*), describing one who, after over-eating, indulges in the pleasure of the bed (*seyya, sukha*), in the pleasure of lying down (*passa, sukha*), and in the pleasure of sleep (*middha, sukha*).<sup>21</sup> The Majjhima Commentary glosses *middha* here as “sleep” (*niddā*, MA 2:69).

**2.4 EVEN ARHATS TIRE.** Now let us look at another interest passage, that is, one of Anuruddha’s **Thera, gāthā**:

*Pañca, paññāsa vassāni  
yato nesajjiko aham*

For fifty-five years  
have I kept to the sitting practice;

<sup>14</sup> M 1:464; S 5:64; A 1:3; Sn 926, 942; J 5:397; Vbh 352.

<sup>15</sup> On conceit (*māna*), see **Me: The Nature of Conceit** = SD 19.2a & **Anusaya** = SD 31.3 (3).

<sup>16</sup> Ts = tatsama, meaning that the word is the same in both Pali and Sanskrit (eg Divy 555), and in this case, BHS, too.

<sup>17</sup> MSV 1.281.1; Divy 102.5, 579.20; LalV 202.2; Mvy 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Sn 437 *pañcamī (senā) thīna-middham*. These contexts may be taken as supporting Edgerton’s view.

<sup>19</sup> Cf Tha 17, 904. (Tha:N 74 n). See also Cousins 1973: 118.

<sup>20</sup> M 16.8-12/1:102 f = SD 51.4; D 33.2.1(20)/3:238.

<sup>21</sup> See **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1 (3.6).

*pañca, vīṣati vassāni*  
*yato middham samūhatam*

twenty-five years  
have passed since torpor was rooted out. (Tha 904)

The Thera, gāthā Commentary interprets *middha* as “sleep” (*niddā*): “They say that of the elder’s 55 years of sitting practice, he did not sleep for 25. The rest he slept only during the last watch (2.00-6.00 am) on account of bodily tiredness.”<sup>22</sup> However, from the context of the verse, it is also possible to take *middha* as meaning “torpor.” It is unlikely that Anuruddha has not slept for 25 years, especially when the suttas do not have such evidence.<sup>23</sup>

On the contrary, we have, for example, records of the Buddha saying that he has to lie down on account of tiredness.<sup>24</sup> In **the Sekha Sutta** (M 53), the Buddha instructs thus, “Ānanda, speak to the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu about the learner who has entered the way (to awakening) (*sekha pāṭipada*). My back is aching; I will rest it.”<sup>25</sup> In a similar tone, **the Avussuta Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.243) relates how the Buddha dismisses the laity and instructs Mahā Moggallāna. The Buddha then tells Moggallāna that the order of monks is “free from sloth and torpor” (*vigata, thīna, middha*), and instructs him to give them a Dharma talk. “My back is aching; I will rest it.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, reports **the Naḷaka, pāna Sutta 1** (A 10.67), on another occasion, the Buddha, feeling his back aching, tells Sāriputta to instruct the assembly that is free from sloth and torpor. But in **the Nandaka Sutta** (A 9.4), the Buddha complains to Nandaka that the latter’s discourse is so lengthy that his (the Buddha’s) back aches, but praises him with another discourse on the benefits of listening to the Dharma.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of what we have said thus far, *torpor as bodily tiredness* may still arise without being caused by over-eating or any other form of improper indulgence. In fact, **the Mahāsaccaka Sutta** (M 36) recounts an occasion when the Buddha is challenged by a wandering debater for taking a nap in the afternoon. The Buddha replies that such taking of a rest should not be misinterpreted as a manifestation of delusion.<sup>28</sup>

**The Peṭakopadesa** clearly states that an arhat’s bodily tiredness should not be taken as a hindrance (Peṭ 161), and **the Milinda, pañha** lists torpor among those conditions that merely accompany the body and which are outside of the control of an arhat (Miln 253). **The Vimutti, magga** includes torpor among the types of derived matter,<sup>29</sup> but a view rejected by the Visuddhi, magga (Vism 450).

In short, while *thīna* as mental sloth stands for conditions of boredom, lack of inspiration or interest, *middha* as torpor has a more ambivalent nature since sleepiness may be due to over-eating, but may also simply arise naturally as sleep, that will affect even those who have overcome the five hindrances.<sup>30</sup>

**2.5 VITAKKA AND VIRIYA.** Now, if the hindrance of *thīna, middha* is characterized by sleepiness and tiredness, then clearly, it is opposed to energy (*virīya*). If we are overwhelmed with *thīna, middha*, we are unable to generate enough mental energy to move forward in our meditation. On the other hand, if we are

<sup>22</sup> *Therassa pañca, paññāsāya vassesu nesajjikkassa sato ādito pañca, vīṣati, vassāni niddā nāhosi, tato param sarīra, kilamathena pacchima, yāme niddā ahoṣī ti vadanti* (ThaA 3:70).

<sup>23</sup> There is a similar ref to sleeping in a sitting posture, but without mention of *nesajjika*, in **Bakkula S** (M 124), where the elder Bakkula is said to have practiced it; for, he says, “In those 80 years, avuso Kassapa, since I went forth, I do not recall ever having used a reclining board (*apassenakam apassetā*),” ie, sleeping at an angle of 45° or higher, not lying prone on a bed: see M 124.35/3:127 = SD 3.15. The reclining board is allowed at V 2:175.

<sup>24</sup> See eg **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.4.2/2:128 to Ānanda, 4.39/2:134 to Cundaka, 5.2/2:138 to Ānanda, 5.24b/2:150 Ānanda to Subhadda) = SD 9; repeated at U 83 f.

<sup>25</sup> M 53.5/1:353-354 = SD 21.14.

<sup>26</sup> *Piṭṭhi me āgilāyati tam aham āyamissāmī ti* (S 35.243.7-8/4:183-184) = SD 60.6. Also in **Saṅgīti S** (D 3:-209); **Naḷakapāna S 1** (A 10.67.1/5:122) = SD 73.5; **Naḷakapāna S 2** (A 10.68.1/5:125) = SD 73.6; also V 2:199.

<sup>27</sup> A 9.4.2/4:359 = SD 73.4.

<sup>28</sup> M 36.45-46/1:250 f = SD 49/5.

<sup>29</sup> T32.445c25, with a Tib counterpart in Skilling 1994: 189.

<sup>30</sup> On Does the Buddha have feelings? see (**Samyojana**) **Koṭṭhita S** (S 35.232,8/4:164 f) = SD 28.4 Intro (3).

able to tap some source of energy, this would drive the hindrance away, at least momentarily. One such way is to resort to the cultivation of lovingkindness<sup>31</sup> or to one of the six inspiring meditations.<sup>32</sup>

According to **the Visuddhi,magga**, the hindrance sloth and torpor stands in direct opposition to the dhyana-factor of initial application (*vitakka*) (Vism 141). This probably means that the clear grasp of an object through initial application counteracts the lack of mental clarity caused by sloth and torpor. Initial application as a dhyana-factor, says Analayo, “provides a directional and energizing input and could be understood to be in particular an expression of the quality of energy” (2009: 60 f). Energy (*virīya*) is, in fact, according to **the (Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta** (S 46.51), one of the seven awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*), and which stands in direct opposition to sloth and torpor.<sup>33</sup>

### 3 Removal of sloth and torpor

**3.1 BALANCING THE PRACTICE.** For meditation to progress effectively, it must be balanced and harmonious. As stated in **the Iddhi,pāda Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20), sloth and torpor prevent the effective working of the five bases of power (*iddhi,pāda*), that is, enthusiasm (*chanda*), energy (*virīya*), mind (*citta*) and investigation (*vīmaṅsā*), by *narrowing them internally* (*ajjhataṃ saṅkhittaṃ*) [1.2]. We need to balance our meditation practice, making sure each of the bases “will be neither too slack nor too tense, and it will neither be narrowed internally [due to sloth and torpor] nor be distracted externally [due to sensual desire].”<sup>34</sup>

Once we are capable of cultivating the five bases of power, we may go on work with **the five spiritual faculties** (*pañc’indriya*), that is, faith (*saddhā*), effort [energy] (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Faith is paired with wisdom, balancing the emotional and the intellectual sides of the spiritual life; effort is paired with concentration, balancing the activating and the restraining aspects of mental cultivation. Mindfulness is the moderator each of these pairs of faculties, holding them together in a harmonious interaction.<sup>35</sup> When the faculties are balanced, the hindrances are overcome, too.

As already noted,<sup>36</sup> the five bases of power and the five spiritual faculties are not stages in meditation but serve as sets of strategies to harmonize and focus our meditation so that they overcome all the hindrances. When the hindrances are removed permanently, the spiritual faculties mature into **the spiritual powers** (*bala*), that is, our faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are stable and natural: we have become saints.<sup>37</sup>

#### 3.2 WAYS OF OVERCOMING THĪNA,MIDDHA.

**3.2.1 Do not feed sloth and torpor.** The suttas and commentaries<sup>38</sup> give a number of ways of overcoming or preventing the hindrances.<sup>39</sup> **The (Nīvaraṇa Bojjhaṅga) Āhāra Sutta** (S 46.51), for example, explains how sloth and torpor arise is “fed,” as follows:

And what, monks, is food for the arising of unarisen **sloth and torpor** (*thīna,middha*) and for the growth and abundance of arisen sloth and torpor?

There are, monks, boredom, lethargy and fidgeting, after-meal drowsiness, and mental sluggishness (*arati tandi,vijambhītā bhata,sammado cetaso ca līnattaṃ*).<sup>40</sup> Frequently giving unwise

<sup>31</sup> See **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8) = SD 38.3.

<sup>32</sup> The 6 inspiring meditation, or 6 bases of recollection (*cha anussati-ṭ,thāna*), are the recollections on (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) moral virtue, (5) charity, and (6) the devas. (A 6.26/3:314 f) = SD 15.6

<sup>33</sup> S 46.51.8/5:104+105) = SD 7.15.

<sup>34</sup> *Na ca atilīno bhavissati, na ca atipaggahīto bhavissati, na ca ajjhataṃ saṅkhitto bhavissati, na ca bahiddhā vikkhito bhavissati* (S 51.20.3/5:277) = SD 28.14.

<sup>35</sup> **Kīṭagiri S** (M 70.13/1:477) = SD 11.1; also **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f) esp SD 10.4 Intro (2), see diag 2.1.

<sup>36</sup> See **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1 (4.2).

<sup>37</sup> See **Pañca Bala** = SD 10.5.

<sup>38</sup> The comy list of 6 ways of overcoming *thīna,middha* are at: DA 3:780; MA 1:284 = SA 3:166 = AA 1:50 = ItA 2:180; VbhA 273. Cf DA 216. See **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 7.1 (Table 4).

<sup>39</sup> See **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1 (4).

attention to them is food for the arising of unarisen sloth and torpor, and for the growth and abundance of arisen sloth and torpor. (S 46.51.7/5:103) = SD 7.15

The operational expression here is “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*), that is, not dealing with the occasions of sloth and torpor in a proper way leads to their increase. The key point is that we should not delve on sloth or torpor, as we would be overwhelmed by them. Secondly, after simply noting them, we should “disown” them, let go of them. This is best done by reflecting on them as being impermanent.

**3.2.2 The threefold effort.** The (*Nīvaraṇa Bojjaṅga*) *Āhāra Sutta* (S 46.51) further instructs on how to “starve” the hindrance of sloth and torpor, that is, by exerting the threefold effort, thus:

And what, bhikkhus, is not food for the arising of unarisen **sloth and torpor**, nor for the growth and abundance of arisen sloth and torpor?

There are, monks, the element of initiative, the element of exertion, and the element of strength.<sup>41</sup> Frequently giving wise attention to them are not food for the arising of unarisen sloth and torpor, nor for the growth and abundance of arisen sloth and torpor.

(S 46.51.17/5:105 f) = SD 7.15<sup>42</sup>

These are the 3 phases of effort: the initial phase, intermediate phase (gathering strength through overcoming sloth) and full intensity phase respectively. They are deliberate acts that must be sustained until the hindrance is overcome.

**3.2.3 The six ways of preventing *thīna,middha*.** The commentaries recommend the following six practices as strategies *to overcome or prevent the hindrance of sloth and torpor*, that is:<sup>43</sup>

- (1) not over-eating (knowing when to stop eating),<sup>44</sup>
- (2) changing meditation postures,
- (3) mental clarity & perception of light,
- (4) staying outdoors,
- (5) spiritual friends,
- (6) conducive conversation.

Most of these strategies are clear enough and self-explanatory. The first method, on not over-eating, is an important strategy, and will be discussed separately [3.2.4]. The second method, changing our meditation posture (*iriyā.patha,samparivattanā*), is a simple strategy. Instead of fighting the discomfort or pain, we should be at peace with it. It is important at the beginning, we should ensure that our sitting posture is just right. Often, just a slight adjustment of our posture (like stretching the leg a bit outwards) would dispel the discomfort. If it persists, we may use it our meditation object, especially watching is “rise and fall” or impermanence.

The third method, that of the perception of light, is another important one, which we shall discuss separately [3.2.5]. The fourth method, that of living outdoors (*abbhokāse vāsa*), is historical: the monastics of the Buddha’s time often live in large parks (*ārāma*), and some would dwell in solitary retreat in the forests. The outdoors exudes an open freshness that healthily keeps us awake and alert. This famous stock passage gives us an idea of the open-air places conducive to meditation: “he resorts to a secluded dwell-

<sup>40</sup> This stock passage is found in **Nidda Tandi S** (S 1.2.6/1:7), (**Āhāra**) **Kāya S** (S 46.2/5:64), and expl at Vbh 352. On methods of this hindrance, see §17n.

<sup>41</sup> *Ārambha,dhātu, nikkama,dhātu, parakkama,dhātu*. Qu at MA 1:284. **Atta,kārī S** (A 6.38) uses these words in a literal sense (A 6.38.3b, 4-6 = 3:337), as part of the Buddha’s answer that there is self-agency (SD 7.6).

<sup>42</sup> Also at S 5:65; A 1:4; DA 3:780, 789; MN 1:283; AA 1:48; UA 233; ItA 2:180; cf VbhA 78. The sutta text here is slightly different from those of Comy’s (apparently quoted from *Bojjaṅga Saṃyutta*). Some of the readings, however, are confirmed by the Sub-comys (eg DAT 2:410).

<sup>43</sup> DA 780; MA 1:284 = SA 3:166 = AA 1:50 = ItA 2:180; VbhA 273. Cf DA 216.

<sup>44</sup> See prec n.

ing: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a gully [gorge], a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw.”<sup>45</sup>

Spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa mittatā*), the fifth strategy against sloth and torpor, is in itself a universal catalyst for the spiritual life;<sup>46</sup> indeed, it is *the whole of the spiritual life*.<sup>47</sup> **The Upaḍḍha Sutta** (S 45.2) records the Buddha’s key statement on spiritual friendship, thus:

Spiritual friendship, good companionship, good comradeship, is **the whole of the holy life**.  
When a monk has a spiritual friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop the noble eightfold path.

(S 45.2/5:2 f = S 3.18/1:87 f; cf Sāriputta’s remark, S 45.3/5:3)

The holy life (*brahma, cariya*) is the training and life-style of true practitioners and trainees (that is, those saints of the path who are not yet arhats). With spiritual friendship, it is easier to keep the precepts, to meditate, and gain wisdom, because we have role models to inspire us. Through such inspiration, we are imbued with energy that overcomes and prevent sloth and torpor.

As speech is our most common way of communication, we need to ensure that our speech is not only truthful, but also unifying, useful and pleasant. And what we communicate with one another should in no way distract us from our spiritual development. Indeed, our speech should enhance our spiritual friendship with others so that we have an environment, external and internal, that is conducive to spiritual development. This is the meaning of conducive conversation (*sappāya kathā*).

**3.2.4 Moderation in food.** The Commentaries have a very interesting phrase for what is canonically known as “moderation in food” (*bhojane mattaññutā*),<sup>48</sup> that is, “grasping the sign in over-eating.”<sup>49</sup> The “sign” (*nimitta*) refers to our gut feeling that we are going to be full after taking four or five more morsels, and to stop eating right there (before we fill full), and then drink some water. The water is not only to rinse the mouth, but also to cut off the feeling of hunger. In this connection, two of Sāriputta’s **Thera,gāthā** refer to moderation in food, thus:<sup>50</sup>

*Allaṃ sukkaṃ ca bhujjanto  
na bālhaṃ suhito siyā  
ūnūdarō mit’āhāro sato  
bhikkhu paribbaje*

Whether what he is eating is wet or dry,  
he should not be overly satisfied.  
Belly unfilled, moderated in food, mindful,  
a monk should wander forth. Tha 982

*Cattāro pañca ālope  
abhutvā<sup>51</sup> udakaṃ pive*

With four or five morsels  
more to eat, he but drinks water.

<sup>45</sup> *Vivittam senāsanam bhajati, araṇṇam rukkha, mūlam pabbatam kandaram giri, guham susānam vana, pattham abbhokāsam palāla, puñjam*. This stock phrase of 9 places conducive to meditation are found at D 1:72, 207, 2:242, 3:49; M 1:181, 269, 274, 346, 440, 441, 2:162, 226, 3:3, 35, 115-117; A 2:210, 3:92, 100, 4:436, 5:207; Nm 1:26, 140, 2:341; Miln 369. A shorter list, probably later, is mentioned in **Anāpāna,sati S** (M 118): “Here, monks, a monk who has gone to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty abode, sits down, and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright, establishes mindfulness before him.” (M 118.17/3:82).

<sup>46</sup> See **Spiritual Friendship** = SD 8.1.

<sup>47</sup> S 5:2-30; A 1:14-18; It 10. See **Meghiya S** (A 9.3/4:354-358 ≈ U 4.1/34-37) = SD 34.2 (2.1) & **Upakkilesa S** (M 128.8-13/3:155-157) = SD 5.18; also see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004 ch 5 (on Sāriputta & Moggallāna).

<sup>48</sup> *Bhojane mattaññutā*. Often with “guarding the sense-doors” (*indriyesu gutta, dvārātā*), etc: **D 33.1.9(20)/-3:213**; **A 2.15.7/1:94**, **5.150.4/3:173**, **6.31.4/3:330**, **7.26.4/4:25**, **8.79.2/4:331**; **Nm 1:144**, 2:480; **Dhs 7**, 231 f; **Vbh 249**; **Pug 25**; **Kvu 616**.

<sup>49</sup> *Ati, bhojane nimitta-g, gāha*. DA 3:780; MA 1:284 = SA 3:166 = AA 1:50 = ItA 2:180; VbhA 273.

<sup>50</sup> Tha 982 f also at Miln 407 & J 255/2:293 f. Tha 983 also at Vism 1:94/33.

<sup>51</sup> *Abhutvā*, absol of *abhujjati*, “he does not eat.” See Tha:N 261 n983. Comy: “Therein, *abhutvā* means that, not eating **the four or five morsels of solid food**, withholding that much food, he should drink water. For this is one

<i>alam phāsu, vihārāya pahitattassa bhikkhuno</i>	this is enough for living comfortably for a monk of resolute mind.	Tha 983 <sup>52</sup>
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**The Suka Jātaka** (J 255), quoting these two verses, adds a third quotation, from **the Doṇa, pāka Sutta** (S 3.3), thus:

<i>Manujassa sadā satīmato mattam jānato laddha, bhojane tanū tassa bhavanti vedanā saṅkam jīrati āyūṃ pālayan ti</i>	When a man is always mindful, who knows moderation in the food he gets, his pains are lessened, guarding his life, he ages slowly.	(S 3.3/1:81+82) = SD 76.2 <sup>53</sup>
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This advice is given by the Buddha to the rajah Pasenadi who is seriously over-weight from over-eating. Following the Buddha's advice, Pasenadi cuts down on his food intake and regains his health.

**3.2.5 The perception of light.** The hindrance of sloth and torpor is of special interest as it is said to be suppressed by the perception of light (*āloka, saññā*) (but it is uprooted only by the path of arhathood). The suttas often mention the "perception of light" together with mindfulness and full awareness.<sup>54</sup> Some discourses associate the "perception of light" with a mind that is "open" (*vivata*) and "uncovered" (*apariyonaddha*) by day and by night, and indicate that such "perception of light" will lead to knowledge and vision.

**The Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20) describes how the perception of light should be cultivated as a path of spiritual power (*iddhi, pāda*), that is, focussing our minds to attain samadhi, thus:

**11** And how, bhikshus, does a monk, **with his mind open and unshrouded, cultivate a mind radiant with light?**

Here, bhikshus, the perception of light is well grasped by a monk, well attended to mentally, well borne in mind, well penetrated by wisdom.

Thus, bhikshus, a monk, with his mind open and unshrouded, cultivates a mind, radiant with light. (S 51.20.11/5:278) = SD 28.14

Here the samadhi attained through the perception of light, if properly developed can lead to the attaining of the six direct knowledges (*cha-l-abhiññā*),<sup>55</sup> the last of which is that of arhathood.<sup>56</sup>

However, the perception of light is also efficacious in more a mundane way, such as the overcoming of drowsiness, as prescribed in **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58), where the Buddha is recorded as giving this teaching to Moggallāna on how to overcome his persistent drowsiness,

If, Moggallāna, that drowsiness still would not go away, then, Moggallāna, you should practise the perception of light, determine the perception of daylight: just as day is, so is night; just as

who is easily contented" (*Tattha abhutvā ti cattāro vā pañca vā ālope kabaḷe abhuñjitvā tattakassa āhārassa okāsam thapetvā pānīyam piveyya. Ayañ hi āhāre sallahuka, vutti*) (ThaA 3:99).

<sup>52</sup> **Tha 983** qu at DA 3:778; MA 1:282; SA 2:107, 3:165; AA 1:47; ItA 1:43, 2:179; SnA 2:494; ThaA 3:99; Miln 407 (with Tha 982), J 255/2:294 (with Tha 982); Nm 2:345; Dhs 404; VbhA 270. Cf A 6.19.6/3:304 f, 8.73.8/4:318 f.

<sup>53</sup> Also qu at AA 5:29; DhA 3:265.

<sup>54</sup> Eg **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.68/1:71) = SD 8.10; **Udumbarika Siha, nāda S** (D 25.16/3:49 = SD 1.4. Cf **Das'uttara S** (D 34), where "radiation of light" (*āloka, pharaṇatā*) is listed as one of the 5 factors of perfect samadhi (*pañca'āṅgika sammā, samādhi*; ie in ref to dhyanas) (D 34.1.6(2)/3:278).

<sup>55</sup> See **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20.36/5:280) = SD 28.14. See also **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.89-98/1:77-84) = SD 8.10 (with similes).

<sup>56</sup> See **Samādhi Bhāvanā S** (A 4.41/2:44-46 = SD 24.1), which prescribes the perception of light for the attainment of "knowledge and vision," def as *the divine eye* (ie, the psychic power of clairvoyance and the knowledge of the working of karma and rebirth): see eg **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.97 f/1:82 f) = SD 8.10.

night is, so is day.<sup>57</sup> Thus through a mind that is open and unhindered, you should cultivate a mind of bright light.<sup>58</sup> It is possible that when you do so, that drowsiness would go away.

(A 7.58.7/4:87) = SD 4.11<sup>59</sup> [3.3.2]

**The Danta,bhūmi Sutta** (M 125) succinctly describes the abandoning of sloth and torpor in these words:

Abandoning sloth and torpor, he dwells free from sloth and torpor, perceiving light (*āloka*, -*saññī*), mindful and clearly aware. He purifies his mind from sloth and torpor.

(M 125.21-23/3:135 f) = SD 46.3

The Vibhaṅga, however, does not seem to regard this as anything more than a metaphor for mental clarity.<sup>60</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Commentaries tend to take “light” here in a literal sense. The Dīgha Commentary, for example, explains *āloka,saññā* as “being endowed with pure perception, free from the hindrance (of sloth and torpor), on account of being capable of perceiving light which is seen by night as by day.”<sup>61</sup> According to **L S Cousins**,

Light phenomena of various different kinds are characteristic of mysticism as indeed of many unusual states of mind.<sup>62</sup> One cause of these seems likely to be liberation of energy experienced as light through sensory translation.<sup>63</sup> This may be appropriate in this present case. (1973: 118)

Such a “perception of light” takes place with the help of mindfulness and full awareness, which brings into play two qualities as a remedy against sloth and torpor that indeed lead to an increase of mental clarity. This, however, is not the only role that mindfulness has to play in relation to the hindrance of sloth and torpor. **The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) describes the tasks of mindfulness in relation to this hindrance as ranging from clear recognition of the presence or absence of sloth and torpor to understanding the condition for the arising of this hindrance, how to remove it, and how to prevent its future arising (M 160).

**The Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) contains a list of the four samādhi meditations (*samādhi,bhāvanā*), one of which is attained through the perception of light. These four meditations are summarized as follows:

- (1) *happiness here and now* is attained through dhyana;
- (2) *knowledge and vision* are attained through attending to the perception of light (*āloka,saññā*) (that is, with clear mind, he cultivates a mind of brightness, *sappabhāsa,citta*);

<sup>57</sup> Comy to **Iddhi,pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20.10/5:278) = SD 28.14 on the perception of light (*āloka,saññā*), gives the full instructions: “A monk [meditator] sits in an open space [*aṅgana*] attending to the perception of light, now shutting his eyes, now opening his eyes. When, having opened his eyes, he closes them and, it appears just as if he sees (*olokentassa viya*), then the perception of light has arisen. It is also called ‘the perception of day’ (*divā,saññā*), and with its arising in the night, it is said to be well mastered.” (SA 3:260).

<sup>58</sup> *Iti vivaṭena* [v] *vivaṭena*] *cetasā aparīyonaddhena sappabhāsam cittaṃ bhāveyyāsi*. Here, “**open and unhindered**” (*vivaṭena...aparīyonaddhena*) alludes to avoiding the first 2 of the “four faults” (*catu,dosa*) in meditation, ie, against being “too slack” (*atilīna*) or “too tense” (*atipaggahita*): see **Iddhi,pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:276-281) = SD 28.14.

<sup>59</sup> As at **Samādhi Bhāvanā S** (A 4.41.3/2:45) = SD 24.1, & (**Anussatiṭṭhāna**) **Udāyi S** (A 6.29/3:322-325) = SD 24.8.

<sup>60</sup> Vbh §549/254.

<sup>61</sup> *Rattim pi divā,diṭṭh’āloka,saññānana,samatthāya vigata,nīvaraṇāya parisuddhāya saññāya samannāgato* (DA 1:211,21 ad A 3:323,14-17; see also AA 3:357,27-358,3; D 3:223,4 f). Cf Cousins 1973: 188, who gives a different tr.

<sup>62</sup> See E Arbman, *Ecstasy or Religious Trance*, vol 1, “Vision and Ecstasy,” Uppsala, 1963: 297 f, 316-334. [Cousin’s n]

<sup>63</sup> AJ Deikman, “Deautomatization and the mystic experience,” in CT Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness*, NY, 1969: 38. [Cousin’s n]

- (3) to *mindfulness and full awareness*, by watching the rise, stay and fall of feelings, perceptions and thoughts as they occur;
- (4) *the destruction of the influxes* by contemplating on the rise and fall of the five aggregates of clinging. (D 33.1.11(5)/3:223)

This suggests that the expression “perception of light” refers to the cultivation of mental clarity. This explanation is supported by the Vibhaṅga, which glosses “perception of light” as a perception that is “open” (*vivaṭa*), “purified” (*parisuddha*), and “cleansed” (*pariyodāta*) (Vbh 254). The commentaries, however, take the expression “perception of light” more literally (a purely radiant light), that is, using the perception of light to actually overcome this hindrance, such as by looking at the moon, or at the sun (MA 1:284).

### 3.3 CASE STUDIES IN SLOTH AND TORPOR.

**3.3.1 Tissa the fat.** The best known stories about sloth and torpor are those related to early monks Tissa the fat, Moggallāna [3.3.2], and Bhagu [3.3.3]. We will begin with the most detailed accounts we have, that is, of Tissa the fat (Thulla Tissa), the Buddha’s own paternal cousin.<sup>64</sup> After joining the order, he lives in a forest community, but is proud of his birth and loves to wear rich robes.

His captious tendency, pointing out others’ faults and lecturing them, makes him rather unpopular to the point that his colleagues teasing and vilifying him. **The (Assūni) Tissa Sutta** (S 21.9) relates how Tissa finally breaks down on account of his colleagues’ negative reactions and goes to the Buddha in tears. The Buddha admonishes him, reminding him of the purpose of the holy life—in his case, to overcome anger, conceit, and scorn.<sup>65</sup>

On another occasion, recorded in **the (Thīna,middha) Tissa Sutta** (S 22.84) and its commentary, the Buddha, with his divine eye, sees Tissa sleeping with mouth agape during the noon-rest and, sending a radiant hologram of himself, wakes him. Tissa is filled with anguish and when he confesses his mental lethargy and dissatisfaction with the holy life, they bring him to the Buddha. The Buddha teaches him this Sutta, at the end of which he becomes an arhat.<sup>66</sup>

**3.3.2 Moggallāna.** Tissa’s single Thera,gāthā is also found in Moggallāna’s verses, thus:

<i>Sattiyā viya omaṭṭho dayhamāne va matthake kāma,rāga,pahānāya sato bhikkhu paribbaje ti</i>	As if smitten by a sword, as if the head is ablaze, for abandoning sensual lust, the mindful monk should wander forth. (Tha 39 = 1162)
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Interestingly, both monks have the problem of sloth and torpor. The whole of **the Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58) recounts Moggallāna’s difficulties with sleepiness in his meditations. The Buddha, through his divine eye, perceives that Moggallāna is struggling with sleepiness in his meditation. Teleporting himself and appearing before Moggallāna, the Buddha teaches him these eight ways of dealing with drowsiness (paraphrased in the first person):

- (1) MENTAL NOTING. Constantly note that perception.
- (2) REFLECTION. If this fails, then we should mentally attend to a teaching we have learned.
- (3) RECITATION. If this fails, then we should recite in detail a teaching that we have learned.
- (4) MASSAGE. If this fails, then we should rub both our ears [in a circular manner with our palms] and massage our limbs.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Pitucchā,putta*, ie the son of the Buddha’s paternal aunt, Amīṭā (MA 2:61): see DPPN, sv Tissa Thera (14).

See Palikanon website: [http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali\\_names/t/tissa.htm](http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/t/tissa.htm).

<sup>65</sup> S 21.9/2:282 = SD 71.7; SA 2:239; ThaA 1:111.

<sup>66</sup> S 22.84/3:105 f = SD 32.12; SA 2:308; Tha 39, cf Tha 1162 (Moggallāna); ThaA 1:111.

<sup>67</sup> “Rub both your ears... massage your limbs,” *tato tvaṃ...ubho kaṇṇa,sotāni āvijeyyāsi pāṇinā gattāni anumajjeyyāsi*. I take *āvijeyyāsi* as pot 2<sup>nd</sup> sg of *āvijjhati*, to move in a circular motion (instead of *āvīñjati*, to pull, to draw, to attract). See CPD: *āvijjhati*, etc. The word *anumajjeyyāsi*, “you should massage,” is pot 2<sup>nd</sup> sg of *anumajjati*, (a) to

(5) LOOK AROUND. If this fails, then we should rise, wash our eyes with some water, look around [at the surrounding] and look up at the stars and constellations.

(6) PERCEPTION OF LIGHT. If this fails then, we should practise the perception of light, determine the perception of daylight: just as day is, so is night; just as night is, so is day.<sup>68</sup>

(7) WALKING MEDITATION. If this fails, then we should, perceiving before and after, determine in walking back and forth,<sup>69</sup> *turning our senses inward, keeping our minds from straying outward*.<sup>70</sup>

(8) REST. If all this fails, then, mindful and fully aware, we should lie down lion-like on our right side, placing foot on foot, keeping in mind the time for rising; and on awaking, we should rise quickly, thinking, “I will dwell without indulging in the pleasure of sleep, or in the pleasure of reclining, or in the pleasure of drowsiness.”<sup>71</sup> (A 7.58/4:86-91) = SD 4.11<sup>72</sup>

**3.3.3 Bhagu.** Another story of how sloth and torpor are overcome, remarkable in its own way, is that of the monk Bhagu. He comes from a Sakya family and renounces the world along with Anuruddha and Kimbila, dwelling together near the village of Bālaka, loṇa, kāra, gāma. One day, as he is leaving his cell to drive away his drowsiness, he falls on the terrace, and is thus spurred on to gain liberation there and then. In due course, he wins arhathood.

Later the Buddha visits and praises him on his solitude.<sup>73</sup> It is on this occasion that the Buddha, after his meal, discourses to Bhagu throughout the three watches of the night, that is, from dusk till dawn the next day.<sup>74</sup> The next morning, Bhagu accompanies the Buddha on his almsround, and then turns back when the Buddha proceeds to Pācīna, vaṃsa, dāya to see Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila (SA 2:304).

Bhagu’s **Thera, gāthā**, recounting his spiritual development runs as follows:

*Ahaṃ middhena pakato  
vihārā upanikkhamim*

Overcome with torpor, I  
went forth from my dwelling.

rub along, to stroke; (b) to beat, flog, pound (CPD). For the first phrase, the Thai tr has แต่นั้นขอเพียงสอดหูทั้งสองข้าง, “then you should put your fingers into both ears.”

<sup>68</sup> Comy to **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20.10/5:278) = SD 28.14 on the perception of light (*āloka, saññā*), gives the foll instructions: “A monk [meditator] sits in an open space [*aṅgana*] attending to the perception of light, now shutting his eyes, now opening his eyes. When, having opened his eyes, he closes them and, it appears just as if he sees (*olokentassa vīya*), then the perception of light has arisen. It is also called ‘the perception of day’ (*divā, saññā*), and with its arising in the night, it is said to be well mastered.” (SA 3:260).

<sup>69</sup> *Pacchā, pure saññī caṅkamaṃ adhiṭṭheyyāsi*. Here *pacchā, pure saññī* can have a simple spatial meaning: be mindful of what is behind you, what is in front of you. The important phrase *pacchā, pure* is also found in **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20), where it simply refers to the whole practice, from beginning to end: S 51.20/5:277 f = SD 28.14. For effective practice, both senses should be applied (albeit, noting that the latter meaning prevails: see foll n). On the 5 benefits of walking, **Caṅkamaṇa S** (A5.29/3:29 f) = SD 76.3. See also Nyanadhammo, “Walking meditation in the Thai Forest Tradition,” 2003: [http://www.forestsangha.org/Ajahn\\_Nyanadhammo\\_Walking\\_Meditation.pdf](http://www.forestsangha.org/Ajahn_Nyanadhammo_Walking_Meditation.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> *Anto, gatehi indriyehi abahi, gatena manasena*. “Turning your senses inward” (*anto, gatehi indriyehi* [*adhiṭṭheyyāsi*]) alludes to avoiding the mind being “narrow [constricted] internally” (*ajjhattam sankhittam*), and “keeping your mind from straying outwards” (*abahi, gatena manasena* [*adhiṭṭheyyāsi*]), to avoiding it from being “distracted externally” (*bahiddhā vikkhitta*): these are the last 2 of the “four faults” (*catu, dosa*) in meditation: see **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:276-281) = SD 28.14. See §7n above on the first 2 of the 4 faults.

<sup>71</sup> “Mindful and fully aware...or in the pleasure of reclining, or in the pleasure of drowsiness,” *tato tvam Moggallāna dakkhiṇena passena sīha, seyyam kappeyyāsi pādena pādam accādhāya sato sampajāno uṭṭhāna, saññam manasikarivā, paṭibuddhena ca te Moggallāna khippam yeva paccuṭṭhātabbam* ‘*na seyya, dukham na passa, sukham na middha, sukham anuyutto viharissāmī ti*.’ “Reclining” here is *passa*, lit “lying on the side.”

<sup>72</sup> As at **Samādhi Bhāvanā S** (A 4.41.3/2:45) = SD 24.1, & (**Anussatiṭṭhāna**) **Udāyi S** (A 6.29/3:322-325) = SD 24.8.

<sup>73</sup> Tha 271-274; Tha A 2:112; cf V 1:350, 2:182; M 3:155; DhA 1:56, 133; J 1:140, 3:489; Miln 107.

<sup>74</sup> SA 2:304. DPPN says that this discourse is referred to as **Kilesiya S** or **Saṅkilesiya S** (MA 2:153), and that it has not been traced. The Be text, however, reads this as **Upakkilesa Sutta** (M:Be 2:60).

<i>caṅkamaṃ abhiruhanto tath'eva papatim chamā</i>	Stepping up onto the walkway, I fell right there on the ground.	(Tha 271)
<i>Gattāni parimajjitvā puna-p-āruyha caṅkamaṃ caṅkame caṅkamim soham ajjhattaṃ susamāhito</i>	Having rubbed my limbs, I climbed back onto the walkway. Pacing up and down, I was well focused within.	(Tha 272)
<i>Tato me manasikāro yoniso udapajjath ādīnavo pāturahu nibbidā samatiṭṭhatha</i>	Then to me there arose a wise minding: the dangers became clear, revulsion was fully established.	(Tha 273)
<i>Tato cittaṃ vimucci me passa dhamma,sudhammataṃ tisso vijjā anuppattā kataṃ buddhassa sāsanaṃ ti.</i>	Then liberated was my mind: See the true rightness of the teaching! The three knowledges <sup>75</sup> have been attained, done is the Buddha's teaching!	(Tha 274)

Bhagu's awakening story should be an inspiration to all meditators who are troubled with drowsiness. There is neither shame nor failure in falling asleep in meditation: it is natural that a tired body falls asleep. After a good rest, with renewed energy, we can then exert ourselves with greater determination. Whatever difficulties or problems we face (such as stumbling) only reminds us that we are not there yet, and that we need to keep going. The key lesson of sloth and torpor is that we need to throw more light into our practice.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.4 PRACTICAL WAYS OF OVERCOMING SLOTH AND TORPOR

**3.4.1 ACCEPT SLOTH AND TORPOR.** Sloth and torpor feed themselves when we try to fight them. As such, one strategy is to simply stop fighting them. Instead, we should examine the sloth and torpor that have arisen in our minds. How do they feel like? Which parts of our body are they affecting? How is the environment contributing to them? Is it too warm? Or too noisy? If you do not feel comfortable with your physical surrounding, then move on to a more suitable location to meditate.

Another strategy is to examine how our minds work. Drowsiness and dullness are the result of a tired mind, usually one that is overworked. In this case, fighting the hindrance would not help, and would even feed it, making us more tired. The idea is to rest, which allows energy to return to our minds.

To better understand this process, **Brahmavamso** uses the concepts of *the knower* and *the doer*. The knower is that part of the mind that merely received information through the six sense-doors. The doer is the active mind that evaluates, comments on and tries to control these experiences. Now both of them share the same source of mental energy; they are really the two side of the same mental coin. Thus, when we have a busy lifestyle or struggling with some issues, the doer uses up most of our mental energy, leaving very little for the knower. When the knower is starved of energy, it feels dullness.

<sup>75</sup> The three knowledges (*te,vijjā*) are: (1) retrocognition (*pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa*, ie, the recollection of past lives; (2) the divine eye (*dībba,cakkhu*) or clairvoyance; & (3) the knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*), that ends rebirth (Cv 7.1.4/V 2:183 (Bhaddiya); **D 33**.1.10(58)/3:220, **34**.1.4(10)/3:275; **M 4**.27-33/1:22, **27**.23-25/1:182 f, **36**.38-44/1:2478-249, **39**.19-21/1:278-280, **51**.24-26/1:347 f, **65**.18-21/1:441 f, **76**.-47-50/1:522, **79**.41-44/2:38 f, **101**.42-45/2:226 f; **S 6**.5/1:146\* (v582), **8**.7/1:192\* (v736), **8**.9/1:194\* (v749); **A 3**.-59.2-4/1:166 f; **Sn 656**; cf (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> knowledge, *āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*) **M 9**.70/1:55, **112**.20/3:36. These 3 are super-knowledges (*superknowledges*), but only the 3<sup>rd</sup> is a "direct knowledge" (*aññā*), as it leads to arhatood. The three-knowledge arhat (*te,vijja arahata*) is one who, with *samatha* as basis, have attained 4 or more dhyanas. The *te,vijjā* here is the antithesis of the brahminical *ti-,veda* (A 1:163; Sn 594; SnA 463). See PED, sv vijjā.

<sup>76</sup> See also (**Anuruddha**) **Upakkilesa S** (M 128/3:152-162) = SD 5.28 (4).

In such a case, it is best to stop fighting the mind, but to let things be. Show the sloth and torpor our lovingkindness; after all, they are telling us that we are mentally depleted. As we become more relaxed and rested, our mental energy will rebuild, and the hindrance will naturally vanish.<sup>77</sup>

### **3.4.2 LOVE LIFE.**

**3.4.2.1 Loving our mind-body.** Any simple strategy to overcome sloth and torpor is to reflect on the value of life, especially our human state. Human life is valuable. Without life there is nothing; as such, it is of the great intrinsic value. It is good in itself. But on a spiritual level, even a philosophical understanding of life can have a higher meaning. Life is precious because it is the vehicle for awakening; the human body, too, as a living body, a conscious being, is the vehicle for spiritual liberation.

After all, all Buddhas are human beings. Isn't it wonderful to be a human; for we too can be Buddhas if we want to. Or we could be a Buddha-like being (*anubuddha*), a true image of the Buddha, as a stream-winner or one of the saints.<sup>78</sup> Reflecting in this way, we begin to feel joyful. Joy is a powerful energy that moves us to wholesome action. It helps us meditate better.

**3.4.2.2 Enjoying our breath.** Or, we can reflect on the preciousness of our breath. In breath meditation, we do *nothing* to the breath. We just let it be, as it is a natural process, functioning quite independent of our consciousness. All we do is mentally watch the breath with unconditional love, like seeing someone we love very much doing something he or she is happy with.

Our breath is the most loyal companion we can ever have, staying true to use right to the very last moment. Our breath is also the most precious natural gift: it is a constant reminder that we are alive. Our breath *is* our life. Meditation teaches us how to breathe wholesomely, that is, in simple terms, to breathe *happily*. With every breath, let me be happy. Breathe in, say "May I be well"; breathe out, say "May all beings be happy." And so on. This is a good way of mustering happy energy to push away sloth and torpor.

**3.4.2.3 Loving our breath.** Our breath is a very accurate indicator of our emotions. The more stressed or worked up we are, the faster we breathe. Technically, breathing is *oxidation*, taking in and burning up oxygen. We burn ourselves up with anger, lust, and other negative emotions.

The more calm we are, the more peaceful our breathing. There comes a point when we are so peaceful that we no more notice our breathing. In fact, the breath has become so subtle that we can hardly notice it. And we don't need to, as we are in joyful concentration, even dhyana. This is when we have full overcome sloth and torpor.

**3.4.3 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GUILT AND FEAR.** We now come a very important point as it concerns basic mental health. We need to know the difference between guilt and fear. We have already discussed how a feeling of guilt is likely to be common if we believe in "sin" or a God-idea, or where family upbringing or religious indoctrination has been rather stern and lacking real love and communication. This easily starts and feeds the hindrance of ill will.<sup>79</sup>

Guiltless fear, however, is something else, and can be very healthy. As it said, a burnt child dreads the fire. We neither hate the fire nor feel guilty about the pain. Guilt is a negative emotion imposed upon us by some higher authority through some kind of dogmatic belief of a supreme being. Fear, or better, guiltless fear, is a natural response to what brings us pain and suffering, or what is not conducive to our personal or spiritual development.<sup>80</sup>

Then, there is bad fear and there is good fear. Bad fear is not helpful, and can also be dangerous and destructive. In this connection, **Brahmavamso** relates his experience, as a lay Buddhist, when he attended a Zen retreat in the north of England. As it was very cold then, the meditators used warm blankets, but it made some of them sleepy and they started nodding off. The teacher who was walking up and down with a meditator's stick,<sup>81</sup> then slapped the shoulders of the person next to Brahmavamso. The sound, as it

<sup>77</sup> See Brahmavamso 2006:39-41.

<sup>78</sup> See **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3.

<sup>79</sup> See *Vyāpāda* = SD 32.5 (4.1).

<sup>80</sup> On the role of guilt and sin in promoting ill will, see *Vyāpāda* = SD 32.5.

<sup>81</sup> 香板 *xiāngbǎn*; Jap, *keisaku*, lit "fragrant board."

were, woke everyone up. “The problem was that the fear that woke me up remained with me, preventing further progress.” (2006: 42)

Brahmavamso adds another amusing comment about the meditating monks in the old forest tradition of Thailand. Some of them would go to dangerous places, such as platforms high in the trees, on cliff-edges, or in tiger-infested jungles. The ones who survived claimed that they had good meditation, but we never hear from the monks who did not survive! (id)

**3.4.3 SENSE OF URGENCY.** Good fear, on the other hand, is helpful, even inspiring. Here “good fear” can be taken as a mild form of samvega (a sense of spiritual urgency).<sup>82</sup> An example of such a teaching is found in the **Anāgata, bhaya Sutta 2** (A 5.78) (given in brief in the Samaya Sutta, A 3:66), which is a beautiful reflection on the urgency of spiritual practice, here summarized, that is, to say, we should reflect thus:

- (1) “Now I am young, but old age will soon catch up with me. Let me master the spiritual practice now so that I will live comfortably *in old age*.”
- (2) “Now I am healthy, but a time will come when I will fall sick. Let me master the spiritual practice now so that I will live comfortably *even when I am sick*.”
- (3) “Now food is easy to get, but a time will come when it will be difficult to get food. Let me master the spiritual practice now so that I will live comfortably *even when it is difficult to find food*.”
- (4) “Now people dwell in good fellowship, but a time will come when fear will reign, crime is common, and people live in groups. It is then not easy to turn to the Buddha Word, or to go for meditation retreats. Let me master the spiritual practice now so that I will live comfortably *even in time of fear*.”
- (5) “Now the order dwells in spiritual fellowship, happily united in one teaching, but a time will come when the order is divided. It is then not easy to turn to the Buddha Word, or to go for meditation retreats. Let me master the spiritual practice now so that I will live comfortably *even though the order is divided*.”

(A 5.78/3:103-105): see SD 1.10 (3.2)

**3.4.4 ENJOY YOUR MEDITATION.** There is something we can learn about the things we do when we were young. We, for example, often enjoyed parties, clubbing and outings. We might even spend the whole night doing so, and don’t seem to tire. We could do so because we *enjoyed* such events. The point to learn here is that when we are enjoying something, we do not feel sloth or torpor.

But liking and disliking are both acquired emotions. They often happen in an unconscious manner. The idea is to carefully watch what we like or dislike. We will be surprised (maybe not) that we may actually like something even if it is not good for us. Shouldn’t we avoid it then?

On this positive side, we can *learn* to like something that is good for us, especially meditation. We begin by understanding as much as we can about meditation. Then we tell ourselves that it is good for us, that we are enjoying the practice, despite the sloth and torpor. When we do this happily, the sloth and torpor will go away. That is why we often see people smiling when they meditate!

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<sup>82</sup> On samvega, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9 Intro (7f).