

A talk offered by Philip Jones to the Silent Mind-Open Heart Sangha on 02-10-2015.

Last week I began a talk on what I'm calling the Twining Vines of Awakening. The vines, so to speak, are the personal, largely individual process of awakening to one's own life and to life in general, and the process of increasing renunciation, or letting go, combined with deepening insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory and conditioned, dependent nature of life. A model for this second process is found in the *Visuddhimagga*, or *Path of Purification*, a Theravāda Buddhist commentary from the 5th century CE. The point of my simile of twining vines is that it seems to me that neither of these processes is sufficient by itself to bring us fully to any degree of Awakening.

Without doing the work of opening to and looking deeply into our own experiences of dissatisfaction, stress and suffering, as well as into our experiences of generosity, happiness, goodwill and equanimity, our hearts will remain limited and blocked in some ways. We will be lacking in some of the compassion that is an essential part of being Awake to Life.

Without developing the courage and determination to see, know and speak (to ourselves and others) what is true, we fail to see and to open to, in our own lives and the lives of others, what is sometimes called the shadow. The shadow involves the painful, difficult aspects of our lives, the hurts and injuries that we could only cope with, when they occurred, by burying them as deep as possible. It involves the intolerances that we feel towards parts of our own lives, and so for the lives of others who display similar qualities. Without doing the work of opening to the shadow, accepting it with kindness and goodwill, we will continue to act without awareness, creating more unwholesome acts, creating more pain in the world and in our own lives.

When we fail to do this personal work of opening and awakening to the truth of our individual lives, it will also interfere with our ability to do the meditative work of seeing through the kind of universal misperceptions that lead to our entanglement with greed, hatred and delusion and that results in so much unnecessary suffering in this world. Yet without also doing the work of intensive meditation involved in the Path of Purification, it is much harder to let go of the sense of an individual self, to let go of the greed and hatred that underly so much of that suffering.

As I mentioned earlier, the *Visuddhimagga*, or *The Path of Purification*, offers a model for the deepening of our meditative practice, that leads to the Four Stages of Awakening described in the Early Buddhist Discourses. This model of purification of the mind involves seven stages, each one unfolding from the previous as concentration and insight deepens. As one directly experiences the practices and processes associated with these seven stages sixteen insights occur that lead one to the edge of awakening. I want to explore some of those this evening.

The first stage is Purification of Virtue, developing a base of ethical living which helps to create interpersonal harmony and stability in our lives and to some degree in our hearts and mind. I spoke of this last week.

Building on that base is the stage of Purification of Mind. This is the development of the skill and ability to concentrate the mind, including an ability to temporarily suppress the Five Hindrances of:

1. greed for sensual pleasures,
2. aversion for the unpleasant,
3. the qualities of sleepiness and sluggishness or a lack of mental and physical energy,
4. the qualities of restlessness and worry or an excess of mental and or physical energy,
5. and doubt, generally doubt about the path of practice, one's teacher or one's own ability to do the practice.

For the Purification of Mind to be fully developed, these hindrances must be temporarily suppressed, which leads to significant calmness or tranquility as well as a much refined ability to see things as they are.

This stage of Purification of Mind can be fulfilled, at least at the beginning, by developing moment-to-moment concentration. One can also fulfill this stage through the development of deeper, more stable states of concentration, such as Access Concentration and the *jhānas*, the deep states of having attention absorbed in the meditative object. The depth of the insights that occur will depend on the depth and strength of concentration that one develops. The suttas and commentaries suggest that to realize the last two stages of awakening, concentration at the level of *jhāna* is necessary, but not for the first two stages of awakening.

Building on the Purification of Virtue and of Mind, one begins to emphasize Insight Meditation practice more, seeing more clearly what is arising into experience in each moment, and seeing the impermanent, unsatisfactory and conditional nature of that object of attention. Over the rest of this path of purification, the sixteen insights, or insight knowledges, that I mentioned earlier arise. These insights cannot be forced and one cannot have these insights just by reading about them or hearing about them in a talk, even though it is useful to know of them. To be true insights they must be directly experienced, they must be known in one's own direct experience. These sixteen insights arise simply as a result of intensive meditation practice unfolding over time.

The third stage of purification is Purification of View. It is fulfilled when one has a direct experiential understanding that there are physical or material processes occurring, and a mental process of knowing them or responding to them. This is the Insight Knowledge of Mentality and Materiality. If one has developed jhānic levels of concentration, one may be able to discern a variety of material and mental processes and states, taking this insight to a deeper level. For many of us the insight into mentality and materiality may not seem like a new or distinct insight. We may have already come to clearly know of this distinction. But it is an important stage of practice that the following stages and insights build upon.

As one continues to practice insight meditation, building on the first three stages of purification, the fourth stage, Purification by Overcoming Doubt is reached. As we repeatedly bring concentrated and mindful attention to the present moment of our experience we begin to investigate or become more familiar with the experience of our body and of feelings—the pleasant, painful and neither-painful-nor-pleasant quality associated with each moment that we encounter. We notice again and again how sensations arise and pass in our experiences of the body. We see for ourselves that the body, all bodies, are composed of parts, and that the functioning of the body is dependent on the way that these parts function and interact. We see that our experience of our own bodies can be broken down into perceptions of sensation that are no different from our perceptions of other forms of matter. All of these lead to a deconstruction of the view that our body is a solid and enduring thing.

As we pay attention to our body moving, we begin to see for ourselves that there is a mental component and a physical one. We see that without an intention to move movement does not occur. We see more clearly that mind and body operate through interdependent

processes of cause and effect. And so we begin to understand that the mind and body function as mutually dependent conditioned phenomena.

As we give attention to the quality of feeling we begin to notice how quickly feeling can change. We begin to see how reactive we are to the feeling quality of experience. We may begin to notice how our perceptions of a moment of experience shape the particular feeling that we experience.

As a result of these practices the Insight develops that the body and mind are able to function without there being an "I" in charge. We overcome the doubt that the conditioned nature of the body and mind is enough to allow us to function in this world. This is called the Insight Knowledge of Conditionality.

So I think that's enough said and enough to digest for this evening. I'll continue to explore the Path of Purification next week.

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References

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