

First Fruition, Second Fruition, and First Dhyana

This article will explain the practice and realization of the second and third fruitions of the Sound-hearer Path. The main reason that sentient beings continue to flounder in and cannot liberate themselves from the sea of birth and death is due to their ignorance. Ignorance refers to the lack of understanding that the three realms, five aggregates, and all dharmas are impermanent, suffering, empty, non-body, and no-self while taking the five aggregates to be real, permanent, joyful, and worthy of pursuit. This ignorance (also known as “the ignorance in a single thought”) has engulfed sentient beings in every single thought moment and has hence trapped them in the cycle of transmigration life after life in the three realms.

The ignorance in a single thought includes four kinds of entrenched afflictions: the affliction due to entrenched identity-view, the affliction due to entrenched attachment to the desire realm, the affliction due to entrenched attachment to the form realm, and the affliction due to entrenched attachment to the formless realm. Sentient beings are bound in the cycle of transmigration in the three realms because they crave for and enjoy the various states of the desire, form, and formless realms. What lies behind the entrenched afflictions in the three realms is self-view—the affliction due to entrenched identity-view—which is the fundamental reason that sentient beings are trapped in and incapable of liberating themselves from the cycle of birth and death.

The main reason for sentient beings’ liking and craving or disliking and hating is the notion of an illusory self. If there is not the existence of such a self, then there will be no loving or hating. In other words, sentient beings crave for the three realms because they possess and harbor the erroneous thoughts and views of a self. Hence, one must eliminate self-view in order to be liberated from the three realms. Let us use the analogy of a tree. If the ignorance in a single thought is a tree, then self-view is its root, and the attachments to the desire, form, and formless realms are its trunk, branches and leaves. As long as self-view exists, attachments to the three realms cannot be permanently eliminated because they will eventually grow back as long as the roots are still alive.

As explained in the previous sections, one attains the first fruition of Sound-hearer (*srotaāpanna*) if one has eliminated self-view. A *srotaāpanna* (stream-enterer) does not take any dharma in the three realms for the real existing self. Skepticism about true reality

and misconception about the precepts will subsequently be eliminated. The self-view, skepticism about true reality, and misconception about the precepts are collectively called the Three Fetters. A person who has realized the first fruition and eliminated the Three Fetters is said to have eliminated the first of the four afflictions in the ignorance in a single thought—the affliction due to entrenched identity-view. The remaining three afflictions of attachments to the desire, form, and formless realms are still to be eliminated. Hence, the next step for the stream-enterer is to eliminate the afflictions caused by the attachment to the desire realm.

Why? Because the content of the attachment to the desire realm is profound and expansive, and the stream-enterer has already been bound by the attachment to the desire realm; hence, among all the attachments to the three realms, the attachment to the desire realm should be eliminated first. Even though a stream-enterer has personally realized that none of the dharmas of the three realms and the five aggregates is real and dependable, his attachment to the desire realm still has not been eliminated. After this life, he will be born in the desire heavens. Even though the dullest of the stream-enterers will not be reborn into the three evil destinations, he will still be reborn back and forth between the human world and desire heavens seven times before he can eventually realize the fourth fruition and enter into final nirvana. Such is taught by the Buddha in the *Long Agama Sutra (Dīrgha Āgama)*: “One who attains the *srotaāpanna* fruition will never fall into other evil destinations and will complete the Way and its fruitions in a maximum of seven more lifetimes back and forth between the heaven and human realms.”

One question remains: “A stream-enterer has already eliminated the fetters, realized the first fruition as well as personally realized the impermanence, sufferings, emptiness, non-body, and no-self of the dharmas of the five aggregates. Why is there still attachment to the dharmas of the desire realm?” The answer lies in the fact that the habitual tendency of craving and attachment that have been accumulated through numerous past lives have not yet been changed or attenuated. We can use the story in the *Sutra on the Miscellaneous Metaphors* to illustrate the point:

A long time ago, there was a kingdom in the west that had few horses. The king spent a fortune in the treasury to purchase five hundred horses to be trained as warhorses to defend the borders. However, no war ever broke out; the king hence said: “Instead of spending so much money feeding these horses, why don’t we send them to the mill to help mill wheat into flour?” Following his order, these horses were sent to horse mills. After a

few years, the neighboring country started an invasion. The horses were sent to the front but they did not know how to charge anymore since they had been in the mill everyday for so long. The more the cavalries whipped the horses, the more they ran in circles and the kingdom was conquered in no time.

Likewise, due to our continuous indulgence in craving for the five desires in the desire realm over the past numerous lives, habits and the afflictions have been formed, which eventually become the afflictions of attachments to the three realms. The stream-enterer has eliminated the “afflictions that can be abandoned through vision,” but has not yet eliminated the afflictions caused by attachments to the three realms that can only be eradicated through cultivation. The afflictions abandoned through vision and the afflictions eradicated through cultivation are different; otherwise there will not be four kinds of entrenched afflictions in the ignorance in a single thought.

So how can a stream-enterer eliminate the attachment to the desire realm? In the *Long Agama Sutra*, the Buddha taught: “After having eliminated the Three Fetters, one should subdue sexual desire, anger, and delusion to attain the fruition of *sakṛdāgāmin* and will return only once to this world to enter into nirvana.” It means that after a stream-enterer has eliminated the three fetters of self-view, skepticism about true reality, and misconception about the precepts, he should quell his sexual desire, aversion, and delusion when trying to eliminate the attachment to the desire realm. In such way, he can attain the second fruition of *sakṛdāgāmin* (once-returner) and will be born in the desire heavens in his next life. After his next life, he will return to the human world for the last time to attain the fourth fruition of arhats and realize nirvana.

In other words, after having eliminated the Three Fetters, a stream-enterer needs to proceed to diligently observe and contemplate the subtle aspects of the five aggregates, six entrances, twelve sense-fields, and eighteen elements. He needs to continue to observe and contemplate the impermanent, suffering, empty, non-body, and no-self nature of the subtle aspects of the five aggregates even to the extent of verifying that the grasped and grasper with respect to every component of the aggregates and elements are all equal. It should be directly perceived that the grasping consciousnesses as well as the five/six sense-objects or the five aggregates that are being grasped are all equal because they are just the internal perceived portion of one’s internal mind or internal six entrances.

As such, one can see that the grasper and the grasped are equal, all being nothing but suffering. As such, one can also see the origination of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and finally achieve the noble truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. In other words, after the realization of the first fruition, one still needs to continue to observe and contemplate the appearing phenomenal world in order to eradicate the subtle attachments to the various aspects of the five aggregates that one did not notice before. Using such elimination of the Three Fetters and the contemplation of emptiness of the five aggregates as the foundation, one continues to further eliminate the attachment to the desire realm.

The attachments to the desire realm can be classified into a total of nine levels, three of each of the coarse, median and subtle types. One who has eliminated the six coarse and median levels is said to be someone who has attained the second fruition of once-returner. It means that a once-returner still harbors subtle attachment to the desire realm, not being able to transcend the desire realm yet and hence will be reborn in the desire heavens at the end of the current life.

The attachment to the desire realm manifests specifically as the five hindrances—desire, aversion and malice, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and skeptical doubt. One needs to be very attentive to be able to forsake these five hindrances. The first of the five hindrances is the hindrance of desire, attaching to the greed for the five desires (the greed for form, sound, smell, taste, and tactile object of the desire realm). Sentient beings are fettered by the five desires and cling to the states of the five desires all the time; this attachment to the five desires will hinder our cultivation on the path. The second is the hindrance of aversion and malice, aversion toward the states that do not meet our expectation. The mental state of aversion and malice will definitely hinder our progression on the path. The third is the hindrance of sloth and torpor, which include dullness and sleepiness. Dullness or sleepiness will make our mind dim and lethargic and prevent us from active cultivation. The fourth is the hindrance of restlessness and remorse; agitation in the mind is restlessness while not being able to accept what have happened that results in worry is remorse. Be it restlessness or remorse, both will make our mind tense and restless and make us stagnant on our path. The fifth is the hindrance of skeptical doubt, the mind that is hesitant and cannot make certain decisions. Prolonged worrying will hinder our cultivation.

These five hindrances are like covers above our heads that obstruct the light of wisdom; hence, they are called hindrances or obstructions. In a nutshell, eliminating self-view and contemplating on the emptiness of the five aggregates are prerequisite for the elimination of the attachment to the desire realm. Relying on such wisdom to confront the circumstance as they arise, one will be able to stay away from all manifestations through observing again and again the arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing of the five desires as well as the impermanence, suffering, emptiness, non-body, and no-self of the five aggregates, to the extent that one will feel the pain like being stabbed by a spear upon the arising of an illusory thought. Such is the method of practice for the Sound-hearer Path. Using this method to eliminate the attachment to the desire realm, the mind is steadfast.

We can imagine how painful it is if our chests are stabbed by spears or knives. For the practitioners on the Sound-hearer Path, when will there be happiness? The sutra teaches that there is only one instance that can be conveniently considered as happiness for Sound-hearers—in the state of meditative absorption of cessation, in which there is happiness of having eliminated all sensations. However, in the state of meditative absorption of cessation, no dharma can be established. The power of in-motion meditative concentration and the observance of the precepts are also needed to assist us in eliminating the attachment to the desire realm. Keeping the precepts, especially the major ones that the Buddha admonish us against, can remove bad habits or keep them at bay, elicit wisdom, enhance the virtues, and strengthen and deepen the power of meditative concentration. We shall be extremely careful and not violate the major precepts to avoid creating additional obstacles for ourselves on the path.

If one can completely eliminate the attachment to the desire realm and prevent the mind from being defiled, one will be able to be liberated from the desire realm after some time and attain the third fruition of *anāgāmin* (non-returner)—one who does not return (to the desire realm) because all the attachment to the desire realm have been completely eliminated.

During the process of eliminating the attachment to the desire realm, the mind is steadfast and dwells continuously and attentively in the state of thorough understanding, and hence the power of meditative concentration will gradually strengthen. In other words, as the attachment to the desire realm subsides and eventually being eliminated, the power of the desire-realm samadhi as well as the *upacāra-samādhi* (the access concentration before the first dhyana) will be gradually attained. Therefore, the first

dhyana will arise naturally upon the elimination of the attachment to the desire realm along with the attainment of the third fruition. The realization of the first dhyana is one of the characteristics of a non-returner.

In the *Sutra on the Collection of the Six Perfections*, the Buddha teaches that if one wants to practice and realize the first dhyana, one must eliminate the threat from the greed for the five desires—the frenzy and craving caused by the seeing of pleasant sights, the hearing of pleasant sounds, the smelling of pleasant odors, the tasting of delicious flavors, and the touching of pleasant tactile objects. Practitioners must stray away from such desires and the five hindrances of desire, aversion and malice, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and skeptical doubt. Therefore, cultivating dhyanas is a method or tool that helps eliminate the attachment to the desire realm. The Buddha also says that only after having realized the first dhyana can one be considered as having attained true samadhi because only after the realization of the first dhyana is one truly capable of being liberated from the desire realm and enters the state of the form realm. The access concentration and the desire-realm samadhi that are at a lower level than the first dhyana are not the true attainment of samadhi strictly speaking because they do not free a person from the desire realm.

Now we know that the realization of the first dhyana is one of the characteristics of a non-returner. However, is a person who has attained the first dhyana necessarily a non-returner? Not necessarily. Because a non-returner has to have attained the first dhyana, but not vice versa. The attainment of fruitions in the Liberation Path is dictated by the elimination of the four kinds of entrenched afflictions included in the ignorance in a single thought (the afflictions abandoned through vision and the afflictions eradicated through cultivation) but not the attainment of dhyanas. For example, one who has eliminated self-view has attained the first fruition of stream-enterer; one who has eliminated self-view and further eliminated the attachment to the desire realm has attained the third fruit of non-returner. Therefore, there are ordinary people who have attained the first dhyana, but there is no non-returner who has attained the third fruition but not the first dhyana, and there is definitely no arhat who has attained the fourth fruition but not the first dhyana.

Nowadays, many Buddhist dharma teachers and prominent contemporary Buddhist figures do not understand this relationship between the first fruition and the first dhyana. They practice sitting meditation earnestly and diligently hoping to induce the first dhyana but to no avail because they do not understand that the first dhyana is induced naturally through the elimination of the attachment to the desire realm. If one tries to maintain the

state of permanent quiescence and permanent illumination everyday without eliminating the greed for the five desires of the desire realm, the first dhyana will never be attained. However, even with the attainment of the first dhyana, most people will still remain as ordinary unenlightened beings because the fruition of Sound-hearer is determined by the elimination of self-view not the attainment of dhyana.

Arising of the first dhyana signifies the abandoning of desire realm and the arising of the form realm, and hence the first dhyana is also named the “samadhi with physical rapture and mental ease that transcends the desire realm.” Generally speaking, the state of the first dhyana is accompanied by the virtues of the five constituents of meditative absorption: perception, contemplation, transcending rebirth or one-pointedness of mind, physical rapture, and mental ease. In the first dhyana, there are perception and contemplation. Perception and contemplation are seeking mind and observing mind, respectively. Perception refers to coarse discrimination and apprehension from the preceding mind. For example, when we want to understand something, we will first take the initiative to search outwardly for a rough understanding and impression of the thing, and that is perceptions. Contemplation refers to the fine reception, acceptance, and the observations of the subsequent mind.

Because there are perception and contemplation in the first dhyana, it is also named the “samādhi with perception and contemplation.” The sutras often praise the Buddha as being “in constant samadhi and a *Mahānāga* (great dragon) never not in samadhi,” which means that the Buddha stays constantly in samadhi. For example, when the Buddha teaches the Dharma, he stays at least in the first dhyana with perceptions and contemplations. Transcending rebirth refers to the abandonment of rebirth in the desire realm (will not be reborn in the desire realm in future lives).

Upon the attainment of the first dhyana, the celestial body of the form realm has also arisen within the body of the desire realm. However, the celestial body of the form realm is pure while the celestial body of the desire realm is coarse and heavy. If we contemplate and observe inwardly, we will see that the celestial body does not have any internal organs and is cloudy or foggy while the surface is like a slice of thin membrane and the functions of the olfactory consciousness and gustatory consciousnesses have disappeared. We can then understand what the celestial body is like and what it means by the pure four great elements of the form realm. As for the physical rapture and mental ease, we will introduce them in the next section.

In this section, we have introduced the first and second fruitions, the arising of the first dhyana, the virtues of the five constituents of the first dhyana, and the first dhyana being one of the characteristics of the third fruition. In the next section, we will introduce the virtues of the other two constituents of the first dhyana and the different levels and types of the third fruition.

