

The Four Stages of Shinay/Shamatha Meditation



Waterfall.

First stage of meditation. There is tremendous activity going on in the mind, like water constantly pouring down in a waterfall.

Do not feel discouraged or disappointed. Realizing that you have to work, continue to practice. Without becoming annoyed or disappointed at the number of distractions, you should resolve to continue the meditation practice. Neither encourage the thoughts nor try to suppress them, but simply work on coming back to the breath.



Meandering River in a Valley.

Second stage of meditation. Sometimes the valley is wide and the ground is level, so the water runs very smoothly. Sometimes there is a turn or the ground is uneven, so there is play and activity in the water.

While thoughts are still arising and you still encounter distractions, they are not as frequent as at the beginning, and not as gross or as powerful. You are not so shaken by the distractions, but are able to come back to the breath quite easily. Sometimes you are able to follow to follow the breath for some moments without any distractions. Again you are able to come back to a stretch of calm and tranquil mind, staying focused on the technique of following the breath.



Ocean with Waves.

Third stage of meditation. While most of the time the ocean is tranquil, once in a while a large wave arises and then settles back into the ocean. For a time, the ocean takes a rest. After awhile another wave arises, and again it goes back into the tranquil ocean.

You are able to maintain the awareness of following the breath most of the time, but once in awhile there are some distractions. At this point, there is not so much shakiness or uncertainty in your meditation practice. You begin to feel a sense of confidence and trust in yourself and in the practice.



Windless, Wave Less Ocean.

Fourth stage of meditation. As you continue to practice, the basic shinay or shamatha meditation finally becomes stabilized, which is likened to a windless, wave less ocean.

No matter how long you meditate, you can sit without distraction. There may still be come subtle thoughts, but they do not take you away from following the breath. To reach this level requires consistent and diligent practice over a long period of time, going through the various stages.