

PATHS OF PURIFICATION

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The main aim of Insight Meditation is to realise the Four Noble Truths in order to attain the state of Enlightenment. It is developed through attaining the seven stages of purification, each of which has its corresponding level of insight. The meditator can ascertain his or her progress according to the level of insight experienced. These stages of purification are as follows.

Purity of Morality

Morality is the foundation of this practice. Without its development there is no way one can achieve the final goal of liberation. Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are basic practices for achieving moral purification. Traditionally, observance of the five or eight precepts is considered to be adequate for the lay person aiming to achieve the necessary purity prior to practising Insight Meditation. Self-control and disciplined behaviour perfect the higher morality of disciplining the mind.

Purity of Mind

After a few days of practice the mind becomes quieter, calmer and less liable to wander, and so it can be said that the process of purifying the mind has begun. In order to progress further, the meditator makes a great effort to develop awareness and concentration and strives to attain one of three types of concentration: Vipassana's moment by moment concentration, access concentration, or absorption. The three meditative factors in the Eightfold Path must be developed in order to purify the mind perpetually inclined towards sense objects. If one fails to be objectively aware when such an object arises at a sense door, then one inevitably reacts to it with either like or dislike. This brings about thoughts that cause the arising of impurities. Nevertheless, through intensive practice and effort to develop absolutely precise and objective concentration and awareness, one can dispel the hindrances and achieve purity of mind. Once this has been done, then one can begin to make progress in the development of insight.

Purity of View

Purity of view is achieved when one has overcome the false idea of a self or soul. Having established purity of mind, the meditator will carefully observe all the mental and material processes at each and every moment and understand the mind and body analytically. While concentrating on breathing, he or she is able to distinguish between the in-breath and the out-breath and become aware that the

interval between the in-breath and its awareness, and the out-breath and its awareness, arise as different processes. In this way, the meditator comes to recognise through direct experience that each mental and material state is a different process and through watching the breath reaches the same conclusion with respect to the other sense functions. For example, a visual object, seeing and awareness are all perceived as distinct factors in the visual process. By observing each of these, the meditator can analyse the mental and material states according to their true essential nature. This is called analytical knowledge of mind and body. When it reaches maturity, the meditator understands that there is no permanent essence present in any of the mental and material processes. This is called purity of view and is described by Buddhaghosa in *The Path of Purification* in the following way:

No doer of the deeds is found, no being that may reap their fruits;
Empty phenomena roll on, this is the only rightful view.

Purity by Overcoming Doubt

Purity by overcoming doubt is defined as that knowledge which arises through comprehending the conditions for the arising of mental and physical phenomena. One overcomes doubts such as "Have I been in the past? Shall I be in the future? Am I now? Am I not?" The understanding of the Law of Dependent Origination, of Karma and Re-birth, are also included here. As concentration and understanding develop, the meditator sees the Law of Cause and Effect operating as he observes the mental and material processes. For instance, when changing his or her sitting position the meditator realises that there is an intention to change the position that precedes the act. Likewise the intention to stretch a limb is recognised as preceding the act of stretching. Through this insight the meditator can make a distinction at each moment between cause and effect.

As time passes, the meditator comes to experience various painful feelings in the body. Just after awareness of one feeling arises, another feeling arises somewhere else. The meditator follows these feelings and focuses awareness on each. Although the meditator is engaged in watching feelings as they arise, only the initial phase of 'arising' is perceived and not the final phase of dissolution. Similarly, as mental images arise one is aware of their arising but not aware of the moment of their dissolution. In this way, the meditator understands clearly that all mental and material processes are conditioned and conditioning. Apart from these processes, there is no person or self who performs or governs the phenomenal world.

Purity by Insight of what is and is not the Path

As the meditator continues to practise with perfect awareness and concentration, he or she becomes aware that every process of the mind and body being observed is subject to change. All of them are impermanent, all merely arise and then pass away. This knowledge is called the insight that observes, explores,

and grasps impermanence. By realising that all mental and physical phenomena are impermanent, the meditator recognises that they are not worth cherishing and regards them as a form of suffering. He or she comprehends that they are absent of self and simply impersonal processes. He or she has clear awareness of the arising and passing of the mental and material processes at every moment. The comprehension that arises by means of direct experience is called insight by comprehension of phenomena. As the meditator focuses attention on these psychophysical phenomena, the arising and dissolution of each process becomes obvious. This is insight of arising and passing away. As a result of insight, various phenomena arise in the mind; they may include brilliant light, strong mindfulness, strong or lucid awareness, firm faith, rapture, tranquility of mind, sublime happiness that suffuses the body, vigour, equanimity. The danger here is that the meditator may feel a liking or subtle attachment to these phenomena. Initially, the meditator is delighted with these experiences and believes he or she has attained the goal. However, when these phenomena are seen in the light of objective awareness the meditator soon realises that they are mere phenomena, subject to change, and as such are corruptions of insight.

Purity by Knowledge and Vision of the Course of Practice

As the meditator carries on with the practice, his or her observation of arising and passing away becomes sharper, stronger and more accurate. When the meditator's awareness reaches maturity, then he or she perceives only two factors in each moment, namely the object and awareness. While giving attention to these, he or she is aware of every factor's dissolution. Thus, when experiencing sensory phenomena, it is the dissolution and not the arising which becomes obvious. This experience is what is known as the arising of dissolution. With the development of this, awareness of fear arises in the wake of the constant and rapid dissolution of all processes. This is insight with the awareness of fearfulness. Perceiving the dissolution of all psychophysical phenomena, the meditator sees them as undesirable and harmful. This is the insight of misery. All such manifestations are seen as being insubstantial, devoid of pleasure and tiresome. This is the insight of disgust. These last three are combined as a single insight; some meditators may experience only one or two of them.

As the meditator experiences all the processes of mind and body and the concomitant fearfulness, misery, and disgust, the desire arises to renounce the mind/body complex. This is the insight of desire for deliverance. The meditator then makes a strong determination and effort to develop awareness and wisdom. All the processes of physical and mental elements become calm and balanced and painful feelings disappear. Awareness now arises smoothly and spontaneously and equanimity is present and continues for a longer time than previously experienced. This is the insight of equanimity of formations. When this insight reaches maturity, the meditator's awareness becomes sharp and occurs two or three times rapidly without the need to exert any special effort. This last stage is called insight leading to emergence or the insight of adaptation. The meditator ascends to this and then

glimpses the special insight that precedes realisation of the noble path. The last of the insights that occur in the progression, it is called purity by insight and vision in the course of practice. Immediately afterwards, a kind of insight arises that falls, as it were, for the first time into Nibbana, which is void of formations since it is by definition the cessation of all formations. This is called maturity insight, the Pali term for which literally means 'the one who has become of the lineage'. In other words, by attaining this insight, the meditator has left behind the lineage of worldlings and embraced that of the Noble Ones.

Purity by Insight and Vision

The moment of the arising of path insight is the last of the seven purifications. After the insight of adaptation and maturity insight, the path and fruition insights follow in succession. The path insight lasts no more than a fleeting moment and then the meditator realises the cessation of all conditioned processes. This is the insight of fruition and it is followed by two or three insights of retrospection in which the path of Insight is contemplated, as is the path of the Noble Ones. Path vision and fruition are experienced by the stream winner. In virtue of this accomplishment he or she has overcome the concept of an everlasting self, doubts about the path or teaching and adherence to wrong rites and rituals. The stream winner has become free from rebirth in any lower realm of existence. A person who wishes to attain the higher stages of Enlightenment should strive ardently to develop insight, beginning with that of arising and dissolution, through which the meditator eradicates the remaining fetters of the defilements. The final stage one attains is that of the Arahant who has won the goal of deliverance from suffering and can never again be reborn. I want to encourage you all to continue making an earnest effort so as to gain such insight and realise the path and its fruits. This is the path for your own liberation; this is the path for your own happiness and purification. May all of you be well and happy! May all of you experience the Nibbanic peace within!

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