

The Three Higher Trainings

They are called 'higher' because they aim higher than just having a pleasant life. They come from an altruistic attitude of universal responsibility. The goal is not merely a worldly one, but of either complete personal liberation, or full enlightenment for the sake of all.

With all three higher trainings of ethics, concentration, and wisdom, we can cut the root of suffering forever.

- Higher training in ethics is focussed on the body
- Concentration is like two strong arms
- Wisdom is like a very sharp axe
- Our delusions and their seeds are the tree



Ethics

Ethics is the very foundation of all the qualities that we develop within ourselves. Nagarjuna says, if a container is broken how can it hold anything? If our ethics are broken, how can we develop any positive qualities? Ethics is a quality of mind that wishes to abstain from non-virtue and negativity. We don't do it for sake of reputation, through bargaining, or through fear. The practice of ethics is not about fear or guilt, but creating circumstances for joy.

At the moment we are bound to cyclic existence because we are under the control of our minds, and our minds are under the control of our delusions. As a result, we are in a state of constant distraction, unable to apply ourselves to what matters to us. Practicing ethical behaviour helps us, like wearing the superpower cloak of our vows as protection.

Concentration

Our minds are like cities of distractions, so we need to create some physical and mental space from the objects of delusion. Calming our mind and focussing on virtuous objects is the basis for cultivating realisations on the path. When we free our minds from distractions, we will find it much easier to discriminate between what to practice and what to abandon.

Without single pointed concentration we are unable to stabilise our realisations or focus on virtue. If we can focus our mind on our chosen topic, without distraction, we will be able to cease the gross delusions entirely. By abandoning the objects of our delusions, we decrease the afflictions. By abandoning mental wandering, we increase the practice of virtue.

Wisdom

To free our minds completely from the control of delusions and their seeds, we need wisdom. Not just any wisdom, but the realisation of the nature of reality. The result of this wisdom is the complete cessation of suffering, of delusions and their seeds. If our studies are based in ethics, our wisdom will not degenerate or become unhinged. Our studies will become like medicine to cure the disease of the disturbing emotions and their results.

Three Reflections for the Higher Trainings

WISDOM: When you go shopping, observe how an item appears to you in the shop when you first see it. Notice how its appearance changes and becomes more concrete as your interest in it grows. Notice how you feel after you buy it and consider it yours.

1. What is the object's function? _____
2. What causes and conditions brought this object into existence? _____

3. How will it change in the future? _____

4. How do other people relate to it? _____

5. What expectations did you embroider the object with? _____

CONCENTRATION: Chose an object of meditation and focus your mind on it, trying to achieve and maintain stability, clarity, and intensity. Avoid laxity and excitement.

Identify the fundamental state of the mind unsullied by thought, just in its own state, mere luminosity. With mindfulness and introspection remain in that state. If a thought arises, name it, rather than get involved in the contents.

Notice your reaction to it. Notice any associated physical sensations, without seeking to change them or react. Just look into the very nature of that thought itself. (This will cause the distraction to lose its power and dissolve of its own accord).

ETHICS: Observe your motivation as often as you can. Before getting out of bed in the morning, establish a non-violent, non-abusive outlook for your day.

6. Think "Whatever I do today, may I become able to help all beings" ☐
7. What else would you like to add to make it personal? _____

8. Divide the day into sections (home, work, transport) to re-check your motivation ☐
9. Take five minutes to reflect at meal times ☐
10. At night examine your actions, communication and attitudes during that day ☐
11. For the positive activities and responses, spend 2 minutes fully appreciating your efforts (recognise details and context) and rejoicing in them ☐
12. For negative responses, what's one thing you could do better tomorrow?
