

## **First Stage of Awakening**

Into the Stream: A Study Guide on the First Stage of Awakening

*Sole dominion over the earth, going to heaven, lordship over all worlds:  
the fruit of stream-entry excels them. (Dhammapada, 178)*

### **The Way to Stream Entry**

The Pali Canon recognizes four levels of Awakening, the first of which is called stream entry. This gains its name from the fact that a person who has attained this level has entered the "stream" flowing inevitably to nibbana. He/she is guaranteed to achieve full awakening within seven lifetimes at most, and in the interim will not be reborn in any of the lower realms.

The study guide on stream entry is divided into two parts. The first deals with the practices leading to stream entry; the second, with the experience of stream entry and its results.

The practices leading to stream entry are encapsulated in four factors:

Association with people of integrity is a factor for stream-entry. Listening to the true Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. Appropriate attention is a factor for stream-entry. Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. (*Samyutta Nikaya*, 55.5)

These factors form the framework for the first part of the study guide.

The Canon's treatment of these factors touches on questions of interest to all meditators, regardless of whether their practice aims all the way to Awakening: How can you recognize a trustworthy teacher? How can you tell the true Dhamma from counterfeit Dhamma? What are the rewards that come from listening to the Dhamma? Which questions should you ask yourself in the course of the practice? What kind of practice qualifies as being in accordance with the Dhamma? What kind of qualities do you need to develop to benefit most from your practice?

For your practice to lead to Awakening, you must develop reliable standards for answering these questions. The Buddha offers some preliminary guidance on developing these standards in his instructions to the brahman teenager, Kapadika Bharadvaja.

[Kapadika Bharadvaja:] "To what extent is there an awakening to the truth? To what extent does one awaken to the truth? We ask Master Gotama about awakening to the truth."

[The Buddha:] "There is the case, Bharadvaja, where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village or town. Then a householder or householder's son goes to him and observes him with regard to three mental qualities — qualities based on greed, qualities based on aversion, qualities based on delusion: 'Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on greed that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, "I know," while not knowing, or say, "I see," while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm and pain?' As he observes him, he comes to know, 'There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on greed... His bodily behavior and verbal behavior are those of one not greedy. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's greedy.

"When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on greed, he next observes him with regard to qualities based on aversion... based on delusion: 'Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on delusion that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, "I know," while not knowing, or say, "I see," while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm and pain?' As he observes him, he comes to know, 'There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on delusion... His bodily behavior and verbal behavior are those of one not deluded. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's deluded.

"When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on delusion, he places conviction in him. With the arising of conviction, he visits him and grows close to him. Growing close to him, he lends ear. Lending ear, he hears the Dhamma. Hearing the Dhamma, he remembers it. Remembering it, he penetrates the meaning of those dhammas. Penetrating the meaning, he comes to an agreement through pondering those dhammas. There being an agreement through pondering those dhammas, desire arises. With the arising of desire, he becomes willing. Willing, he contemplates [lit: "weighs," "compares"]. Contemplating, he makes an exertion. Exerting himself, he both realizes the ultimate meaning of the truth with his body and sees by penetrating it with discernment.

"To this extent, Bharadvaja, there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. I describe this as an awakening to the truth. But it is not yet the final attainment of the truth."

[Kapadika Bharadvaja:] "Yes, Master Gotama, to this extent there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. We regard this as an awakening to the truth. But to what extent is there the final attainment of the truth? To what extent does one finally attain the truth? We ask Master Gotama about the final attainment of the truth."

[Buddha:] "The cultivation, development, and pursuit of those very same qualities: to this extent, Bharadvaja, there is the final attainment of the truth. To this extent one finally attains the truth. I describe this as the final attainment of the truth." (*Majjhima Nikaya*, 95)

The study guide then gives details under the following headings:

### ***Association with People of Integrity***

"With regard to external factors, I don't envision any other single factor like friendship with admirable people as doing so much for a monk in training, who has not attained the goal but remains intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A monk who is a friend with admirable people abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful." (*Itivuttaka*, 17)

### ***Listening to the True Dhamma***

The opportunity to listen to the Dhamma is considered valuable both because it is rare and because it yields great benefits.

### ***Appropriate Attention***

Having heard the Dhamma, it is important to bring appropriate attention — seeing things in terms of cause and effect — both to what you have heard and to your experiences in general, for this one factor can make all the difference in the success or failure of your practice.

### ***Practice in Accordance with the Dhamma***

In developing dispassion for the clinging-aggregates, appropriate attention is an important first step in practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma.

"For a monk practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, this is what accords with the Dhamma: that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to form, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to feeling, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to perception, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to fabrications, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to consciousness.

As he keeps cultivating disenchantment with regard to form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness.

As he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he is totally released from form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. He is totally released from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is totally released, I tell you, from suffering and stress."

"For a monk practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, this is what accords with the Dhamma: that he keep focused on inconstancy... stress... not-self with regard to form, that he keep focused on inconstancy... stress... not-self with regard to feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness.

As he keeps focusing on inconstancy... stress... not-self with regard to form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness.

As he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he is totally released from form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. He is totally released from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is totally released, I tell you, from suffering and stress."

*(Samyutta Nikaya, 22.39-42)*

### ***Mindfulness and Alertness***

"Stay mindful, monks, and alert. This is our instruction to you all. And how is a monk mindful? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

He remains focused on feelings... mind... mental qualities in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. This is how a monk is mindful.

"And how is a monk alert? There is the case where feelings are known to the monk as they arise, known as they persist, known as they subside. Thoughts are known to him as they arise, known as they persist, known as they subside. Discernment [*vi*: perception] is known to him as it arises, known as it persists, known as it subsides. This is how a monk is alert. So stay mindful, monks, and alert. This is our instruction to you all."

(*Samyutta Nikaya*, 47.35)

### ***Restraint of the Senses***

"And how does a monk guard the doors of his senses? On seeing a form with the eye, he does not grasp at any theme or details by which — if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye — evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. On hearing a sound with the ear... On smelling an odor with the nose... One tasting a flavor with the tongue... On touching a tactile sensation with the body... On cognizing an idea with the intellect, he does not grasp at any theme or details by which — if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect — evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. Endowed with this noble restraint over the sense faculties, he is inwardly sensitive to the pleasure of being blameless. This is how a monk guards the doors of his senses."

(*Digha Nikaya*, 2)

### ***The Three Forms of Right Conduct***

"Now, Cunda, there are three ways in which one is made pure by bodily action, four ways in which one is made pure by verbal action, and three ways in which one is made pure by mental action.

"And how is one made pure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person, abandoning the taking of life, abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given. He does not take, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. Abandoning sensual misconduct, he abstains from sensual misconduct.

He does not get sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made pure in three ways by bodily action.

"And how is one made pure in four ways by verbal action? There is the case where a certain person, abandoning false speech, abstains from false speech. When he has been called to a town meeting, a group meeting, a gathering of his relatives, his guild, or of the royalty, if he is asked as a witness, 'Come and tell, good man, what you know': If he doesn't know, he says, 'I don't know.' If he does know, he says, 'I know.' If he hasn't seen, he says, 'I haven't seen.' If he has seen, he says, 'I have seen.' Thus he doesn't consciously tell a lie for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of any reward. Abandoning false speech, he abstains from false speech. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world. Abandoning divisive speech, he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he doesn't tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he doesn't tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord. Abandoning abusive speech, he abstains from abusive speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing and pleasing to people at large. Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, and the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal. This is how one is made pure in four ways by verbal action.

"And how is one made pure in three ways by mental action? There is the case where a certain person is not covetous. He does not covet the belongings of others, thinking, 'O, that what belongs to others would be mine!' He bears no ill will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. [He thinks,] 'May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!' He has right view and is not warped in the way he sees things: 'There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits and results of good and bad actions. There is this world and the next world. There is mother and father.

There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives and brahmans who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.' This is how one is made pure in three ways by mental action.

"These, Cunda, are the ten courses of skillful action."

(*Anguttara Nikaya* , 10.176)

### ***The Four Establishings of Mindfulness***

"[1] Now, on whatever occasion a monk breathing in long discerns that he is breathing in long; or breathing out long, discerns that he is breathing out long; or breathing in short, discerns that he is breathing in short; or breathing out short, discerns that he is breathing out short; trains himself to breathe in...and... out sensitive to the entire body; trains himself to breathe in...and...out calming bodily fabrication: On that occasion the monk remains focused on the *body* in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this — the in-and-out breath — is classed as a body among bodies, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the body in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

"[2] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself to breathe in...and...out sensitive to rapture; trains himself to breathe in...and...out sensitive to pleasure; trains himself to breathe in...and...out sensitive to mental fabrication; trains himself to breathe in...and...out calming mental fabrication: On that occasion the monk remains focused on *feelings* in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful — subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this — close attention to in-and-out breaths — is classed as a feeling among feelings, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on feelings in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

"[3] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself to breathe in...and...out sensitive to the mind; trains himself to breathe in...and...out satisfying the mind; trains himself to breathe in...and...out steadying the mind; trains himself to breathe in...and...out releasing the mind: On that occasion the monk remains focused on the *mind* in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — subduing greed and distress with reference to the world.

I don't say that there is mindfulness of in-and-out breathing in one of confused mindfulness and no alertness, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the mind in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

"[4] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself to breathe in...and...out focusing on inconstancy; trains himself to breathe in...and...out focusing on dispassion; trains himself to breathe in...and...out focusing on cessation; trains himself to breathe in...and...out focusing on relinquishment: On that occasion the monk remains focused on *mental qualities* in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful — subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. He who sees clearly with discernment the abandoning of greed and distress is one who oversees with equanimity, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

"This is how mindfulness of in-and-out breathing is developed and pursued so as to bring the four establishing of mindfulness to their culmination.

### ***The Seven Factors for Awakening***

"And how are the four establishing of mindfulness developed and pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination?

"[1] On whatever occasion the monk remains focused on the *body* in and of itself — ardent, alert, and mindful — putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world, on that occasion his mindfulness is steady and without lapse. When his mindfulness is steady and without lapse, then *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[2] Remaining mindful in this way, he examines, analyzes, and comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment. When he remains mindful in this way, examining, analyzing, and coming to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[3] In one who examines, analyzes, and comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, unflagging persistence is aroused.



When unflagging persistence is aroused in one who examines, analyzes, and comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then *persistence* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[4] In one whose persistence is aroused, a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises. When a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises in one whose persistence is aroused, then *rapture* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[5] For one who is enraptured, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm. When the body and mind of an enraptured monk grow calm, then *serenity* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[6] For one who is at ease — his body calmed — the mind becomes concentrated. When the mind of one who is at ease — his body calmed — becomes concentrated, then *concentration* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

"[7] He oversees the mind thus concentrated with equanimity. When he oversees the mind thus concentrated with equanimity, *equanimity* as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

[Similarly with the other three establishing of mindfulness: feelings, mind, and mental qualities.]

"This is how the four establishing of mindfulness are developed and pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination.

### ***Clear Knowing and Release***

"And how are the seven factors for awakening developed and pursued so as to bring clear knowing and release to their culmination? There is the case where a monk develops *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening... *persistence* as a factor for awakening... *rapture* as a factor for awakening... *serenity* as a factor for awakening... *concentration* as a factor for awakening... *equanimity* as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in relinquishment.

"This is how the seven factors for awakening, when developed and pursued, bring clear knowing and release to their culmination."

(*Majjhima Nikaya*, 118)

### **Stream Entry and its Results**

When treating the experience of stream entry and its results, the Canon uses all three of its typical modes of discourse: the narrative mode — stories about people who have attained stream entry; the cosmological mode — descriptions of the after-death destinations awaiting those who have attained stream entry; and what might be called the "emptiness" mode, which describes mental states in and of themselves as they are directly experienced as absent or present, both during and after stream entry.

The material in this part of the study guide is presented in five sections.

The first section, **The Arising of the Dhamma Eye**, discusses the experience of stream entry, and concludes with a passage indicating why the experience is described in terms of the faculty of vision.

The second section, **The Three Fetters**, discusses the three fetters of renewed existence that are cut with the arising of the Dhamma eye: self-identity views, uncertainty, and grasping at habits and practices.

The third section, **The Character of the Stream-enterer**, discusses the personal characteristics of a stream-enterer that flow directly from the cutting of the first three fetters. This section focuses on three lists of the four factors of stream entry, which are not to be confused with the four factors for stream entry discussed in the first part of the study guide.

The fourth section, **Rewards**, discusses the rewards of stream entry that are come both in this life and in future lives.

The final section, **Advice**, echoes the Buddha's last words to his disciples before entering total nibbana.

The discourse reporting those words — *Digha Nikaya*, 16 — also reports that the most backward of the monks present at the Buddha's passing away were stream-enterers. The fact that his last words to them stressed the need for heedfulness underlies the fact that even stream-enterers have to be wary of heedlessness.

This is especially true in the present day, when many different meditation schools define the attainment of stream entry in such different terms, raising the question of whose certification of stream entry is valid and whose is not. The safest course of action for all meditators — whether certified as stream-enterers or not, and whether that certification is valid or not — is to maintain an attitude of heedfulness with regard to all mental qualities.

The term "stream" in "stream entry" refers to the point where all eight factors of the noble eightfold path come together.

"Sariputta, 'The stream, the stream': thus it is said. And what, Sariputta, is the stream?"

"This noble eightfold path, lord, is the stream: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."

"Very good, Sariputta! Very good! This noble eightfold path — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration — is the stream."

(*Samyutta Nikaya*, 55.5)

### ***The Arising of the Dhamma Eye***

What does the Dhamma eye see when it arises? Then Ven. Assaji gave this Dhamma exposition to Sariputta the wanderer: "Whatever phenomena arise from a cause: Their cause and their cessation. Such is the teaching of the Tathagata, the Great Contemplative."

Then to Sariputta the wanderer, as he heard this exposition of Dhamma, there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: *Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.*

(*Mahavagga*, I.23.5)

This standard formula — it is repeated throughout the Canon — may not seem that remarkable an insight. However, the texts make clear that this insight is not a matter of belief or contemplation, but of direct seeing. As the following passages show, belief and contemplation may be conducive to the seeing — and an undefined level of belief and discernment may actually guarantee that someday in this lifetime the seeing will occur — but only with the actual seeing does there come a dramatic shift in the course of one's life and one's relationship to the Dhamma.

Part of what makes the arising of the Dhamma eye such a powerful experience is that the realization that "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation" must follow on a glimpse of what stands in opposition to "all that is subject to origination," i.e., a glimpse of the Unconditioned — deathlessness.

The insight of a stream-enterer into the truths of causality on the one hand, and of the Deathless on the other, is accurate as far as it goes, but it does not equal the intensity of the insight of the arahant — one who has reached the final level of awakening.

### ***The Three Fetters***

The four levels of Awakening are defined by the extent to which they cut the ten fetters by which the mind binds itself to conditioned experience.

"And which are the five lower fetters? Self-identity views, uncertainty, grasping at habits and practices, sensual desire, and ill will. These are the five lower fetters. And which are the five higher fetters? Passion for form, passion for what is formless, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. These are the five higher fetters."

*(Anguttara Nikaya, 10.13)*

"In this community of monks there are monks who are arahants, whose effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis..."

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of the five lower fetters, are due to be reappear [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world..."

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, are once-returners, who — on returning only one more time to this world — will make an ending to stress..."

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three fetters, are stream-winners, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening."

*(Majjhima Nikaya, 118)*

For the stream-enterer, the arising of the Dhamma eye — with its insight into the causal principles underlying the origination and cessation of stress — is what cuts through the first three fetters.

"He attends appropriately, *This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.* As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: self-identity view, doubt, and grasping at habits and practices."

(*Majjhima Nikaya*, 2)

First, ***self-identity views***:

[Visakha:] "But, lady, how does self-identity come about?"

[Sister Dhammadinna:] "There is the case, friend Visakha, where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person — who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma — assumes form (the body) to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"He assumes feeling to be the self...

"He assumes perception to be the self...

"He assumes fabrications to be the self...

"He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity comes about."

[Visakha:] "But, lady, how does self-identity not come about?"

[Sister Dhammadinna:] "There is the case where a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones — who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma — does not assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"He does not assume feeling to be the self...

"He does not assume perception to be the self...

"He does not assume fabrications to be the self..."

"He does not assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity does not come about."

(*Majjhima Nikaya*, 44)

The **fetter of uncertainty** is defined as doubt in the Awakening of the Buddha, the truth of his Dhamma, and the practice of his noble disciples. What this uncertainty boils down to is doubt as to whether there is a Deathless dimension, and whether one can realize it through one's own efforts. The experience of the Deathless — following on the practice of the Dhamma to the point of entering the stream — cuts this fetter by confirming the possibility of a human being's awakening to the Deathless, the correctness of the Buddha's teaching as a guide to entering the stream, and the worthiness of those who have reached the stream.

"There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones is endowed with unwavering confidence in the Awakened One: 'Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the world, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of devas and human beings, awakened, blessed.'

"He is endowed with unwavering confidence in the Dhamma: 'The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Blessed One, to be seen here and now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be realized by the wise for themselves.'

"He is endowed with unwavering confidence in the Sangha: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well... who have practiced straight-forwardly... who have practiced methodically... who have practiced masterfully — in other words, the four types of noble disciples when taken as pairs, the eight when taken as individual types[1] — they are the Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples: worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, the incomparable field of merit for the world.'" (*Anguttara Nikaya*, 10.92)

NOTE: The four pairs are (1) the person on the path to stream entry, the person experiencing the fruit of stream entry; (2) the person on the path to once-returning, the person experiencing the fruit of once-returning; (3) the person on the path to non-returning, the person experiencing the fruit of non-returning; (4) the person on the path to arahantship, the person experiencing the fruit of arahantship. The eight individuals are the eight types forming these four pairs.

The ***fetter of grasping at habits and practices*** is often described in the Pali Canon with reference to the view that one becomes pure simply through performing rituals or patterns of behavior. This view in turn is related to the notion that one's being is defined by one's actions: If one acts in accordance with clearly defined habits and practices, one is *ipso facto* pure. Although the Canon recognizes the importance of habits and practices in the attaining the stream, the experience of the Deathless shows the person who has attained the stream that one cannot define oneself in terms of those habits and practices. Thus one continues to follow virtuous practices, but without defining oneself in terms of them.

### ***The Character of a Stream-winner***

A standard formula in the Canon describes a stream-enterer in terms of four factors. The first three of these four factors of stream entry are directly related to the cutting of the fetter of uncertainty. The fourth is related to the cutting of the fetter of grasping at habits and practices.

***Conviction*** in the Triple Gem of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha is not simply a matter of belief or devotion. It forces one to place trust in the principle of kamma — the principle of action and result in line with which one first gained entry to the stream.

***Virtue***, as practiced by the stream-enterer, is also a function of a deep trust in the principle of kamma, and of a sympathy for others that arises from that trust. Although stream-enterers may still break the minor rules of training, the depth of insight that informs their virtue ensures that their adherence to the basic principles of morality is unshakable.

***Generosity*** is actually a characteristic that must precede stream entry. However, the attainment of stream entry gives generosity a distinctive integrity.

***Discernment*** is the character trait of the stream-enterer that is most directly related to the cutting of the fetter of self-identity views. However, its implications spread to other facets of right view as well. In fact, "consummate in view" is one of the epithets for a stream-enterer. The impact of being consummate in view extends, not only to one's intellectual life, but also to one's emotional life as well.

### ***Rewards***

Many of the passages describing the rewards of stream entry focus on the stream-enterer's fate after death:

He/she will never be reborn on a plane lower than the human, and will tend to experience exceptional happiness wherever reborn. As for the number of rebirths remaining for the stream-enterer before total Unbinding, the texts distinguish three levels of attainment.

"[Some,] with the wasting away of the three fetters, are 'one-seed-ers' (*ekabijin*): After taking rebirth only one more time on the human plane, they will put an end to stress.

"Or, not breaking through to that, not penetrating that, with the wasting away of the three fetters they are 'family-to-family-ers' (*kolankola*): After transmigrating and wandering on through two or three more families [according to the Commentary, this phrase should be interpreted as 'through two to six more states of becoming'], they will put an end to stress.

"Or, not breaking through to that, not penetrating that, with the wasting away of the three fetters they are 'seven-times-at-most-ers' (*sattakkhattuparama*): After transmigrating and wandering on among devas and human beings, they will put an end to stress."

(*Anguttara Nikaya*, 3.89)

The Canon often places great importance on the power of the last mental state before death in determining one's future plane of existence. However, the power of stream entry is so great that it can overcome even a muddled state of mind at death, ensuring that the next rebirth will be a good one.

### **Advice**

Although it would be pleasant to conclude the study guide with passages of encouragement, we would probably do better to follow the example of the Buddha, who directed his last words to his stream-enterer disciples, encouraging them not to rest content with the rewards awaiting them, but to maintain instead an attitude of heedfulness.

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, "Now, then, monks, I exhort you: All fabrications are subject to decay. Bring about completion through heedfulness." Those were the Tathagata's last words.

(*Digha Nikaya*, 16)



## Glossary

**Arahant:** A "worthy one" or "pure one"; a person whose mind is free of defilement and is thus not subject to further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and his highest level of noble disciples.

**Asava:** Effluent; fermentation. Four qualities — sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance — that "flow out" of the mind and create the flood of the round of death and rebirth.

**Deva (devata):** Literally, "shining one." An inhabitant of the heavenly realms.

**Dhamma:** (1) Event; action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) nibbana (although there are passages describing nibbana as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma*.

**Jhana:** Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion. This term is derived from the verb *jhayati*, which means to burn with a still, steady flame.

**Kamma:** Intentional act. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

**Nibbana:** Literally, the "unbinding" of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. "Total nibbana" in some contexts denotes the experience of Awakening; in others, the final passing away of an arahant. Sanskrit form: *Nirvana*.

**Sangha:** Community. On the conventional (*sammati*) level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns. On the ideal (*ariya*) level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream entry.

**Tathagata:** Literally, "one who has become authentic (*tatha-agata*)" or "one who is truly gone (*tatha-gata*)." An epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

**Vinaya:** The monastic discipline. The Buddha's own term for the religion he founded was "this Dhamma-Vinaya."

**Source:** "Into the Stream: A Study Guide on the First Stage of Awakening", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 17 December 2013, [http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/into\\_the\\_stream.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/into_the_stream.html) . [Text excerpted from original article, and title modified, by Alexander Peck with the intent of leading and encouraging readers to go to the comprehensive original to understand the depth of the subject matter. This only remains as an introduction to this topic.]

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