

The First Stages of Purity

(One day Retreat May 11, 1997)

Today I will tell you about the early stages of purity in the practice of meditation. There are seven stages of purity described in regard to *VipassanĒ* meditation, but the first and the second stages of purity are actually not *VipassanĒ*. But they are the bases for the practice of *VipassanĒ* and so they are included in the seven stages of purity for *VipassanĒ* meditation.

The first stage of purity is the purity of *Sila* or the purity of moral conduct. Purity of moral conduct is very important for those who practice meditation. Without the purity of moral conduct, they cannot hope to get concentration. Purity of moral conduct means just keeping the moral conduct pure. That means:

- Abstention from killing living beings,
- Abstention from taking by way of theft what is not given,
- Abstention from sexual misconduct,
- Abstention from telling lies and
- Abstention from taking intoxicants.

These precepts, although they are taught in Buddhism, are not particularly for Buddhists. According to our books, they were available even before the time of Buddha and many people mentioned in the *JĒtaka* stories kept these precepts. Not only five precepts, they also kept eight precepts or even ten precepts.

For lay people five precepts is enough. I mean keeping five precepts is enough for the purification of moral conduct. If *yogĒs* or meditators take five precepts, then their moral conduct is said to be pure. At the longer retreat we have the meditators take and keep eight precepts. That is because taking or keeping eight precepts is better than keeping five precepts. By taking eight precepts the meditators get more time to devote to the practice of meditation. And also there is less chance of unwholesome mental states to arise. So we insist upon *yogĒs* to take eight precepts during the longer retreats.

It is important that those who practice meditation should first purify in their *SĒla* or moral conduct. The question is how long must a *yogĒ* be pure in moral conduct before he or she can practice *VipassanĒ* meditation. When we read stories in the Buddhist books, we come to the conclusion that it is not necessary for a *yogĒ* to be pure in moral conduct for a long time before he or she takes up *VipassanĒ* meditation.

The story of the well-known robber A-gulimĒla. A-gulimĒla was not only a robber but he was also a killer. He killed many human beings, but one day Buddha went to him and tamed him. So he first became a monk and then he practiced meditation and he became enlightened. In his case, his moral conduct was not pure for a long time (before he started meditating). When he was in the forest, he was killing people to collect the fingers. But after he met the Buddha, he gave up all these unwholesome actions and he became a monk and practiced meditation and he got enlightenment. It is not necessary for a person to be pure moral conduct for a long time before he or she practices *VipassanĒ* meditation. But it is good to keep moral

conduct pure always. We are not encouraging you to be unpure in moral conduct and then just purify before practicing meditation.

But I want you to understand that purity of moral conduct means purity in the moral habits when you practice *VipassanĒ* meditation. If you keep your moral conduct pure, you do not suffer from remorseful feelings or regrets. Your mind is calm and so you can get concentration easily. Since purity of moral conduct is important, you take the precepts at the beginning of this retreat. By taking these precepts and also by keeping them you are affirmed that your moral conduct is pure and you do not have to worry about whether your moral conduct is pure or not. You can practice meditation without concern or without worry about the purity of your moral conduct.

When there is no worry or anxiety about the moral conduct because your moral conduct is pure, you can practice meditation with calmness. The first purity *yogĒs* have to achieve is the purity of moral conduct. This purity of moral conduct is not yet meditation. It is just *SĒla* or taking precepts and keeping them. But it is a firm basic for the practice of meditation. That is why the purity of moral conduct is included in the seven stages of purity in *VipassanĒ* meditation.

The second stage of purity is called purity of mind. Purity of mind is interpreted as meaning the attainment of neighborhood concentration and *JhĒna* concentration. In order to attain neighborhood concentration and *JhĒna* concentration you have to practice *Samatha* meditation. There are two kinds of meditation taught in Buddhism, *Samatha* meditation or tranquility meditation and *VipassanĒ* meditation or insight meditation. You can get neighborhood concentration and *JhĒna* concentration only when you practice *Samatha* meditation. There are forty subjects of *Samatha* meditation. Among them only thirty subjects can lead you to the attainment of *JhĒnas*. But all forty can lead you to attainment of neighborhood concentration. Neighborhood concentration proceeds the *JhĒna* concentration. Without neighborhood concentration, there can be no attainment of *JhĒna* concentration. In order to get these two kinds of concentration a person practices one of the forty subjects of *Samatha* meditation.

Neighborhood concentration is so called because it is in the neighborhood of in the vicinity of *JhĒna* concentration. According to this interpretation, in order to get purity of mind a person has to practice *Samatha* meditation. And later after attaining the neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration, that *yogĒ* will proceed to *VipassanĒ* or will change to *VipassanĒ*. When he changes to *VipassanĒ*, he will take the neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration as the object of his meditation. In other word he will practice *VipassanĒ* on the neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration. He will try to see the neighborhood or *JhĒna* concentration as impermanence, as suffering and as no-soul.

This is for those who practice *Samatha* meditation first and then change to *VipassanĒ* meditation. Such people are called in PĒli '*SamathayĒnika*' that means those who have *Samatha* meditation as vehicle. We can call them '*Samatha-passengers*'. There are those who took the *Samatha* train and then reach some stage. And then at that stage they change to *VipassanĒ* train and get on it to reach their destination of *NibbĒna*. When we call a person '*SamathayĒnika*' or a person who has *Samatha* as vehicle, we do not mean that he practices *Samatha* meditation only

and reaches that destination. Because he cannot reach this destination without the practice of *VipassanĒ* meditation. So a *SamathayĒnika* is one who first practices *Samatha* meditation, who gets the neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration and then practices *VipassanĒ* on these two kinds of or any one of these concentration and ultimately reaches his destination.

But what about us?

We do not practice *Samatha* meditation. So do not get neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration since neighborhood concentration and *JhĒna* concentration are described as the purity of mind.

How are we to get Purity of Mind without neighborhood and *JhĒna* concentration? Or can we skip this stage? Can we skip from Purity of Sila to Purity of View the third stage? That is impossible because these stages are to be attained one by one in their due order.

We who practice *VipassanĒ* meditation only actually do not skip the second stage, the stage of Purity of Mind. Purity of Mind means actually the purity of concentration or *SamĒdhi*. Those who practice *VipassanĒ* only also need to get a certain kind of concentration because without concentration one cannot penetrate into the nature of things. Buddha said, "Monks, practice or develop concentration. And when the mind is developed, then you begin to see things as they really are."

In order to see things as they really are, in order to see things as impermanent and so on we need a certain kind of concentration. But since we do not practice *Samatha* meditation, we do not get neighborhood concentration or *JhĒna* concentration. But we get another kind of concentration when we practice *VipassanĒ*. That is momentary concentration. Those who practice *Vipassana* only substitute momentary concentration for the neighborhood or *JhĒna* concentration. For those who practice *VipassanĒ* only, momentary concentration is called purity of mind. When a yogĒ attains the momentary concentration, he is said to have achieved the second stage of purity, the Purity of Mind.

When does a yogĒ attain momentary concentration?

In the beginning, a yogĒ practices *VipassanĒ* and he or she tries to be mindful of the objects, mindful of breathings or mindful of the movements of the abdomen and mindful of any object that becomes prominent at the present moment. But try as he might, his mind still goes out here and there. This is the normal experience of all meditators. Although they try to keep their mind on the object of meditation sometimes or maybe frequently the mind goes here and there.

But with practice, with perseverance you try to be mindful of the object at the present moment. And as your mindfulness grows in intensity, your mind begins to become still and your mind becomes steadfast on the object of meditation. That means the wonderings or distractions become less and less. Or they become less frequently until the time will come when your mind is on the meditation object only and it does not or very rarely goes to other objects. When a yogĒ has reached such a state, when a yogĒ has attained that kind of concentration, then he is said to have achieved the second stage of purity, Purity of Mind.

Although it is called a momentary concentration, it is similar to the neighborhood concentration. When a yogĒ who practices *Samatha* meditation gets neighborhood concentration

and his mind is on or his *SamĒdhi* is on the meditation object only and it is not distracted. And at that time the obstacles or mental hindrances are all subdued. Although mental hindrances are not eradicated, not got rid of altogether, they are subdued and so they do not come up to the surface. At that time his concentration is very strong and good, and he is always on the meditation objects.

In the same way during *VipassanĒ* meditation, when a yogĒ gets the momentary concentration, his mind is always on the object of *VipassanĒ* meditation. One moment of concentration is followed by another moment of concentration and then followed by another moment of concentration. There are no gaps between moments of concentration and there are no interruptions in his flow of concentration.

The difference between the neighborhood concentration and momentary concentration is that the neighborhood concentration dwells on one object only on the chosen meditation subject. But the momentary concentration may take different objects at different moments. So the objects may be different but concentration is always there; concentration on object A, concentration on object B, concentration on object C and so on. Although the objects may be different from moment to moment, the mindfulness or the concentration is always there. It is not interrupted by distractions, by mind going out. And so it is as powerful as the neighborhood concentration. At that time again the mental hindrances — sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse and doubt — are subdued.

When a *yogĒ* gets momentary concentration, his mind becomes steady, calm and then begins to see the objects clearly. In the beginning you may think that you see the objects clearly. You put your mind on the breaths and you think that you see the breaths clearly in and out, in and out, or you see the movements of the abdomen clearly rising and falling, rising and falling. But as your mindfulness and concentration get stronger, you see more clearly. With the attainment of momentary concentration, your seeing of objects becomes more and more clear or the objects appear to you more and more clearly.

Whatever object you keep your mind on you see it in your mind clearly. Clearly means without mixing with other objects. In the beginning sometimes even mind and matter are mixed together. You do not see clearly mind and matter separately and they may appear to you mixed up. But with the growth of concentration you begin to see mind clearly and matter clearly. You begin to see that mind and matter as a pair 'arise' and 'disappear'. When you see mind and matter clearly, you come to see as if there were two or three people. Now *yogĒ* sometimes reported that formerly he thought that he was just one person, now it seems he is two persons or three persons. That is because he is seeing mind and matter clearly in his mind. So there is the matter which is noted and then the mind which notes and then the mind which is aware of that noting mind, so something like three things going on.

When you see in such way, you are said to see the mind and matter distinctly one from the other. That is what is called the discerning of mind and matter or differentiation of mind and matter which is the first *VipassanĒ* knowledge. When a person reaches the first *VipassanĒ* knowledge, he is able to discard the wrong notion of a person or an individual or a self. Because what he sees for himself are just mind and matter arising and disappearing or going

and coming as a pair. He fails to see anything over and above mind and matter at every moment. When he sees just mind and matter at every moment, he loses the wrong notion that there is a person, there is an individual, and there is a permanent entity. He is able to discard this wrong view regarding the personality, regarding himself. That is the third stage of purity reached by those who practice *VipassanĒ* meditation. That third stage is in the domain of *VipassanĒ*.

But even that stage strictly speaking is not in the *VipassanĒ* proper. In order to understand that you need to know the meaning of the word '*VipassanĒ*'. *VipassanĒ* means seeing in various ways. Seeing in various ways means seeing mind and matter as impermanent, suffering and no-soul. That understanding you get only after you go through another stage, a stage where you see things related, things related as cause and effect. After seeing things as a related, as cause and effect, after seeing that everything is conditioned, then a *yogĒ* comes to see the object arising and disappearing clearly. He is convinced that the objects are impermanent and when he sees the impermanence of objects, he also sees the suffering or unsatisfactory nature. When he sees the unsatisfactory nature, then he also sees the unpersonal nature or unsubstantial of things.

Actually *VipassanĒ* begins with that seeing mind and matter as impermanence and so on. Before that there are two stages. These two stages are two kinds of knowledge. These two kinds of knowledge are also called *VipassanĒ* knowledge because they proceed towards *VipassanĒ*. Although they are not yet strictly *VipassanĒ*, they are proceeding towards *VipassanĒ*. So they are included in *VipassanĒ* knowledges. But before we reach that stage, we practice *VipassanĒ* again. That is very rudimentary *VipassanĒ*, very fundamental *VipassanĒ*. That is before we get momentary concentration, still we practice *VipassanĒ* and not *Samatha* meditation.

We get the momentary concentration and then we proceed from there until we reach our destination. These are the first three stages of purity a *yogĒ* must go through.

-The first one is the Purity of *Sila*, that is not actually not meditation.

-The second one is the Purity of Mind, that means attaining *SamĒdhi* either neighborhood *SamĒdhi* or *JhĒna SamĒdhi*, on the one hand or momentary *SamĒdhi* or the other.

After that a *yogĒ* reaches a stage where he discerns mind and matter clearly. When he discerns mind and matter clearly, when he sees that there are only mind and matter arising and disappearing at every moment, he is able to discard the wrong view about personality or the wrong view about a person or an individual or a permanent soul. These are the three early stages in *VipassanĒ* meditation. I want you to remember just these three stages:

Stage of Moral Purity,

Stage of Purity of Mind, and

Stage of Purity of Views.

SĒdhu!, SĒdh|!, SĒdhu