

The 4 limbs for streamwinning (*sotāpatti-y-aṅgāni*)¹

Source: SD 3.3 (4.1.1), Entering the Stream © Piya Tan 2003.

The “4 limbs of streamwinning” are the supports for gaining streamwinning or the factors that lead us to the path of awakening. These are explained as follows:

(1) **Associating with true individuals** (*sappurisa,samseva*), those who know and practise the true teachings, and are imbued with moral virtue, wisdom and compassion, who inspire thus us to emulate them. In this way, we begin to know and understand the Buddha as the ideal of self-awakening, the Dharma as the true path to that awakening, and the sangha as the holy community of noble saints of the path or those who live emulating these noble saints and the Buddha’s teaching to become self-awakened. In short, we have wise faith in the 3 jewels.²

(2) **Hearing the true teaching** (*saddhamma,savana*), that is, the teaching of the Buddha, especially as recorded in the early Buddhist texts, in all their simplicity and clarity. The teaching trains us to harmonize our actions and speech with the people around us and with our environment. Such a harmonious life is the basis for mental cultivation, which in turn develops both our body and mind, so that we are physically and mentally healthy. With a healthy mind in a healthy body, we are more readily open to wisdom training.³ This is called the 3 trainings.⁴

(3) **Wise attention** (*yoniso,manasikāra*) refers to the habitual practice of directing the mind or attention to see directly into the true nature of things, that they are all impermanent (*anicca*). As we see deeper into this recurring pattern, or “universal characteristic” (*sāmañña lakkhaṇa*), we begin to understand that they are also unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). In due course, we begin to see that what is impermanent and unsatisfactory has no abiding essence or eternal self or soul.⁵

Wise attention, in other words, is our own effort at personal cultivation for the arising of liberating wisdom. The other way for liberating wisdom to arise is through wisely listening to others, or “the voice of another” (*parato ghosa*).⁶

(4) **Practice of the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma** (*dhammānudhamma,paṭipatti*) to live a wholesome life in keeping with the teachings of the Buddha and his early saints. **The (Nibbidā) Dhamma,kathika Sutta** (S 12.16) defines this as practising the Dharma “for the sake of revulsion, of dispassion, of cessation”⁷ regarding any,

¹ In a series of 20 suttas in **Sotāpatti Saṃyutta**, viz, S 55.74, each says that these 4 qualities are instrumental in gaining all the fruitions in the spiritual life.

² On the Buddha’s virtues, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7; on the virtues of the Dharma, see **Dhammānussati**, SD 15.9; on the virtue of the Sangha, see **Aṭṭha,puggala S 1** (A 8.59), SD 15.10a(1).

³ For related suttas, see SD 3.3 (4.1.1+4.1.2).

⁴ See **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁵ These are the 3 characteristics (*ti,lakkhaṇa*): see **Atam,mayatā**, SD 19.13 (1); **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16), SD 1.2.

⁶ For further details, see **Yoniso Manasikāra Sampadā S** (S 45.55/5:31), SD 34.12 (2); **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14 (5).

⁷ See **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1.

a part or all of the 12 links, that is, decay-and-death, birth, existence, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the 6 sense-bases, name-and-form, consciousness, decay and ignorance.⁸

On a simpler level, this refers to renunciation (*nekkhamma*) in a spiritual sense, that is, in terms of the body, speech and mind.⁹

Bodily renunciation refers to the habit of letting go of whatever is unwholesome and unhelpful to our physical health and wellbeing. Ethically, this means respecting life (ours and others), the happiness of others, and their personal space and freedom (these qualities are, in fact, embodied in the first three of the 5 precepts).¹⁰

Verbal renunciation is the habit of refraining from speech that is false, divisive, harsh or unbeneficial, and the practice of right speech, that is, speech that is true, unifying, pleasant, and beneficial. In short, this is communication that is helpful and healing.

Mental renunciation is training ourselves to let go of negative ideas and views, and cultivating wholesome ones. This is best done through meditation and mindfulness practices.¹¹ Through meditation, we learn to let go of all thoughts, so that our mind is calm and clear, healing us and helping us to see people in a positive way, and see the true nature of life and the world so that we live truly happily and beneficially, evolving on the path of personal growth and spiritual liberation.¹²

R885 Inspiration 534

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⁸ See **(Nibbidā) Dhamma, kathika S** (S 12.16), SD 46.18.

⁹ These are the 3 doors of karma: see SD 5.7 (2.2.2).

¹⁰ On the 5 precepts, see **Veḷu, dvāreyya S**, SD 1.5 (2); **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2).

¹¹ See **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1.

¹² On renunciation (*nekkhamma*) as spiritual practice (esp meditation), see **Hālidakkāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9-12), SD 10.12; **Sexuality**, SD 31.7 (1.6.2); **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (14.7).