

1. One who has entered the stream and has become free from the first three of the ten fetters, which are the illusion of being a self separate from all other selves (the basic fetter of all of us), vacillation or skeptical doubt (the special fetter of intellectuals, scholars, and scientists), and clinging to forms and rules (the special fetter of fundamentalists).

2. One who will return once only and who is nearly free from two further fetters: cravings or desires and all ill-will or aversion, that is, wanting either to have or not to have.

3. One who will return no more (but be reborn in higher worlds) and who is completely free of the first five fetters.

4. One who is worthy (an *arhat*), having cast off the last five fetters: desire for existence in the lower worlds of forms, desire for existence in the higher formless worlds, conceit or self-esteem, restlessness, and ignorance.

The ten fetters are wrong ways of thinking and desiring that have to be removed, one by one, as we follow the Path to the ultimate goal.

In the Theosophical tradition, these four stages are referred to as the first four initiations. It is probably best not to think of these as formal initiations like those of Freemasonry or even as wholly distinct stages of development, but as a symbol of the fact that enlightenment, liberation, or salvation does not come all at once, suddenly, but instead is a process that comes by degrees. Becoming enlightened is not like flipping a wall switch that suddenly turns on the light. Rather, it is like turning up a dimmer switch to gradually increase the light until it is as bright as possible. Still, the first step must be taken, and that beginning is a discrete event, like putting our hand on the switch or stepping through the gate onto the Path.

It took us a long while to lose the knowledge that we once had. It will take us a long while to regain it and to lose the ignorance we have replaced it with. We should not hanker after special powers and insight (“the eye-sight of the mountain eagle, the hearing of the timid doe” of verse 159 or the “deva-sight and deva-hearing” of verse 160). Instead, we should enter the stream, form the links that unite us with others, and eventually everything else will follow.