

# Meditation and Insight III

## The Progressive Stages of Insight

A Non-Residential Teaching Retreat  
with  
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### *The Progress of Insight Part I*

The Progress of Insight can be divided into three main parts.\* In the first of these, Wisdom begins as an *intellectual* understanding that gets transformed into *Insight* through direct experience in meditation. This process applies to the first 3 Purifications and their 4 corresponding Knowledges:

Purification of View

1. Analytical Knowledge of the Mental and the Physical

Purification by Overcoming Doubt

2. Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality
3. Knowledge by Comprehension by Groups

(The Eighteen Great Insights)

Purification by Knowledge and Vision of Path and Not Path

- 4a. Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away (I)
- (The Ten Distractions from Insight)

In this first part of the Progress, a clear intellectual understanding is achieved through study, contemplation, and reflection. This understanding informs and guides mindful observation during meditation, helping to organize the meditation experience in a meaningful way. Then, as a result of this observation, your understanding gets transformed from being merely intellectual, to being deeply intuitive.

#### ***Purification of View***

The first step is called Purification of View, and is characterized as the *Analytical Knowledge of the Mental and the Physical*. It is also described as “Distinguishing between the Body and Mind,” and as “No Being apart from *Nama & Rupa*.”<sup>1</sup>

The traditional way of achieving the *Analytical Knowledge of the Mental and the Physical* is by studying and contemplating Dharma topics including:

- *Nama* and *Rupa* (mental processes and physical processes);
- the Five Aggregates (sensations, feelings, perceptions, mental constructs, and consciousness);
- Dependent Origination (causality in general, plus the specific links of: consciousness, body and mind, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and becoming);

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<sup>1</sup> The literal meaning of *nama* is name, but it has come to include every other mental process in addition to naming, with no exceptions. It refers, therefore, to absolutely everything that is mental in nature. *Rupa* literally means form, but it has likewise come to have a much broader meaning. First, it can refer to every kind of material object that can interact with any of the physical sense organs. By extension, it can be taken to mean anything and everything of a physical or material nature. But in an interesting inversion, since the only way we can ever know of the existence of anything at all of a physical nature, including our own bodies, is through sensation, *rupa* ultimately means *sensation*.

- the Eighteen Elements (the six kinds of sense objects, the six sense organs, and the six consciousnesses); and
- the Four Elements (solidity, fluidity, temperature and change).

Also included is:

- reflecting on the twofold division into mental and physical in a variety of ways;
- reflecting on the fact that, in your own experience, mental states originate with sensations and are dependent upon objects; and
- reflecting on your personal experiences of consciousness and objects of consciousness in order to realize there is no being or person apart from these two.

Basically, this means discerning through analysis and reflection that your individual reality consists of a sequence of conscious experiences, each following one upon the other, from the time of your birth until the present moment. You notice that each of these experiences consists of an *object of consciousness* and a *conscious awareness that knows that object*. It is further discerned that the objects of conscious awareness are of two types: sensations presented to conscious awareness by the five physical senses; and mental objects arising from within the mind and known directly to the mind. In terms of *rupa* (physical reality) from the point of view of actual experience, *there is only sensation*. In terms of *nama* (mental activity) first there are *mental objects* – fabrications of the mind itself, and then there is the mental act of “*knowing*” an object, sensory or mental.

*Rupa* as sensations and *nama* as mental objects are interdependent. There are, of course, series of sensations that follow one another in a way we interpret to mean that there is a physical world where physical events cause other physical events. In other words, *rupa* causes *rupa*. But sensations also cause mental objects to arise in consciousness. Every sensation is usually followed immediately by conceptualization in some form: the identification and “naming” of the sense object. When you think about it, most of these conceptual formations are ultimately derived from previous sensations. We aren’t born with a mind full of concepts and ideas. And more complex and abstract concepts are built out of simpler concepts that were formed in response to earlier sensations. Past sensations leave residues in the form of memory, and these memories can be triggered by present sensations. Depending upon the feelings and emotions associated with particular sensations, desire, aversion, and intentions to act in various ways also arise. So *rupa* also causes *nama* in many different forms. Put more simply, physical events may cause physical events, but the sensations we impute to physical events also cause mental events.

This interdependent relationship between the mental and physical goes the other way as well. It’s obvious that mental events cause other mental events. Thoughts lead to other thought, emotions, and intentions. But mental events also cause sensations. For example, you may be totally unaware of the sensations in your foot until an intention arises to direct your attention towards those sensations. In this case, the mental event of intention is the cause of your becoming conscious of those sensations. And this is even more obviously the case when you decide to turn your head to look behind you. But *every* physical action is the result of an intention. When the intention for a particular act arises, say raising your arm, a certain sequence of sensations follows that we interpret as coming from the action. (That the physical action itself ever actually happens is only inferred. Think about dreams and hallucinations. All we know for certain is that it felt and looked like it happened.) So we can also say that *nama* causes *rupa*, that mental events cause sensations.

In the traditional Buddhist formulation, mental objects are known by the “mind sense,” therefore mental objects can be lumped together with other physical sensations. We now turn to the interdependence of *nama* as knowing and *rupa* as the known. The “knowing” aspect of *nama* – conscious awareness – *only* appears in conjunction with an object, and *always* disappears at the same instant the object disappears. When you see an object, for example, the knowing of the image begins and ends with the appearance and disappearance of the object from your field of vision. It may be followed by a sort of mental reverberation, a memory of the object, but the knowing of the recollected image likewise ends when the memory fades.

When we reflect on it logically, the “knowing” and the “known” seem to be two quite different concepts. Experientially, however, consciousness and the object of consciousness *can never be separated*. Yes, we infer the continued existence of certain objects when we are no longer conscious of them, but when you think deeply about it, ultimately that’s nothing but an unverifiable assumption. For all we *really* know, the object ceases to exist between the time we stop being conscious of it and the next time we become conscious of it again. And as for consciousness existing apart from one of the two kinds of objects – sensations or mental objects – this is also totally absent from experience. Put more simply, there is no consciousness other than “consciousness of...”

Furthermore, not only is there no possible separation of the object from the mental process of knowing it, neither is there any separate “knower” that can be identified. The knower, the knowing, and the known all arise in total dependence upon one another, but *only the knowing and the known are experienced directly*. The knower is totally absent from experience, it is something added by the mind itself, and is a mere idea. In other words, there are only sensations and mental objects, and a mental process of knowing these objects, and apart from these objects and the knowing of them, there is no separate person. Thus it can be said, “Comprehending *nama* and *rupa*, he concludes there is no 'I' or 'mine' in this aggregation of mind and matter.” (Paravahara Vajirinana Mahathera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*).

### ***Purification by Overcoming Doubt***

"Correct Knowledge, Right Seeing and Overcoming of Doubt - these things are one in meaning and only the letter is different."(Vissudhimagga.) This is where, through direct experience in meditation, you achieve *intuitive* comprehension of what you’ve already understood *intellectually*. This understanding has become Insight when it is the result of simple noticing through *direct experience*, not just reasoning.

First comes the *Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality*. You observe that:

- in every case, mental events and sensations are the result of causes and conditions;
- that mind and body (*nama* and *rupa*) are interdependent;
- that there is no self or person apart from the experience of mind and body; and
- that this is true now, always has been, and always will be.

Through direct observation in meditation, it becomes intuitively obvious that there is consciousness only of mental objects and sensations, and that these two are interdependent. Mental objects arise in dependence upon sensations, and all conceptual formations are ultimately derived from previous sensations. Mental processes as intention cause sensation through action,

and mental processes cause other mental processes. Sensations, including those arising from the “mind sense” cause the mental process of consciousness to occur. Likewise, through simple observation and direct experience, it is clearly recognized that “you” are ultimately reducible to this sequence of experiences, that, there is no “being” or entity apart from this sequence of conscious experiences. With this knowledge, according to the Vissudhimagga, the meditator is said to have gained Insight and is known as Cula Sotapanna, the “Lesser Stream-enterer.”

Next comes the *Knowledge by Comprehension by Groups*. What this rather enigmatic label refers to is the Insight, through direct experience, that *all states are impermanent* as well as *devoid of self*, and that as such, *they can never provide the satisfaction we crave*. Because it involves Insight into the Three Characteristics – impermanence, no-self, and suffering – this *Knowledge by Comprehension* marks the beginning of the *vipassana* practice leading to Sotapanna, true Stream Entry. It begins the same way as the *Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind*, with contemplation and intellectual understanding. It is called “comprehension by groups” because the Five Aggregates, the Six Sense Bases, and the Links of Dependent Origination are each investigated, one after the other, in terms of Impermanence (*anicca*)<sup>2</sup>, No-self (*anatta*)<sup>3</sup>, and Dissatisfaction (*dukkha*)<sup>4</sup>.

Intellectual understanding becomes Insight realization as the result of observing the initial, middle and ending phases of many different objects of attention during meditation. The cumulative effect of all this observing, over and over again, is a deep understanding, through direct experience, that impermanence applies to *every* object of consciousness, mental or physical. You also observe that in every instance, in the hearing, there is only the hearing, in the thinking, there is only the thinking, in the feeling, there is only the feeling, and so forth, and that these are all *impersonal* processes – there is no “self” in them. It is further clearly discerned that only after one process has ceased does the next one begin. While watching its destruction and disappearance, each conscious experience is understood as *impermanent* and *impersonal*, and you also notice its quality of *unsatisfactoriness*. All this is known through direct experience, without the need for reflection or reasoning. By inference, you realize that the same thing is true of all processes, past, present and future.

You will realize from this description that your meditation has always consisted of Insight experiences, although you may not have recognized them: The two kinds of objects of consciousness; their interactions and interdependence; the complete absence of a “self” from actual experience, *except* when the *idea* of self is part of the object; the constancy of change, and so forth. When you become aware of these as Insight experiences, and then mindfully observe

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<sup>2</sup> *Anicca-Lakkhana*. Actually, there is nothing but continuous change, which is termed “*anicca*”, in the sense of continuous “passing away” (*aniccam khayatthena*).

<sup>3</sup> *Anatta-Lakkhana*. Although the five aggregates (*khandha*), including consciousness, are ever-changing, under the blinding influence of delusion (*avijja*), we foolishly credit ourselves with an abiding, perdurable entity, thinking: “This is who I am. This is my self.” Here, the *atta*, self, soul, or ego that is being negated does not mean the self of everyday experience, usually expressed as “oneself.” Rather, it refers to the concept of a permanent or abiding nature, distinct from the body, like the *atman* of Hindu philosophy or the soul of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

<sup>4</sup> *Dukkha-Lakkhana*. Clinging to the ever-changing aggregates (*upadanakkhandha*) as an abiding self is suffering (*dukkha*).”

them as such, Insight arises. The information these experiences contain, which is different from your pre-existing view of things, gets assimilated into your worldview with the result that your worldview changes.

As the Progress of Insight continues, all of these Insights, but the Insights into the Three Characteristics in particular, will continue to deepen. Of these three, Insight into No-self is by far the most important. When your intuitive view of reality no longer includes any possibility of regarding your Ego-self as real, you will have become a Stream Enterer. This can also be described as “the intuitive understanding of the emptiness of Self.” This is the culmination of the Insight process, and emptiness of Self cannot be completely realized *until after* the emptiness of all other phenomena has been realized.

As all of these Insights deepen, anything that causes Insight into No-self to lag behind the others is going to make the process much more painful. Entertaining notions of reincarnation and past and future lives is particularly insidious in this regard. Your mind will still be clinging to the notion of being a Self, while realizing ever more deeply the impermanence and emptiness of everything else. This in turn will lead to an intense inner struggle, resistance to continued practice, and feelings of despair, misery, frustration, and hopelessness. What could be worse than to be a Self stuck in the midst of such a reality? One of the worst things that might happen is that clinging to Self would lead you to abandon the Path of Insight and to cynically try to manipulate “empty” reality in the desperate pursuit of your own happiness. The best thing you can do for yourself, in terms of the Insight practice, is to become as intellectually clear as possible on the doctrine of No-self, and then apply yourself diligently to transforming that understanding into Insight. It will both speed your progress in Insight, and also make the journey relatively painless. Truly understanding No-self is the key to a quicker and gentler Awakening.

The Insights belonging to the Purification of View and the Purification by Overcoming Doubt are part of a list known as The Eighteen Great Insights. The list itself is a bit cumbersome, but it will be helpful once you have reached this point to become familiar with it:

1. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Impermanence rejects and abandons the false perception of permanence.  
*[1 and (11) are the same.]*
2. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Dissatisfaction abandons the misleading perception of pleasantness.  
*[The perception of phenomena as a source of fulfillment and sustained happiness is abandoned. 2 and 12 are the same.]*
3. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of No-Self abandons the false perception of self.  
*[3 and 13 are the same.]*
4. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Disenchantment with phenomena abandons delighting.  
*[Delighting is craving accompanied by happiness due to anticipation of satisfaction. Disenchantment with the world is induced by contemplating how impermanence and no-self lead to dissatisfaction and suffering. Contemplating this disenchantment and its cause leads to abandoning delighting. When 2 is established, 4 is partly established as well.]*

5. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Dispassion abandons greed.

*[The fading away of passion results from the contemplation of impermanence, no-self, and dissatisfaction. Contemplating this fading of passion and its cause, greed no longer arises. When 3 is established, 5 is partly established as well.]*

6. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Cessation abandons originating.

*[Contemplating the cessation of mental formations is part of contemplating impermanence. When there is no attachment to what has ceased, those mental formations don't arise again in the future. When 1 is established, 6 is partly established as well.]*

7. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Relinquishment abandons grasping.

*[Relinquishment means renouncing the perception that phenomena have an abiding self-nature. Grasping is the belief that formations are substantially real and enduring. Abandoning grasping means no longer perceiving them as abiding entities with their own self-nature. When 3 is established, 7 is partly established as well.]*

8. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Extinction abandons the perception of compactness and substantiality.

*[This is the Contemplation of Dissolution, moment-by-moment, of objects of consciousness. What is abandoned is any assumption of continuity. The compact is resolved into its elements. This insight starts with the contemplation of dissolution. When 1 is established, 8 is partly established as well.]*

9. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Dissolution abandons the striving and acquisitiveness by which kamma is accumulated.

*Through seeing the dissolution of formations, consciousness does not incline with craving to that process of becoming by which one accumulates kamma. When 1 is established, 9 is partly established as well.*

10. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Change abandons the perception of stability/lastingness.

*When 1 is established, 10 is partly established as well.*

11. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of the Signless rejects and abandons the sign as false.

*[Here, the 'sign' refers to the appearance of phenomena as entities, which, due to a perception of unity, continuity and substance, are assumed to be at least temporarily enduring. This is mere appearance, and when it has been penetrated, phenomena are perceived as 'signless'. 11 and 1 are the same.]*

12. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Desirelessness abandons desire.

*[When the dissatisfactory nature of phenomena is understood, they are no longer perceived as desirable. 12 and 2 are the same.]*

13. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Emptiness abandons the misinterpretation and belief in self-nature as false.

*[Just as impermanence is also called the 'signless' no-self is also called 'emptiness,' referring to the emptiness of self of the individual. 13 and 3 are the same.]*

14. The Insight into States that is Higher Understanding abandons all misinterpretations due to grasping at a core of substantial existence.

*[Insight into States occurs through knowing an object by seeing its dissolution, and by also seeing the dissolution of consciousness together with its object. "Formations dissolve, there is nothing beyond the death of formations" is the Higher Understanding and is the Insight into States. By this means, the grasping at a permanent core, which is accompanied by craving, is abandoned. When 1-3 and 11-13 are established, 14 is partly penetrated.]*

15. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Correct Knowledge and Vision abandons all misinterpretations due to confusion.

*[Correct Knowledge and Vision refers to seeing the conditioned and interdependent nature of body and mind. 15 is established with the Purification by Overcoming Doubt.]*

16. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Danger abandons misinterpretation leading to attachment.

*[Contemplation of Dissolution leads to Knowledge of Appearance (of permanence) as Fearful. Owing to the Knowledge of Appearance as Fearful, there arises the Knowledge of the Contemplation of Danger. This knowledge, consisting in seeing the danger in clinging to formations, leads to the Knowledge of Contemplation of Disgust and the abandoning of craving for becoming. With this abandoning, there arises the Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance. When 2 is established, 16 is partly penetrated.]*

17. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Reflection abandons non-reflection, thoughtlessness and non-awareness as to the three characteristics.

*[The three characteristics are Impermanence, No-Self, and Dissatisfactoriness. By means of reflection, the ignorance that is non-reflection on impermanence etc. is abandoned. When 3 is established, 17 is partly established.]*

18. One who develops Discernment through the Contemplation of Turning Away [from Samsara, the round of rebirth and suffering] abandons the defilements conducive to rebirth.

*[Knowledge of Equanimity About Formations and Conformity Knowledge are the contemplation of turning away, due to which the mind recoils from all formations. When all of the other 17 Great Insights have been established, the basis has been prepared for 18.]*

The particular Insights that are fully developed at this stage are: numbers 1 and 11 (which are the same); 2 and 12 (also both the same); 3 and 13 (also the same); and 15. Insight number 14 has been partly penetrated. The full penetration of all of those Insights that have not yet been completely established begins with the *Knowledge of Contemplation of Dissolution*.

## ***Purification by Knowledge and Vision of Path and Not Path***

Having purified your understanding of impermanence, you pass from the *Knowledge by Comprehension by Groups* to the *Knowledge of Rise and Fall*.

As you have been practicing, your attention has become much more stable, your perception clearer, and your mental processes have accelerated. Because of this quickness, if you have been engaging in a practice that involves verbal noting, you will need to either greatly simplify your noting or completely abandon it in favor of simply “noticing.” As swift as the arising and passing away of sensations and mental processes are, the mind can fully comprehend them as they happen. Each object is comprehended singly and clearly, and that is why this is known as the *Knowledge of Rise and Fall*. You have reached the single-pointed concentration of Stage Seven of the Ten Stages of Samatha. Although the perception of sensations arising and passing away is exquisitely clear at this stage, if there are no extraordinary objects or feelings, you may become lazy. But often, spontaneous movements, prickly sensations and itching, hot and cold, and all sorts of other strange and inexplicable sensations will appear. When concentration is intense, these may be quite uncomfortable, almost unbearable. These are the precursors to the physical pliancy of Stage Eight and herald the arising of Meditative Joy (*piti*), so they are actually signs of progress. You may also see disturbing images, or experience intense emotions, sometimes associated with memories. This is the “purification” aspect of Stage Seven. All of this is quite normal, and if you persevere, it will be replaced by joy (*piti*), and feelings of comfort and pleasure in your body and happiness of mind (*sukha*).

In the so-called “dry” Insight practices (commonly known in North America as “Insight Meditation” or “Vipassana Meditation”), this progression to Stage Eight concentration with *piti* and *sukha* is deliberately interrupted by means of the “noticing” process. The reason is to avoid what are known as the Ten Distractions from Insight:

1. Illumination
2. Understanding (the knowledge achieved through Insight)
3. Joy
4. Tranquility
5. Pleasure (which floods the whole body)
6. Faith and confidence
7. Energy
8. Concentration and Mindful awareness
9. Equanimity
10. Attachment

There is actually no need to try to avoid or prevent these from arising. The first 9 are actually wholesome and beneficial, although they do have the potential to be distractions from the continued pursuit of Insight. On the other hand, number 10, Attachment, is both unwholesome in itself, and is actually the reason a meditator might become distracted by the other nine. So all that is really necessary is to recognize and relinquish attachment when it arises. The experienced Samatha practitioner will, of course, already be familiar with all of these and recognize them for what they are, so their practice of Insight will not be interrupted or disturbed. But it will usually not take too long before even the less experienced meditator realizes that these “distractions” are due to causes and conditions, are ultimately unsatisfactory, and are not the goal of the Path. With



this realization, the Insight knowledge has been established that is called Purification by Knowledge and Vision of Path and Not Path.

This marks the end of the part of the Progress of Insight that involves intellectual understanding getting corroborated through direct experience. The “knowledge” that has been obtained can powerfully influence your behavior *if you happen to recollect* in the moment. Fortunately, recollecting the wisdom you’ve acquired does tend to become more habitual and automatic, which allows you to make many positive changes in your life. It also allows the Insight experiences that occur off the cushion to be recognized, which not only deepens but also extends Insight. What it doesn’t do is alter your most fundamental view of reality.

### ***The Progress of Insight Part II***

The Insights that follow in the next part of the Progress of Insight penetrate much more deeply into the subconscious domains of the psyche.

#### ***Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way***

This is the point beyond which Insight is *initiated entirely by direct experience*, and is traditionally regarded as the true beginning of Insight. Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way is comprised of 11 Insight Knowledges. We have already divided the Progress of Insight into 3 parts. We will further divide Part II into 3 sub-parts:

##### Part IIa

- 4b. Knowledge of Contemplation of Arising and Passing Away (II)
- 5. Knowledge of Contemplation of Dissolution

##### Part IIb

- 6. Knowledge of Appearance as Fearful
- 7. Knowledge of Contemplation of Danger/Knowledge of Misery
- 8. Knowledge of Contemplation of Disenchantment/Knowledge of Disgust
- 9. Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance

##### Part IIc

- 10. Knowledge of Contemplation of Reflection/Knowledge of Re-observation
- 11. Knowledge of Equanimity About Formations
- 12. Insight Knowledge Leading to Emergence
- 13. Conformity Knowledge/Knowledge of Adaptation
- 14. Maturity Knowledge/Change of Lineage Knowledge

### ***The Progress of Insight Part IIa***

In the beginning, the *Knowledge of Contemplation of Arising and Passing Away* continues. Perception is clearer, the mind is faster, and the focus of attention is more effortlessly sustained than ever before. You perceive ever more distinctly the arising and disappearing of sensations and mental processes. You observe that the object attended to disappears instantly just where it arose, neither moving nor otherwise changing. You realize the characteristic of impermanence in particular, in its purest form, by directly grasping the fact of momentary change. To the degree that your mind is prepared by previous Insight, you grasp the emptiness of objects as well.

What is happening during all of this is that, through continued observation of the arising and passing away of sensations and mental objects, the understanding that has been acquired so far is percolating down to deeper and deeper levels of the mind. This new information must then be incorporated at these deeper levels. Thus, the Insight process is continuing, but in a less obvious way.

At some point, the *Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away* gives way to the *Knowledge of Contemplation of Dissolution*. You have been clearly aware that, in each act of attention, there are two factors present: the object of attention and the mental state of knowing it. Now what stands out most clearly in your introspective peripheral awareness is that, when the *object* of attention fades, so does the *consciousness* that was attending to the object. Conscious awareness becomes fascinated by this phenomenon, seizing upon it. The perception of the process becomes even clearer as you continue to observe the dissolution of these two things, the object of attention, and the consciousness attending to the object. An object appears. It disappears. The consciousness of the object disappears.

This fascination of the mind with the dissolution of phenomena reflects the active assimilation of information at a deep unconscious level. You have not consciously decided to observe dissolution so closely. Rather, a powerful compulsion to do so has arisen from the unconscious mind. What is most important is not so much the fact of dissolution, but that it involves the dissolution of both the object, *and the consciousness that knows the object*. This has implications not only for worldview, but also for self-view, and now the mind must find a way to reconcile this observation with those views.

Sometimes, if attention is stable enough, and mindfulness is powerful enough, the experience of dissolution will involve a complete dissolution of all perception into a meaningless vibration at an extremely rapid frequency. When this happens, the mind usually recoils immediately to a “perspective” that allows it once again to project meaning upon what appears in consciousness. If you repeat this experience, it will yield profound Insight into Emptiness as well as Impermanence. You will have a direct experience of the process by which the mind constructs and projects meaning on experience.

### ***The Progress of Insight Part IIb***

As the *Knowledge of Contemplation of Dissolution* “matures,” It gives way to the *Knowledge of Appearance as Fearful* also known as the *Knowledge of Fear*. This marks the beginning of a series of Insight knowledges known as the *Dukkha Nanās* or Knowledges of Suffering. The *Dukkha nanās* include the next four Knowledges, from *Fear* through *Reflection*. They are where the mind confronts suffering until Insight into suffering has been fully achieved. The Insight experience that drives this process has primarily to do with previous Insights into Impermanence and Emptiness.

The *dukkha nanās* are characterized by powerful and unpleasant emotional states that can overflow as physical pain and misery. These are the conscious manifestations of a deep unconscious struggle. If the mind has been well-prepared through the practice of *Samatha*, and if, as mentioned earlier, you have made the effort to understand and gain Insight into No-self, then your journey through these *dukkha nanās* will be quick and gentle. Otherwise, this can be the most difficult part of the Progress of Insight. This difference is reflected in the different names given to these Knowledges: The *Knowledge of Appearance as Fearful* versus the *Knowledge of Fear*; the

*Knowledge of Contemplation of Danger* versus the *Knowledge of Misery*; the *Knowledge of Contemplation of Disenchantment* versus the *Knowledge of Disgust*. When the Progress through these Knowledges goes easily and quickly, it can be difficult to distinguish one from the next. When it is more protracted, because of the intensity of the unconscious struggle to absorb Insights that are so much at odds with existing worldview, the Knowledges are much more distinct. And they may even need to be gone through several times. In the worst cases, people may be stuck in the *dukkha nanas* for weeks or even months, with profound impacts on their daily lives. But in every case, the solution is the same: to persevere until the goal is reached. That realization, in fact, is the Insight that characterizes the last of the *dukkha nanas*, the *Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance*.

Let's go through them one by one. The *Knowledge of Appearance as Fearful* is the realization that all compounded things, past, present, and future, including the mind and consciousness itself, are subject to decay and destruction. The suffering that results from their impermanent, conditioned, and fabricated nature makes the fact that they appear to be self-existent entities frightening. Their true nature as illusory, empty, and void of self-nature makes their appearance as permanent and self-existent into a fearful trap. For some, who experience this as the *Knowledge of Fear, the mind is gripped by fear and helplessness*.

*Knowledge of Contemplation of Danger* is the realization that what is frightening is truly dangerous as well. For those who experience this as the *Knowledge of Misery*, this means they can only see *suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and misery, and they become seized with dejection. If they fail to continue practicing, then fear will overpower them once again.*

*Knowledge of Contemplation of Disenchantment* refers to the experience of complete disenchantment with worldly things. There is no delight to be found in what is impermanent, fearful, and dangerous. Safety and happiness only comes with detachment from them. Some will experience this as the *Knowledge of Disgust*, and become *discontented and listless, miserable both in body and spirit.*

*Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance* comes from this complete detachment from worldly things. With no clinging to any form of worldly existence, the only remaining desire is to be released. For some, there will be *painful feelings in the body making it difficult to sit, and the mind seems to shrink from the meditation object, making it difficult to continue to practice.*

The *Knowledge of Contemplation of Reflection* is the realization that there is no escape, other than to go forward and achieve the final goal. This comes from reflecting on the perceptions of permanence, self-existence, and self-nature that have been abandoned, and recognizing that there is no way to return to the delusions of the past. The Three Characteristics are clearly seen, especially, the characteristic of suffering. Some will *experience the body and mind as an unbearable mass of sickness and suffering, beset by restlessness* until the reflection takes hold and the mind becomes clear and calm once again. The Knowledge arises that there is nothing else to do but work for the salvation that comes with Awakening, and there is a clear decision to persevere in the practice.

### ***The Progress of Insight Part IIc***

With the determination to continue until the goal is achieved, the *Knowledge of Equanimity About Formations* arises. For those who had experienced fear, misery, disgust, and dissatisfaction, these are now completely gone. Pain is usually entirely absent. There is no mental disturbance with thoughts of any kind, fearful or joyful. There is only *peaceful tranquility and sublime clarity of mind*. Sometimes bodily sensations disappear, and still suffused with serenity, the meditator experiences a rapture as if enjoying a shower of tiny particles, and might also see brightness like a clear sky. This *Knowledge of Equanimity* is basically equivalent to Stage Ten Samatha. What makes it special is that Insight is very well established, and equanimity is very strong. Observing objects of consciousness and understanding them through Insight is *effortless*. It is difficult to direct attention away from the meditation object, and if you do so, it quickly returns.

Meditation easily continues for *two or three hours without interruption*. Events usually unfold very quickly from this point, but if Path and Fruition are not gained within 2 - 3 hours, concentration becomes slack and the mind returns to the *Knowledge of Contemplation of Reflection*. Some meditators may progress and fall back several times.

*Insight Knowledge Leading to Emergence* arises when there is a precise conjunction of Insight and equanimity. An object will appear in consciousness, and in that moment will be understood entirely in terms of one or the other of impermanence, emptiness, no-self, or suffering. This will continue for several moments of consciousness. The last of these moments is known as *Conformity Knowledge* or *Knowledge of Adaptation*. Due to the strength of equanimity, the mind refuses to grasp at the object, and instead turns away from it. In the next moment, all mental fabrication ceases. This moment of cessation is known as *Maturity Knowledge* or *Change of Lineage Knowledge*. With the complete cessation of mental fabrication the mind enters Nibbana, which is devoid of all formations since it is the cessation of them. This cessation of mental fabrications is the *Insight experience* that triggers the *final Insight* that transforms the meditator from an ordinary worldling to one who has achieved Awakening. That is why it is called *Change of Lineage*.

### ***The Progress of Insight Part III***

The preceding events, *Insight Knowledge Leading to Emergence*, *Conformity Knowledge*, and *Maturity Knowledge* have all happened very quickly, in the blink of an eye so to speak. We have now arrived at the final conclusion of the Progress of Insight, called the Purification by Knowledge and Vision.

#### ***Purification by Knowledge and Vision***

15. Path Knowledge
16. Fruition Knowledge
17. Knowledge of Reviewing
18. Attainment of Fruition

The next event, *Path Knowledge*, also lasts only a single moment, but in that moment, the culminating Insight is achieved that makes a person a Stream Enterer. This Insight is Supramundane in the sense that, at the deepest level of the psyche, the mind no longer holds the same intuitive view of reality as does the rest of the world.

It's rather difficult to explain just how the Insight of *Path Knowledge* is different from what has gone before. But the experience of Nibbana perfectly crystalizes the understanding that, whatever is seen as separate, conditioned, composite, and either mental or physical (which is absolutely everything) is *nothing but a fabrication of the mind itself*. The truth is the opposite. Where there appear to be formations, separate conditioned "things," there is really only interconnectedness, process, and a unity that is neither mental nor physical, but quite beyond both. All separateness is illusion. Nibbana, the complete cessation of all formations, the only unconditioned phenomenon among all phenomena, is itself completely devoid of any separateness, of Selfhood. Furthermore, suffering is just another mental formation, the result of clinging to other illusory formations, and is every bit as illusory as all the rest.

This Insight is by no means fully assimilated by the Stream Enterer. There is still a long way to go, three more Path attainments and three more stages of Awakening. The Stream Enterer will continue to feel like a separate Self, but at the same time know they are not. What is most clear to them and changes them quite significantly, is that they can no longer believe in and cling to the ego-Self as who they really are. Completely liberated from that delusion, the ego-Self is simply seen as another formation. They will continue to experience desire and aversion, get caught up in clinging to formations, and suffer from time to time as a result. But they can never again truly believe in the self-nature and self-existence of any of those formation. Whenever their suffering gets intense enough, it will "wake" them up again to the *Path Knowledge* they have realized, and they can cease their clinging and relieve their own suffering. All such painful delusion can be dispelled by recollecting that it is their own mind that is projecting these formations onto unity, interdependence, and process, and there really is no Self in it.

*Path Knowledge* is followed immediately by *Fruition Knowledge*. Although *Fruition Knowledge* may last for only a few seconds, it usually lasts for at least several minutes, and sometimes much longer, even up to an hour or more. The mind in *Fruition Knowledge* abides in the same Nibbana as the mind in *Path Knowledge*. It is the "realization of the bliss of cessation," and something extremely important is occurring here. The *Path Knowledge* Insight is being integrated into the mind as a whole. This integration process won't be fully completed on this initial occasion, which is why it is so important to be able to repeat the experience and dwell in the state of *Fruition* repeatedly in the future.

When *Fruition Knowledge* ends, the mind resumes its normal fabricating activities, and the meditator begins the *Knowledge of Reviewing*. At this point, there are two possible scenarios: the experience of Nibbana left an imprint in memory, or it did not. Which one is the case depends on the specific practice the person was using, and the particular circumstances in which *Emergence* occurred. In the case where there was a strong introspective awareness focused on *the mind itself*, there is a clear recollection afterward. In the case where both attention and awareness were directed towards *objects of consciousness* immediately prior, then no memory trace is left by the cessation of those objects, and all that is recollected is a "gap."

In the *Knowledge of Reviewing*, which may last up to several hours, the new Stream Enterer reflects on what has just happened, and will interpret it in terms of whatever conceptual system is most familiar to them. Much of the *Review* involves recollecting the specific events leading to *Emergence*, and the specific object and the Insight that arose with it. If he or she recalls something other than a simple gap in consciousness, the most significant feature of the experience itself is

that it was devoid of all formations, was, in fact, totally void. This is why it is so often described as Consciousness Without an Object, or a Pure Consciousness Experience, or the Experience of Emptiness. Someone from a theistic tradition might describe it as “knowing God,” but, of course, God is beyond human knowing, hence the experience of a void. Some meditators, however, only experience rapture, tranquility, and happiness during the *Review*.

If, following the *Review*, the meditator continues to practice, they will experience the *Attainment of Fruition*, which is a repetition of *Fruition Knowledge*. Having just reviewed the events leading to *Emergence*, they will often reach *Fruition* in exactly the same way they did the first time, the only difference being that it can last much longer. The *Attainment of Fruition* is a complete cessation (Nibbana), so there is obviously no awareness of bodily and mental processes. (Although this does change with the attainment of the higher stages of Awakening.)

It is important for the meditator to practice achieving fruition, achieving it rapidly, and remaining in it for periods of up to an hour or more. This not only consolidates the Insight that has made them a Stream Enterer, it prepares them for attainment of the next Path. Some people have been known to proceed from First Path (Stream Entry) to Second Path (Once Returner) and even Third Path (Non-returner) in a single sitting.

For most though, a period of maturation on each Path will be required before they are ready to proceed to the next. When they are ready, they will repeat the Progress of Insight, usually beginning with Part IIa.

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\* NB: Someone following the Ten Stages of the Samatha-Vipassana practice without the guidance of a teacher may not experience the Progress of Insight described here. This isn't to say they won't have powerful Insight experiences, rich with *potential* Insight. However, these Insight experiences may not be recognized as such, and can often go undeveloped. The same is true of someone who is always in a hurry to reach the next Stage, and who may unwittingly dismiss Insight opportunities as mere disruptions of their practice. But once you have achieved *samatha*, you can still quickly achieve Insight, especially by working with a very powerful kind of Insight practice called *jhana* in Pali, and *dhyana* in Sanskrit. This refers to states of profound single-pointed absorption in which both the focus of attention and mindfulness become progressively more and more refined. These *ghanas* are then used as a vehicle for attaining *vipassana*.

Also, not everyone will necessarily experience the Progress of Insight in quite the same way as it is described here, although it will *follow the same pattern*. Much depends upon the method of practice you follow, how much time you spend in daily practice versus longer retreats, and how much of your Insight experiences occur in daily life rather than on the cushion. The description given here best fits someone engaged in a practice that is strongly conducive to the realization of Impermanence or Emptiness as the driving Insight, spends long periods in retreat, and has relatively little Insight experience outside of formal practice. A *jhana* practitioner, for example, will not have the same experience of the individual Knowledges. What *will* be the same in every case is:

- As in Part I, a correct view must be established through direct experience with regard to the true nature of conscious experience; the relationship between and interdependence of body and mind, matter and mentality; and the absence of the Knower from actual experience. Then, by one means or another, the nature of reality as change-only, as pure flux, as process must be realized; the empty nature of perceived objects as mere mental constructs without independent existence or a self-nature corresponding to their appearance must be realized; and the similar emptiness of the personal Self must be realized. And by “realized,” it is meant these understandings need to be established at an intuitive level. The formulation of the basic facts here is Buddhist, but the same facts regarding the nature of reality can be stated in the using the concepts of other religious traditions as well.
- As in Part II, these Insight into the facts of impermanence, emptiness, and no-self must penetrate to the deepest levels of the psyche; and the further Insight must be clearly established that all suffering is due to clinging to wrong views, and that so long as there is the slightest vestige of delusion in the mind, suffering will continue.
- As in Part III, Insight and equanimity must be conjoined powerfully enough that the mind turns away from and ceases grasping to its own formations as real. The mind effectively stops its own processes of fabrication, and this must happen while the mind is in a state in which it is capable of “experiencing” the cessation of fabrications. Whether or not this cessation leaves a memory trace accessible to consciousness is not important, but in order to continue the Path to full and complete Awakening, it must be possible to voluntarily repeat this cessation over and over again. The entire Progress of Insight can occur spontaneously, or as the result of a less systematic training process. The problem is that the cessation that is its culminating Insight experience cannot be readily reproduced.