



**The Eight Stages of Mastery – *Abhibhāyatana***

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## ***Kasiṇa* Meditation as the Basis for Eight Stages of Mastery (*abhibhāyatana*).**

The eight stages of mastery (*abhibhāyatana*) taught by the Buddha refer to the *kasiṇa* bases. They are a special mental training (*bhāvanā*) within the framework of *samatha* meditation.

The mental training here is perfected by practicing with the *kasiṇa* all four *jhānā*, with limited forms and with unlimited forms. Limited means that the form does not expand. The forms are taken up once internally, once externally. With both methods, as well as with keeping the limited image and the unlimited image, the mind should be skillful. The colours can be pure or impure. The pure colours are called beautiful, the impure ones are called ugly.

The eight stages of mastery (*abhibhāyatanaṇi*) have the function to overcome the sense sphere. They represent a certain concentration training based on *kasiṇa* meditation. Through the various exercises with the *kasiṇa*, internal and external, beautiful and ugly, limited and unlimited, the mind becomes very flexible and concentration goes deeper. The exercises are more difficult in their succession, so it is said: 'Overcoming (mastering) these, I know and see.' The knowing and seeing of the corresponding exercise happens after emerging from the *jhāna*. The practice is reflected upon and the mind turns to a more difficult step.

In MN 77, the Buddha says that many of his disciples dwell in this way, attaining the ability and perfection of higher mental power or direct knowledge (*abhiññā*).

These exercises are thus a good preparation for *vipassanā* meditation, to achieve deep concentration and to make the mind flexible to different objects.

In the time of Buddha Gotama, his disciples practiced them. Today they are often forgotten or their value is not understood.

## Description of the eight stages of mastery in the Suttā.

AN 10.29 Kosala 1 – Paṭhamakosalasuttaṃ.

*”Bhikkhus, there are these eight stages of mastery (abhibhāyatana). What eight?*

*One percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, limited, beautiful or ugly. Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the first stage of mastery.*

*One percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, unlimited, beautiful or ugly. Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the second stage of mastery.*

*One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, limited, beautiful or ugly. Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the third stage of mastery.*

*One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, unlimited, beautiful or ugly. Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the fourth stage of mastery.*

*One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, black ones (nīla)<sup>1</sup>, black in colour, with black appearance, with black radiation. Just as the flax flower or a Benares cloth smoothed on both sides is black, of black colour, black appearance, black radiation; so too, one not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally. Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the fifth stage of mastery.*

*One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, yellow ones, yellow in colour, with yellow appearance, with yellow radiation. Just as the kanikara flower is yellow, yellow in colour, with yellow appearance, with yellow radiation or just as Baranasi cloth, smoothed on both sides, might be yellow, yellow in colour, with yellow appearance, with yellow radiation, so too, one not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, yellow ones . . . Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the sixth stage of mastery.*

*One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, red ones, red in colour, with red appearance, with red radiation. Just as a marshmallow flower (bandhujīvaka, pentapetes phoenicea, hibiscus) or a benares cloth smoothed on both sides is red, of red color, red appearance, red radiation; so too, one not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, red ones . . . Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the seventh stage of mastery.*

*One not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, white ones, of white colour, with white appearance, with white radiation. Just as the morning star is white, white in colour. Just as the morning star or a Benares cloth smoothed on both sides is white, of white colour, white appearance, white radiation; so too, one not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, ... Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. This is the eighth stage of mastery.*

*These are the eight stages of mastery. Of these eight stages of mastery, this is the foremost, namely, that one not percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, white ones, of white colour, with white appearance, with white radiation. Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see. There are beings who are percipient in such a way. But even for beings who are percipient in such a way there is change and alteration. Seeing this thus, the instructed noble disciple becomes disenchanted with it; being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate toward the foremost, not to speak of what is inferior.”*

<sup>1</sup> *Nīla* is translated as black, brown, or blue. It is also used to describe the colour of the hair. Since Indians have black hair, the *kasiṇa* here is referred to as ‘black’.

## Practice of the eight stages of mastery

**1<sup>st</sup> stage:** *One percipient of forms internally  
sees forms externally,  
limited, beautiful or ugly.  
Having mastered them,  
he is percipient thus: I know, I see.  
This is the first stage of mastery.*

For the practice of the first stage, the object is taken up internally, that is, by one's own body parts. This is expressed by the statement: '*One percipient of forms internally sees forms externally, ...*' It is possible with appropriate concentration from the fourth *jhāna* with another object to see one's own body parts in the body. For example, the fourth *jhāna* can be practiced with mindfulness of in- and outbreath. One emerges from the *jhāna* and focuses on a body part.

When one is successful like this, the object appears as an external sign (*nimitta*). The object is not spread out, as it is usually in *kaṣiṇa* meditation, but remains limited. That means, the body part is perceived in its actual form, first internally and then as a sign externally in front of the mind and kept as an object of meditation. The commentary explicitly states that the object should remain limited and not grow. Therefore, attention is also to be drawn to this, not to let the object spread. According to the commentary on the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, the first Abhidhamma book, 'beautiful or ugly' refers to the colour. Yellow or red can be perceived as a clear, beautiful color, or it can be perceived as unclear, dirty, and therefore called ugly. However, beautiful or ugly is also just a way of translating the pali words *suvaṇṇa*, *dubbaṇṇa*. The word *vaṇṇa* means colour and one could also say good colour or bad colour. For example, when one picks up the yellow colour from urine, it can be clear yellow, but it can also be dirty or greenish yellow. In the same way, blood can be clearly red, but it can also be bluish or dark. In the first case it is a good colour to look at, in the second case it is a not so good colour to look at. This is the context that is meant here. While practicing with this colour, one sees it, knows what colour it is and can keep it in front of oneself with mind consciousness for a certain time. However, the knowledge also relates to the disadvantages of the colour and the disadvantages of the corresponding *jhāna*. One can practice the four fine-material *jhāna* with the picture taken in this way, if one takes the colour as an object. If one takes the body part itself as an object, one can only achieve the first *jhāna*.

In the commentaries to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī and in that to the Middle Length Discourses MN 77, it is always assumed here that one practices the *kaṣiṇa* meditation with this first exercise. This is one possibility. However, this is not clear from the sutta text. It can also be that one practices only with the corresponding body part and takes this as meditation object. In that case, only the first *jhāna* can be achieved with this exercise. The colours are not explicitly mentioned until exercise five to eight. Moreover, the term *kaṣiṇa* means 'all' or totality, which means according to its name that it is a large, spread-out area.

In AN 10. 29 it is said:

*"One person perceives the earth kaṣiṇa above, below, across, undivided, measureless. One person perceives the water kaṣiṇa . . . the fire kaṣiṇa . . . the air kaṣiṇa . . . the black kaṣiṇa . . . the yellow kaṣiṇa . . . the red kaṣiṇa . . . the white kaṣiṇa . . . the space kaṣiṇa .. - the consciousness kaṣiṇa above, below, across, undivided, measureless. These are the ten kaṣiṇa bases."*

Here we can see that the word *kaṣiṇa* is in contradiction to a limited form, as it is pointed out in this sutta as measureless.

The mastery in this exercise, no matter how one does it, lies in mastering the *jhāna* and thus in overcoming the sense sphere, overcoming the hindrances, and mastering the special object.

Knowing and seeing (*jānāmi passāmī*) happens after emerging from the *jhāna*. It can refer to different things. If one wants to practice thoroughly with these objects, one should consider the following:

- One recognizes the object properly, i.e., the body part and its colour.
- One considers the hindrances that are overcome and the *jhāna* factors that have arisen.
- One knows that it was *jhāna* and not sense sphere consciousness by analyzing the *jhāna* mental process.
- One sees the disadvantages of the corresponding *jhāna* in relation to the next higher one, such as: the first *jhāna* is close to hindrances and restless due to the initial and sustained application of the mind. The second *jhāna* is calmer.

Knowing and seeing via these retrospective considerations regarding *samatha* meditation can also include *vipassanā*: One views all factors involved in body and mind as impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and selfless (*anatta*).

**2<sup>nd</sup> stage:** *One percipient of forms internally  
sees forms externally,  
unlimited, beautiful or ugly.  
Having mastered them,  
he is percipient thus: I know, I see.  
This is the second stage of mastery.*

In this second exercise, one proceeds in the same way as in the first, by taking up the form from an inner part of the body, seeing it as *nimitta* in front of oneself, and then spreading it out as unlimited, that is, encompassing the entire universe. This description clearly refers to *kasīṇa* meditation. Here one perceives a part of the body, ignores the perception of the form of the corresponding part, and concentrates only on the colour of the part. This colour then appears externally, that is, in front of oneself. Either it spreads by itself completely around one, which often happens without willful effort, or, if it does not happen, one spreads the colour systematically around oneself until it encompasses the entire universe infinitely.

- For the white color the bones are well suited, for the absorption as *kasīṇa* especially the back of the head.
- For the yellow colour the urine in the bladder is well suited.
- For the red colour, the blood is well suited.
- For the black colour, the pupil is well suited or, if the hair colour is appropriate, the hair. The hair colour also is perceived with closed eyes with mind consciousness and not with eye consciousness.

In the commentaries picking up the colour from the following parts of the body is recommended:

- picking up the black colour from the hair, pupil or bile,
- the yellow color from the skin, the fat or the yellow spot of the eye,
- the red color from the flesh, blood, the tongue, the palms of the hands and soles of the feet or the red in the eyes,
- the white color from the bones, teeth, nails or the whites of the eyes.

One can practice all four *jhānā* in this way.

After emerging from the *jhāna*, one practices knowing and seeing as described for the first exercise.

**3<sup>rd</sup> stage:** *One not percipient of forms internally  
sees forms externally,  
limited, beautiful or ugly.  
Having mastered them,  
he is percipient thus: I know, I see.  
This is the third stage of mastery.*

The third stage is practiced in the same way as the first one. However, here one takes the forms externally, that is, from the body parts of another person. If one has been successful with the first and second stage and has developed the four *jhānā* with the four colours, one is also able to absorb the forms and colours from the body parts of another being.

**4<sup>th</sup> stage:** *One not percipient of forms internally  
sees forms externally,  
unlimited, beautiful or ugly.  
Having mastered them,  
he is percipient thus: I know, I see.  
This is the fourth stage of mastery.*

This fourth stage is practiced like the second, but one picks up the colour from the body part of another being.

**5<sup>th</sup> stage:** *One not percipient of forms internally  
sees forms externally, black ones (nīla)<sup>2</sup>,  
black in colour, with black appearance, with black radiation.  
Just as the flax flower or a Benares cloth smoothed on both sides is black,  
...;  
so too, one not percipient of forms internally  
sees forms externally.  
Having mastered them, he is percipient thus: I know, I see.  
This is the fifth stage of mastery.*

For this exercise, the colour is absorbed from an external object, that is, not from a part of the body, but from an inanimate object.

Here a pleasant object should be chosen with a clear colour, which is expressed in the sutta text, by the colour of a flower with a radiant colour.

However, you can also take a neutral object and make a disc out of cardboard with the appropriate colour. The colour should be clear.

**6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> stage** are practiced accordingly with the colours yellow, red and white.

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<sup>2</sup> *Nīla* is translated as black, brown, or blue. It is also used to describe the colour of the hair. Since Indians have black hair, the *kasiṇa* here is referred to as 'black'.

## General Notes on *Kasiṇa* Meditation

The word *kasiṇa* means allness or totality. These meditation objects are so called because one expands the corresponding image all around oneself, as if surrounded by the entire universe. So this is a special training and skill regarding the development of the sign for absorption (*nimitta*), which is different from other objects for *samatha* meditation, such as mindfulness of in- and outbreath and contemplation of the 32 parts of the body. We find this meditation mentioned several times in the Pālikanon. However, we do not find precise instructions in the suttā itself. It is described in detail in the Visuddhi Magga, an ancient commentary work, as well as in the Vimutti Magga, which is said to have formed the basis for the former. In the West, this meditation, which can be useful on different levels and at different stages of practice, is little practiced and guided. Most teachers who teach *samatha* meditation teach only mindfulness of breathing.

The *kasiṇa* meditations were taught in India before the teaching of Buddha Gotama already.

The *kasiṇa* meditations are meditations on external objects. One can attain all four *jhānā* with *kasiṇa* meditations, and based on the four fine-material *jhānā*, one can attain the four immaterial (*arūpa*) *jhānā* via the *kasiṇa-nimittā* and their letting go, by going beyond the material images. Thus, the *kasiṇa* meditations are of particular importance for the unfoldment of *samatha* meditation.

There are a total of ten objects with which one can practice *kasiṇa* meditation. The four colours of the eight stages of mastery are included.

This way of developing concentration with a visual, external object is easier for some people than with a bodily object, such as mindfulness of breathing.

*Kasiṇa* meditation differs from mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath in that the object is spread out all around one, with the idea of filling the entire universe with it. By imagining vastness, the mind becomes focused, open and wide. In mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath, the mind becomes very fixed on a small point of the body, and when the *nimitta* appears, this is also kept there. Attention remains focused on this point of the body also in the *jhāna*, where the light *nimitta* appears. In *kasiṇa* meditation, one focuses on a point that may be more or less distant after spreading the *kasiṇa* throughout the universe. The consciousness becomes strengthened and powerful through *kasiṇa* meditation. The object becomes clearer and clearer in *kasiṇa* meditation as concentration increases, in contrast to mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath, where it becomes more and more subtle.

For *kasiṇa* meditation, one observes the external image until one can see it clearly with the mind, that is, with the eyes closed. Then one concentrates on the image thus formed (*uggaha-nimitta*). Continuing to keep one's concentrated attention on it, the very clear, unmoving counterpart-sign (*patibhāga-nimitta*) arises, and thus the neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) is achieved. If one thus continues to concentrate on this image, the consciousness enters absorption, and one has attained the first *jhāna*.

### Benefits of *Kasiṇa* Meditation

In MN 77 The Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyīn - Mahāsakuludāyīsuttam, it is reported that the Buddha meets a gathering of wandering ascetics, to which the wandering ascetic Udāyīn also belongs. The Buddha explained them the five kinds of practice on the basis of which he is venerated by his disciples. The fifth kind of practice of the ways to develop wholesome states of mind, includes the ten *kasiṇa*.

*“Again, Udayin, I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to develop the ten kasina bases. One contemplates the earthkasina above, below, and across, undivided (advaya) and immeasurable (appamāṇa). Another contemplates the water-kasina ... Another contemplates the fire-kasina ... Another contemplates the air-kasina ... Another contemplates the black-kasina ... Another contemplates the yellow-kasina ... Another contemplates the red-kasina ... Another contemplates*



*the white-kasina ... Another contemplates the space-kasina ... Another contemplates the consciousness-kasina above, below, and across, undivided and immeasurable. And thereby many disciples of mine abide having reached the perfection and consummation of direct knowledge.”*

The *kasina* areas are a very helpful training for *bhāvanā*, development of the mind, as the Buddha called the practice he taught. The mind is trained in a clear orientation of the mind, but besides that also in a flexible perception, once regarding the kind of object, but also due to the multiple objects. The mind opens through the perception of the allness, but at the same time it is clearly focused. With regular practice, this practice has an effect on the mind. There is generally more openness in the mind. It is an antidote to a narrow limited mind. By practicing openness, there also arises mental connectedness with the entire universe without thinking it or willingly bringing it forth. Openness does not become diffuse, but remains clearly focused through the practice of one-pointedness.

The *kasina* exercises are a suitable training for acquiring higher mental faculties through which direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) is possible. They are also a suitable foundation for higher mental powers (*iddhi*).

However, the *kasina* meditations have many benefits even at an initial, everyday level of practice. They serve to develop the mind at every level and also provide a resting place in everyday life. Each individual *kasina* object brings forth a special experience and has its particular effect on the body and mind. As the consciousness which practices meditation produces matter in form of small microparticles, the body changes through meditation. Generally, pleasant matter is produced with right concentration.

In colour *kasina*, the white colour is balancing, equilibrating and harmonizing. It calms an excited mind, but does not make it tired. It makes it calm and awake. The red colour is stimulating and works well in case of drowsiness, but can make an alert mind restless. It is rather unsuitable for choleric temperament. Yellow or white are more appropriate here. The yellow colour tends to have a dampening effect and is therefore helpful with a restless mind. Yellow also has a balancing effect when there is a tendency to dislike. Black brings out deeply repressed things. Thus, each *kasina* in its own way leads to purification of the mind from unwholesome and unpleasant states, as far as this is possible through *samatha* meditation. If one practices all *kasina* in sequence, this purification is comprehensive and has corresponding harmonizing effects on body and mind. Through this comprehensive effect, the mind is able to quickly perceive and understand very subtle things in body and mind. This kind of mental development, of course, needs time which one invests if one gives mental development a certain priority in one's life.

The effects also appear when external objects are observed with open eyes, but become more intense when the objects can be observed inwardly.

The Buddha said of his teaching that it was good at the beginning, middle and end of the path to final liberation. So it is with *kasina* meditation. One can practice it, as well as other *samatha* meditation objects, on different levels. It is beneficial and brings forth wholesome things when practiced correctly from the beginning with contemplation of an external object up to the attainment of higher knowledge for insight and liberation and the attainment of supernatural powers.

### **Practice of *Kasina* Meditation for the Stages of Mastery**

One can practice the fifth to eighth stages of mastery with any object of the corresponding colour. For example, a flower is suitable. The colour should be clear. However, in the beginning it is more difficult to pick up the colour from a small object like a flower. A disc made of cardboard is more suitable at the beginning, because the object is larger, has no structure and no particular shape.

If one makes a disc for the colour *kasina*, it should have a diameter of about 30 cm. It can be a cardboard disc or one can stretch a piece of cloth over a plate or a lid of the appropriate size. The surface should be as smooth as possible with little texture. Then one should observe the colour of the disc. The task here is to pick up the colour. The perception is directed only to the colour.

Shape, structure, etc. must be ignored. Special features are not perceived. In the beginning, it takes practice to direct the perception so specifically. Perception should be strong, but one should not stare at the image with the eyes. Mindfulness is very important in taking up the picture so that it can be remembered in the mind. Mindfulness knows what the mind is perceiving and prevents staring blankly at the image. If the eyes become tired while observing, one should first strengthen the mindfulness so that the mind knows what it is perceiving or, if that does not help, one can close the eyes for a moment and relax and try to imagine the colour.

It may be, with continuous observing, that other images appear. These should be ignored at all and the consciousness should always be brought back to the perception of the simple external object. One should not add anything to the object and the mind should not get entangled in stories. With deeper concentration, old experiences may appear diffusely as images. Purification of the mind is in no way a matter of taking these images and becoming involved with them. Energy is needed here to bring the mind back again and again to the actual object of meditation, which is a colour. Only in this way can this kind of meditation lead to very fruitful results and mental confusion can be avoided. If it is not possible at all to bring the mind back to the actual object and to see it clearly, i.e. the mind perceives images on the external object which are not to be found there in reality, one should realize that these images were created by the mind and distract from developing wholesome states of mind. One should realize that one has only a black, red, yellow or white disc in front of oneself. If this approach is not sufficient and images still appear on the actual object, one should close the eyes and contemplate bodily sensations by going through the body from top to bottom. Once the mind has calmed down in this way, one can proceed with the *kaṣiṇa* object with the eyes open.

One should make a firm decision (*adhiṭṭhāna*) that one wishes to attain *jhāna* concentration with the chosen object. One can also try to specify: 'May the mind perceive only the white colour (or the corresponding chosen object).' Such a firm decision, supports the mind's focus on the one chosen object. One can also contemplate on the blessings of these happy, wholesome states of mind and the benefits of seclusion.

One should also make a steady effort to overcome sloth and torpor by bringing forth balanced energy and continuously looking at the object with open eyes. The eyes should not be opened too wide nor too little. If they are opened too wide, exhaustion comes quickly and the counterpart sign cannot arise; if they are opened too little, drowsiness comes and one does not perceive the image clearly enough. Thus, with interest, full of confidence, calm but still energetic, one should contemplate the image until the perceived image clearly appears in the mind with closed eyes. One can strengthen the concentration on the visible image by directing the mind again and again to the chosen object by internally repeating the words such as 'white, white ...'.

This observation with open eyes already brings many advantages, therefore one should not devalue this stage of practice. One should practice so long and again and again in such a way, until the sign with closed eyes becomes clearly perceptible. It can be only a short time at first. Through the constant uninterrupted contemplation of the image internally, it remains for a longer time. It persists longer in the mind through uninterrupted clear perception. If the mind is restless and distracted, it cannot be kept in the mind. Then it is useful to work with the external object to calm the mind further. As long as the inner image is not stable, one should practice this way a hundred or a thousand times or even more.

It may also be that when the eyes are closed, the complementary colour appears with the colour *kaṣiṇa*. For example, with white it may be black, with red it may be green. In no case should one take the complementary colour to be the object. If it occurs, the mind tries to see the object with the eyes. In this way, concentration cannot be maintained. The inner image must be generated with mind consciousness and arise from the heart. As long as this is not so, one must look at the external object with open eyes. One should also consciously avoid using the eyes during inner contemplation. The eyes must be still and unmoving in the head. However, since we always perceive visual objects with the eyes, the mind tends to involve the eyes. However, the sign must be perceived from the heart with mind consciousness.

Internally, the colour may appear as a limited object, such as a disc, or already spread out in all directions around one. If this kind of meditation is known in the stream of consciousness, the received image spreads around one very quickly without any special wish for it. If it does not happen this way, one has to develop the spreading systematically.

As soon as during the exercise and while concentrating on the object with closed eyes, the perceived image (*uggaha-nimitta*) appears to one as clearly and vividly as with open eyes, the perceived image is considered to have arisen. If one can see the sign with closed eyes, concentration and also mindfulness, as well as clear perception have developed well.

It is necessary to continuously perceive this one object, which must appear clearly in the mind. The mind should be very straightforwardly directed, the perception must be clearly and strongly aimed at the object. The mind should not waver in any way and perceive other objects. When the opposite image disappears, one can return to the external image. The image should be perfectly still. It should not move. The object should also not flicker, but show a compact, closed field of colour.

Through this continued meditation on the adopted image, the hindrances are suppressed and are absent for longer and longer periods. Concentration can be established, and sooner or later the counterpart sign (*patibhāga-nimitta*) will appear.

The difference between the learning sign image (*uggaha-nimitta*) and the counterpart sign (*patibhāga-nimitta*) is as follows: In the learning sign imperfections of the *kasīṇa* disc still appear, whereas the counterpart sign shows a smooth surface and is faultless; it is much clearer than the learning sign. It is a mentally generated image and surrounded by light. It has a much more radiant effect than the learning sign. The mind is now established in the neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*).

The neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) precedes the full concentration (*appanā-samādhi*). In the neighbourhood concentration, the mind is concentrated by pushing back the mental hindrances (*nīvarana*), in the stage of full concentration as a result of strengthening the *jhāna* factors (initial application of the mind, sustained application of the mind, joy, happiness, one-pointedness).

In the neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), the *jhāna* factors are not yet so strongly developed. This stage is compared to a little child who cannot yet walk safely and often falls over while walking. The falling down of the child corresponds to the falling of the consciousness into the life continuum (*bhavaṅga*) in the neighbourhood concentration.

In full concentration, when the mind has entered absorption with the object (*jhāna*), the *jhāna* factors are strongly developed, having gained firmness. The mind can dwell in absorption for a long time, with the uninterrupted arising of wholesome moments of impulsive consciousness (*javana*).

Thus, if one has already practiced *kasīṇa* meditation in previous lives, the counterpart sign (*patibhāga-nimitta*) arises quickly and the mind enters absorption. If this does not happen, one must guard the counterpart sign very carefully, devoting oneself to concentration again and again and avoiding distractions also during non-formal meditation times. One should recall the counterpart sign as often as possible, even if it is only for a moment. One should not sleep too much, because if the mind stays too long in the life continuum, concentration is lost. One should avoid violent physical movements and fast running.

The image can be kept in mind only when it has spread all around one. This means that it appears all around one without limitation. If it does not happen by itself, one must spread it out step by step. If one omits this spreading and concentrates on the received disc, one cannot keep the concentration for a long time uninterruptedly. The obtained counterpart sign should be gradually expanded in the width of one, two, three or four fingers. In this way, one should slowly expand it more and more. The more thorough the expansion, the better the image will be anchored in the mind. Then one should expand it further to a meter, to the whole room, the whole building, the whole village or town, region, country until one has filled the whole universe. The expansion must be strongly desired and then the mind must be directed accordingly. When the image has expanded around oneself without any gaps, one concentrates again on a spot that is just in front

of oneself. This section is also called *nimitta*. The concentration should no longer wander around the expanded area, but be firmly anchored on one spot. If the image remains constant in this way, the mind soon enters the first *jhāna*. Then one has to develop the skills with this object and the first *jhāna*.

Thereupon, one develops the further mental absorptions and skills up to the fourth *jhāna*.

## Benefits of the Stages of mastery

The stages of mastery are a good preparation for *vipassanā* to enable direct seeing and understanding of the things to be observed for insight.

They comprise four *jhānā* and lead to stable concentration when practiced correctly. Through the different objects, the mind becomes flexible to grasp and focus on different objects.

Through the different colours as objects, which must be seen clearly and distinctly with mind consciousness, one can well check one's concentration and ability to perceive the sign (*nimitta*). Only with good concentration can the colours be seen as internal objects with eyes closed. Any distraction affects the image of the colour. The colour becomes unclear or perforated when the mind takes other objects. Thus, one can check one's own concentration at any time by oneself.

The colour *kaṣiṇa* are especially suitable for people who easily develop aversion. Since they are beautiful or neutral objects, the mind cannot easily develop resistance. The mind can thus come to rest more easily.

As illustrated in the sutta AN 10.29 Kosala 1 - Paṭhamakosalasuttam, although the *kaṣiṇa* meditations are means of concentration and thus, with concentration as the direct cause, suitable for developing wisdom and knowledge, they are subjects to the suffering of change (*viparināma-dukkha*) and must be overcome in order to attain the highest, *Nibbāna*. They are overcome through correct *vipassanā* meditation. They are themselves *samatha* objects and serve as that for seeing directly in *vipassanā* meditation their impermanence and thus the unsatisfactoriness that lies within them, as well as selflessness, and lead so to the turning towards *Nibbāna*.

In Paṭisambhidāmagga, KN, the connection between *kaṣiṇa* meditation as *samatha* meditation and gaining insight and liberation is presented as follows:

*"Through the earth kaṣiṇa .....*

*Through the water kaṣiṇa ....*

*Through the fire kaṣiṇa ....*

*Through the air kaṣiṇa ....*

*Through the black kaṣiṇa ....*

*Through the yellow kaṣiṇa ....*

*Through the red kaṣiṇa .....*

*Through the white kaṣiṇa ....*

*Through the space kaṣiṇa .....*

*Through the consciousness kaṣiṇa .... there is concentration (samādhi) with one-pointedness of consciousness and non-distraction.*

*Through this concentration, insight arises. Through this insight, the influxes decay.*

*Thus, there is first concentration and then insight.*

*Through this insight, the influxes have been destroyed.*

*Thus it was said: 'Wisdom through purity, through non-distraction, and through cutting off the influxes is insight in direct succession to concentration.'"<sup>3</sup>*