



Constructing the Earth Kasina

Approach the construction in one of two recommended ways: Put the materials together with as little thought and effort as possible; with just sufficient attention to make the device functional, or Take your time, work slowly and carefully, do not rush the construction. Do every step with pre-meditation. Consider the vibration of every element very carefully: do not use anything stolen (taken without being given), do not use anything valuable, do not use anything that is connected with an upsetting memory (exception being if you use earth from a cemetery or such, where the intent is to deliberately bring about upsetting associations).

I will describe the careful method:

Find a fairly substantial (1" thick) non-descript board about 1' X 1.5'. Find a piece of leather about 10" X 10" (it does not need to be perfectly square) Obtain about 1 cup of well sifted earth. Tack the leather to the board. If you want to put some "power into this" use 100 "tacks", and try and find what they call "staples", but are what I would call small nails, rusted would be better than brand shiny new (wet them and leave them outside for a couple of days). Even better would be the type of crude nail that is used to nail into concrete; but I am not sure if they make such in a small size and a large size could easily split the board -- if a suitably small nail of such a type is found, it would probably pay to take a file and sharpen the points of the nails (alternatively pre-drill holes in the board).

Even better than tacks or nails would be 100 small pointed wooden pegs inserted into pre-drilled holes through holes driven through the leather. Be careful where you get the earth. Earth from a spot connected with good feelings would be good. Earth from your own back yard. Earth from a cemetery. If you live in a city and have no way to find earth, buy a small bag of earth from a garden store (I would recommend opening the bag, removing the earth you need, and letting it sit around for quite some time before using it...perhaps you might take the earth from a potted plant, give the plant the new earth and take the old earth for the kasina). Sift the earth. You want earth with a consistent texture and color. Place the earth on the leather that has been secured to the board. Spread it around in a circle about 1/4" thick and the diameter the width of your spread-out hand (a "span"). Make the edges of the circle as perfectly round as possible and make the surface as smooth as possible (use a board or spoon or knife to smooth it out).

Using the Earth Kasina

Place the Earth Kasina on the floor in your place to be alone, approximately 3 lengths of your forearm--tip of finger to tip of elbow (a "cubit") in front of where you sit, or on the line of sight down the bridge of your nose when you are seated in the proper upright posture. Once in place the kasina is not to be touched, moved or intentionally altered by you in any way until it is time to remove it and destroy it. You sit, looking at the kasina when you sit, until you have "mastered" the preliminary phase of the Earth Kasina technique. You will know that this has happened when you are able to see the kasina "in your mind's eye", in all it's detail.

NOTE: Do not get hung up on the "device-ness" of the earth kasina...the earth device was at one time just the perception of earth in a plowed field, the rest is just hokum...but, of course, hokum pocum is one aspect of what learning the earth device is about...the other is that what you are learning here, in Buddhist terms is twofold:

1. "perception of earth" as a means for excluding perception of everything else (i.e., concentration), and
2. "perception of earth" in terms of the Four Truths

This is "Perception of Earth in terms of the Four Noble Truths": (Ref: Middle Length Sayings, #28: The Simile of the Elephant's Footprint (Greater))

What is Pain?

Birth, Aging and Death
Grief and Lamentation
Pain and Misery
and Despair

In a Word: the Five Dimensional Stockpiled Piles of Dukkha are Pain.

And what is the Five Dimensional Stockpiled Piles of Dukkha?

That Pile of Material
That Pile of Sense Experience
That Pile of Perception
That Pile of Personalization
That Pile of Consciousness

And what is that Pile of Material?

The Four Great Elements are what is understood as Material: Earth, Water, Firelight, and Wind.

And What is the Element of Earth?

There is the Element of Earth that is External, and
There is the Element of Earth that is Internal

And What is the Element of Earth that is Internal?

That which is hard, solid, resistant and which is located within, and with reference to what is understood as an individual: hair of the Head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, and brain.

Perceiving this in terms of the Four Noble Truths, as it really is, it is seen that "This is not "Me"; This is not "Mine"; I am not a part of This; This is not a Part of Me. And he Dumps the Element of Earth that is Internal.

And how is the Element of Earth that is External to be seen?

The impermanence, instability, of this element can be seen; comparing the great element of earth to this insignificant body, grounded in wanting, it is seen that there is "not anything here for saying, "I" or "Mine". If some disagreeable, painful situation comes to one, one reflects: "This disagreeable, painful situation is experienced as a consequence of sense experience. Sense experience is based on the contact of sense organ with object of sense. These things are made of this great element of earth and are, as it is, subject to impermanence and instability. Even this consciousness of mine is based on perceptions of materiality and is therefore impermanent and unstable." And consequently, experiencing a disagreeable, painful situation, he recollects the Teacher, and he remembers that "even if low-down thieves should carve you limb from limb with a two-handed saw, whoever sets his heart at enmity, he for this reason, is not a doer of my teaching" and he remembers

"Become like Earth, Beggars! This Earth, when someone comes along saying "I will destroy this Earth, mighty and powerful though it is!" and that person tosses up the earth, and digs into the earth, and kicks the earth, and spits on the earth, and urinates on the earth, and makes obscene gestures at the earth...This Great Earth Element is in no way moved in the slightest by any of this." And he resolves: "Now willingly let blows from hands and feet affect this body, let blows from clods of earth, from sticks, from weapons, affect it, for this teaching of the Awakened Ones is being done!" And in recollecting the Teacher in this way, with this stirring Vibration, there is developed in him a detachment based on the skillful, and he moves himself even more, thinking: "It is certainly not to my credit that although I recollect the teacher in this way, I have not attained to that ultimate detachment that is the goal of my efforts. And he redoubles his efforts, and he understands that this "seeing" has illuminated but one Way down one Strand of One Element of One Division of But the First of the Four Noble Truths, and he makes it a purpose to work out the remaining strands.

And in this way he is making good use of this earth device.

And this is how the Mulapariyaya deals with the earth element:

In the case of the second case, Beggars, we have the Beggar who is a seeker, a little developed in mind, short of his intended goal, one who lives preparing to throw off the yoke the throwing off of which there is nothing better, he recognizes earth as earth. Recognizing earth as earth, he knows about earth. Let him think not about earth. Let him think not of earth in whatever ways he thinks of earth. Let him not think in terms of 'My' with regard to earth. Let him take no delight in earth. How come?

Because this way this matter may be fully understood by him, so I say.

TMT: Or, for the lazy meditators among you ...

During one of my stays at the Bhavana Society I made an earth Kasina with a white Chinette paper plate and a half inch of dirt from one of the flower gardens. I would carry it to group meditation mornings and evenings and spend the rest of the time in my kuti practicing (well ... attempting to practice) the Jhanas by means of the earth kasina.

On that note ...

Do you agree that month(s) of intensive meditation in total seclusion is absolutely necessary for progress in the Jhanas? My teacher at Bhavana says it absolutely is but I'm not sure I agree.

On the jhanas: To my mind, the most important thing in terms of jhana is orientation. Nibbana is not the "getting" of something, but the "getting rid of" that which is obstructing it. The whole of the Dhamma, and that includes the Jhanas, is of the same nature. Consequently, progress, whether or not it gets as far as jhana, begins the second you sit

down to "not do" the world. Then, I believe it is clear if we actually carefully read the suttas, the first burning is there from the first conscious appreciation of the peace and calm of not being involved in our usual lustful and angry habits...and this whether it is for just an instant or for sustained periods. Next up from there I have a more controversial view...that the other jhanas are also attainable in these glimpses from ordinary life: the second burning is just the fact of having turned the mind onto the fact that one enjoys the practice of jhana itself, the third burning is when one appreciates the way it "feels", the fourth is an appreciation of the concept of detachment. All of these are then developed in depth with greater practice. So the thing is three dimensional and not linear.

In the same way as looking at a conch shell in two dimensions, it may be perceived to have several discrete sections, but when looking at the actual shell it will be seen that these sections are just one view of a spiral formation that is one continuous sequence; and in the same way as one could trace one's way across one dimension of the shell and cross the different segments, or one could trace one's way in a continuous line following the spirals; or in the same way as one could say that the first segment lead to the second and the second to the third and the third to the fourth, and the fourth lead to the mouth of the shell; or one could say that at any point along the whole of the surface of the shell there was continuous contact with the mouth of the shell from the inside...

In the same way when one is looking at the jhanas it is possible to see them as four separate units, or one unit which evolves into the next; and one could traverse the whole, step-wise defining progress in the units we understand as the jhanas, or one could traverse the whole in one smooth progression; and one could say that one step lead to the next and that to the next and that to detachment and nibbana, or one could see that at no point along the way was Nibbana more than one step away, and that all jhanas and all the components of all the jhanas were at all times present even from the first step.

On the other hand, (eliminating the idea of "impossibility") sustained periods of uninterrupted practice are definitely an advantage.

PS: Agree, the kasina's should either be made with excessive care or just thrown together with little or no thought. Originally the earth kasina was just looking at a plowed field... did you count the pegs?

References:

Warren: Buddhism in Translations, translations from the VisudhiMagga: The 40 Subjects of Meditation and The Earth Kasina

Digha Nikaya #33: Sangiti Sutta: Complete Spheres.