

INTRO TO PITI AND SUKHA

Read the 5th and 6th instructions

Through the contemplations we are putting in place a process of cause and effect or conditioned co-production (*paticca-samuppada*) where all five jhana factors are encouraged thereby building samatha:

From the first tetrad arises a sense of ease and well-being in the breath, body and mind

If we engage with the breath and body moment by moment, our interest in being with what's actually happening is building and the pull to habitual hankerings is lessening

Then an internal sense of well-being, not dependent on external stimulation or affirmation arises

This process is the focus of the 5th and 6th contemplations

The 5th and 6th contemplations focus on the “warm” jhana factors

Satisfaction, rapture (Pali, *piti*; Sanskrit *priti*;))

Piti is a feeling of delight, pleasure, energy freely moving in the body (the main manifestation) but also in the mind and emotions.

It arises when we breakthrough restricted blocked energy (mostly psychic but also physical)

Buddhadasa describes it as the excited happiness (pleasant vedana) that arises when one is successful in something

- So piti arises as our willingness to experience the breath and body, as they are, begins to bear fruit. We see that the practice works
- A gladness as the breath, body and mind begin to calm and our experience starts to transform

Traditionally *piti* is of 5 degrees

1. Lesser – raises hairs on the body
2. Momentary – like repeated flashes of lightning
3. Flooding – like waves breaking on the shore
4. All pervading – in the whole body, like a full bladder (or a fully inflated balloon) or a mountain cavern pouring forth a mighty flood of water
5. Transporting – lifts the body (even levitates it)

The manifestations are not limited to these 5 but you get the idea. Energy release in the body (can start as the smallest tingle, I get a shiver down the back).

- It can be very subtle or more dramatic
- Some people can feel strange because they feel orgasmic in a meditation. This is piti. If we understand it we can relax into and not doubt or fear what's happening (or cling to it for that matter which we'll see in a moment)

The intensity of piti is not really an indicator of a more effective or less effective practice.

- I think using the word piti is better than using the translation rapture which doesn't account for the spectrum from subtle to more intense along which this fruit of meditation may appear. The translation satisfaction has quite a different connotation to it than rapture does.
- Piti may be more prevalent or more or less intense at different times in our practice.
- Meditation can be seen as a process of coming into contact with more and more of our minds in a series of what appear as plateaus and breakthroughs. Actually, if we are consistent in our practice there is constant creative change and learning happen and it just appears as plateaus (as if not much is happening) and seemingly inexplicable breakthroughs (in that all of a sudden things change more dramatically)
- There was a study done of the learning of dabblers versus those committed to a topic and the learning curve of the committed student was one of plateaus and breakthroughs with an overall trajectory of deepening experience where as the dabblers curve had peak experiences that quickly dropped out and cancelled out so that there was no augmentative progress.
- Anyway, at times of breakthroughs we may experience more dramatic piti.
- Ayya Khema emphasizes that piti is always there. This has been my experience. It's always there but we don't know to look for it or we haven't learned how to find it yet. It might be very, very subtle or just somewhere we're not usually aware of – an ear lobe, the sides of the torso, in the armpits!

The important thing in the 5th instruction is to recognize piti and to purposefully cultivate it and by doing so strengthen samatha.

Here in the sutra we simply turn our attention to be sensitive to rapture.

This “sensitive to” is patismvedin (Pali) which means experiencing, feeling, enjoying or suffering whatever the case may be. It comes from the verb patisamvedeti which means to feel, experience, undergo, perceive

So with the 5th contemplation we study piti, we experience and perceive and enjoy it

It may be that piti has already arisen by the time the 5th instruction comes or even before that

Even before being aware of the whole body, if we're really drinking the breath, absorbed in it then piti may arise

- Sometimes the breath is spoken of as the samboghakaya for those of you familiar with that terminology. The body of delight and pleasure.

Sometimes it's right there the moment we sit down if we've come to the practice with an attitude of real delight at being able to just be with what is

Whenever piti arises we can make it the object of our attention, letting the breath drop to the background

- Can notice the location, duration and qualities of piti and how piti affects our experience of body and mind

When the piti fades we can abide still sensitive to the piti or if it feels that there's more work to do in establishing stability and calm in the body, return to the work we were doing before with the breath or body in the 1st tetrad.

It may be that piti has not yet arisen when we come to the 5th instruction

Then we can be sensitive to it in its seedling forms. It may be just a subtle pleasure in the body, energy in the body. Recognizing the fruits of the practice, the sense of the breath or body or mind calming even if just subtly and being satisfied with that

We can also build the conditions for piti by more unwaveringly paying attention to the breath and body. This will have the effect of withdrawing hankering after other experiences and help give rise to piti which grows out being present and interested in what's happening in the meditation, right now

Once we touch into piti we can allow it to strengthen and mature

Elsewhere in the Pali Canon, as taught in Ayya Khema's book *Who is My Self* (which is excellent on working with the jhana factors), the Buddha speaks of suffusing, drenching, filling and irradiating your body so that there is no spot in your entire body that is untouched by piti.

- This is like that idea of drinking the experience to really taste the flavor of it

So we can allow the piti, unclamp on the body, let go of controlling experience and let it spread (much like allowing the breath to be as long as it wants)

After a while we can familiarize ourselves with piti such that we can voluntarily touch into it. It's an energy that's just there below the surface all the time if we can come into the present moment and things as they are with kindness and attention.

Sometimes when piti arises we get excited and try to grab on to it to make it last.

But, if we try to cling on to it we only fossilize the fluidity in our just liberated energies and eradicate the conditions upon which piti arose.

Enjoy the piti while it's there and let it go in its own time.

Piti while initially enjoyable can also become wearing or course or tiring after a while.

That breakthrough isn't always pleasant, it can be jarring even violent sometimes.

And it's just like with any pleasant sensation we don't want it constantly. Who wants really to have sex 24 hours a day or to eat chocolate cake constantly? After a while you get fatigued by it.

Buddhadasa talks about how piti is stimulating and causes the mind to tremor and shake

In the progression of conditions, piti will tend to quiet to bliss or sukha through a process called passaddhi (pali) prasadhi (Sanskrit), likened to how the sound of a gong attenuates.

Passadhi is tension release, tranquility, serenity.

The energy of piti is absorbed

From piti, through this process of passadhi the jhana factor of sukha arises.

Bliss or contentment (Pali, *sukha*) (note, translated in Rosenberg book as pleasure but this is sukha specifically as one of the five jhana factors so better translated as bliss)

Literally, "easy to bear"

Tranquil, soothing pleasant vedana

Sukha results from piti

In this context I prefer bliss as a translation. Sangharakshita defines bliss as, "the apparently causeless feeling of intense happiness which wells up from the depths. Of his being when, the physical innervations associated with piti have subsided, the meditator is no longer aware of the physical body." This is not from denying the body but really establishing the foundation of the body. It grows out of the work we did in the body tetrad.

When we come to the instruction on being sensitive to bliss it may already have arisen or may not be present yet

Again we can become sensitive to the seed forms of bliss bringing an attitude of peace and contentment to whatever is happening. Calming resistance to our experience and letting things be. Letting what's happening in the meditation be enough

A sense of settling in to the practice

Being sensitive to bliss, whenever it arises we can make it the object of our attention, letting the breath drop to the background

Can notice the location, duration and qualities of sukha and how sukha affects our experience of body and mind

Suffusing, drenching, filling and irradiating your body and mind so that there is no spot that is untouched by sukha.

Here the sense of body dropping away or becoming very subtle may occur

Times when bliss is not present we can gently use breath and body awareness as a way of staying present while practicing a sensitivity or receptivity to sukha should it appear

It may be that in the entire practice of the 6th contemplation bliss never appears.

We just learn from what is happening then. You don't just have the meditations here to "get" the teaching. It takes time to mine the teaching and see what's it pointing to

- The story of the guy who went on a 2 month vipassana retreat and after a month felt his collar against his neck and thought "oh, that's what they've been talking about when they've been talking about being aware of the body!"

The traditional simile for piti and sukha:

Man thirty traveling in a desert and asks where is water?

He's told it's beyond the forest where there is a lake. Hearing this he's delighted.

Walking closer he sees people carry water and starts to see water birds and gets more and more delighted.

He then goes to the lake, he descends and bathes and drinks at his pleasure.

- From the time he hears about the water until getting to the water is rapture. Gladness and delight at the object in view.
- Entering the lake is like bliss. Enjoying the taste.

Personal images:

Can be a sense of breaking out from the tree line to a vista.

Or a dam breaking and the pressure of the water behind the wall subsiding as it collects in to a vast lake

Full blown it is a qualitative shift in experience.

Traditionally entering upon *piti* and *sukkhā* is spoken about in terms of moving from *kāmaloka* – the world of sense *desire*, being pulled outward (to words to food, to sex, to information, to clothes, to cars, to new Buddha *rupas* and *chotchkies*) to the *rupa loka*, the pure form world (corresponding to the 4 *rupa jhanas* for those of you that are familiar with the traditional categorization of meditative absorptions). So much energy goes into seeking after happiness in the world of sense desire and that happiness is fleeting, dependent on that which is outside of ourselves. Learning an optional way of being. Joy and happiness born of seclusion. Born of concentration.

The instructions 1-6 are a causal sequence building the meditative absorptions.

We can practice instructions 1-6 to help us build *samatha*. But for the purposes of becoming enlightened, a little *samatha* may be enough. Nagarjuna said that we only needed enough concentration to stay with the *vipasyana* inquiry. And as we add some *vipasyana bhavana* reflections we may find that those help become more absorbed and have the effect of building *samatha* because they increase our interest in what is happening. So *piti* and *sukkhā* across a whole spectrum can be beneficial to helping us stabilize the mind enough (access concentration) to stay present and interested in the meditation. It doesn't need to be fully transporting rapture or all pervading bliss.

There are warnings about becoming attached to *piti* and *sukkhā*.

We can see attachment in terms of “wanting, craving” when we suffer because they are not present

When they are present we can have a sort of addictive relationship to them

We meditate to transform ourselves so if we train ourselves to give rise to *piti* and *sukkhā* and then bliss out and hang out there we won't have the motivation or skill to use the pliability of mind generated through *samatha* for the *vipasyana* work, which isn't about dwelling in pleasant experience but being open to everything and becoming voluntarily aware of *dukkhā* or suffering

Rosenberg says, “Meditative states are ephemeral, and can be especially so when you're trying to hold on to them. Rapture and happiness, however deep they may seem, are not ultimately fulfilling. They have a certain existential loneliness to them, a trace of me and mine. They disappear when the conditions that produced them end. And when they do, if we're attached to them, we suffer.”

So we learn to encourage piti and sukha because of the samatha they help build. We enjoy them when they are there but we also understand they are impermanent and not the same as being enlightened and let them go and also don't go down the path of despondency when they are not there.

Today we'll work with these instructions and tomorrow we'll make the transition to vipasyana bhavana.