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November 29, 2020

In response to Ven. Anālayo's article on the Meditation Maps of Daniel Ingram I would like to add my understanding based on 45 years of teaching Vipassana, and my own practice in the monasteries of Mahasi Sayadaw, author of the Progress of Insight. The perspectives expressed by Ven. Anālayo in this article directly match what I have seen and understood.

In my experience, I have only seen the Progress of Insight stages arise during periods of extended retreat for students. While there can be small intimations, or deliberately constructed versions of these insights in daily practice, these are not the real experience. The unfolding of the genuine stages is a profound and powerful process arising from sustained concentration and mindfulness. The profound insight knowledges of the Progress of Insight are not accessible and common in ordinary life, in times like just walking about or watching TV.

In fact, encouraging students to claim the experience of the progress of insight in daily activities and meditation can lead the mind to construct the feeling of experiences that are much less profound than the spontaneous and powerful illuminations of the actual progress of insight. This is a danger which undercuts the profound and spontaneous transformation during the deep Progress of Insight, and is a misguided understanding against which the masters in the Mahasi tradition have regularly cautioned.

Almost always, adverse reactions and psychological problems associated with mindfulness meditation arise for students who have a history of strong trauma or of mental illness. These do not arise in relation to the deep stages of the Progress of Insight, but can occur in meditation from the very beginning of practice. Moreover, the approach of a heavy, forced and intense effort to note every experience can further exacerbate adverse reactions.

In our community, for twenty-five years I have trained teachers to be aware of the potentially adverse responses in the subset of students with strong trauma/mental health history, and given teachers skillful tools to recognize, steady or stop meditation practice and send students to other experts for help in this area. However, the Progress of Insight is not relevant to these issues. It is only the mistaken belief that the Progress of Insight stages are commonplace that can lead to sounding a false alarm that because of this, mindfulness itself may be dangerous.

Understanding trauma and meditation is critical. Distinguishing initial daily insights, constructed experiences, and deep transformative processes is important. This is not a question of judging one teacher's approach versus another, but of bringing experience and clarity to the writings on the deeper processes of mindfulness meditation.

May all of our dialogues bring clarity and benefit to all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.