

Be, See, Free, We (1 of 10) Doors of Liberation

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There's a kind of multi-faceted theme for this week. I'll introduce it this way: the core of the meditation practice that we do is called “insight meditation.” “Insight” is a translation of *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā* means “to see clearly” or “to see with emphasis.” In the ancient texts, *vipassanā* is not a meditation practice. Rather, it's a result of meditation practice in the form of insight.

As we develop and cultivate meditation, at some point there is a revelation that happens. I use the word “revelation” because we don't have the sense that we're probing or doing an analysis. We are just seeing what's there and allowing what's there to show itself in a deep way.

There are three insights – a deep insight into impermanence or inconstancy, a deep insight into suffering, and a deep insight into not-self. That is one piece of a larger process of practice. The idea is to get there in order to have these deep insights. To get to those insights, the practice is to cultivate and develop ourselves in meditation in such a way that we can have those insights. We don't do the insights. The insights just happen as we become stable, focused, and clear.

How do we cultivate ourselves? Maybe a little bit paradoxically, we cultivate the opposite of the three characteristics. We cultivate stability and stillness so that we can see impermanence, change, and inconstancy really well. We cultivate happiness and well-being so that we can have the capacity for deep insight into suffering – the capacity to really look at and be with suffering in a very deep way without it being a negative experience. And we cultivate something that can be called in English something like “self-confidence” or “efficacy.” The sense of strong self-confidence allows us to see what is called “not-self.” So that's what we cultivate.

Now, why do we cultivate these? We cultivate these to have the insights. Why do we cultivate the insights? We have the insights in order to bring the mind to a place, to a time where the mind has no fixations. The mind is not fixating on wanting or resisting something,

not fixating on desires, aversions, delusions, ideas, and fears.

Often the mind is fixated. It's kind of focused about something and is really stuck there. It wants that or is that

in ways that we don't really begin to see until we start calming and settling the mind more deeply. Then at some point, we notice that the mind keeps being preoccupied. There's a tension, a momentum, a holding pattern in the mind. Some of this is almost below the level of thinking. This fixation can be the very attachment or fixation to being alive or being a self. We can even be fixated on things like being safe, having opinions, or holding onto stories. There is nothing necessarily wrong with those things, but there's no freedom with the mind fixated.

The purpose of seeing these deep insights into inconstancy, suffering, and not-self is so the mind can release its fixations. Doing that very deeply brings the mind to something that the Buddhist tradition calls “the three doors of liberation.” Those are the doors that lead to the mind letting go in a deep way, letting go of its deepest fixations, leading to liberation. Those three doors are the door of the signless, the door of the wishless, and the door of emptiness.

The signless is the door where we no longer fixate on any of the projections we have on reality around us. This means the more abstract or complicated projections we have about people – our biases, prejudices, and judgments. But it also refers to the simplest projections, even the projection on something like a door that it's a door, or a chair that it's a chair. The way chairs function in our society, “chair” is a completely appropriate and to some degree accurate idea that we apply to this piece of furniture that we call a “chair.” But if you brought a chair to people 50,000 years ago on this planet, those people maybe wouldn't know it was a chair. They wouldn't be sure about what it was. Maybe they would think it was a stepping stool to get up to the fruit in the tree. It might not occur to them that it was a chair. But we see it that way.

Even the simplest forms of attributing concepts to things can be a fixation. When the mind is no longer projecting anything, that's called “the signless.” “Signless” means no signs, so no projections of concepts or ideas. When we get the mind to the point where it's relaxed and still enough, open enough, safe enough, and peaceful enough that it's not making any projections on anything at all, then something can release. There's something about seeing inconstancy and impermanence that helps us to realize that the more we see things constantly changing, the more we see they don't fit. The

projections don't quite work. Then the projecting mind can finally release or relax.

The wishless means that when we experience suffering, we see the unsatisfactory nature of things and the degree of stress or tension that is somehow inherent in so many things, even the smallest movements of the mind. Surprisingly, when we really see that from a place of happiness, the ways in which we get fixated on the pursuit of happiness or on our suffering can release. Then something very deep can let go.

The third door is to really see something about how things are not self – the not-self characteristic of phenomena. I'll talk more about that later. Most people understand how much fixation human beings have on themselves, on self. We need to first have a lot of self-confidence – to have cultivated that. When there's enough self-confidence one can begin to let go of the fixation on self. When the mind stops that fixation, for some people, that's the door they step through for deeper liberation.

There is what we cultivate. There's what we see. And there are the doors to freedom. That is followed by how we live in the world. Each of these three doors can open to a different benefit for living in a good, wonderful way in the world. But for now, I want to say that there are four different steps in this larger process. This could be

summarized in a little saying: First, you be. Then you see. Next, you free. Finally, you are we.

“First you be” means you become someone who's stable and has a sense of well-being and confidence. Then you see means you see the three insights of inconstancy, suffering, and not-self. Then you free means you step through the doors of liberation – the doors of the signless, the wishless, and emptiness. The mind settles very deeply. And then you're we. Then the solid barrier, solid walls between self and other dissolve. Concern, care, and love for the whole world become much more natural and are an expression of that freedom. Because how could there be freedom without that freedom opening us up to care about the world around us?

That's the overview of some of what will happen this week. I hope that this is nice for you. In the first days of this week, I will talk mostly about the three doors of liberation. In a sense, we're starting with the advanced teaching as the background, the direction we're going in practice. For the retreat, I'm going to talk about the cultivation, being, what we develop, and the insights.

I look forward to continuing this theme over the next few days. Thank you.