

Dragons on the Eightfold Path

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Session 8: Wise Integration

This part of the Eightfold Path is often taught as Right Concentration, with the four stages below (*jhanas*) as more & more refined states of absorption into a meditation object, such as the breath at the tip of the nose. The trouble is that you need a lot of specialized conditions to “get” these states; and the “getting” itself can become greedy and driven. So I’ve taken to looking at the Buddha’s words as descriptions of states of being that you can experience anywhere, gradually coming into a continuous sense of wholeness. Wise Integration is a process of coming home. It is happening all the time, an unavoidable side-effect of your practice. Be curious. Notice & acknowledge the stages of integration whenever you experience them. Keep going! The fruits of practice are everywhere.

4 Stages of Wise Integration:	Possible field notes:
There is the case where a student of wise integration — quite withdrawn from sense-obsession, withdrawn from unskillful qualities — enters & remains in the first stage of integration: rapture & pleasure born from letting go, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.	<i>Letting go of worry and craving, bitterness and hostility, blame and expectation, I enter fully into the present moment. It feels good: reflecting on the situation I find myself in, I think about past experiences and how they may inform the present. I think about the skillful teachings I’ve received & how they may be applicable to what I am living through now.</i>
With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, she enters & remains in the second stage of integration: rapture & pleasure born of integration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance.	<i>Once I’ve thought these things through, I let go of thinking as a primary tool, and settle into a kind of confident, creative stillness that informs my engagement with all situations: meditation, dinner party, sitting on the toilet, grocery store. All one. Joy bubbles up of its own accord, and is everywhere.</i>
With the fading of rapture, she remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. She enters & remains in the third stage of integration, of which the Noble Ones declare, “Equanimous & mindful, she has a pleasant abiding.”	<i>Giddy joy fades away. In its place is a steady, embodied sense of well-being. Walking along, I feel my chest and shoulders open and relaxed. I feel my hips and legs and back, just as they are. I feel the soles of my feet on the ground: steady, alive, changing in each stride. I inhabit body, heart & mind with gratitude and full awareness.</i>
With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — she enters & remains in the fourth stage of integration: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.	<i>I’ve given up trying to manipulate the universe to give me pleasure & spare me pain. Why cling & push, when so much of what I’ve learned has come through the hardest lessons, and when the sacred and the ordinary are one? I know myself through and through: ragged bits, and smooth. I trust this life. Wherever I am, I am home.</i>

Adapted from Thanissaro Bhukku’s translation of the Magga Vibhanga Sutta:

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.008.than.html>