



Preparing the Mind For Nibbana

ON THIS DAY OF VAISAKHA, Earth is bathed in the soothing light of the full moon. We may think nostalgically of the hallowed Sal tree grove in Lumbini where Prince Siddhartha was born on a Vaisakha day¹. We also think of the Bodhi tree on the bank of Neranjara River where the Buddha attained Enlightenment and the Sal grove in Kusinara where the Blessed One attained Parinibbana². All these things happened on the full moon day in the month of Vaisakha.

Since that time this Vaisakha full moon has shed its light upon the Earth for over twenty-five centuries. It reminds us of a story in the Buddha's Dispensation.

¹ Vaisaka day - The full moon day of May.

² Parinibbana - The passing away of Lord Buddha.

On a certain occasion the Blessed One said:

“Meritorious Bhikkhus, there are places where no sun or moon throws light. They are in deep darkness. There are such places near us.”

Then a Bhikkhu asked the Blessed One,

“Venerable Sir, the Fortunate One, is there a place in this world without sun or moon, thus shrouded in terrifying darkness?”

“Yes, Bhikkhus, there is such a dark place. That is the mind that has not understood the Four Noble Truths,” said the Supreme Buddha.

(*Andhakara Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya*).

A long journey...

We do not know the length of the journey we made through the series of rebirths. We do not know the oceans of tears we shed in our sorrows. We do not know the winds of despairing sighs we have made in our lamentations. If we were to write our aspirations during our sojourns in the series of rebirths the surface of the Earth will not suffice to place the pages.

We may have been born in the world of Devas or of Brahmas or on Earth. We may never know how many times we were reborn in the four Hells.

Many people have no fear of sojourning in a series of rebirths. They may not have any particular fear of a rebirth in Hell. However, all fear suffering and punishment.

Greatest Truths of this world...

Very rare indeed is the birth of a Buddha. He shows us the truth. We learn about this truth in His Dispensation.

There is a reality we must understand. The Four Noble Truths is that reality. As long as the Four Noble Truths remain obscure to us we will be destined to make a limitless journey through *samsara*.

The Blessed One said:

"Bhikkhus, the Four Noble Truths are unchanging. They are absolute realities. That is why they are called the 'Noble Truths'"

(Tatha Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya).

The Four Noble Truths are timeless and therefore valid for all time. They are rational. Anyone with faith, effort and wisdom can understand and realize them.

There is a defined way to reach the Four Noble Truths. That is the Eightfold Noble Path. The first of its eight parts is right view; the others are right thought, right speech, right bodily action, right

livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. One must walk this path to become free from the series of rebirths.

Stream-enterer and personality belief...

The way to Nibbana consists of four stages. In the first stage one must be established in the right view and learn about the Four Noble Truths. One must understand them in depth. One must meditate and contemplate the Four Noble Truths. One will gain the wisdom of the Truths. Thus one would become a Stream-enterer (*sotapanna*). This is the first stage of realizing Nibbana.

The wisdom of the Truths is the knowledge of the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the extinction of suffering and the truth of the Eightfold Noble Path leading to the extinction of suffering. A Stream-enterer has a clear understanding of the truths of suffering. That helps to eliminate personality belief (*sakkaya ditthi*).

Life is held together by five aggregates. They are known as the five groups of existence or the five groups of clinging. They are: **corporeality** (*rupa*), **feeling** (*vedana*), **perception** (*sañña*), **mental formations** (*sankhara*) and **consciousness** (*viññana*). Corporeality has its origin in the four ultimate constituent elements. Feeling, perception and volition result from sense-impression (*phassa*). Consciousness results from corporeality (*rupa*) and mentality (*nama*). The Supreme Buddha identified

these five aggregates as ‘suffering’. The existence of these five groups drives one to acquire a personality belief (*sakkaya ditthi*).

The life of the stream-enterer...

A Stream-enterer has the wisdom to reject any joy arising from the five aggregates because he or she understands the reality of the Noble Truth of suffering. When one understands the truth of suffering, one also understands the remaining Noble Truths. Then one’s personality-belief becomes extinct. One who contemplates the truth of suffering understands how it manifests.

One will know that the Buddha’s realization is the ultimate truth. One will understand the Buddha’s Doctrine about suffering. One will understand the life and effort of the noble person, the Buddha, who achieved the fruition of the Path.

Such a person knows the need to cultivate discipline of bodily action, speech and mind. Such a person sheds all doubt about the Doctrine, delights in observing the precepts of virtue spoken by the Enlightened One, and has discipline of virtue and the faculties. Thus, clinging to mere rules and ritual has no place in his or her life.

The Noble Disciple now has the right view. That will guide him or her through the other phases of the Noble Path.

His vision for the Nibbana...

The Stream-enterer recognizes thoughts of lust when they arise from wrong contemplation of a sense-object. One recognizes also a feeling of hatred arising in oneself resulting from wrong contemplation of a sense-object. One understands that the basis of one's wrong thoughts is unwise consideration of sense-objects. One exercises wise consideration over and over again to dispel lust and anger arising from unwise consideration.

The major obstacles to wise consideration are the five hindrances – the qualities that blind our mental vision. They are: sensuous desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and skeptical doubt (*kamacchanda*, *vya-pada*, *thinamiddha*, *uddhacca-kukkucca* and *vicikiccha*).

These five hindrances prevent one from understanding the truth but misguide one to unwholesome deeds. Sense-desire diverts one's attention and binds one's mentality with an object of anger or jealousy. Sloth and torpor diminish effort and concentration. Restlessness shatters the calmness of mind that is needed to direct right thought. Entertaining doubts about the path of meditation and contemplation is '**sceptical doubt**'.

He can recognize the enemies of his mind....

The Stream-enterer makes continuing effort to overcome the five hindrances. One makes every effort to distance oneself from conditions that cause the hindrances. An object of sensuous

desire may cause sensuous desire in an instant. As a Stream-enterer one recognizes this as a hindrance.

One may contemplate upon the loathsomeness of what the physical body comprises, and make effort to dispel sensuous desire. One would contemplate upon the parts that comprise the body. One will know the body consists of the four ultimate constituent elements. One will train one's mind to contemplate upon a cadaver, bloating, decomposing until it becomes a part of the earth.

As these contemplations improve in intensity and degree of concentration, the tendency to stray towards objects of sensuous desire will become less.

The practise of the meditation of loving-kindness will lessen the occurrence of objects of anger. Then, one can practise mindfulness of in-and-out breathing and also contemplate the impermanence of the five groups of clinging.

Control the dangerous machine....Mouth....!

The moment one lets go mindfulness one may lose control of one's words. When one's mind is trained one will be mindful whenever one is about to speak an untruth. One will be mindful when one is about to speak harsh words. One will be mindful when one is about to speak meaningless words. At such times one will summon the strength and discipline not to speak

unwholesome words. One may speak the Dhamma or remain silent. As the disciple improves in understanding of the Noble Path unwholesome actions caused by unwholesome words will cease altogether.

Avoiding unwholesome bodily actions is very important. One way of doing that would be to follow the Five Precepts. A person would make the Five Precepts a guiding factor for his or her actions. One will thus develop abhorrence for unwholesome actions and fear of unwholesome *kamma*- results. One will cultivate one's mind to refrain from taking life, taking what is not given. One will develop a clean character. One's conduct of life will be righteous. One will delight in one's righteous way of life.

The four foundations of mindfulness....

A person having the right view will thus discipline bodily action and word. One will develop concentration and wisdom. One will become established in the four foundations of mindfulness – contemplating the body in mindfulness, contemplating feeling in mindfulness, contemplating the mind in mindfulness and contemplating the five groups of clinging, six sense-bases, and factors of enlightenment – in all those contemplations in mindfulness.

Contemplation of the body (*kayanupassana*) includes that of in-and-out breathing, loathsomeness of body, ultimate component elements and a cadaver dissolving into the earth. All

these belong to contemplation of body. The mind is calmed, concentration is established and the five hindrances are removed through these contemplations.

The mind develops through the contemplation of feeling (***vedananupassana***) – being mindful of pleasure, pain and neutrality.

Being mindful of one's thoughts (***cittanupassana***) is contemplation of mind. When a thought of sensuous desire arises one recognizes it as such. When a thought of anger arises one recognizes it as such. When a thought of delusion arises one recognizes it as such. When one is stricken by sloth and torpor one recognizes that. When one enters absorption one recognizes it as such. When the mind scatters towards external objects one recognizes that.

Conditioning the mind to recognize mental states and effects in this manner is contemplation of mind. Right view, wisdom, effort, concentration, and mind-discipline are essential factors in contemplating the mind.

As a Noble Disciple one now continues to practise contemplation of mind-objects (***dhammanupassana***). One meditates upon the nature and reality of the five groups of clinging. (***panca-upadanakkhandha***). One understands corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness so as not to lead one to further rebirth.

One would wisely analyze how rebirth occurs due to internal sense bases such as eye ear and nose, and external sense bases such as eye-objects, sound and smell. In one's contemplation one understands how one can become free from the series of rebirths.

Such a person develops the factors of enlightenment. The Supreme Buddha has taught us seven such factors. They are: mindfulness, investigation of the law of Dhamma, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity (***sati, dhamma vicaya, viriya, piti, passaddhi, samadhi, upekkha***).

To make oneself ready for the development of the factors of enlightenment, the Noble Disciple focuses on concentration through mindfulness. Right concentration is the last element in the Eight-fold Noble Path. In that context, it is the ability of the mind to remain focused with other elements of the Noble Path. When one is well established in mindfulness, concentration is the natural outcome. The Supreme Buddha defined it further as the four meditative absorptions. Thus, the four meditative absorptions can only develop through mindfulness.

First stage of Samadhi³...

First Jhana⁴:

³ Samadhi – concentration.

⁴ Jhana - absorption

Supposing a person is practising mindfulness of in-out breathing. The first phase of any meditation is to restrain one's words and body-action by discipline of mind. Next one contemplates upon thought conception and discursive thinking about an object of meditation. If that object is in-out breathing one becomes mindful of in-out breathing. If the object is loathsomeness of body one becomes mindful of the thirty-two body components. If the object is the five groups of clinging one becomes mindful of corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. All these meditations require thought-conception, discursive thinking, energy and concentration.

As one continues to remain mindful of the selected object of meditation and maintains discursive thinking, the five hindrances are gradually overcome and one keeps focused on the object of meditation only. When the five hindrances – namely, sensuous desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and sceptical doubt (*kamacchanda, vyapada, thinamiddha, uddacca-kukkucca and vicikiccha*) – are overcome, the mind feels a sense of joy, *piti* and well-being, *sukha*.

The body relaxes and the mind concentrates. One can sustain concentration for a long period. One's concentration becomes stronger. Then one has acquired thought-conception, discursive thinking, joy, a sense of wellbeing and concentration. Thus, such a person has entered the **first sphere of absorption** (*pathama jhana*).

Second Stage of Samadhi...

Second *Jhana*:

Having entered the first sphere of absorption, one examines the obstacles one must now clear to strengthen one's absorption. Occasional short distractions of the mind and reverting to the object of meditation is the nature of the first absorption. Thought-conception and discursive thinking makes the mind meander amongst external objects. One understands this phenomenon and considers it as a setback for strengthening the *jhana*.

Now, one succeeds in focusing on the object of meditation independent of thought-conception and discursive thinking. One's concentration becomes stronger. Thought-conception and discursive thinking that initially promoted meditation are now quietened in the presence of the absorption. One's joy now springs from within one's concentration – the joy of absence of thought-conception and discursive thinking. This is the second absorption. The Noble Disciple recognizes the factors of the second absorption that are not in the first.

Third Stage of Samadhi...

Third *Jhana*:

The disciple who has practised the second absorption then understands that his or her mind is overly influenced by joy. Such

a person concentrates to move away from this sense of joy or rapture, *piti*. One's wisdom becomes keener, and one's mind becomes calmer. Thus, one's mind becomes totally relaxed. One still takes pleasure in the sense of well-being, *sukha*. One's concentration is robust and one's mind is calm. This is the third absorption.

Fourth Stage of Samadhi...

Fourth *Jhana*:

To proceed to the fourth absorption one must cast aside physical and mental happiness as well as physical and mental unhappiness.

Gradually, one's mind shines forth with clarity and an ethereal quality. One is established in an unshaken concentration and neutral feeling. Then one examines the reality of the five groups of clinging. One strengthens the seven factors of enlightenment (*satta bojjhanga*): mindfulness, investigation of the law of Dhamma, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity (*sati, dhamma vicaya, viriya, piti, passaddhi, samadhi* and *upekkha*).

Then how, He practises the mind....?

Previous experience in the practise of meditation leading up to insight, that is, *vidarshana* or *vipassana*, will help a great deal at this stage. *Vidarshana* is the intuitive realization that exposes

the truth of impermanence, suffering and the non-self and unsubstantial nature of all corporeal and mental phenomena of existence. One will now understand the nature of the five groups of clinging, the four constituent elements and the sense bases. One will see them as impermanent, suffering and non-self. One will focus concentration to realize the Four Noble Truths.

Developing the seven factors of enlightenment

This is mindfulness – the first factor of enlightenment (***sati sambojjhanga***). One fully understands that the five groups of clinging are encountered in the contemplation of body, feeling, mind and mind-objects. When one contemplates the five groups of clinging as things impermanent, suffering and non-self one loses attachment to them. What arises now is the investigation of the law of Dhamma (***dhamma vicaya sambojjhanga***).

A disciple who has reached this stage has the capacity to understand the law of dependent origination (***paticca samuppada***). Such a person penetrates the law of cause and effect. He or she knows that effects result from causes and when causes cease, their results also cease.

Such a person makes effort to eliminate unwholesome volitions and accumulate wholesome volitions. Strength and effort

to understand the truth is called the energy factor of enlightenment (***viriya sambojjhanga***).

The joy that overwhelms the Noble Disciple in this stage of development rises from the understanding of impermanence, suffering and non-self. He or she understands the true nature and reality of that joy. This is the rapture factor of enlightenment (***piti sambojjhanga***). The rapture that comes with understanding relaxes the body and mind. It dissipates all stress of body and mind. One has gained wisdom. One sees the five groups of clinging in one's rapture. This is the tranquillity factor of enlightenment (***passaddhi sambojjhanga***).

Then, he can see the reality well....

Thus one strengthens tranquillity and insight within the seven factors of enlightenment. One's mind is calm and tranquil. By concentration of mind one realizes that suffering consists of nothing other than the five groups of clinging. Thus, one sees suffering in the five groups of clinging. The nature of the mind that does not cling to its state of concentration is one of neutrality. Nevertheless the disciple remains detached even from a neutral mind. Such a person sees the five groups of clinging even in a neutral mind. He or she sees in it impermanence, suffering and non-self.

He realizes the Four Noble Truths...

The disciple is, thus, well established in mindfulness and the seven factors of enlightenment. Such a person fully understands the five groups of clinging as the truth of suffering. One discards ignorance and craving for the five groups of existence with full understanding of the truth of the origin of suffering. He or she gains higher knowledge by vanquishing ignorance (*avijja*). One gains deliverance by vanquishing craving. Such a person realizes the path to extinction of suffering by practising virtue, concentration and wisdom (*sila, samadhi, paññā*).

By this time the Noble Disciple is an **Arahant**⁵. Such a one has reached deliverance. Since one has fully realized the Four Noble Truths one is free from defilements. One has knowledge and vision of one's deliverance. That is the wholesome accumulated wisdom of the Four Noble Truths.

At last, He attained the Nibbana.....

One knows one has understood what one should about suffering. One has overcome the origin of suffering. One has successfully traced one's steps along the path and attained Nibbana. One knows that the cycle of rebirth has ended for oneself. There will be no more suffering in *samsara*. One followed

⁵ Arahant – The enlightened disciple of Lord Buddha.

the path of the Supreme Buddha's Dispensation. One has ended the indeterminate journey through foul and fair rebirths.

The final fruition of the Path is the attainment of Nibbana. Groups of existence still remain with a person at that stage. When physical death occurs he or she is in a state of Nibbana without any residual groups of existence (*an-upadi-sesa-nibbana*)....



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