



THE ASIAN
CLASSICS INSTITUTE



Nirvana Immersion

Homework Master

Class Three: Destroying the Enemy

1) The Sanskrit word *arhat* is used to describe someone who has reached nirvana. Explain the two meanings of this word, and then list the three stages that we go through to reach it, in the description known as the “Four Fruits of the Practice of Virtue.”

[The Sanskrit word *arhat*, which is used to apply to a person who has reached nirvana, can be split up in two different ways—both of which are rich in meaning.

One way is to split the word into *ari*, which means *enemy*; and *hat*, which comes from a root \sqrt{han} (*han*) and means *to strike* or *to hit* (this root is seen in the Sanskrit word *ahinsa*, to “not harm”; and in the English *gun*).

Together then the word means *the one who has destroyed the enemy*. The enemy here is our own negative emotions, and so an *arhat* is someone who has reached nirvana.

Another way to read *arhat* is to connect it to the root \sqrt{arh} , which means *to deserve*. *Arhat* then means *someone who is worthy*, and is explained by saying that a person who has reached nirvana is very *worthy* of our offerings, since any karma collected with them is so powerful.

As we come to understand more and more about how the world around us works, we begin to shed more and more of our negative emotions. This then affects the rebirths that we can see our own mind laying down in front of us, like stepping stones as we go. The process here is called the “Four Fruits of the Practice of Virtue.”

Nirvana Immersion
Homework Master, Class 3

The first of these fruits is called “stream-enterer.” This is a reference to our first direct perception of ultimate reality. When we have this experience, we are plopped down onto a metaphorical conveyor belt which will carry us inevitably and inexorably to full enlightenment within a comparatively short amount of time.

The second fruit is called “once-returner.” This means that we have eliminated so many negative emotions (and the seeds they plant) that we can only see ourselves take a rebirth one more time into a place called the Desire Realm. The Desire Realm is the realm that we are in now—a realm of death and sadness, filled with impure (ignorant) thoughts of desire for things like food and sex.

The third fruit is called “non-returner”; a stage we reach where we have destroyed so many negative emotions that we will no longer perceive ourselves be born into the Desire Realm. From here on we can only take births into the Form Realm and the Formless Realm, places of great temporary happiness.

Once we have overcome then the last of our negative emotions completely (especially all forms of our misunderstanding the world around us), then we attain the fourth fruit: the destruction of the enemy, the state of an *arhat*.]

2) How is it that, once we reach it, nirvana will last forever? Explain with a comparison to emptiness itself.

[It’s important to appreciate that when we stop our negative emotions by using our new understanding of how mental seeds run the world, we stop them *forever*. Once you realize that your husband’s yelling is coming from your habit of yelling at the people who work for you at your office, you simply stop him by stopping your own yelling.

It’s not like—once you’re really strong in this understanding—you can slip back into thinking that your husband’s yelling is coming from him. That is, we’re not *suppressing* our anger at how he yells at us: we’re stopping it at the root, inside of ourselves. And it won’t come back again.

A parallel can be drawn here with emptiness itself. Remember that emptiness is a negation: an *absence* of something. There is nothing in the universe which comes from its own side. The absence of things that come from their own side is thus absolute in this universe, and that will never change: it’s not like at some point they could be *partly* missing from the universe. And this means that this absence is unchanging.

Nirvana Immersion
Homework Master, Class 3

Absences of things are unchanging, even up to the moment that they go away (in cases where, for example, there is an absence of your friend in the room, and then they walk in). Drawing the proper parallels to the absence of negative emotions in nirvana (which lasts forever) is an important exercise for a person interested in reaching nirvana.]

3) What are the four ways in which we can perceive the world around us, according to Keutsang Rinpoche? How do these four apply to people who have not yet seen emptiness; people who have, but who have not yet reached nirvana; people who have reached nirvana, but who have not yet reached enlightenment; and people who have reached enlightenment? Please answer by filling in the following blanks:

A. Four ways of perceiving things:

[(1) A water pitcher, for example, appears to be a water pitcher—and we take it to be a water pitcher.

(2) A water pitcher appears to be coming from its own side, and we take it as coming from its own side.

(3) A water pitcher appears *not* to be coming from its own side, and we take it to be not coming from its own side.

(4) A water pitcher appears to be coming from a tiny image which has popped out of a karmic seed inside of our own mind, and we take it to be that way.]

B. How these apply to—

(1) Someone who has not yet seen emptiness:

[They have the first two modes of perception in their mind, but not the second two.]

(2) Someone who has seen emptiness, but not yet reached nirvana:

[They can have all four modes of perception in their mind.]

Nirvana Immersion
Homework Master, Class 3

(3) Someone who has reached nirvana, but not yet reached enlightenment:

[Things can appear to them to be coming from their own side, but they don't take them to be that way. Therefore these beings no longer have the second mode, but they do have all the rest.]

(4) Someone who has reached enlightenment:

[For these beings, it's no longer possible for anything to appear to be coming from its own side. And so they further lack any case where things are appearing to come from their own side.]

4) What are the Four Steps for removing our favorite negative emotion? Answer by using the one emotion that you have chosen as your favorite from the six candidates of anger; jealousy; addictions; judging other people; busyness; and procrastination.

Step One: [Make a single sentence to express your goal: "I want to stop being jealous of other people; I want to learn to celebrate the achievements of everyone I ever meet."]

Step Two: [I will make a plan to help a certain person who also seems to be having a problem with jealousy. I will choose them carefully, and I will plan out every step to meeting with them from time to time to give them support and help them with their challenge. I will "daydream" on this plan as often as I can, since it plants more and more seeds.]

Step Three: [I will actually take this person out, say to Starbucks, and offer them my support in dealing with their jealousy. I will reflect on how this could start an entire movement of people who try to achieve their dreams by helping someone else achieve the same dream.]

Step Four: [Before I go to bed at night, I will lay back and give some good solid thought to all the good things I've done during Steps Two and Three to help the person who is my "project." This is the "secret weapon" for making seeds expand and grow wildly, and open quickly!]

Nirvana Immersion
Homework Master, Class 3

5) What unexpected disaster can occur with the Four Steps if we're not careful with our motivation? What is a very simple way to transform this motivation into bodhichitta, the highest form of love? Again, answer by using your own "favorite" negative emotion as the example.

[Suppose that we make an effort to help a person who has a jealousy problem *only* because we want to remove our own jealousy, and not because we want to help them. In this case we will plant seeds to see our own jealousy disappear (and be replaced by a true joy in others' achievements).

At the same time though, we'll be planting other seeds to see selfish people around us, all the time! To avoid this problem, we simply add to Step Three the part mentioned above: As we are talking to our friend and giving them advice and support to overcome their own challenge with jealousy, at the same time we very consciously reflect upon how—if we are able to overcome our jealousy by using this new "karmic seed" system—then others will inevitably copy us.

I could spark a whole revolution in how people deal with their negative emotions—I could make whole parts of the whole world happy! This is real bodhichitta, real ultimate love, and it completely prevents any seeds for selfishness.]

Coffee shop assignment: Please meet with at least one other person—or better, a group of people—whom you didn't know well before this teaching; do your homework together and discuss together any questions you have. Please write here where, when, and with whom you did your homework:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, spend some time meditating on the Four Steps that you will use to stop your own worst negative emotion, and to develop the opposite, using karmic seeds—something that *always* works!

Please write here the two times that you started these meditations (homeworks without these times will not be accepted):