

A talk offered by Philip Jones to the Silent Mind-Open Heart Sangha on 04-07-2015.

This is another of the series of talks on what I'm calling the Twining Vines of Awakening. For the past four weeks I've been exploring some topics outside of the framework of the Path of Purification, but tonight I'm returning to that model.

The last time I spoke about the Path of Purification was with regard to the fifth stage of the model: Purification by Knowledge and Vision of What Is the Path and What Is Not the Path. I want to briefly go over that stage again, to give us context for what comes next.

There are two Insight Knowledges that arise during this phase of intensive practice: the first is Knowledge of Comprehension. This knowledge or insight has to do with a significantly deeper and broader, direct experience and understanding of the impermanent, unsatisfactory and conditional nature of almost all of our experiences. The second insight knowledge is the Tender Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away. It involves directly seeing in our own experience with much greater clarity than we've experienced previously that mental and material processes arise and pass away because of the arising of conditions and the ceasing of conditions. It is a much deeper and clearer knowing of the cause and effect nature that underlies all the phenomena we experience, except for the Unconditioned.

Associated with the strength of the mindfulness and concentration at this stage there are also ten powerful meditative experiences that may arise. If one becomes attached to them, then they are regarded as "corruptions of insight." They become obstacles to one's progress. But when one understands that being attached to them is not the path, and that seeing their arising and ceasing is the path, then this stage of the path has been completed.¹

So as our practice continues to unfold, as mindfulness and concentration continue to become stronger and stronger, the insight knowledge of arising and passing away moves into its mature phase. At this point in practice mindful attention becomes quite steady. We easily see the momentary nature of the sensory objects that we encounter. We very clearly and consistently see that each moment arises and ceases or is impermanent. We see the unsatisfactory nature of these moments, that because they are constantly changing they aren't a reliable refuge or source of comfort. And we clearly see that each moment arises dependent on causes or conditions and ceases dependent on those causes and conditions changing.

Sayadaw U Pandita, the contemporary Burmese master, describes this as a point when the awakening factor of equanimity becomes quite strong and there is a great sense of comfort or ease and a very refined degree of happiness.² One is not reactive to pleasant or unpleasant objects, and is able to sit for hours without pain.

The ability to see and know moment-by-moment experience with this kind of precision, then becomes the foundation, the condition for the arising of the remaining insight knowledges that will become clear before the first stage of Awakening. The remaining insight knowledges often happen quite quickly so that one may not even recognize them as distinct insights. Being able to consistently be right in the moment watching thoughts, feelings and sensations arise and pass, it can feel as though we have someplace new to stand. There is a significant freedom that comes as we are able to be so present and yet unentangled with experience.

Then as one continues watching the arising and ceasing of phenomena and the consciousness that knows them, there is a shift that occurs. One begins to give primary attention just to the ceasing of the object and the consciousness that knows it. This may happen naturally, but may also be a result of intentionally shifting attention to just the ceasing phase. Consistently noticing and knowing the ceasing of the objects of attention and simultaneous ceasing of the knowing or consciousness of those objects, is the Insight Knowledge of Dissolution.

With the consistent knowing and experiencing of the ceasing of each moment of experience, the ability to perceive in terms of concepts such as "arm" or "body" stops functioning for a while. This is a direct result of the clarity and speed with which one can now see and directly know the ceasing, ceasing, ceasing of the basic elements of experience such as the brief energetic impulse of a thought ceasing or a moment of hearing ceasing. With this comes the direct, deep recognition that everything that one relied on for one's sense of self is constantly ceasing and therefore unreliable. So there is no place to stand to build or buttress a sense of self. Everything is shifting constantly. Accompanying this recognition, there is often a sense of fear or grief. Some teachers describe this in emotionally dramatic terms, while others describe it as perhaps being troublesome, but not emotionally cataclysmic. This experience is called the Insight Knowledge of Appearance as Terror. It's certainly a dramatic name, isn't it.

If one identifies with the fear or grief, they can become obstacles to one's progress. The path ahead is to notice the impermanent nature of these experiences as well.

As one lets go of the fear or grief and continues directly knowing the ceasing, the Insight Knowledge of Danger arises. This is the direct experiential understanding that our suffering arises because we cling to all of the events that make up our daily experiences, what in Buddhist teachings are often called the Five Aggregates of Clinging. In other words, clusters of experiential events of materiality or form: such as hardness/softness, heat/cool, fluidity/solidity and so forth; clusters of feeling: the pleasant, painful and neither-painful-nor-pleasant tone of each moment of experience; clusters of perceptions: the conceptual recognition of certain signs or characteristics of an object; clusters of mental formations: all of our mental events other than feeling, perceptions and consciousness, but especially intentions and the energetic impulses to act on intentions; and clusters of consciousness: the bare knowing that a specific object has been contacted in this moment, such as simply knowing that hearing a sound is occurring in this moment.

With the knowledge that one can get caught in clinging to any of these aggregates and end up in unsatisfactoriness and suffering, the next insight knowledge arises: Knowledge of Disenchantment and Dispassion. It involves becoming disenchanted and dispassionate towards all the conditioned phenomena that one encounters during this phase of meditation. It's not necessarily a permanent disenchantment, though it could be. Usually it is more a process of gradually letting go. It's also not that one feels aversion to all conditioned phenomenon. It is that one no longer is enchanted by them. And so there is no longer a passion or desire for them. There is no longer an attraction to them, while engaged in this stage of intensive practice.

The knowledges of Terror, Danger and Disenchantment may be experienced as distinct insights, but they follow so naturally one from the other, that they may simply be experienced as one insight. This is not a problem. One doesn't have to experience them separately.

The danger of the phase of disenchantment is that if the aim of practice has been for some form of sensual comfort or deep meditative experience, then one may lose one's motivation to continue practicing. So at this stage it is important to continue with the intensive practice of directly knowing the arising and ceasing of each moment of

experience and with the aim of complete liberation and the direct knowing of nibbāna: the unconditioned or freedom.

It may seem that what I've been discussing is such an advanced or refined state that it is impossible to achieve, or at least way beyond your current abilities. But I do want to encourage you that it is simply the result of diligent intensive practice. I also want to emphasize that this is a model. Each person's experience may be somewhat different, for one thing usually less straightforward, so one shouldn't cling to this map as the way it has to be, or the way it absolutely will be. The important thing is to keep practicing wholeheartedly and with kindness, patience, and determination.

So I think that's enough for tonight. There's only a few more insight knowledges to cover but more than there is time for this week. But we're getting close to nibbāna now.

© Philip L. Jones, 2015

Notes

1. See Twining Vines of Awakening talks 4 & 5 for more detail about these insights and experiences.
2. Sayadaw U Pandita, *In This Very Life: The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2nd edition, 1992, p. 200.

Other Sources:

Catherine, Shaila. *Wisdom Wide and Deep: A Practical Handbook for Mastering Jhāna and Vipassanā*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2011.

Flickstein, Matthew. *Swallowing the River Ganges: A Practice Guide to the Path of Purification*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001. (This book has been slightly revised and reissued by Wisdom under the title *The Meditator's Atlas*.)

Sayadaw U Pandita. *In This Very Life: The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2nd edition, 1992, pp. 171-211.