

## Ease Through Purification

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### THE GOLDSMITH - Shakyamuni Buddha

THERE ARE THESE GROSS IMPURITIES in gold: dirty sand, gravel, and grit. The dirt-washer, having placed the gold in a vat, washes it again and again until he has washed them away.

When he is rid of them, there remain the moderate impurities in the gold: coarse sand and fine grit. He washes the gold again and again until he has washed them away.

When he is rid of them, there remain the fine impurities in the gold: fine sand and black dust. The dirt-washer washes the gold again and again until he has washed them away.

When he is rid of them, there remains just the gold dust. The goldsmith, placing it in a crucible, blows on it again and again to blow away the dross. When the dross is blown away, the gold is then refined, pliant, malleable, and luminous. It is not brittle, and is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament the goldsmith has in mind—a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain—the gold would serve his purpose.

In the same way, there are these gross impurities in you as a meditator: misconduct in body, speech, and mind. These you abandon, destroy, dispel, wipe out of existence. When these are gone, there remain the moderate impurities: thoughts of sensuality, ill will, and harmfulness. These you wipe out of existence. When these are gone, there remain the fine impurities: thoughts of your race and background, thoughts related to not wanting to be despised. These you wipe out of existence.

When these are gone, there remain only thoughts of the dharma. Your concentration is neither calm nor refined. It has not yet attained serenity or unity.

It is kept in place by the stone activity of forceful restraint. But there comes a time when your mind grows steady inwardly, settles down, grows unified and concentrated. Your concentration is calm and refined, has attained serenity and unity. It is no longer kept in place by the activity of forceful restraint. Then comes the knowing and seeing of things as they truly are.

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### THE PRACTICE OF PURIFICATION

- Adapted from a piece by Amaro Bhikkhu

THE HABITS OF IDENTIFICATION, attraction, aversion, and anxiety create suffering and lead to rebirth in samsara. They keep us far from our main goal, that of recognizing things as they truly are. Ultimate reality is the principle that all mental and physical phenomena—people, mountains, galaxies, the New York subway—are regarded as being without a separate self-identity or existence. In order to see the true nature of existing phenomena, we need to purify the mental cloudiness that keeps us from seeing it.

The Buddha taught that “it is owing to the development of virtue, concentration, and wisdom, that enlightenment has been fully realized.” In order to learn how to properly apply these three agents of purification—virtue, concentration, and wisdom—we need to learn from our mistakes. Purification is synonymous with this act of learning.

The methods to do this revolve first around a conscious recognition by the individual of destructive or delusory tendencies in his actions, his speech, and his mind; second, around the resolution to do better in the future. This is working on the principle that if we simply deny our shortcomings the obstructive karma will be

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regenerated continually and unconsciously. Once things are opened up and acknowledged honestly, however, the purifying process can function freely.

“For it is growth in the Buddha’s way of training, when one sees one’s error as such, to make amends for it in accordance with the dharma, and undertake to be more careful in the future.”

These acts of recognition can vary in size from a brief mental noting, 100,000 prostrations, mantra recitations, and visualizations employed in the Tibetan ngodro practice. Regardless of the dimensions or grandeur of the act, however, the essence of the transformation is identical. It is a radical letting go of the past and a reformation of attitude. On the psychological level, this act of purification is the catalyst of all beneficial development.

The Buddha extended this principle of purification through different approaches toward meditation, particularly the development of what are known as “The Four Foundations of Mindfulness” or Satipatthana. These four are, in brief:

1. mindfulness of the body,
2. feeling tone, like, dislike, don’t care
3. mental states (or moods),
4. mind objects (or the categories of dharma and phenomena according to the Buddha’s teaching, such as The Four Noble Truths).

They are described as, “A path that goes in one direction only: to the purification of beings, to the surmounting of sorrow, to the disappearance of pain and grief, to the attainment of the true goal.

THIS SCHEMA OF CONCENTRATION and contemplation of mind is designed to fulfill the work of purification. For example, in the section on the “contemplation of mental states,” the Buddha says, “Here a monk knows a lustful mind as lustful and a mind free from lust as free from lust; a hating mind as hating ... a deluded mind as deluded ... a distracted mind as distracted ... a concentrated mind as concentrated ... a liberated mind as liberated and an unliberated mind as unliberated .... Mindfulness that ‘here is a mental state’ is present just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness. And he abides

detached, not grasping at anything in the world.”

This passage outlines a crucial element of what “purification” means on the level of mind: it’s not what you think or feel, it’s your awareness of and attitude toward thoughts and feelings that counts.

Anger arises, but it is observed only as the mind state of anger—in the light of awareness, we can feel it, acknowledge it, not follow it, and dissolve it in the light of awareness. Nothing has been destructively repressed, no hurtful action has been taken, and the light of the mind is “on” in this process of purification.

As the consistency of awareness is strengthened by meditation, this process is illuminated more and more clearly. It is seen that the anger arose, dissolved, and that any identification of a feeling of ownership that causes the anger to become attached to your idea of who you are is unnecessary. It arises and ceases, it is known by awareness as arising and passing phenomena.

This insight naturally develops into a deep recognition of the laws of causality and interdependence, and the heart rests in the knowing of these dharma relationships.

Being this knowing  
is the Way,  
the path to peace.

At first this kind of insight arises only momentarily, so effort needs to be made to sustain or further it. Once the path of purification has been seen, however, and we have managed to get onto it, we need to be able to keep ourselves on it. Sustaining and furthering insight into our tendency to selflessness is essential to purification.

Eventually there is the realization of oneness/wholeness/completeness—that there is no separation of self and other selves, no motivation for afflictive impure emotions and actions—

only a quality of brightness and ease.

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