



# The Nine Abiding Minds

**By Master Ji Ru**

From a dharma talk given  
at the Mid-America Buddhist  
Association on April 29, 2007.

*The nine abiding minds describe the basic technique of sitting meditation in both the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions.* Nine abiding minds is a step-by-step technique of bringing the mind into deeper states of concentration. Before we talk about this practice, though, we would usually mention certain preliminary factors or requirements, such as having faith in the practice, good health, and a strong desire to learn, practice, and integrate the teachings of the dharma into one's life. Also mentioned would be a person's ability to understand the nature of the phenomenon of arising and passing away. Another prerequisite is having a noble teacher for guidance. We need these conditions to help us come together with the practice.

1. INWARD ABIDING
2. CONTINUOUS ABIDING
3. CALM ABIDING
4. ABIDING NEARBY
5. HARMONIZED ABIDING
6. ABIDING IN QUIETUDE
7. SUPREME QUIETUDE
8. SINGLE-POINTED CONCENTRATION
9. MAINTAINING EQUANIMITY WITHOUT ACTION

**THESE METHODS OF CESSATION,  
TAUGHT BY THE SAGES,  
ARE THE NINE STAGES OF MENTAL ABIDING.**

**N**ow to begin our topic of the nine abiding minds: How does the mind exercise or perform in this so-called human brain? We know that we generally let our minds run free. However, in Buddhism the practitioner is required not to allow the mind to run free. A free mind, in this sense, does not bring calmness or the highest knowledge. In Chinese Buddhism we say when you let your mind run free there is no government in your mind. Therefore, you don't guide your mind properly. The result is that the mind only attends to dukkha, not sukkha. In dukkha you allow the mind to be unsatisfactory (in a state of suffering), always resulting in stress and distress. On the other hand, in sukkha, the mind attends to the opposite, to true happiness or liberation.

## 1. INWARD ABIDING

The first abiding mind is called inward abiding. When we're talking about practice, in general people have a mind that they let loose to focus on external information; they pay attention to external phenomenon. For example, in America we want to be polite and show that we are paying attention to people during conversations. This attention to communication usually does not bring calmness or peacefulness. Often conversations will make the mind more skeptical and scattered. Our minds have difficulty concentrating because the object of our focus is constantly changing.

Inward abiding is the opposite of this usual outward focus of the mind on external experience. During inward abiding the mind is focused in the here-and-now on the practice of observing the arising and falling of the breath. Inward abiding means we bring our mindfulness to look inward at the body and mind. **In this meditative form, our usual technique is to focus on the four foundations of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body as body, mindfulness of feeling as feeling, mindfulness of the mind as mind, and mindfulness of the object of mind as to what it is. For example, the first point is mindfulness to the body.** While sitting in inward abiding we don't let our mind scatter or break out all over the place. In this way, we use mindfulness to bring the mind's attention back to the focus on the body as seen in the rising and falling of the breath.



**...we use mindfulness to bring the mind's attention back to the focus on the body as seen in the rising and falling of the breath.**

**...in continuous  
abiding we find it  
easier to return  
our mind to  
the focal point  
of the body.**



**In calm abiding  
you can more  
easily correct  
the mind and  
help it to return  
to the object  
of focus.**

## **2. CONTINUOUS ABIDING**

The second abiding state is continuous abiding. Here we focus on our body, moment to moment, and do not let go. As the breathing slows down, the mind will slow its own repetitive action. From our previous observation we know that the mind is really active. Our sense doors are especially open to external information. It is the old habit of focusing externally. If we change this habit into a new practice, while in the state of continuous abiding, we will begin to feel a type of happiness. So our practice of continuous abiding allows us to penetrate more deeply into the inner mind. **Our focus becomes aware of the body as if one were training oneself as an unyielding force. In this case the force is one of surrendering, abandoning, and renouncing the attraction to the external.**

Buddha uses the simile of a dog being tied to a post. At first the mind will be quite challenged, and as a result the mind will struggle against the chain. However, in continuous abiding we find it easier to return our mind to the focal point of the body. We are more able to remind ourselves to be mindful of the object of meditation. As the practice continues there is an easier unification of the mind and the object, the focus is more centered on the mind knowing the body: mindful, mindful; knowing, knowing. In this type of continuous abiding, when we are sitting in the meditation hall, it is not that we are doing nothing, but that we are seriously being mindful in abiding and knowing, in being aware of the body.

## **3. CALM ABIDING**

The third step is calm abiding. This important stage is when inward abiding and continuous abiding are practiced with success, that is, until slowly the mind is again overcome with thoughts. In calm abiding you can more easily correct the mind and help it to return to the object of focus. This resetting of the mind is called calm abiding. We know that when the mind is not calm either many improper thoughts prevail, or the mind is easily influenced to continue contacting external objects. When the object of our focus changes rapidly from one object to next, we call this 'losing the mind.' **Calm abiding is the opposite of losing the mind because the mind is determined to stay focused one-pointed on the object.** Although the meditator is not one hundred percent able to do this, in calm abiding the practitioner is more easily able to reset the mind on the body during practice than before.

#### 4. ABIDING NEARBY

During our practice we continue contemplating the steps of inward abiding, continuous abiding, and calm abiding. We practice and notice how the mind's old habits are replaced by this new conditioning. These practices lead to abiding nearby, which means that the mind calmly abides close to the meditation object. The mind no longer becomes disturbed. In abiding nearby our mindful memory no longer forgets the object of meditation. When the habitual, uninstructed mind-tendency wants to fasten to something external, the mind is now able to remove the wasteful thinking, not allowing itself to become distracted by external information. **Abiding nearby means that we come very close to the object of our concentration, and the mind does not stray far from its focus.**

In one sense, abiding nearby is very different from the beginning three steps of inward abiding, continuous abiding, and calm abiding. In the three beginning steps you force yourself to avoid all the disturbances. By avoiding distractions and by controlling the mind, we are able to follow the rising and ceasing that usually disrupts our attempts to remain mindful of the intended object. In the stage of abiding nearby, the mind has an abundance of energy to focus itself. We no longer need to force the mind to remain focused. The mind is able to awaken before an improper thought rising. The mind is no longer making things up –no longer entertaining fantasies.

#### 5. HARMONIZED ABIDING

The fifth stage is called harmonized abiding. **When we are abiding nearby, the mind, body, and breathing are each very clear in every moment. The coarse and intermediate mind-states are becoming calmer.** In harmonized abiding, however, even the deeper, subtle mind-state, which functions to balance the mind, body, and breathing, becomes pacified. In this more subtle mind-state right knowledge begins to emerge. Right knowledge does not come from our discursive thinking process, the usual rising and ceasing of discriminating thoughts. Our usual active mind, although intelligent about worldly phenomena, is still too scattered, too coarse to penetrate to a deeper experience. In harmonized abiding we begin to experience this deeper knowing of the mind-state. Right knowledge allows us to experience an initial realization of the four noble truths for ourselves, to see more clearly the eightfold path, the three dharma seals, and the twelve links of dependent origination. We actually have different feelings about our life.

When we sit we know that we are in control of our own mental reactions; we can guide our mind. Our mindfulness will be stronger as a result of this technique. This stronger mindfulness is what we call the "linking of the sequence of the abiding minds from the first step to the fifth step."

**In the stage of abiding nearby, the mind has an abundance of energy to focus itself.**



**Our usual active mind, although intelligent about worldly phenomena, is still too scattered, too coarse to penetrate to a deeper experience. In harmonized abiding we begin to experience this deeper knowing of the mind-state.**

**We love this moment  
for in this moment  
there are no longer  
any distractions.**



**The mindfulness is  
strong enough to  
immediately dispel and  
eliminate the errors of  
the mind.**

The results of experiencing this mind-state are obvious to us and to others. We can tell the difference between when we have a daily practice of deeper abiding or not. This result will bring up some new feelings of tranquility and joy from a deeper level. So we say that harmonized abiding is a great and delightful state for the mind to experience.

## **6. ABIDING IN QUIETUDE**

When the great and delightful feeling of tranquility comes to us, we can say that the mind is more stable. We feel the mind, body, and breathing becoming even more stable. We enjoy this kind of feeling, not as an attachment of pleasure, but as a natural result of virtuous practice. We love this moment for in this moment there are no longer any distractions. Hence, this is called quietude abiding. From this time on the personality will change. **We grow to appreciate a deeper quiet mind as compared to how we have been in the past. We are no longer attracted to distractions, to noisiness, and to disturbances.** All the information from the senses and any thoughts of ill-will from the past no longer have any appeal for this contemplating imagination. At this stage we have a new feeling of no longer being attracted to that kind of the external stimulation.

## **7. SUPREME QUIETUDE**

The seventh step is called “followed by supreme quietude.” This is an even more peaceful and calm state of mind. The mindfulness is strong enough to immediately dispel and eliminate the errors of the mind. When a person’s practice comes to this point, any experience of the inner impurities is gone. We know something is different in life right now. **The psychological mind-state becomes even more balanced. This type of level-headedness is so balanced that there is a total reduction of all anger, worry, anxiety, dullness, drowsiness, and sleepiness.** All of these past habits have ceased. We have found a mindfulness that is very strong and clear, a mind-state composed from a new energy wherein rising thoughts are immediately cut off without effort. This is the kind of energy that comes from supreme quietude, and as such, it is strongly related to single-pointed concentration.

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

## 8. SINGLE-POINTED CONCENTRATION

When single-pointedness is formed, the mind begins to deepen into a type of concentration where the mind is kept even and straightforward. When single-pointed concentration is achieved we have nearly completed the basic sequence of the nine abiding minds practice which will lead us to still deeper concentrated states called the four jhanas. **In single-pointed concentration there is almost no difference between the penetration into the mind and into the object of mind. We cannot separate where the self is and where the opposite object is.** Here and now we find an essential quality emerging that comes from this direct perception of a more subtle reality. This experience is called joyful diligence: a joining of right effort and tranquility. This connection between right effort and tranquility is not solely in the mind as it permeates the entire mind-body. It is actually through the body's focus that the mind is brought into this more refined form of concentration experienced as remaining single-pointed. When someone comes to this kind of mind-state, the material world no longer can evoke craving and clinging. All of the sensory stimuli that have previously acted as a fuel, promising to make the mind happy, are now corrected by the mind and the coarse and subtle desires cease arising.

## 9. MAINTAINING EQUANIMITY WITHOUT ACTION

Now we come to the last step: maintaining equanimity without action. Equanimity is realized when the mind takes no action. The mind-state operates naturally without scatteredness. This is a much more advanced stage of the mind in meditation. It is called the state of concentrated balanced mind. **The nine abiding minds apply the practice step-by-step in a process ultimately reaching the goal of equanimity.** This final stage is called 'nine is one,' and is the result of consistent and deep mindful practice. This is what is called the ninth abiding mind.

Hearing about the teachings, reading about the practices, studying and analyzing, these are all beneficial, but only to a point. If we don't apply and put the teaching into practice, we will not advance to true realization. Only when we apply ourselves to the practice of calm-abiding will we bear its fruit.

Born in Malaysia, MASTER JI RU was ordained as a Theravada monk in 1980. He later studied Chinese Buddhism and ordained in that tradition under the great Buddhist Master, Venerable Zhu Mo in 1986. Currently he is Abbot of the Mid-America Buddhist Association in Augusta, Missouri, and its sister temple in Chicago, the International Buddhism Friendship Association.

**When someone comes to this kind of mind-state, the material world no longer can evoke craving and clinging.**

**Equanimity is realized when the mind takes no action.**

