

What Do We mean by “Insight.”

Insight is an understanding that pertains to cause and effect relationships within a given context. It can refer to:

- ❖ An intuitive understanding of the underlying nature of a thing or a process: an insight into the way something or someone “really” is, beyond surface appearances.
- ❖ Grasping the internal relationships and behaviors that characterize a particular system: the way something “really” works.
- ❖ A person’s ability to acutely observe, penetrate, and discern the nature of something: “Let’s ask her opinion, she has good insight.”
- ❖ A personal, introspective understanding: “I need some insight into why this keeps happening to me, why I get myself into these situations.”

Dictionary.com definition of insight:

1. an instance of apprehending the true nature of a thing, especially through intuitive understanding: *an insight into 18th-century life*.
2. penetrating mental vision or discernment; faculty of seeing into inner character or underlying truth.
3. *Psychology*.
 - a. an understanding of relationships that sheds light on or helps solve a problem.
 - b. (in psychotherapy) the recognition of sources of emotional difficulty.
 - c. an understanding of the motivational forces behind one's actions, thoughts, or behavior; self-knowledge.

- ❖ What people normally refer to as insight are sudden changes in understanding.
- ❖ When an insight manifests suddenly, it is sometimes described as an epiphany.
- ❖ Insights are described as intuitive because they don't seem to be the result of ordinary reasoning and thinking. We don't really know where they come from, insights just appear.

Non-insight problem solving: the answer comes slowly and methodically, as the result of conscious analysis. You are quite aware of the steps leading to the solution, and can explain how you got there.

Insight problem solving: The answer appears suddenly, unexpectedly, and it can be difficult to describe the logic behind the solution. The source of the solution is intuition. Insight involves things like:

- ❖ seeing the problem in a new way;
- ❖ connecting the problem to another problem for which a solution is already known;
- ❖ letting go of past experiences that were preventing the solution from presenting itself; or
- ❖ seeing the problem in the context of a “bigger picture”.

Four Steps to Problem Solving

Preparation – we focus our attention on the ideas and information relevant to a solution, and set aside irrelevant factors. This is a conscious process that is called selective encoding.

Incubation – we engage in process of combining and recombining all relevant information, searching for a solution. This is called selective combination. We also compare the present problem with past problems that have similar features. This is selective comparison.

Solution – as it turns out, the most fundamental difference between insight and non-insight is where the solution comes from - the conscious mind, or the unconscious mind.

Verification – solutions need to be validated by higher order “thinking” processes. An otherwise effective solution may not be acceptable for social, legal, moral or other reasons. Also, it may work in principle, but not in practice.

Insight Experiences

Insight experiences challenge our normal way of viewing things.

When such an experience is recognized and confronted, it poses an “insight problem.” Both conscious and unconscious mental processes are activated to find a way of altering our view of reality that resolves the problem.

Once the unconscious has produced a solution that can be verified in consciousness, we have achieved actual *Insight*.

True Insight permanently changes how we see the world, and respond to it.

Insight Experiences

Insight experiences don't always lead to insight. They may be dismissed or ignored because:

- ❖ We just can't be bothered;
- ❖ We would rather not have to change;
- ❖ We believe that we've got life figured out, and so there must be some mistake.

To continue to grow means to remain open to insight, to learn to recognize insight experiences whenever they present themselves, and to appreciate them as opportunities.

Gateways to the Dharma

One of three kinds of Insight experience has probably brought you to the Dharma:

Impermanence – overwhelmed by the ceaseless change, no matter how hard you struggle, you still find yourself treading water with no end in sight. Having nothing reliable to cling to and no certainty in life is your Insight challenge.

Emptiness – nothing is as it appears, everyone sees everything differently, and there is conflict everywhere. Both truth and lasting faith are elusive, so life appears to be a meaningless struggle. Emptiness is your Insight challenge.

Suffering – Suffering, your own and that of others, is endless and overwhelming. The world seems tainted by an unrelenting evil, spreading into every corner. This is your Insight problem and challenge.

Whichever of these three has set you on the Path, Insights into the other two will soon follow, because they are all connected.

On the Buddha's Path, you will learn to:

recognize Insight experiences whenever they present themselves,
and
cultivate the kind of Insight that profoundly changes your personal
reality.

You will ultimately be *transformed* in a way that puts you beyond
the reach of every kind of suffering, and makes your life a perfectly
satisfying and meaningful experience.

The Progress of Insight Part I

Purification of View:

1. Analytical Knowledge of the Mental and the Physical

Purification by Overcoming Doubt

2. Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality
3. Knowledge by Comprehension by Groups
(The Eighteen Great Insights)

Purification by Knowledge and Vision of Path and Not Path

- 4a. Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away (I)
(The Ten Distractions from Insight)

Wisdom begins as *intellectual* understanding that is then transformed into Insight through direct experience in meditation.

Analytical Knowledge of the Mental and the Physical

Dharma topics:

- ❖ Nama and Rupa (mental processes and physical processes);
- ❖ the Five Aggregates (sensations, feelings, perceptions, mental constructs, and consciousness);
- ❖ Dependent Origination (causality in general, plus the specific links of: consciousness, body and mind, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, and becoming);
- ❖ the Eighteen Elements (the six kinds of sense objects, the six sense organs, and the six consciousnesses); and
- ❖ the Four Elements (solidity, fluidity, temperature and change).
- ❖ reflecting on the twofold division into mental and physical in a variety of ways;
- ❖ reflecting on the fact that, in your own experience, mental states originate with sensations and are dependent upon objects; and
- ❖ reflecting on your personal experiences of consciousness and objects of consciousness in order to realize there is no being or person apart from these two.

Purification by Overcoming Doubt

Through direct experience in meditation, you achieve intuitive comprehension of what you've already understood intellectually. This understanding has become Insight when it is the result of simple noticing through direct experience, not just reasoning.

Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality

You observe that:

- ❖ in every case, mental events and sensations are the result of causes and conditions;
- ❖ that mind and body (nama and rupa) are interdependent;
- ❖ that there is no self or person apart from the experience of mind and body; and
- ❖ that this is true now, always has been, and always will be.

Knowledge by Comprehension by Groups

Impermanence. Actually, there is nothing but continuous change, which is termed “anicca”, in the sense of continuous “passing away” (aniccam khayatthena).

No-self. Although the five aggregates (khandha), including consciousness, are ever-changing, we foolishly credit ourselves with an abiding, entity, thinking: “This is who is my self.” Here, the atta, self, soul, or ego that is being negated does not mean the self of everyday experience, usually expressed as “oneself.” Rather, it refers to the concept of a permanent or abiding nature, distinct from the body, like the atman of Hindu philosophy or the soul of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Suffering. Clinging to the ever-changing aggregates (upadanakkhandha) as an abiding self is suffering (dukkha).”

The Ten Distractions from Insight:

1. Illumination
2. Understanding (the knowledge achieved through Insight)
3. Joy
4. Tranquility
5. Pleasure (which floods the whole body)
6. Faith and confidence
7. Energy
8. Concentration and Mindful awareness
9. Equanimity
10. Attachment

The Progress of Insight Part IIa

Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way

4b. Knowledge of Contemplation of Arising and Passing Away (II)

5. Knowledge of Contemplation of Dissolution

The Progress of Insight Part IIb

The *Dukkha Nanas* or Knowledges of Suffering Part IIb

6. Knowledge of Appearance as Fearful
7. Knowledge of Contemplation of Danger/Knowledge of Misery
8. Knowledge of Contemplation of Disenchantment/Knowledge of Disgust
9. Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance

The Progress of Insight Part IIc

10. Knowledge of Contemplation of Reflection/Knowledge of Re-observation
11. Knowledge of Equanimity About Formations
12. Insight Knowledge Leading to Emergence
13. Conformity Knowledge/Knowledge of Adaptation
14. Maturity Knowledge/Change of Lineage Knowledge

The Progress of Insight Part III

Purification by Knowledge and Vision

15. Path Knowledge
16. Fruition Knowledge
17. Knowledge of Reviewing
18. Attainment of Fruition