

Sound-hearers' Fourth Fruition, Summary of the Sound-hearer Bodhi, and Right View

The afflictions that need to be eliminated as one progresses towards the fourth fruition are the five higher fetters: (1) craving for existence in the form realm (2) craving for existence in the formless realm, (3) restlessness, (4) conceit, and (5) ignorance. Although the celestial bodies in the form realm are tall, expansive, and magnificent with wondrous voice along with fine pleasant tactile sensation, they are ephemeral and therefore attachment to them should be eliminated in order to advance to the formless realm. There are only three elements—mental faculty, mental objects, and consciousness—in the formless realm. However, it is not tranquil in the formless realm because there still remains the conscious perceptive mind, which must be further eliminated or the attainment of the fourth fruition will not be possible. Likewise, restlessness is the result of the existence of mental objects along with the conscious perceptive mind and hence any subtle restlessness should be eliminated as well.

The conceit that ordinary people understand and refer to involves arrogance and conceit derived from personal attributes. For example, people can be arrogant as the result of their tall and robust physical bodies, enormous wealth, or noble lineage. However, the conceit in the Sound-hearer Dharma refers to the subtle attachment to the existence of self—inasmuch as the conscious mind's enjoyment of the existence of self and unwillingness to let go the self is a form of conceit—which inevitably leads to the cycle of birth-and-death in the three realms. Using the four formless *samādhis* as examples, the mind still perceives the ten directions in the state of *samādhi* on infinite space, meaning the conscious mind still exists and so does conceit. Therefore, such conceit must be eliminated or one will not be able to advance to the next stage. Once such conceit has been eliminated, one can then advance further to the *samādhi* on infinite consciousness. The so-called *samādhi* on infinite consciousness refers to the state in which past, present and future seeds of *vijñāna* (potential functions of consciousness) are infinite, implying that the conscious perceptive mind and conceit still remain. Both must be eliminated before one can advance further to the *samādhi* on nothingness—awareness of the state of nothingness. However, the function of knowing still exists in such a state, and, therefore, it is not truly tranquil. One should proceed further to the state of neither perception nor non-perception. Perception implies knowing even though such

knowing is very subtle when the consciousness no longer reflects upon itself; such a state is still not truly tranquil. Once such perception has been eliminated, one will be able to attain remainderless nirvana at any time.

Ignorance is foolishness and lack of proper understanding. For instance, taking the states of the four formless *samādhis* as nirvana is ignorance. Establishing the precepts through incorrect reflection and taking them as truth—believing that upholding them can help one attain the Fourth Fruition—is also ignorance.

After having eliminated the five higher fetters, one becomes an individual who has attained the fourth fruition and can attain nirvana without remainder after death and become an *arhat* liberated through insight at the very least even though such individual's habitual seeds have yet to be completely eliminated. In other words, an arhat can eliminate delimited existence, but not one's habitual seeds completely.

To sum up, Sound-hearer Bodhi has the Four Noble Truths as its essence, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness as its Dharma-gate (method of cultivation) for the practice of observing one's behavior, and the Eightfold Noble Path as its method to realize the illusory nature of the aggregates, sense-fields and elements. After having recognized and accepted that the aggregates, sense-fields, and elements are all illusory and subsequently eliminated the three fetters, one attains the first fruition of *srotaāpanna*. One attains the second fruition of *sakṛdāgāmin* by attenuating cravings, aversion, and ignorance. Such an individual will attain the third fruition of *anāgāmin* after having further eliminated the five lower fetters. If the individual further eliminates the five higher fetters, the fourth fruition of arhatship will then be attained. Although arhats with the attainment of the fourth fruition have eliminated the manifestation of afflictions, they still have not completely eliminated the habitual seeds.

Next, we will address a few questions related to Correct Views and Correct Understanding.

Question 1: After an arhat has eliminated the five aggregates and eighteen elements and entered remainderless nirvana, will such a state be nihilistic emptiness?

Answer: In Buddha's era, all arhats knew that they could enter remainderless nirvana after having eliminated the five aggregates and eighteen elements. However, they had doubt whether it would become nihilistic emptiness and raised the question to the Buddha.

Buddha told them, “When an arhat enters remainderless nirvana, it is not nihilistic emptiness because there still exists the fundamental reality of remainderless nirvana.” Because arhats had faith and confidence in the Buddha, they had no fear inwardly and outwardly and were able to eliminate the five aggregates and eighteen elements and entered remainderless nirvana at ease. In other words, one can enter nirvana without remainder when the conscious mind is willing to eliminate itself.

Many Buddhist disciples recite the *Heart Sutra* daily and come across such stanzas: “There are no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental faculties; there are no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and mental objects; there are no visual consciousness all the way to no mental consciousness”. The heart (mind) mentioned in the *Heart Sutra* refers to the state after an arhat has entered remainderless nirvana. Hence, such a state is not nihilistic emptiness because there still exists the primordial mind as stated in the *Heart Sutra*.

Question 2: Is there any difference among the state of remainderless nirvana realized by arhats liberated through insight, arhats with twofold liberation, and great arhats with three insights as well as six supernatural powers?

Answer: Arhats liberated through insight attain liberation through wisdom, and therefore they can only be liberated dependent upon specific time. Arhats with twofold liberation not only are liberated through insight but also have acquired the four concentrations and the four formless absorptions as well as the meditative absorption of cessation [*nirodhasamāpatti*]; therefore, they can enter remainderless nirvana any time. As for great arhats with three insights and six supernatural powers, they not only are twofold liberated but also have acquired three insights and six supernatural powers and can hence enter remainderless nirvana at any time. We can see that arhats can enter nirvana due not to their meditative concentration but their wisdom acquired through having eliminated afflictions. Although meditative concentration does help an arhat with liberation, it is not the primary basis of liberation. In other words, there are differences among the states of realization only in the realm of existence of the five aggregates. Nirvana without remainder is a state in which the five aggregates and eighteen elements have all been eliminated completely, and therefore there is no difference whatsoever in that state attained by the three kinds of arhats. Hence, there is no relative superiority or inferiority in the state realized by arhats who have entered the remainderless nirvana.

Question 3: Have arhats attained and realized nirvana when they enter remainderless nirvana and have they reached the opposite bank?

Answer: Many people think that arhats have attained and realized nirvana or have reached the opposite bank. We will use an example to clarify whether arhats have attained nirvana or reached the opposite bank. Suppose you want to go to a place. You must possess your five aggregates in order to say that you have arrived at the place. In other words, you need your form aggregate to physically arrive at the place, your perceptive mind to know that you have arrived, whether the trip is tiring, or how much longer you will arrive at the place. Likewise, only when one still possesses the five aggregates can one attain nirvana and reach the opposite bank. If the five aggregates and eighteen elements have all been eliminated—meaning that one no longer exists—how can one say there is anyone to arrive at the place? Who has attained nirvana? Who has reached the opposite bank? Obviously, there is no one who has attained nirvana or reached the opposite bank. Hence, when an arhat enters remainderless nirvana, there is no one who has attained nirvana and no one who has reached the opposite bank.

Question 4: Did Buddha manifest in the human world for the purpose of teaching just Sound-hearer Bodhi and Solitary-realizer Bodhi?

Answer: Certainly not. Buddha manifested in the human world to teach the one-and-only Buddha Vehicle—letting people know that they can all attain Buddhahood. The difference between Buddha Bodhi and Sound-hearer Bodhi will be addressed briefly from the perspective of the Three Virtues. The Three Virtues are virtues of the Dharma-body, *prajna*, and liberation. When a bodhisattva concentrates on Chan contemplation and suddenly realizes the true mind and finds the Dharma-body, such a bodhisattva has attained the virtues of the Dharma-body. After realizing the Dharma-body *tathāgatagarbha*, a bodhisattva is able to elicit the wisdom of *prajna* (virtues of *prajna*) that enable the bodhisattva to gradually acquire a thorough understanding of the sutras and treatises taught during the Second and Third Round of Dharma Transmission. Viewing all the dharmas of aggregates, sense-fields, and elements from the perspective of Dharma-body, the bodhisattva then realizes that the aggregates, sense-fields, and elements are all truly illusory, all have arisen from the Dharma-body and acquires the virtues of liberation. The bodhisattva then possesses the virtues of the Dharma-body, *prajna*, and liberation. On the other hand, Sound-hearers have only eliminated the five aggregates and eighteen elements; however, they do not know

where the five aggregates and eighteen elements came from. Moreover, their realization of virtues of liberation are not definitive or thorough, and they do not possess any of the virtues of the Dharma-body and *prajna*.

Bodhisattvas have eliminated not only the manifestation of afflictions but also the habitual seeds, even the beginningless ignorance, in order to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, the Dharma of bodhisattvas is superior, the minds are miraculous, and vows are expansive; in contrast, the Dharma of Sound-hearers is inferior, minds are mediocre, and vows are petty. Buddha manifested in the human world not merely for the purpose of Sound-hearer Bodhi and Solitary-realizer Bodhi but for the purpose of the one-and-only Buddha Vehicle. Therefore, Sound-hearers should turn from the small and inferior to the great vehicle so that they would not be unappreciative and ungrateful to Buddha who preached the Dharma with toil for forty-nine years. The main purpose of Buddha manifesting in the human world is for the teaching of the one-and-only Buddha Vehicle and to let all sentient beings who have karmic connections with him plant the seeds and cultivate the conditions for the attainment of Buddhahood in the future.

