The Wisdom Parami

Wisdom is a core quality of Buddhist doctrine; it is the primary subdivision of the Eightfold Path, which contains Wholesome Understanding and Wholesome Intention. All the other attributes of the Eightfold Path such as Virtue (Wholesome Speech, Action and Livelihood) and Mental Discipline (Wholesome Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration), function to make Wisdom manifest.

Those folks who have studied these qualities with me previously understand that I prefer different wording for the qualities comprising the Eightfold Path: I believe Clear Awareness and Benevolent Intention are more accessible and useful terms to use. Clear Awareness constitutes the flow of subjective experience that is free from the confusion brought about from clinging to views, primarily what is called “personality view”, that is, a misperception of reality that imagines an enduring and controlling ego/self. Benevolent Intention addresses the driving energy of craving, that is, the desire for pleasant experience and the desire to avoid unpleasant experience.

Wisdom is one of the Paramis (Paramitas in Sanskrit), perfections of mental processes that support the process of awakening. On April 27, an article about the Paramis was posted on the Orlando Insight Meditation website entitled “Perfecting Qualities For Awakening”. Here is a quote from the work of Nina Van Gorkem that was part of that article:

“Wisdom (paññå) has the characteristic of penetrating the real specific nature (of dhammas), or the characteristic of sure penetration, like the penetration of an arrow shot by a skillful archer; its function is to illuminate the objective field, like a lamp; its manifestation is non-confusion, like a guide in a forest; concentration or the four (noble) truths, is its proximate cause.”

The penetrating characteristic of Wisdom relates to the basic practice involved with mindfulness of breathing, that is, awarely aiming attention at a focal point, in this case the sensation of breathing, and sustaining that awareness sufficiently to investigate its qualities to avoid identifying that emerging mental formation as an enduring and controlling self. The investigation involves vipassana practice, which provides the illumination.

It is also important to cultivate different levels of Wisdom: *conceptualization* and *realization*. *Conceptual* understanding involves studying the teachings and commentaries, while *realization* involves direct experiential awareness of the three characteristics of reality from a Buddhist perspective, that is, impermanence, the absence of an enduring, controlling self, and the distress and confusion that arise from craving and clinging.

Another way to describe the differing levels to pay very close attention to how craving drives attention, and how attention becomes enchanted with a conditioned, momentary self-state organization. This investigation makes clear the conceptual nature of clinging. When this awareness is sufficiently matured, the process of awareness is not subject to craving and clinging, so experience flows effortlessly and peacefully, a state of nondual awareness.

Nondual awareness doesn’t mean that the mind is blank, thoughtless; rather it means that the process of thinking is not made personal. Thinking is a phenomenon of nature, like wind in the trees, or the movement of the body—*there is no self that is inherent in thinking.*  Thinking can still happen in an orderly, beneficial way, much as the movement of the body can happen in a graceful, productive way. The Buddha didn’t give up thinking after awakening, but the process of thinking was understood through Wisdom, which allowed the need for ego gratification or ego protection to dissolve. We don’t have to wait for the process of awakening to be fully operational to benefit from the practice of mindfulness; every time we redirect attention away from wholesome self-state organization and towards self-state organization emerging from clear awareness and benevolent intention, the benefits of Wisdom arise.