

Essential Dhamma

A collection of essays by Michael M. Olds

Volume II

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Buddham Saranam Gacchami
Dhammam Saranam Gacchami
Sangham Saranam Gacchami

I go for Refuge to the Buddha
I go for Refuge to the Dhamma
I go for Refuge to the Sangha.

Editor's Introduction

This is the second volume of a compilation of Dhamma essays by (very) long-term practitioner Michael M. Olds.

Most people reading that book (a dozen at most!) will have read the first volume, but I feel the need to reiterate that Michael did not request the publication of his work.

I am doing this of my own will, and I am delighted to spread (in a non-proselytic way!) the work of Michael that has been so fruitful in my own Dhammic life.

Young Beggar Nick, San Francisco, February 2017

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Setting Priorities

*The idea of death
as a guide to forming priorities*

You only need this one idea: you could die at any time now. In the next couple of years, or in the next year, in the next month, in the next week, tomorrow, in the next minute. You just don't know. The only reasonable way to deal with this is to act with the idea that you could die at any time from the next minute on.

Make Death your constant companion. With that idea taken seriously you can set up life priorities which will be rewarding now in the relief from stress of worry about future regret and will give you at the end the satisfaction of having done your best to meet the challenges of life in a reasoned manner.

Setting priorities is also hugely rewarding in this material world. You accomplish much more and what you accomplish assumes an order which builds on your personal growth.

Do, for yourself, that which you wish to have done or think you ought to have done before you die. Or said another way, do what you would regret not having done before you die.

Deal with all beings as though it were the last time you would be dealing with them... before they die... before you die.

Some sub-sets of these might be: broadening and deepening one's knowledge of the Dhamma; training yourself not to deal with people dismissively (or worse); expressing gratitude; paying off debts; righting wrongs done; doing good works.

Setting priorities is a complicated process. One's list of priorities will change over time. Priorities will change in the context of your learning. Some priorities influence other priorities so changes in one set will force changes in another. Be flexible. Do not hang on to a set of priorities just because it has served you well in the past.

This one consideration, considering the idea of death, will serve well as an over-riding guide for the setting of most lists of priorities.

Who's On First?

#1. Yourself: If you don't take care of yourself first, how will you be able to take care of others?

Close Family
 Relations,
 Friends,
 Workers,
 Teachers,
 Bhikkhus and holy men of good moral conduct

Real People face-to-face

Real people at a distance: over the phone, via letter, e-mail...

Virtual people: via essays, books on or off-line, blogs, tweets

What's Up?

Giving: Generosity

#1. Food
 Clothing
 Medicine
 Shelter
 The Dhamma

When?

To one in need
 when you are in need
 to one arriving
 when you are arriving
 to one departing
 after you have departed
 when the heart feels the desire

The Eight-Dimensional Way as A Set of Priorities

I. High Working Hypothesis

1. 'This' is Pain
2. This Pain results from Thirst
3. To End the Pain, End the Thirst
4. This is The Way: High Working Hypothesis, High Principles, High Talk, High Works, High Lifestyle, High Energetic Self-Control, High Mind, High Getting High, High Vision and High Detachment

II. High Principles

1. Let Go
2. Let Go Harming Living Beings
3. Let Go of Mental Cruelty

III. High Talk

1. Let go saying what is not true,
2. deceitful speech, harmful speech, cruel speech, slander, distasteful speech

IV. High Works

1. Let go harmful deeds,
2. Taking what has not been given,
3. Saying what is not true,

In your deeds, commerce, or working of magic charms.

V. High Lifestyle

Adopt letting go of what you can see for yourself is an unskillful form of behavior as a style of life.

VI. High Energetic Self-Control

1. Restrain unskillful things that have arisen in the present,
2. Refrain from unskillful things that have not yet arisen,
3. Obtain skillful things that have not yet arisen
4. Retain skillful things that have arisen in the present.

VII. High Mind

1. Live in a body,
2. in sense experience,
3. in the heart and
4. in the Dhamma,

seeing these things as they are, seeing how they arise, seeing how they decline, seeing how they pass away, watchful and self-aware, letting go of indulgence in anger and depression, bound up in nothing at all in the world.

VIII. High Getting High

1. Learn to appreciate the peace and calm of solitude,
2. Learn to enjoy the serene life,
3. Learn to enjoy the ease of living alert and recollected,
4. Learn to appreciate the clarity of detachment.

IX. High Vision

See the Four Truths as they really are, understanding:

"This" being, that happens;
with the absence of "This", the absence of that.

X. High Detachment

Seeing from the point of view of High Vision, let that go and form no new point of view and see the detachment from points of view as freedom and in this freedom, see the freedom of Nibbana and know:

This is having left behind rebirth,
This is having lived the Godly life,
This is having done duty's doing,
In this way there will be no more It'n-n-at'n Me!

On Wordly Activism

On Worldly Activism, Self Defense, Protest and Politics in the name of the Buddha

This morning I read on another message board where some individual is claiming that there is a doctrine in the Dhamma that permits killing in self-defense and in the case (such as with a Hitler) where numerous beings would be saved suffering and death as a consequence. **This is absolutely not Dhamma.** There is *no* doctrine in the suttas which advocates intentionally killing any living being (including one's self!) under any circumstances. There is no doctrine in the suttas which would even support activism in a worldly situation, self-defense, protest or politics of any kind.

This individual is from a school based on ordinary thinking calling itself Buddhism. The doctrine from which this conclusion is erroneously reached is that indicated in the simile of the nurse in charge of a baby who has swallowed a fish-hook²: in this case the nurse crooks her finger, sticks it down the baby's throat, and even though drawing blood and causing pain, takes out the fish-hook.

This is how this should be understood: this may be taken literally, that is, in the situation where an individual is in danger of serious injury or death and another injury (such as surgery, or drawing another's blood for a transfusion) will save that individual, then such an act is appropriate (if the individual to be injured is willing, or if the individual is incapable of indicating willingness, if there is a competent guardian who acts on that individual's behalf for that individual's benefit). How come? Because all parties to the situation have the intent to do good and no intent to do bad to anyone. That's how come.

This may be taken figuratively: that is, where there are beings who are going astray because of wrong views, who will suffer grief for their views if the truth is told, then the truth may be told when the intention is to save these individuals from the suffering their views may bring upon themselves. How come? Because the intent of the one causing the pain is to assist in eliminating the pain of the one's he is injuring, and the pain of those being hurt is the pain of one suffering withdrawal from a bad habit... that is, it is a good thing that is happening, and the view that it is a bad thing that is happening is incorrect.

"The Teacher does not contradict the world, Beggars, it is the world that contradicts The Teacher". Even here there is need for caution: if one understands that one's efforts will fail, one must not make the effort, for to do so would put the others in the position of disbelieving the Truth and as such it would be to intentionally cause others to do themselves injury.

There is nothing in this which indicates that one may intentionally cause pain, injury or death to one (unwilling, uncooperative) individual (even a Hitler) to alleviate the pain of another individual or individuals, or, for that matter the entirety of humanity. Such a view ignores completely the law of kamma: individuals are responsible for their own actions; beings suffer the consequences of their own actions; intentional wrong acts are a bad example to others and are therefore bad kamma on two levels.

In this day and age (September 10, 2001³) we have seen Bhikkhus claiming to be followers of Gotama set themselves on fire to protest the political points of view of others; we can see daily the political activism of leaders of Buddhist schools; and there are in existence numerous groups of Buddhists whose orientation is the defense of or advocacy of clearly worldly concerns.

Whatever the good intentions of these individuals, where they go astray is in suggesting that their personal position is justified by the teachings of Gotama.

Straight out, self-immolation (or any sort of self-mutilation, even the "hunger strike" made in protest) is an extreme act of anger. If it results in death, it amounts to murder. It is a bad example to others. It rouses others to extremes of anger. It completely lacks compassion for the enemy. And it propagates a wrong view claiming it to be the Dhamma.

This Dhamma is for those who see the suffering inherent in living in the world and understand that there is no stopping this suffering by altering things *in* the world. Those leaders of groups of Buddhists who engage in Politics and Activism on behalf of worldly issues are leading their followers away from the Dhamma, setting a bad example, rousing others to anger, and display anger towards others.

We have a number of examples in the suttas which we can use for our guidance.

There was a case where a certain king⁴ went out with his army to slaughter Gotama's clan for an insult he had received at the hands of Mahānāma,

the Sakkyan Prince whose daughter by a slavegirl was given to King Pasenadi. Gotama, seeing the outcome for one and all, and out of compassion for *one and all*, decided to take action in the effort to prevent the slaughter. What was his action?

He sat by the side of the road on which this king would go to do his deed.

This worked three times, and failed the fourth time. On the fourth time the Buddha realized there was going to be no stopping him by reminding him of his better nature, and he let it drop at that point.

An act of protest? No. An act where the good of all concerned was considered and where no injurious act was committed towards any involved party.

Activism yes, but in the service of the Dhamma, and by methods worthy as examples of Dhamma, not in the service of worldly gains.

We have the simile of the saw (MN 21) where it is said that even if bad guys saw one to pieces if one allows anger to result, one is not following the Buddha's instruction.

We have the case in the BrahmaGala Sutta, the first sutta of the Long Discourses, where the Buddha speaks of how the Beggars should react to criticism of the Buddha himself (not to speak of reacting to those in the world who criticize one another!); here he states that it would not be proper to react with anger because that would obscure one's ability to understand the situation clearly and respond appropriately. And what would be the appropriate response? To take the issues one at a time and deal with them on the level of the issues, not on the level of the emotions.

We have the case of a beggar who was very attached to the female beggars. He would get angry at anyone who even slightly criticized them. He was reprimanded for such and told that even if others physically assaulted the female beggars, if he were to indulge in anger or acts of anger as a consequence, he would not be doing the Buddha's bidding.

I am dealing with this issue here to protect those who find refuge here. I am not going there to do battle with those there. This is not me contradicting those who hold other views; this is me indicating where those of other views are misrepresenting the Buddha (those of other views are free to protest or do whatever acts they believe are appropriate... what I am free to do is to state "just this and that is not found in This

Dhamma”... and that is what I am doing).



I have been reading on various Buddhist discussion boards the various stabs at resolving in Buddhist terms the issue of the ethics of US/US Allies retaliation towards the WTC terrorists. The following is from posts made to those boards.

On the one hand it is good to see people seeking in the Dhamma for answers; on the other hand I see that the bulk of the effort is being directed towards the attempt to figure out which Buddhist authority should be relied upon for one's position in the matter. I think a more productive outcome would be to consider the situation from the point of view of the dhamma itself for even by the Buddha's own instruction we are not to simply go by the word of some authority, even that of the Buddha.

So what is the dhamma that applies here?

Do we need to go farther than the most fundamental instructions: This is a system which tells us that when we can see for ourselves that going a certain direction is the source of bad conditions increasing and good conditions decreasing, that we should stop going that direction⁵.

So let me ask you: can you see for yourself that Lust, Anger, and Blindness are bad conditions; that actions based on Lust, Anger, and Blindness are painful in result?

If you are able to see that Lust, Anger, and Blindness are bad conditions, and that actions based on Lust, Anger, and Blindness are painful in result, then I ask you:

Is retaliation against one's enemies an act that originates in Lust or does it originate free from Lust?

Is retaliation against one's enemies an act that originates in Anger or does it originate free from Anger?

Is retaliation against one's enemies an act that originates in Blindness or does it originate free from Blindness?

The recent terrorist action has pushed some very hot buttons. I think it is a very understandable thing to see many people reacting with desire to cause pain in those who caused them pain, with anger in their hearts and with little or no understanding of anything other than the pain that they have experienced. If you are truly interested in your own mental welfare, however, I strongly suggest that you make an attempt to create a divide between what the Dhamma teaches us and your own capabilities to act in strict accordance with this dhamma.

This dhamma is unequivocal: act from lust, anger, or blindness and the consequences bring pain. There is *absolutely no* justification in the Dhamma for *any sort* of intentional infliction of pain on anyone, even one's worst enemies. If you need the authority of the Dhamma, look to MN 21: The Simile of the Saw: where the instruction is that even if bad men are sawing one to pieces if one adopts a heart of anger as a consequence one is not doing the Buddha's work.

Draw a divide and you will, at a later time, when your head has cooled off, be able to say: "I was wrong here, I was weak in wisdom, this is a good system to which I will return now." Try and justify by referencing the Dhamma your own weaknesses and inability to control your emotions and in the end you will have no Dhamma to return to.



The main thing that is being missed by the one who advocates retaliation, is that the idea is not what we want to do, feel like we want to do, or what others tell us to do, but what is the ideal we should aspire to if we are to call ourselves followers of the Buddha's Dhamma.

"Many Buddhists argue that war is avoidable and never acceptable, but some insist that it is justified under certain circumstances. The Buddha has pointed out that death was the destiny of warriors even after initial victories. But he did not appear to intervene in 'just' wars, e.g., for self-defense. Accordingly, Buddhists when under attack, often argued that violence and war were permissible under those situations to save their life and property and to protect their way of life and the Buddha's Teachings."

It does not matter to the case what the Buddha did *not* do. To think one knows the implications of an *inaction* is a presumption, and that is a particularly dangerous thing to do when dealing with a mind such as the Buddha's. In any case, intervening in worldly matters is not remotely connected to the purpose of the Dhamma. The system is based on not-

doing; letting go, and escaping the world. If "doing" were a requirement of the system, there would be no way for individuals to escape kamma. We, as students of the Buddha, should look to his *actions*, and to his *words*. Nothing in any of the actions or words described in the Suttas would indicate even the slightest hint of any tolerance for any act of body, speech, or mind done with the intent to injure. If you disagree with this I ask you to point to any line in the suttas where there is any positive statement concerning acting with intention to injure.

It does not matter what "Buddhists" say; or that others have said that Buddhism is this or that. Our job is to understand Dhamma by way of Dhamma not the talk of others, whether Buddhists or non-Buddhists, whether in positions of authority or not. We should rely on the word of others (whether Buddhists... etc) only insofar as their words are consistent with Dhamma.

"... in another Sutta from Digba Nikaya. ... The Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta described the story of King Dalhanemi, a Universal Monarch. The Buddha recounted the story of this king who ... in a righteous manner, arrange to provide protection, shelter and security for all your [sic] citizens including soldiers, samanas and brahmanas." (DN 26)

With regard to the example of the Wheel Turning King; it was not The Buddha who advised this king, it was the Bhodisattva in a previous birth, before his enlightenment, and that makes all the difference. The Jakata stories (and that is what this sutta really is) are filled with examples of the Bhodisattva preaching values inconsistent with the Dhamma. These should be read for just what they are: stories of the various values held by people and the Buddha prior to the Buddha's enlightenment. And, what it is proper for a king to do in the proper performance of his duties is in no way something that should be taken to indicate that it is, in terms of Dhamma, good, or proper or will lead the doer thereof to anything but the appropriate kammic result.

It is not our position here to be telling the leaders of the world what to do. They have not asked us. What we can know is: intentionally inflicting harm (whether to initiate violence, in self-defense, or as revenge) is not Dhamma. Here, on a board such as this, our job is not to determine what is right for the leaders of the world to do it is our job to be determining how we should be handling ourselves in these circumstances. For this we have instructions in no uncertain terms:

"Self-illuminated, Beggars, live self-protected, by not else protected; Dhamma-illuminated, Dhamma-protected, by not else protected." (SN 22.43)

I read the lengthy... lengthy... wordy... very wordy extraordinarily thinly reasoned essay cited⁶:

There are two things badly done in this essay: first of all, although there are statements to the effect that the Canon justifies violence under certain circumstances, the suttas are cited only once, and that simply to indicate a description of one lay follower's situation. The rest of the citations are to commentary. Now there will be many who disagree with this, but our instructions as followers of Buddha are not to take the word of commentators where they differ from the meaning of the suttas, and that is just what is being suggested by this writer.

The second mistake he makes, and one which you appear to be making as well is to identify Buddhism with the behavior of those who call themselves Buddhists. Even in the Buddha's day, some of his followers were violent men and people who taught wrong dhamma. Buddhism is the Dhamma as exemplified by the Buddha, the Suttas, and the Eight Pairs of Men (Streamwinner through Arahant), not by the "uneducated many folks".

"If their country is invaded, all lay citizens, except very young, old, or infirm, are duty-bound to defend in an appropriate way, if there are no other options. 'Doing nothing' or 'Surrender' is not an option unless we are all Arahants. We have read stories of many men becoming Monks just to avoid those army duties in times of crisis. The Buddha even had to introduce new rules to prevent army deserters."

The question here is by whose definition of "duty" is the layman bound? You have not made the case that the Buddhist layman is in any way bound to self-defense or violence or even protest by any evidence based on the actions or words of the Buddha.

You suggest that because a rule was made to prevent deserters from joining the Sangha, that the implied weakness of individuals endorses armies and war and violence. I suggest that the making of such a rule does no more than the rule that requires that one have no obligations or debts before joining and those rules do not condone obligations or debts.

You say: "At the moment Buddhists are not directly involved. Buddhism teaches the doctrine of Peace and Liberation. But it is not the doctrine of Surrender."

In one way it is proper to say that Buddhism is not the doctrine of surrender: that is, surrender to bad conditions such as Lust, Anger, and Blindness; but that is not, I believe, what you had in mind.

On the other hand, seen properly, Buddhism is definitely the doctrine of surrender:

Letting Go is the First Principle of *Samma Sankappa*.

And, just catching my eye in an effort to find the translation of the *Seven Factors of Enlightenment* that I recall uses the translation "self surrender" for *vossaggapari.naamii* (which I was unable to locate):

Middle Length Sayings, I # 2: Horner (PTS ed, pp 15) (See also MN2)

In this teaching, monks, a monk, wisely reflective, develops mindfulness as a link in awakening and which is dependent on aloofness, dependent on lack of attraction, dependent on ceasing, ending in renunciation.

(pp. 15):

In this teaching, monks, a monk, does not give in to malevolent thought...thought of harming that has arisen, he gets rid of it, he eliminates it, he makes an end of it, sends it to its ceasing.

(pp. 14):

In this teaching, monks, a monk, wisely reflective, is one who bears cold, heat, hunger, thirst, the touch of gadfly, mosquito, wind and sun, creeping things, ways of speech that are irksome, unwelcome; he is of a character to bear bodily feelings which, arising, are painful, acute, sharp, shooting, disagreeable, miserable, deadly.

Nanamoli/Bodhi uses "relinquishment":

Here a Bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, develops the mindfulness enlightenment factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment.

Here is the quote I was looking for:

And of what sort is the effort to make become?

Herein a monk makes to become the limb of wisdom that is mindfulness, that is based on seclusion, on dispassion, on ending, that ends in self-surrender. He makes to become the limb of wisdom that is investigation of Dhamma ... the limb of wisdom that is energy, that is so based. He makes to become the limb of wisdom that is zest ... that is tranquillity ... that is concentration ... that is equanimity, based on seclusion, on dispassion, on ending, that ends in **self surrender**. This, monks, is called "the effort to make become."

PTS: The Book of the Gradual Sayings II: The Book of the Fours, II: Deportment iv: Restraint, Woodward, trans, pp16



Guards watch over Afghan Buddhas

The Straits Times (Singapore), Nov 29, 2002

Countries offer money in bid to save remains of giant statues which were blown up by Taleban

WASHINGTON - New efforts are under way in Afghanistan to preserve the little that remains of two ancient Buddhas destroyed last year by the Taleban.

These are the Afghanastani Buddha statues that the Taleban blew up recently.

This is what I say: Let it go! This is just rock, pathavi, earth. "There comes a time when this old earth becomes disturbed." It's in the nature of things that have been constructed that they come to an end.

To this point about a million dollars has been put together to help in the restoration of these statues. They are speaking about raising \$35 million.

\$35 million would feed the entire population of Zimbabwe for more than a year and they want to spend that on restoring the contrived shape of some rocks that I have no doubt whatsoever the Buddha himself would have had destroyed had they been constructed by his sangha.

We as Buddhists would be better off ourselves, and be showing the world a true face of Buddhism, if we were to make it known that it is our belief that the real lesson here is that all things come to an end, and that rather than wasting money fighting this true fact, we direct it at the relief of another true fact: people, living beings here, are going without food, clothing, medicine, and shelter which this money could be used to supply.

There! Was that being an activist? Yes. I am saying "Just this and this are not found in this Dhamma. Just this and this are not done by one acting according to this Dhamma."

¹ There is an exception, of course, although it is not a very broad one (and it is not really an exception to the idea that this is not a thing which is recommended or even explicitly allowed in the suttas; it is just a statement of the outcome in terms of kamma and ethics): in the case of an individual who is suffering grievous physical pain, **who is also able to reach Arahantship at the moment of death**, there is no bad kamma or "blame" for that individual if he brings his own life to an end violently (as with a knife). One who commits suicide and fails the attainment of Arahantship at the time of death will have committed an act of murder and will experience the kammic consequences of that act.

See: SN.4.35.87

² I have the characters in this wrong (or I am remembering it from another instance), but for the same idea see MN 58... a few paragraphs down.

³ *Editor's note:* Yes, this was written the day before the WTC attacks!

⁴ This is King Vidudabha, son of King Pasenadi. The insult was that the Sakkyan's, being asked for a daughter to marry King Pasenadi to unite the two clans, believing the Sakkyan's to be superior in birth to the Kosalan's, gave a daughter by a slave, using deceit. The story is apparently discussed in DhP.A. 216 (which I do not have) and is found in full in *Jataka*

465 This is the story as it appears in PTS, Dictionary of Pali Proper Names, pp517:

"The second visit of note [by the Buddha, to *Kapilavatthu*] was that paid

by the Buddha when Vidudabha chagrined by the insult of the Sakyas, invaded Kapilavatthu in order to take his revenge. Three times Vidudabha came with his forces, and three times he found the Buddha seated on the outskirts of Kapilavatthu, under a tree which gave him scarcely any shade; near by was a shady banyan-tree, in Vidudabha's realm; on being invited by Vidudabha to partake of its shade, the Buddha replied, "Let be, O king; the shade of my kindred keeps me cool." Thus three times Vidudabha had to retire, his purpose unaccomplished; but the fourth time the Buddha seeing the fate of the Sakyans, did not interfere.

⁵ See MN 61, MN 17, AN 3.65, and http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/the_pali_line/course/gradualsila.htm#HOW_TO_JUDGE

⁶ *Editor's note* : the essay's URL is <http://www.jbe.gold.ac.uk/6/bartho991.htm> but unfortunately, the page is no longer available. Maybe the reader will find it in an Internet archive (such as <http://archive.is> or so). In any case, I found that Michael's arguments in a nutshell were still relevant.

Understanding the Distinctions between Kamma, Ethics, Morality, the Rules of the Sangha, and the Behavior Required of One Seeking Awakening

There seems to be a good deal of confusion out there concerning the difference between kamma, ethics, morality, the rules for the bhikkhus, and the behavior required for awakening¹. This is how it breaks down.

Kamma

Kamma is like a law of physics. There are varying views concerning the mechanism of action of that law, but that it is a law independent of views of how it works is the idea. In the doctrine of Gotama kamma is a two-sided matter: the intentional doing of a deed by body, word, or wish, and the consequence. The factors that influence the outcome are the intent, the deed, and the recipient of the deed.

Intent is intent to harm, intent to cause pleasure, or intent to end kamma. The deed is the form: by body, speech, or will. The effect of the recipient is in proportion to the degree of his detachment from the world.

The most potent aspect of the deed is the mental.

The consequences of a deed are not one-for-one, but are enormously magnified. To understand this, imagine the way a rock tossed into a pond acts on every single drop of water in the pond. Every single drop of water that is acted upon reacts causing a rebound of energy which itself acts on every single drop of water... and so forth. Now imagine this happening in a sphere and expand that sphere to the entire universe. And of course, as per usual, place yourself at the center of that universe.

The way in which the recipient of a deed can be understood to influence the consequences of the deed through his degree of detachment can be understood by imagining the way two individuals react to a hurtful word. The one who is attached responds with anger. In effect he has absorbed the greater bulk of the energy of the harmful deed and responds with the majority of the reactive force. The man who is detached stands aside, as it were, and the energy passes on to the greater universe. A 'bad' deed done to an attached man will be seen to have a lesser result than one done to a

detached man and will occur differently with regard to time; a good deed will have a greater consequence done to a detached man.

The magnitude of the repercussion and its timing is also influenced by the doer of the deed and the nature of the deed.

Escape from kamma is possible because kamma reaches only as far as that which has become: that is, that arises as a consequence of the conjunction of individualized consciousness with named shapes.

Those that argue that science will never accept the laws of kamma should think about quantum physics and the idea that things become only when there is an observer.

Ethics

Ethics are rules for behavior that evolve from points of view concerning the nature of existence and kamma. For example, the ethics of a person whose view is that there is no self will be different than the ethics of one who believes that there is an essential, everlasting soul. The ethics of a person who believes that what happens to one returns to one in exactly the same form as one has acted on another is different than the ethics of one who believes that the form and magnitude of the rebounding consequences of a deed is in accordance with the intent, the nature of the deed, and the detachment of the recipient of the deed.

Ethics are rules made up by man and can be misconceived.

In the doctrine of Gotama as found in the Suttas ethics, the behavior required for awakening, and the rules for the bhikkhus all derive from the view of kamma put forth there, that is: that the form and magnitude of the rebounding consequences of a deed is in accordance with the intent, the nature of the deed, and the detachment of the recipient of the deed.

Morality

Morality is different from both ethics and Kamma. The term 'Moral' is from the word 'Moralis' custom, > mores, norms or what is normal > manners. Morality is an evolving set of rules and attitudes based on what is considered normal good behavior.

The problem with morality is its baseless claim to the defining of 'right and wrong'. Essentially we can trace most of the problems in the world to reliance on morality.

Rules for Members of the Order

The rules imposed on the members of the Sangha are independent of, but consistent with the Ethics that derive from Gotama's view of kamma and the behavior required of one seeking Awakening. Additionally, however they may also include rules intended to appease the views on ethics and morality of the lay population. Such a rule, however, will not be inconsistent with kamma or the ethics derived from Gotama's view of kamma.

Originally there were no rules. As the order grew in size rules were imposed according to a set of criteria:

Saṅghasutṭhutaṃ | |
 saṅghaphāsaṃsāraṃ | |
 dhammaṅkūṇaṃ puggalaṇaṃ niggahāya | |
 pesaṇaṃ bhikkhūṇaṃ phāsuvihāraṃ | |
 diṭṭhadhammikaṇaṃ āsavaṇaṃ saṃvaraṃ | |
 samparāyikaṇaṃ āsavaṇaṃ paṭighātaṃ | |
 appasannāṇaṃ pasādaṃ | |
 pasannāṇaṃ bhīyobhāvāya | |
 saddhammaṭṭhitiyā | |
 vinayānuggahāya.

My translation:

For the well-being of the Sangha,
 for the comfort of the Sangha,
 for the control of evil-minded men,
 for the comfort of good beggars,
 for restraint with regard to the corruptions of this seen thing,
 for repelling the corruptions arising with regard to the hereafter,
 for clarification of the unclear,
 for making the clear moreso,
 for establishing the Good Word,
 for setting up discipline.

Horner:

For the excellence of the Order
 for the comfort of the Order
 for the restraint of evil-minded men,
 for the ease of well-behaved monks,
 for the restraint of the cankers belonging to the here and now,

for the combating of the cankers belonging to other worlds for the benefit of non-believers, for the increase in the number of believers, for establishing the dhamma indeed, for following the rules of restraint.

The important thing to keep in mind is that the rules were imposed on bhikkhus only, not on the lay population, and the only punishment in terms of the rules themselves was forfeiture of a thing gained, or some degree of lessening of the beggars standing in the order... right down to expulsion. There would be kammic repercussions and punishments by the king for some of the offenses, but that was not the business of the rules.

The rules for the order can be likened to the laws of a state. Laws are created to regulate good standing within the state, but their 'goodness' is in relation to the ethics and wisdom of those who make up the laws.

Behavior required for Awakening

The behavior required of one seeking enlightenment is different from the goal of creating good kamma, the following of ethics derived from kamma, morality, or the rules of the order. It derives from the goal of Gotama's system, which is the escape from kamma.

The rules derive from *Sammā Ditthi*, High View, or the point of view that experience as an individual follows upon identification with the actions of the individual intending to create experience of existence and that such experience is mistaken and painful and that to avoid the mistake and the pain identification with such actions must be avoided. That is:

This is Pain

This Pain arises from Wanting

To end this Pain, end the Wanting

This is the way: High View, High Principles, High Talk, High Works, High Lifestyle, High Self-control, High Mind, High serenity, High Vision and High Detachment².

Avoiding identification with the intent to create experience is accomplished by not identifying with the actor or the action and by the behavior characterized as 'intentional not-doing': the abstention, when occasion presents itself, from acting with identification intending to produce a result other than ending.

For example: *Sammā Vāca*, High Speech consists in *abstention* from intentionally saying what is not true, or from hurtful or useless speech. High Works and the other dimensions of the 'Way' are similar 'not-doings' or abandoning or letting go of or ending of 'doings'.

¹ See for example the discussion at <http://sujato.wordpress.com/2012/01/28/why-buddhists-should-be-vegetarian-with-extra-cute/>

² For details see http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/method/naya_the_method.htm

Where is Memory stored?

M: *The fact that it is possible to recall memory of past lives means that the memory is being stored somewhere. Where?*

Also where are the rebounds of Kamma being stored?

Both these questions are related although it is not obvious. The Buddhist proposition is that the brain is a sense organ much like the Eye. So in the same way as the Eye does not "store" sights, or "have" sights *in* it, the brain does not store or have ideas or memories, but is only an implement for becoming conscious of such¹. The Mind or Memory, I suppose you would say, is "Out There".

Make a distinction between "this body" and "the world" which is not limited in time or space. So while the ordinary man allows himself consciousness only of what he deems he has experienced in "this body", (and thereby confines to flimsy images that which is deemed to have "past") by mental development rising above body-view, all of that which is stored in Mind is accessible to Brain-consciousness in a manner one might say is in a continuous present (at least in a form as "real" as any present moment can be called "real").

Memory works by "associations" or "connections" and the individual can manipulate his way through these associations both chronologically and through "phenomena" (objects). There are some sorcerers out there that have so mastered their minds as to be able to recall former events (all former events, not only those experienced "personally") as though they were standing in the scene watching the real thing take place again.

This is also the real purpose of the [Nidana](#) that begins each sutta: those who are "seers" are able, if the story is true, to use the short description of when, who, where and why, to travel back and see the events for themselves.

Now imagine that this Mind is *all* encompassing (that is, it encompasses both [Nama](#) and [Rupa](#)) and that it works as well as with memories, with vibrations. I explain this with an image: imagine a sphere. In this sphere is absolutely every conceivable variation of everything, every conceivable outcome of everything².

Then imagine that consciousness is traversing that sphere. As it goes along, subjectively identifying itself as "Me", actions of body, speech, and imagination take place. These acts reverberate through that sphere. From the very instant an action is taken a rebound is also set in motion; as the

vibration traverses the sphere, the rebound is continuous, bouncing off of all things at all times forever. The "individuality" that set the action in motion retains his vulnerability to the rebound (imagine him being blown in a certain direction by a wind or being moved by a current) through the same sort of "connections" as allow memory. (The rebound off of different objects is of varying magnitude and swiftness in proportion to the force of the actor, the nature of the object and the nature of the act. The subjective experience of pleasure or pain depends on the intent of the act.)

What we call the "end" of a deed, is really a fiction. What actually happens is that the reverberation has reached a state of dilution to the degree that it has become unnoticeable.

All this is, of course, as it is applied to the non-Arahant. The Arahant is not inside this sphere!

¹ Of course we know that certain memories are stored in the brain. This is not exactly what I am speaking about here. This might be likened to the RAM memory of a computer. The extent of this RAM memory might even be huge, but it should be thought of as a working copy of the "real" thing that I am saying is "out there" and is the object of the brain-sense.

² In fact, as I understand quantum physics, it states that these "possibilities" exist only as possibilities until such a time as consciousness is brought to bear upon them, this also accords with [Downbound Confounded Rebounding Conjunction](#) where "Downbound Consciousness Rebounds Bound Up in Nama/Rupa ...but for this discussion imagine they have an on-going existence; in any case avoid forming a "ditthi" (view) concerning the ultimate existence or non-existence of any one way that this may be, this is just an image useful for orienting yourself to the mechanics of kamma

If This Be Madness or Mad as an Arahatter

Ogha: *Hello Obo, Tell me if you know, what is the Buddha's position on mental illness? I understand severe conditions bar someone from entering the sangha. I have a friend who just got locked up in a ward (again). Manic episodes that rival anything I could imagine. Seems to be (hyper-) lucid and reflective through or at least after the experiences.*

From what I have read there appear to be several different issues in the suttas with regard to mental illness.

I do not have a citation at hand, but I recall one episode where someone approached Sariputta and asked him if maybe the whole of the Buddha's system was not just some sort of madness. Sariputta's response was, "If this is madness, it is the best of madnesses!"

The case of the first case is what we would call 'going crazy'. Someone because of stress of circumstances goes completely out of character and does a regrettable action. This, in terms of the rules, is a reason to overlook the infraction.

There is one case I remember which comes close to what we call madness. A woman called Cloak Walker¹ had an unbelievable string of bad luck (loss of husband, two children and both parents, bing bing bing) which she blamed on herself. She went round and round in circles walking on her cloak (step, flip cloak, step... I see that this story is told somewhat differently in different places) til she round and round came around to where the Buddha was sitting. What happened?

The Buddha looked up and said: 'Sister, recover thou thy presence of mind.' And snap fingers she was restored to good health and became a very advanced bhikkhuni.

At the time there was a very interesting lack of concern over crime and madness. Law was administered by what we might call overlords, Governors of provinces or towns (but these could be learned brahmins) and the headmen of the village were the judges, or a person could set themselves up as a judge, or a person who was considered to be of high ethical understanding could be asked to judge a case. Cases could be appealed all the way up to the king, if a party was of sufficient conviction or courage. It was only if the people complained that these guys or the king went after a criminal (or if the crime was to the governor, not paying

taxes etc.) It was ok to exact justice for yourself if someone injured you. If you made a mistake, of course, they could bring you before a judge.

It is an interesting side note to the issue of legal matters. Nobody lied. Or very few people tried to lie their way out of punishments. The group confessions in the Sangha rely on this characteristic as well. In some of the old Kung Fu movies we see something similar when a student breaks the rules and approaches the Shi-fu saying: "I have broken a rule, please punish me." In the suttas and Jataka stories when someone is brought before the king and asked if he committed a crime and he lies, it is always sufficient for the king to say: "I am the king. I am able to punish people at my own discretion" for the person to change their position and confess the crime.

As for madness, mostly it was taken in stride. Not even considered madness. Even today they have guys walking around there no clothes, cover themselves in mud and ashes, go into the jungle and live like wild animals, mad as hatters. In fact, both in India and China at the time and even somewhat today a wise man may go around looking and acting mad, hair flying all over the place, just to avoid pests.

The real madness was considered to be doing things that were self-injurious in terms of kamma. Lies, injury, theft, were what Gotama would call in-sanity.

I personally believe almost all cases of what we call madness are matters of advanced mental states or special talents occurring to people unaware of magic or advanced mental states, connected to an opinion that such a thing is madness. Bring them into a situation where what is happening to them can be put in context with mental development, snap fingers, no more madness.

Paranoia: the ability to see potentialities. Naturally the human being like all animals first looks for dangerous possibilities, but the talent is in the ability to see contingencies. A lot of, if not all, the 'evidence' paranoiacs see is careless observation (a lot of madness is really 'pretending' where the person has lost self-control, something like a child playing a pretend game who has become lost in the story, the reality doesn't matter, it's not relevant to the story) which is not corrected because of bad habits of observation that everyone has. There is over-development on one side and not enough development on the other.

Schizophrenia (multiple personality): making the mistake of identifying with a personality characteristic as 'my self' in combination with the

perception of what exists in most people, which are groups of characteristics completely in distinction or opposition to other characteristics. Like in a normal person, acting a role, playing a role to get women, get a job, etc. This rather than simply seeing that we are just a collection of 'bits' with consciousness going from bit to bit. And that what we need is a set of rules or supreme court to which each set of characteristics can bring another set of characteristics for a neutral fair ruling according to a standard acceptable to all (say: nothing is allowed that will cause us bad kamma, cause us to end up in an asylum, in the electric chair, etc... in other words The Eightfold Way. If you want to do something and part of you thinks it's mad or immoral, you bring it to the Judge, the Magga. And you must train yourself to obey that ruling. Everything else goes. You are allowed to play Dhamma Lawyer. Weazle your way around a rule if you can make your case before the Magga.)

The other aspect of schizophrenia is the fact of having perception that crosses barriers that are otherwise put up to prevent the conscious self from perceiving contradictory aspects of the personality (one set of characteristics unacceptable to another). The talent there is what we would call deep insights into things.

Manic/depressive disorder is having a lack of understanding of the Seven Dimensions of Self-Awakening. No ability to balance the energy creation side (study, energy creation, enthusiasm) with the calming side (impassivity, serenity, detachment) because of poor development of the memory (and, lack of knowledge). This person should make a strong effort to control and calm down the energy when in the manic state. In the depressive state, very little can be done because there is no will (been there, done that.)

If pushed, go to a shrink and ask him what his definition of madness is and he will be forced to say: 'the subjective state where a person feels unhappy.'

In other words: madness is when you think you are mad and are not happy with that.

Ogha: *As for mania, this 'madness' is a term attributed by 'unhappy' others, most often not the manic individual herself. In many cases, someone experiencing mania feels euphoric, liberated, powerful, or all-knowing. They may test these feelings through action: streaking naked, jumping fences, speaking backwards. It is often an observer's interpretation of 'normal' and fear that causes the manic individual to suffer. An observer often directly or indirectly and often violently restrains the manic individual.*

I suppose the manic individual needs to learn to constructively harness these temporal creative powers without freaking out others, without getting locked up and/or drugged. Or the individual must establish conditions (medicine, care, social network) to prevent the states and/or their negative results (asylum, social stigma). As I understand, the mania is most often associated with cycles of depression. It is his or her inability to balance these high and low extremes that is the debilitating condition.

We see the situation here about the same way. Part of the problem with smoothing out the energy side is that initially it isn't experienced as 'as high'. Like the alcoholic or drug addict trying to live without. If a person gives the balancing method suggested in the Seven Dimensions of Awakening some time, over time there will be a balanced rise to the highest levels possible. They need to be able to accept a period of moderate energy/vision in exchange for a lessening of the depression but should know that eventually there will be nothing lost.

"Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

"Sometimes it is better to just say nothing."

- Sigmund Freud

There is one other interesting aspect to this. This relates very closely to the issues concerning not denying that there is a self even while knowing that there is no thing there that is the self. It is the deference shown to the consensus reality. The consensus reality is our vehicle. We do not go around saying "You cannot say: 'Please pass me the salt' because there is no self there or no thing there that is really the salt." First off we do not do that because there is no need to cause other people perplexity. Then we do not do that to avoid the asylum. So your point is well taken: in order for the extra-ordinary not-mad person to be not-mad in this madness, they must take cognizance of and respect the ordinary reality. To do otherwise would be madness.

¹ See

<http://buddhadust.net/backmatter/appendixes/personalities/patacara.htm>

Stumbling Blocks

K2: *What follows is a big stumbling block for me: It seems to me that sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, despair, aging and death, while no fun, are part of life, and could be thought of as a small price to pay (or maybe a fair price, or a necessary price, or an inevitable price) to live in the world and enjoy its bounty and pleasures. Aging and death come soon enough. Didn't the Buddha develop the idea of Dukkha after he left the palace grounds, where his father had created the illusion that time could stand still, and saw for the first time the ravages of time — age, disease, death? What I cannot understand is why the two cannot stand side by side: the pleasures of the world; the pain of aging sickness and death. Why does one have to be renounced to prepare for the other? Why cannot one be enjoyed and the other endured?*

Were you aware that "Stumbling Block" is exactly the term used for enjoying the pleasures of the senses?

I will answer this question directly, but I would also suggest reading the long discussion with Aldo¹ and see if you can see that this is the same question as he asked from another point of view.

K2: *About the term "stumbling block" — no I did not know, at least not consciously. Who know what lurks below. Has the term appeared in BuddhaDust before? If so, then I probably did read it, and that might account for it re-emerging in my question.*

Yes, I do remember reading the long discussion with Aldo and Veronica way back when, and also being intrigued by it. I just glanced at it again now with your link. I think the questions posed then were (or became) more complex than mine. Maybe the head/heart problem is similar. For me, I would put it: why do I have to embrace this view that the world is so dukkhy, so unrelentingly dukkhy? So what if all pleasure ultimately is impermanent, well so is dukkha impermanent, so I say, give them equal status, why not? Why all this renunciation?

So ask I.

Read. Not "glance". Try to understand, study, see if you can see. You think you are asking a simple question. You are not. You are asking the question all of America is asking about Buddhism. Aldo is asking the same question in a different way. It will help you if you are able to understand your question stated in a different way. If you only want a simple answer to a simple question, the answer is: "Who's stopping you?"

The Parable of the Water-Snake²



Here is a case where pleasures of the senses were called "stumbling blocks." This is the most unequivocal statement about this issue that I can recall.

In it, a Beggar named "Arittha Once-a Falconer" holds that in indulging in sense pleasures there is no stumbling block, and further holds that this is what the Buddha is teaching. He is questioned by the other Beggars and then he is summoned before the Buddha who asks him if it is true he holds such a view and attributes it to the Buddha. He replies that it is true. The Buddha replies:

To whom then do you, foolish man, understand
that dhamma was taught thus by me?

Have not things that are stumbling-blocks been spoken of by me
in many a figure, and in following these is there not a veritable
stumbling-block?

Sense-pleasures are said by me to be of little satisfaction, of much
pain, of much tribulation, wherein is more peril.

Sense-pleasures are likened by me to a skeleton ...
to a lump of meat ...
to a torch of dry grass ...
to a pit of glowing embers ...
to a dream ...
to something borrowed ...
to the fruits of a tree ...
to a slaughter-house ...

to an impaling stake ...

Sense-pleasures are likened by me to a snake's head, of much pain, of much tribulation, wherein is more peril.

And yet you, foolish man, not only misrepresent me because of your own wrong grasp, but also injure yourself and give rise to much demerit which will be for a long time, foolish man, for your woe and sorrow.

And

"Indeed, monks, this situation does not occur when one could follow sense-pleasures apart from sense-pleasures themselves, apart from perceptions of sense-pleasures, apart from thoughts of sense-pleasures."

There are a couple of sources for the opinion that there is no problem in indulging in sense pleasures — that is, within the suttas; I am not here dealing with ideas such as tantric yoga and so forth.

The first is the fact that the Buddha recommends that once one has attained Arahantship then there is no problem living in town and that this even may be encouraged because it will be of great advantage to the people to see Arahants.

But the subsequent formation of the opinion that therefore it is ok or possible to live in the world and progress in the Dhamma is not warranted as this is a case that applies only to one who has already accomplished what was needed to be accomplished³.

Second is the case where the fact that in the case of a Beggar who is absolutely and strictly the passive recipient of a pleasurable sense experience incurs no fault.

This might happen when some pleasant item of food is placed in the bowl. This was also the case in a case in the Vinaya where an Arahant, asleep, was mounted by a woman and brought to orgasm in the sleep state. And again similarly, an orgasm occurring in sleep is not a fault. The point here is to note that it is necessary to understand that there is absolutely no intention on the part of the beggar in these cases to "get" these pleasures... there is no telling some woman "well, I'm going to sleep now, whatever happens, happens..."

The third case is the case where a beggar has made some advancement in jhana but not enough advancement in wisdom⁴.

Here the perception can be reached that there is absolutely no substantive reality to anything at all in the world and that anything that happens in the world is of no significance whatsoever... it is mere ripples in a reflection, like the wind passing over an oil slick.

What this view misses is that subjective reality is experienced as real by those bound to subjective reality, and that therefore the conclusion that there is no consequence of actions is incorrect: subjective reality is a real part of the world.

Additionally, the individual who has come to such a conclusion has not yet escaped subjective reality and will find himself subject to the consequences of his actions, however unreal they may appear from one's point of view.

I have found that it is always necessary to take what the Buddha says at both face value and as having a deep significance. To hold that he is speaking only on one or the other level usually results in misunderstanding.

Additionally, the Buddha speaks "In Brief". This means that, like a trained witness on the witness stand, he almost always only answers the question that is asked.

If the questioner fails to perceive the deeper implications of an answer, and does not ask the necessary follow-up questions, the matter is left at the level of the questioner. As readers of the discussions after the fact we must make sure we do not fall into the same error.

Now as a matter of procedure for those of us in training: the point is that we are following a hypothetical position that the source of pain is desire, wanting, hunger/thirst (*tanha*). It is a simple matter of logical deduction to see that any going after getting of any kind of sense pleasure whatsoever is necessarily based on desire, wanting, etcetera. So, following our hypothesis, adhering to our principles, we necessarily must let go of our pursuit of sense pleasures.

Insofar as we do indulge in the pleasures of the senses, we should put aside any tendency to guilt, and simply acknowledge our weakness and resolve to improve.

Repeat: **In this system, Nobody is telling Anybody what to do;** and that means no God is laying down rules that one needs to feel guilty about breaking. We are being told this is for our own good:

Do this to rid yourself of Pain.
Don't do this because it is dangerous.



You have asked: "Why do the pleasures of the world need to be renounced in order to prepare for the pain of the world."

We have, in the use of the words "pleasures need to be renounced" and "prepare for the pain" some clues about what may be confusing to you about the dhamma.

This dhamma is not intended to prepare one to deal with pain.

This dhamma is intended to eradicate pain altogether.

And the teaching here is not as simple as just renouncing the pleasures of the senses, it is best understood as teaching that **the whole phenomena of sense experience must be understood thoroughly**; it teaches that the attachment to, aversion to, and ignorance of sense experience must be let go in order to prevent the *experience* of pain.

Understanding the problem to be "dealing" with pain and hearing that the solution is the renunciation of pleasure, naturally leaves you with the unsatisfying prospect of a life spent in pleasureless coping with pain. Not exactly inspiring to effort.

So the Very First Issue that should be understood is that what is being proposed by this system is a Solution to the Problem of Pain. Emphasis on the word Solution.

This system, if followed, is not going to leave you with an unsatisfying answer.

Guaranteed: One step on this path is one step better than what came before. And the final step, Nibbana, is a state⁵ that is utterly devoid of pain in any category of pain you can conceive.

Ordinary pleasure, the pleasures of the senses, require that something be attained: a beautiful sight, sound, scent, taste, or touch.

There is a different sort of pleasure: there is the pleasure of being free from debt, free of illness, free from enslavement, of having emerged from the wilderness, of being free from pain⁶.

If you need to conceive of Nibbana in terms of what it might be like, as opposed to what it is not, think of it in terms of this kind of happiness; the kind that is the result of freedom from something, not dependent on the getting of something.

The getting of something we can never guarantee, and we can know for certain will not last.

The Buddha is saying that the type of happiness that is the result of being free of pain is within our power to bring about and that because it is not dependent on "getting", once brought about (by the elimination of what is preventing it), it cannot come to an end⁷.

Really; are you suggesting that there is *any* sight, sound, scent, taste, or touch out there that could promise to compare with such an offer?

For me, I look at the people and I say: how can they live like this? Never asking themselves "Why?", they madly rush after every pleasure and right before our eyes it can be seen that they are enjoying less and less and less with every effort. Yet they rush headlong into life, declaring in complete ignorance (how could it be anything else, they never gave it a thought?) that just this is the right thing, just that is the wrong thing. The arrogance is stupendous!

Well, there is no convincing anyone of this. Some people just need to experience a little disappointment to see the sense of never experiencing pain again, some people need to have their world destroyed, some people need to have the gates of hell open up for a tour (your's truly, for one! Work'n at it best I can down here boss!), some people need to stare Death in the face, some people need to see the problem of rebirth before they get serious. Who knows what will bring it about for different individuals? This is a system for those who have already decided to take a chance on the proposition.

Nobody in this system should be out there trying to persuade anyone of anything. I have a Website here⁸. I'm not telling anyone they must pay attention, I am giving opportunity; going any further is not something you will find here. If I tell you "you should do this," this should be understood to mean: "if you wish to understand how this is in your own best interests, you should do this." OK?

So if you want to Understand the relationship of enjoying pleasures of the senses to the problem of ending pain, this is for you:

The instruction here is that sense experience needs to be understood;
that the satisfaction in sense experience,
the danger in sense experience, and
the escape from the danger of sense experience needs to be understood.

These are the senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, Touch and Mentation.
These are the objects of sense: Sights, Sounds, Scents, Tastes, Touches,
and Mental Objects.

Sense experience results when an object of sense comes into contact with
an organ of sense.

This is the satisfaction of the experience of sense:

Sense experiences are of three sorts: pleasant, unpleasant, and neither
pleasant nor unpleasant⁹.

For one downbound to the world, any sort of sense experience is to be
considered as a pleasant experience¹⁰.

For one not downbound to the world, pleasant sense experience is to
experience pleasant sense experience and remember that this is temporary
and to let go of any attachment to it; unpleasant sense experience is to
recollect the non-attaining of a sense experience and to yearn for the
Freedom of Nibbana which has not yet been attained; sense experience
that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant is to be seen as the experience of
Nibbana in the here and now¹¹.

This is the danger of the experience of sense:

Based on sense experience is Perception,
Based on perception is Conscious Awareness,
Based on Conscious Awareness is Wanting or Disliking,
Based on Wanting or Disliking is Going After Getting,
Based on Going After Getting is Getting,
Based on Getting is Starting to Lose and, losing always ending in ending;
grief and lamentation, pain and misery, and despair.

This is the escape of the experience of sense:

You can see, if you look, that the place the chain can be broken is
between where that which is out of one's control (the conscious

experience of pleasure or pain or neither pleasure nor pain at the senses) is followed by that which is under one's control (going after getting). And that further, if we could eliminate the Wanting and Disliking, we would have a much better chance of handling the going after getting.

What could we eliminate in order not to experience the wanting or disliking?

If we eliminated our conscious awareness of sense experiences we could eliminate the wanting and disliking.

What could we eliminate in order not to experience the conscious awareness of sense experiences?

Perception.

What could we eliminate in order not to experience Perception?

The experience of sense.

What could we eliminate in order not to experience the experience of sense?

The conscious awareness that is the result of getting what we go after getting (bringing our eye, so to speak, into contact with what we want to see), so Going After Getting.

So there, by not reacting to sense stimulations by going after getting the repetition of a pleasant sense experience, or getting away from an unpleasant sense experience, we eliminate the future recurrence of pain dependent on the result of that going after getting.

The process (what not to go after getting and how to not go after getting it), broken down into the various ways it applies to life, is called The Magga. The Way. The Noble Eightfold Path.

High View: accepting as a hypothetical position the idea that The All is In Pain; That the Origin of that Pain is in Wanting (hunger/thirst; desire); that the ending of that pain is to be had by the ending of that wanting; and that this is the way (aka: The Four Noble Truths).

High Principles: based on our hypothetical position we conclude that our highest principles should be: letting go; non-cruelty and non-harm.

High Talk: talk not reflecting wanting or going after getting; no lies, slander. abusive and idle talk.

High Works: works not reflecting wanting or going after getting; no lies, taking other people's things; inflicting pain; or forgetting our principles under the influence of sense desire.

High Lifestyle: Letting Go of what we can see for ourselves is a low element of our lifestyle: after all; we cannot have a process of living that is based on getting when we have a goal of letting go. This is "Walking it like you talk it."

High Self Control: Controlling bad conditions that are present, keeping bad conditions that are not present away; keeping good conditions and getting good conditions that are not present ... do we have a contradiction? No: good conditions are defined as the absence of bad conditions.

High Satisfaction Pastures: Deep Penetrating Knowledge of, and release from that which heretofore has been the subject of the idea "Me" or "Mine": body, sense experience, emotions, and the world as seen through this system (the dhamma).

High Getting High: We all try to get high. This way is based on letting go of more and more.

High Vision: seeing our High View as it really is, seeing the truth of it and seeing it as it works.

High Detachment: the letting go resulting from High Vision that ends in absolute, timeless freedom from Pain; the knowledge when free that in freedom one is free, and the realization and the knowledge that left behind is rebirth, done is duty's doing, the best life has been lived, no more of this side or that side, no more being any kind of it at any place of atness left for me!

And this is the experience of the escape from the danger of sense experiences of which there is no further escape needed.

K2: *I came across this in "Encounters with Qi" by David Eisenberg:
A teacher for a day is to be respected like a father for a lifetime"*
— Chinese proverb

An excellent sentiment, but of course the Pali one-ups it, for a father, is, after all, even if for a lifetime, just a passing phenomenon, a mere finger-snap; while the Dhamma serves he who understands and lives by it for ever after.

¹ *Editor's note* : included in this book as the chapter « Understanding understanding »

² The Middle Length Sayings, I, #22: Discourse on the Parable of the Water-Snake; PTS, Horner trans, pp 167.

³ "Indeed there is a quality in you, Mahanama not got rid of subjectively, on account of which at times things belonging to greed, taking hold of your mind, persist, and things belonging to aversion ... and things belonging to confusion, taking hold of your mind, persist. But this quality could be got rid of subjectively by you, Mahanama, if you would not dwell in a house, if you would not enjoy pleasures of the senses."

PTS: MLS #14: The Stems of Anguish, pp 91

⁴ See SN 34 at http://buddhadust.net/dhamma-vinaya/bd/sn/03_kv/sn03.34.001-055.olds.bd.htm

⁵ *Editor's note*: Michael uses the word 'state' here in a 'conventional' way; he's not making a statement about the ultimate nature of Nibbana. For more about this read "Is Nibbana conditioned?" in the previous volume (or at http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/dhammatalk_forum/dhamma_talk/dt_009.conditioned.vs.own-made.htm)

⁶ "In the same way, Beggars, as a man, after taking out a loan and setting up a business, and after a time that business becomes successful and he should pay off that loan and have a little left over with which to support a wife, he would feel relief because of this, he would be happy because of this.

In the same way, Beggars, as a man might have fallen sick from some disease, be in pain, in critical condition, unable to eat and without strength in his body, but after a time he were to recover, be free of pain, out of danger from that disease, able to eat, and feeling the strength return to his body, he would feel relief because of this, he would be happy because of this.

In the same way, Beggars, as a man who had been thrown in prison might be freed from bondage, safe and secure, with no loss of property, he would feel relief because of this, he would be happy because of this.

In the same way, Beggars, as a man who had been a slave, not his own man, subject to another, not free to go where he wanted and who, after a time was freed, made his own man, not subject to another, free to go

where he wanted, he would feel relief because of this, he would be happy because of this.

In the same way, Beggars, as a wealthy merchant traveling on the highway through the wilderness filled with robbers, murderers, and kidnappers, and, after a time he were to emerge from that wilderness safe and sound, with no loss of property, he would feel relief because of this, he would be happy because of this.”

⁷ Because what is obstructing it is something that must be gone after and got, it can be said that freedom from it is within one's control: we are able to guarantee the results of "not-doing" — it will not produce any results.

⁸ *Editor's note:* At the time of the publication of this book (February 2017), Michael has gone offline permanently, and is sending updates to the webmasters (me and another person) via posted SD cards. He has also removed his email from the website.

⁹ For more details about sense-experience (vedana), see http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/the_pali_line/course/gradualesson3.htm

¹⁰ Meaning, including painful sense experience, no matter how bad. This is because for one who is faced with non-existence, as at death, life in any form whatsoever is preferable to the alternative. For more on this idea see Pajapati's Problem (*Editor's note: available in the previous Volume, or at http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/bd_dhammatalk/dhamma_talk/pajapatis_problem.htm*)

¹¹ For more on this, see the chapter about asukha-m-adukkha vedana

Using "Beggar" for "Bhikkhu"

Summary: This term is not disrespectful to the bhikkhus, others' attitude towards beggars is. 'Beggar' is the meaning of 'Bhikkhu'; it is disrespectful to the Buddha to try and worm out of that; the spirit of the word and the 'role' of the Bhikkhu is that of the beggar - the king or god who goes out among the people dressed as a beggar, but behaving perfectly, to see what they really think of him and to gauge the standards they are using to measure.

"I begs!

It's the only honest way to make a living."

— some homeless beggar roun 67th St. NYC, 70s

A: I found the rendering of Bhikkhu as "Beggar" quite unfamiliar and jarring, because as I understand the monastic discipline (and I have a little monastic experience) although bhikkhus live dependent on alms, they do not beg. So jarring did I find your rendering that I did not even read the passages you had so rendered as addressed to the Sangha. I formed a picture of street beggars in my visual imagination¹. I find that I am happiest either to leave 'bhikkhu' untranslated (simply importing it as a loan word) or to render it with monks. If the dependence on alms is, however, what you want to stress, why not 'mendicants'²? Just a thought from one who is very sensitive to language and its nuances.

First, let me say that I am not the only one, nor the first, to use the term "Beggar" for "Bhikkhu"³. I believe Buddhaghosa goes into the meaning of the term and takes pains to say that although the term means (among numerous other things) one who "begs", that is not to be understood to be the case with Gotama's Bhikkhus.

I have chosen to use the word not with the intent of stressing the Bhikkhus' dependence on gifts, but with the idea of pointing out where, precisely, in the structure of society, such a group would be found today if anyone were to actually follow the Dhamma to the letter (and that perhaps society's attitude toward this group is the thing that needs to be changed). To be sure we have Buddhist "Monks" here today, but, without any intent at denigrating their intentions, I believe you will find that the foundation of their presence here and elsewhere in the West is based on the collection and handling of money (to be clear, I am not saying that Buddhist monks are here making money! Only that it has been necessary

for them to handle money to survive here). This is not the Old Way, and as hard as this may sound, represents to me a lack of courage and commitment and a lack of effort to live on, and thereby use up, stored up *kamma*. It is putting proselytizing foremost, and this is an error in technique that represents 'thirst' and as such is a bad example.

Secondly, my use of the term was rationalized in a previous discussion, where I pointed out that what is in back of the idea of becoming a homeless one is not only the giving up of worldly possessions (certainly not for the security of worldly possessions as more or less guaranteed by the monastic system now in place), but the View from the position of one without possessions.

Thirdly, although "shock" per se was not my intent, "provocation" certainly was. I believe the monastic system in place at this time is not a reflection of the original intent (if I believed differently, I would have become a Bhikkhu decades ago). I am of the belief that the original intent of the system is much closer to that which we see in (I may have the term wrong) the "extraordinary" men of your own Australian aboriginal culture, or that of the Men of Power of the South American natives, or the Wise man, Witch Doctors, Shaman of other cultures around the world. That what we see and have today that we call Buddhism is for the most part the result of the numerous compromises made for the sake of soft late comers to the Samgha.

Beggars were called Beggars in much the same way Black males for a time here were calling each other "Nigger". It hardens them to abuse. Being hardened to abuse, they are in greater control of their anger when abused.

**Scorn not The Beggar
and His Bowl
for In The Eyes of God
We are Beggars, All!**

We see much angst among today's Bhikkhus and their followers concerning being thought of as Beggars. But this stands the original intent on its head!

At least one original intent was that the Bhikkhus, by adopting the "occupation" of Beggar, would cause the people to think twice about thinking badly of beggars, for In the Eyes of God, We are Beggars, All.

I have long imagined God sitting up there hearing APPAMADA drifting up to him in the form of the sounds 'alpa me ga!' near'nuf the only sounds he ever hears come up from these parts, I betcha.



I get spam
I see ads on every website I visit

and Pop-up ads

and Pop-under ads

And Every program I buy comes with ads for its newsletter filled with ads

Ads fill the newspapers

My mail is filled with ads

Every charity sends out ads

they ask for money

they ask for food

they ask for our very blood!

Every educational institution sends out ads

Banks send out ads

Every food we eat is advertised

The government spends millions of dollars advertising the army, navy, marines, airforce and itself

Politicians spend millions advertising themselves

The postoffice advertises on TV
 The telephone company advertises in the Post Office
 The Police Benevolent association calls up using menacing tones to try
 and frighten people into buying window stickers that advertise the Police
 Benevolent Association
 Lawyers advertise
 Doctors advertise
 Dentists advertise
 Gardners advertise by stuffing cards and flyers into crannies in my
 mailbox - why should they be any different?
 Books come with ads
 TV programming is ads with ads
 In the movie industry they call it product placement

Cop shows and movies advertise the cops
 Lawyer shows advertise the lawyers and cops
 Survivor advertises tourism
 Discovery shows advertise the scientists
 Animal Programs advertise wildlife conservation
 Public Television has ads and tells us it does not accept advertising
 Cooking shows advertise cookware and cooking schools and restaurants
 and tourism and foods and restaurants
 Reality programs advertise actor/singer/dancer/spokesperson/model
 wannabes
 I get ads through my fax at all times of the day and night
 I get telephone solicitations all day long
 I get ads in my telephone bill

and gas and electric bill
 and water bill
 and credit card bill

And of course there are billboards
 and signs all over the great outdoors

Here today (USA Friday, March 21, 2003 3:13 PM) this mighty power is
 making war with a tiny good-for-nothing country for the primary purpose
 of advertising its military hardware
 The war-room briefings are just commentaries explaining the virtues of
 the military hardware our military is selling

Odds are you too are in the ad business in one way or another.

I know I am.

Are you really going to argue with me that we are beggars all?

But still the beggar on the street is despised by those not remembering:

Should you, beggars, happen to see one who has fallen on hard times, someone hard to look at, you can say:
"Such is such as such as I in this long inconstant time gone by."

How come?

Out of reach of the mind,
beggars, is the start of one's run-around,
not known is the beginning point of beings reigned in by
blindness, bridled by thirst,
rolled-up in this our run'n-round.

SN 15.11 – Olds Translation



The other day (today being: Sunday, March 30, 2003 6:58 AM) on CNN there was a feature on the Dalai Lama. This fellow looks like a very good sort, however much he is far too involved in the world to be demonstrating in his person the role of representative of Buddhism that has come to him. But this is the connection here:

Suppose one were (as he is) interested in tackling the problem of inequality in the world in a way which was congruent with the goals of the system.

Just imagine what the reaction of those who despise the homeless would be were it to be widely known that among them, dressed no differently⁴ and supported no differently, one who simply walked from place to place, accepting in his bowl what was placed there⁵ sleeping where there was just sufficient shelter to keep out of the rain... was the Dalai Lama.

Then suppose it was known that not only he lived in such a manner, but thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of his followers did so also.

Would this not force the people to reconsider their behavior when it came to homeless beggars? (OK, some will never change, but would it not give those whose attitude was not solidly formed, people who were behaving badly towards the poor simply because that's what everyone else does, an opportunity to reconsider?)

And in this lifestyle the idea of 'giving up', 'letting go' of the world would be something that was a true thing both in word and deed. A living lesson in the Dhamma for every one to see whether or not they had any direct contact with a bhikkhu.

That is the intent behind the idea of the 'Bhikkhu', say I.

And one other note: Did I mention this? Sakka, the King of the Gods, when he revisits the world, usually comes here in the guise of an old, raggedy beggar.

¹ Exactly what I would have hoped! (*Editor's note: See the Chapter "Keep on trucking"*)

² That seems a little "slick" to me, as the definition of mendicant is really "beggar".

OED: [ad. L. mendWcant-em, f. mendWcare to beg, f. mendWcus beggar. Cf. mendiant, mendinant.]

A. adj. Begging; given to or characterized by begging. Also, characteristic of a beggar.

spec. Applied to those religious orders which lived entirely on alms. B. n. A beggar; one who lives by begging.

Where the reference is to religious orders that live by "begging" the reference contains too many overtones to Christian Friars for my taste. Additionally, in the end, the intent of these Christian Friars is precisely the same as the Buddhist Bhikkhu, but has retained the idea of association with the begging class more closely.

³ Rhys Davids' explanation of his translation of 'bhikkhu' in Buddhist Suttas, 1.1, note 9:

The word translated 'brethren' throughout is in the original bhikkhū, a word most difficult to render adequately by any word which would not, to Christians and in Europe, connote something different from the Buddhist idea. A bhikkhu, literally 'beggar,' was a disciple who had joined Gotama's order; but the word refers to their renunciation of worldly things, rather than to their consequent mendicancy; and they did not really beg in our modern sense of the word. Hardy has 'priests;' I have elsewhere used 'monks' and sometimes 'beggars' and 'members of the order.' This last is, I think, the best rendering; but it is too long for constant repetition, as in this passage, and too complex to be a really good version of bhikkhu. The

members of the order were not priests, for they had no priestly powers. They were not monks, for they took no vow of obedience, and could leave the order (and constantly did so and do so still) whenever they chose. They were not beggars, for they had none of the mental and moral qualities associated with that word. 'Brethren' connotes very much the position in which they stood to one another; but I wish there were a better word to use in rendering bhikkhu.

⁴ The beautiful robes we see on the Bhikkhus today were originally deliberately made worthless if they happened to be made of good quality cloth — they were torn apart and re-sewn, and died to have the look of cast off rags that had been out in the sun too long.

⁵ If one is to insist on the distinction between "the bhikkhu" and "the beggar", as being between one who begs (literally) and one who receives gifts, I would like to contribute my personal observation of numerous "beggars" in New York City who either did not need to beg because of the generosity of the people, or who were too proud to beg and earned their living rummaging through the garbage... something actually praised by the Buddha, that is, scrap-eating.

Adukkha-m-asukhā vedanā

Editor's preface

The following chapter is the result of a letter exchange between Michael and myself (exchanges which have followed the pattern of me bothering him with Dhamma questions, and Michael graciously taking the time to write me essay-long answers).

The recent subject of my enquiries was around adukkha-m-asukha vedana, and particularly around Ven. Thanissaro's translation of its associated *anusaya* that renders as "ignorance-obsession" (Ven. Bodhi: "the underlying tendency to ignorance"). It was my understanding back then that this meant that "neutral sensations (feelings)" were taken to be permanent and a stable refuge (while they weren't), and that this was the "ignorance-obsession".

This is where Michael advised me to get back to the Pali (as he has stressed multiple times to me already) and to see that the translation of "neutral" was a quite misleading one, and that the literal translation of "neither-painful-nor-pleasant" was worded that way for a reason: that we are here talking more about a "non-sensation".

The underlying tendency to ignorance was then, according to Mike's understanding, ignorance regarding the actual nature of freedom (Nibbana).

The content has been slightly arranged for a book format, and some irrelevant parts have been omitted.

N: *What I was trying to say was that neutral sensations could be mistaken for Nibbana, since they are still "fabricated", willed, own-made (for instance, the follower of the magga who's getting pretty skilled at letting go and is able to mostly abide in tranquility/indifference/impassivity, is experiencing peacefulness but is still willing/own-making that peacefulness: he's still involved with samsara and is still bound by time).*

Would it be correct then to say that Nibbana is an experience (but not a sense-experience, not vedana) that is neither-pleasant-nor painful, and thus, that neither-pleasant-nor-painful sense-experiences is "as close as it gets" to Nibbana, the best "approximation" of it that an individual (a consciousness bound up in nama-rupa) can fabricate (in other terms, neutral vedana, or indifference/equanimity, is less involvement with samsara, therefore, is getting closer to emptiness of greed, hatred & delusion. That would connect with the direction of the path which is less and less doing with in regards to the world. But in that case, the mind would have to drop that last bit of

intentionality/manipulation/involvement that is fabricating that current neutral sense-experience, to fully experience Nibbana).

Does that make sense? Or are you basically saying that "neutral feelings" are actually "instances" of Nibbana not being recognized?

The first problem here is understanding how 'vedana' is used in the suttas and how it is translated.

The word is literally: *experience-given*; or even more basically: *thrill-holding-knowledge*.

In Pali, *vedana* is used interchangeably for three different things, which in English are:

1. Sense-experience: Experience through the senses, which is identified-with experience of individuality: identified-with-consciousness aware of consciousness bound to identified-objects. Eye-sights, ear-sounds, nose-scents, tongue-tastes, body-touches, mind-things (mind-dhamma = things, objects).

2. Sensation: The unpleasant, pleasant, or not-unpleasant-but-not-pleasant *feeling* that results from kamma (or sankaraming) with the intent to create pleasure, to cause pain, or to end kamma¹. These can be 'downbound to the world' (carnal) or 'related to letting go', depending on one's attitude:

- Experiencing an unpleasant sensation, reacting with tanha for pleasure, for living, or for not-living, one experiences unpleasant sensation downbound to the world.
- Experiencing an unpleasant sensation, regarding it as a passing phenomenon, one experiences a pleasant sensation headed towards freedom and Nibbana.
- Experiencing a pleasant sensation, reacting with tanha for pleasure, for living, or for not-living, one experiences a pleasant sensation downbound to the world.
- Experiencing a pleasant sensation, regarding it as pain, one experiences a painful sensation headed towards freedom and Nibbana.

- Experiencing a sensation that is not-painful-but-not-pleasant, reacting with *tanha* for freedom/Nibbana, one experiences a not-painful-but-not-pleasant sensation bound up in blindness.
- Experiencing a not-painful-but-not-pleasant sensation, seeing it as freedom, one experiences a taste of Nibbana. A little confusing because we hear sensation as 'feeling', where here it is really experience of not feeling.

3. **Experience:** this use is where it is in reference to the experience of Nibbana or the experience of the Arahant.

Start with that which *conditions* vedana:

- Identification with intent to create experience (vedana) for the self by way of inflicting pain through thought, word or deed, the result is identified-with painful experience (vedana).
- Identification with intent to create experience for the self by way of bestowing pleasure through thought, word or deed, the result is identified-with pleasant experience.
- Identification with intent to end kamma for the self by way of abstaining from inflicting pain or bestowing pleasure, there results (eventually; after a period of withdrawal which can be experienced as painful, but which pain must be seen as a result of previous intentional actions) experience (vedana) which is not-painful-but-not-pleasant.
- Intent is restricted, limited, defined as being limited to these three forms (intent to cause pain, intent to cause pleasure & intent to end Kamma). There is ultimately, or *in actuality*, no way to have 'intent to create not-painful-but-not-pleasant sensation', or Nibbana. It is like saying that there is no way to intend beyond what can be created by acts intending to cause pain, cause pleasure or end kamma. No 'secondary' intent is in actuality a real intent. I can know that by abstaining from such and such an act there will result at some point Nibbana, but the intent itself is restricted to the immediate act of abstention. Otherwise we would have as a result an own-made Nibbana, (e.g. the Bodhi Mind) which is what is being spoken of as false Release.

- If the *identification* with not-painful-but-not-pleasant experience, through blindness, is maintained, called experience that is not-painful-but-not-pleasant downbound to the world², there will result tanha, and upadana (thoughts pondering how to get away from this non-experience into pleasant experience) fueling further existence (bhava) and birth and its consequences.
- If the identification with this latter experience is abandoned (by seeing it as a taste of freedom from painful and pleasant experience, called experience that is not-painful-but-not-pleasant connected to giving up [aka: not carnal; 'niramisam dukkham vedanam']) or does not arise, the result is an instance of the experience of Nibbana.



- ❖ I. Intent to cause pain ➡ painful sense-experience, painful sensation, painful experience
 - resulting in tanha for pleasure, living, or ending experience which results in upadana (thinking of ways to get such), which results in existence, birth...
- ❖ II. Intent to cause pleasure ➡ pleasant sense-experience, pleasant sensation, pleasant experience
 - resulting in tanha for pleasure, living, or ending experience which results in upadana (thinking of ways to get such), which results in existence, birth...
- ❖ III. Intent to end kamma ➡ no sense-experience, no sensation, not-painful-but-not-pleasant experience
 - which can be seen as Unpleasant by the blind, resulting in tanha for pleasure, living, or ending experience which results in upadana (thinking of ways to get such), which results in existence, birth...

- or a taste of Nibbana by the educated student of the Aristocrats
 - which can be lusted-after, resulting in tanha for pleasure, living, or ending experience which results in upadana (thinking of ways to get such), which results in existence, birth...
 - or which can be let go and examined for those conditions which resulted in it which habit-a habituating leads to 'inhabiting that habitat' pass the hat.

You see? It's a matta-a-attitu.

You asked: "What I was trying to say was that neutral sensations could be mistaken for Nibbana, since they are still "fabricated", willed, own-made (for instance, the follower of the magga who's getting pretty skilled at letting go and is able to mostly abide in tranquility/indifferent/impassivity, is experiencing peacefulness but is still willing/own-making that peacefulness: he's still involved with samsara and is still bound by time)."

The adukkha-m-asukham is conditioned (paccaya or nidana; it comes about as a result of, or tied to), but is not sankharamed, not fabricated (that means made one's own by one's self) willed, or own-made.

Even if a person willed adukkha-m-asukham in the process of an act of giving up intent to create experience by reacting to a situation which would result in pleasure or pain, the intent would not be lined up with the deed. The intent lined up with the deed would be the non-doing of something which would result in the non-experience of what would have been the result. It is a step further that adukkha-m-asukham follows.

Adukkha-m-asukham comes about as a result of ending kamma, not intending to create adukkha-m-asukham. Kamma intended to end kamma is 'non-fruitful', has no result, or rather has a result in no experience of result. The intent relates to the act and was own-made; the result conditioned by the result of that was not.

Or you might think of it as the own-made result was the non-experience of experience of pain or pleasure and the resulting experience of that was

Presented with the opportunity to act to create pleasure or pain, one abstains from so intending and so acts in a way that ends that kammic stream. That is an intentional 'not-doing'. There is no manifest or real result of not doing. The result of these conditions is non-experience producing experience of adukkha-m-asukham.

You asked: "Would it be correct then to say that Nibbana is an experience (but not a sense-experience, not vedana) that is neither-pleasant-nor painful, and thus, that neither-pleasant-nor-painful sense-experiences is "as close as it gets" to Nibbana, the best "approximation" of it that an individual (a consciousness bound up in nama-rupa) can fabricate (in other terms, neutral vedana, or indifference/ equanimity, is less involvement with samsara, therefore, is getting closer to emptiness of greed, hatred & delusion. That would connect with the direction of the path which is less and less doing with in regards to the world. But in that case, the mind would have to drop that last bit of intentionality/ manipulatoin/ involvement that is fabricating that current neutral sense-experience, to fully experience Nibbana).

I would say that it would be correct to say that Nibbana is an experience but not a sense-experience. It is referred to as vedana. It is not-painful-but-not-pleasant. It is referred to as a kind of happiness. Try and distinguish in your experience the difference between being happy and feeling pleasure.

Experience that is not-painful-but-not-pleasant is, for one who has not given up everything in the world, an experience of 'temporary Nibbana'. When it is regarded as "as close as it gets" to Nibbana, the best "approximation" of it that an individual (a consciousness bound up in nama-rupa) can fabricate then it is "as close as it gets" to Nibbana, the best "approximation" of it that an individual (a consciousness bound up in nama-rupa) can fabricate, or the experience of the 'underlying tendency to blindness'.

Indifference (if I correctly understand you to mean 'passadhi') is not a sense-experience, sensation or experience. It is a mode of behavior. If done properly which is largely a matter of not reacting, it should result in not-painful-but-not-pleasant experience.

Equanimity (if I correctly understand you to mean 'upekkha') is first of all not 'equanimity', but detachment. U pecca ouch ya k-kha. Hold your right hand index finger in the fist of your left hand and pull it out. Equanimity by definition is a *state* balanced between two other states. It is therefore a state of 'being'.

Detachment can be a state of detachment or the fact of being detached. If it is the former, it is a mode of behavior with similar results to that of Indifference; if it is the latter it is the experience of not-painful-but-not-pleasant experience or Nibbana.

Not-painful-but-not-pleasant experience, upekkha (in the ultimate sense), akalika, vinnana-anidassana, emptiness (empty of lust, hate and blindness), signlessness (without signs of lust, hate and blindness), aimlessness (without ambitions based on lust, hate and blindness) are all synonyms for Nibana.

The Magga, too, is a synonym for Nibbana. It is not a 'less and less', it is absolutely free of states of being. It is 'The High Way'. It is 'The Way' for the student who comes by practicing what the Magga dictates more and more close to having abandoned self and having created Nibbana, to walking The Magga.

Again (we are hair-splitting here, remember) the Magga is not something which points in the direction of, but is a description of. It is the student which must use it to point himself in the direction of Nibbana.

Then you end up saying: *"But in that case, the mind would have to drop that last bit of intentionality/ manipulation/ involvement that is fabricating that current neutral sense-experience, to fully experience Nibbana)."* which is back on track.

"Does that make sense? Or are you basically saying that "neutral feelings" are actually instances of Nibbana not being recognized?"

Nearly yes. I am saying that There being the not-painful-but-not-pleasant, not delighting in that, thus is he released, thus he is one experiencing upekkha, akalika, vinnana-anidassana, emptiness, signlessness, aimlessness, Nibbana, The Magga. To not recognize that is blindness.

¹ Better to not think of it as 'neutral' in that it makes conscious the idea that it is a 'not-sensation'; this is a non-experience, an absense of sensation. Slow down, take the time to say 'not-painful-but-not-pleasant', you end up going much faster.

² aka: carnal 'samisam adukkha-m-asukham vedana'; samisam = with-meat or with-rice which was once called meat

Emptiness

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the Emptiness suttas¹. They demonstrate the method in absolutely unmistakable terms.

Read and re-read and think about them and diagram them and memorize them and work them out in your head.

Ask yourself "What is he saying about the value of these "Jhanas"?

What is he saying is the final state of one remaining here who has attained arahantship?

If you have been bothered by the noise coming from people talking about "The Void", these are the suttas on which this idea was first grounded.

Examine what it is that is being said: This is not talking about "attaining" any kind of "Void"! This is talking about living in the fullness of emptiness, empty of empty habits, not an empty habitat!

This is not talking about the "Ultimate Voidness of all Phenomena." In fact it is talking about exactly the reverse - that is that that which is connected with phenomena is Not Void; it is a disturbance of the emptiness - even down to the subtlest of subtle states: the plane of [neither-perception-nor-non-perception](#).

So then how do we end up?

We end up rattling around in this hardly even bound up anymore collection of sense organs and their reactions to phenomena until such time as this too is ready to be let go.

Read! Read this carefully! I am telling you this is important stuff!

V: With regard to Bhikkhu Thanissaro's "Lesser Emptiness", when the Buddha talks about the earth realm is he referring to the rupajhana states (1st - 4th burning?) achieved through absorption meditation or samatha?

I have never actually heard this term "earth realm". If one is speaking of "Earth" with a capital "E", or "The World" then this is included in what is called "rupa". Rupa = material, the having become a "thing" of things, the word meaning "light" or visible, and describing the essential nature of the phenomenological world as being made up of light.

When, in the Emptiness Sutta, the Buddha is speaking about focusing on earth, what is intended is "earth" (lower-case 'e'), "dirt", "ground" (these words are so fundamental, and have evolved into the 'grounds' of so many derivative concepts, that it is hard to use them to mean just what they are!) You will find the commentaries insisting that what is intended here is "The Earth Kasina" or concentration device, a round circle of earth used to focus the concentration such as "paying attention to breathing" is used to focus the attention. I do not think this is precisely correct. I think these "devices" are a later development, an artificial way of doing what is suggested here which is to just pay attention to the earth-like.

The idea here is not to suggest the gaining of any state, the idea is to suggest the "emptying-out" of the mind by limiting the focus to one idea (concentrating on one idea, he considers the mind "empty" of any other ideas — do not mistake this statement, as has been done by some schools, for a practice which has its focus on the process of emptying): the earth-element in things. One initially does this by looking at some dirt, focusing on the dirt. If there is to be any thinking going on, it should be about dirt. If you are going to look at something besides the dirt, look for the "solidity" or "material" property of the thing you are looking at. See everything as made of dirt.

By having brought your mind to focus down on dirt, what you will have done is gained nothing — there is nothing possible in the perception of dirt that was not present all along. What you will have done is eliminate from your mind all the stuff that is not concerned with the perception of dirt. This is the point.

After a while, the tamed, trained, educated student of the Aristocrats, a seeker, a little developed in mind, short of his intended goal, but one who lives preparing to throw off the yoke, the throwing off of which there is nothing better, learns to recognize earth as earth; recognizing earth as earth, he knows about earth; he learns not to think about earth, he learns not to think about earth in whatever way he used to think about earth, he

learns not to think in terms of "my" with regard to earth, he learns to take no delight in earth. How come? Because This Way, he has learned, this matter becomes fully understood by him (*MN 1*).

At this point or at any point from the start of this exercise, at the time he has found within himself an ease and sense of appreciation of the lack of disturbance this mental state has brought about, he has entered *The First jhana* (he is enjoying the peace and calm of solitude).

At the point when his inner dialog, his chattering and reminiscing about earth (thinking about) becomes still, this will have been his entering *The Second jhana*.

Going no further than this in terms of "devices or realms or objects of perception", if he found ease in *The Third Jhana* or Detachment in *The Fourth Jhana*, he would need to use devices or objects of concentration and such no more, but would, living in this state, simply do his duty by the collection of sense organs and their reactions to their stimuli that was once known to him as "my body" in "my world."

But if he did not find such Satisfaction, should he be one who is still clinging to "Pleasure-wishing", "Living" and "More Living"², he could go up by way of: Water, Firelight, Wind³, Beings, Gods, The Creator, God, The Radiant Beings, the Luminescent Beings, The Fruitful Beings, The UpAbove, The Realm of Space, The Realm of Consciousness, the Realm of No Thing There, the Realm of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception, Seeing, Hearing, Sensing, Knowing, Oneness, Multiplicity, The All and Nibbana⁴ or,

he could go up through the Third Burning, Fourth Burning, The Realm of Limitless Space, The Realm of Limitless Consciousness, The Realm of No Thing There, The Realm of Neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception, to the Ending of Perception and Sense Experience⁵,

Or he could do it by concentrating on the One idea: Food to its deepest roots and its broadest conception; or on the Two ideas, *nama* and *rupa*; or on the Three ideas, the three sensations; or on the Four ideas, the Four Noble Truths; or on the Five ideas, the Five Stockpiles of Existence; or on the Six ideas the Sixfold sense spheres; or on the Seven Ideas the Seven Dimensions of Wisdom; or on the Eight ideas, the Multi-Dimensional Aristocratic Way; or on the Nine Ideas, the Nine Habitats of Beings; or on the Ten Ideas, the Magga, or on all of the above,

Or you could take side trips through Magic Powers, the Divine
Eye and Recollection of Previous lives

Or from any point along the way, you could go straight to the Signless
Or to the Pointless
Or to the Empty

... and you would still need to come to the conclusion: This too was
confounded, made to become, subject to ending.

It's sort of like how hard is it for you to get a joke? How much
explanation/convincing, exactly, do you need, in order to see that

There Is Nothing At All There That Can Be Conceived of *In Any Way Whatsoever* "wherein is delight, wherein is content, but that from its changing and becoming otherwise there will not arise grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair." ?

V: And when the Buddha talks about the realms of limitless space, limitless consciousness, no thing there and not even perceiving non-perception is he referring to the arupajhana states also achieved through absorption meditation or samatha? Are these the 5th-8th burnings?

Yes

And when he talks about the state empty of greed, lust and ignorance, is he referring to a state achieved through vipassana, insight meditation or samatha?

This is actually another way of speaking about Nibbana, and if we must cast this in terms of vipassana and samatha, it requires both.

The state empty of greed, lust and ignorance will come about through a sequence that goes something like this (we need to be careful not to make an orthodoxy out of this):

- Book Knowledge
- Understanding the Book knowledge
- Putting the book knowledge into practice (calming down and review — the two words in Pali being Samatha and Vipassana — I am saying that "Vipassana" is not Insight, it is the work done that brings about insight, "Review", looking things over, thinking things over, thinking things through, especially: "This being, that is")

- Seeing (Dittha or Vijja, also (confusingly, I think, but very much as in English we can say a person 'knows' meaning that they have a basic understanding, and we can also say a person 'knows' meaning that they have a really complete understanding or picture) called 'Nana') things as they really are
- Wisdom (the wisdom to understand what is needed to be done based on what one sees);
more putting into practice in the form of Letting Go, and finally,
- Objective Detachment.

In the process of accomplishing this one will most probably (but not necessarily) have attained various states of brilliance, shining wit ("Knowing" or Jhana) and may well have been taken to various "Realms" both visible and purely mental. Or maybe not. It depends, as I said, on how stubborn, thick headed and mulish you are ... one is.

V: *And may I ask to what state is he referring in the end? Nibbana?*

This is a little confusing if we rely on the texts because they sometimes make Nibbana conditional and sometimes do not. I think, based on the Emptiness suttas we can say something like this: After everything has been understood and accomplished, as a consequence of the fact that "This Body — And/or everything else formerly considered "mine" such as material things, sensations, perceptions, the old personal world, and consciousness (the khandas), or bodies, sensations, emotions, or ideas (the satipatthanas) or the eye and sights, ear and sounds, nose and scents, tongue and tastes, body and touches, mind and ideas (the realm of the senses), or..." is not "One's Own", those things do not just "come to an end" because of this achievement. They rattle on. As long as they do so, the Arahant, being compassionate now by nature, does his duty by these things. His "emptiness" is obscured only to the extent of these things, but the Arahant would no longer be thinking "my" with regard to these things.

So one needs to put this state into a "category" insofar as conventional speech is concerned, and for that purpose, it is called "Nibbana with residue" or, sometimes "Nibbana with attachments" or, even, "Nibbana with something further to be done" and the state beyond that, when the last bit of what might by outsiders come to have been thought of as the living remainder of "so and so" has burnt itself out, done gone, finished up, is called "Final Nibbana" or "Pari-Nibbana".

V: My understanding to date regarding vipassana meditation is that jhana is not necessary or prerequisite or even possible in order to practice vipassana. In fact, I've often wondered how one can be in a higher jhana state which by definition is absent of vitakka and vicara and yet direct the mind towards investigation of phenomena?

I would partly agree with this. What looks like the source of confusion to you personally here is the reason I object to the term "Vipassana" being translated "Insight". If you think of the term as "Review" with "seeing" or "insight" following after, then the jhana states proper (except for the first burning, where vitakka and vicara are still going on) would not be possible while "Vipassana" was going on. The fact is though, that high levels of "Review" will occur just after emerging from the jhanas, and the jhanas themselves may become the subjects of Review (after emerging from them).

V: Can one conclude from this sutta that the Buddha is saying that achieving jhana is not what one should do, but rather one should concentrate on vipassana?

No and no. The Buddha is not making a value judgement concerning people's stubborn thickheaded, blind tom-foolery: if you need to go through to Neither Perceiving nor not Perceiving and beyond to see the trick, then that is what you should do. And vipassana is always simply a tool (to make it a goal *is* a mistake), however it is defined, and would not therefore be anything that one should do to the exclusion of anything else that might work. You are trying to let go, empty out, not cultivate some kind of mastery over a tool. And that holds for the Jhana states as well.

The Little Spell of Emptiness (MN 121)

I had the privilege once, of seeing this spell cast by a master of The Craft⁶.

The first thing you see, when you see one of these "suttas" done properly, is that what we do not get from the printed suttas, and what I think is another of the things holding back the understanding of this material today, is that these are like "scripts".

This is the idea for a "play". Scripted Events. A Formula. A Recipe. The words to a spell, but a spell that must be "cast" to bring out its meaning — meaning important in order to have any grasp on the tools being provided by the spell.

Today we hear about the oral tradition of peoples of South America and Africa and we are able to comprehend why the knowledge of their ages

was preserved in story form: it is easier to remember that way. We find it difficult to accept that we too are being spoon fed in such a similar way.

Our pride is of such huge and encompassing proportions that it fails to see the obvious: if this system were simply a collection of rules and pieces of information, the whole collection could be put in a one volume book (call it, say, The Abhidhamma — the Dhamma underneath the Dhamma; that is, if we got it right, which is something I am not ready to say about what is currently called the Abhidhamma). We need also to look at the *style*.

As the teacher casts the spell, he looks out over the listeners and is able to see them in terms of what they know. He will see masses of a certain color or such, and know that this bunch is all in agreement about this piece of knowledge — that bunch over there is not in agreement with that.

He will not make an assessment such as this in an intellectual way; he will react to how the subject matter makes him feel when it comes up... "Have I made myself clear?" he will ask himself... And he knows: "I have not made myself clear in regards to..."

He fills in the doubtful thoughts with explanation of details. Very similar to the "Commentaries" we have today, but these are bound in seamlessly to the content. It seems to the listener as though the progress from one (say, using the Little Emptiness Spell as an example: going from one "sphere" to the next) actually requires a step-wise progression of explanation.

The Teacher references common personal experiences to focus attention on the fact that the listener does, in fact, have experience in almost all cases; what the teacher does is see where his "knowledge" of a sphere is the same as the student's and indicate that they are referencing the same phenomena; he thereby "permits belief" in the experience as being the one being spoken about in the sutta. What the Teacher is doing is lifting, by these explanations, the entire listening audience into the experience being spoken of in the sutta: the plane of space, the plane of consciousness... etc.

In The Little Spell of Emptiness, what is happening is that Ananda is being led up to the "End of the World" (if a Beggar cleans out, tidies up and liberates his mind) at each step (sphere) along the way and also by way of the progression of spheres. At the top the two trails up meet

together at a summit. At this summit it is possible to view the way the "Signless" was constructed.

This has been a message conveyed over and over in the explanation leading from one sphere to the next: how the way there is constructed.

And there is, at this point at least, an opportunity for "realization" on the part of anyone in the audience, or at least, the teacher can bring the spell to a conclusion as he has done the best he can for that go-through.

At this place, also, it is possible to see the dimension and scope of the "staircase" used to arrive at this summit and one can see the real meaning of "The Fullness of Emptiness": this Emptiness is built on an all-encompassing foundation; it cannot be shaken.

I can hear someone out there in the audience say: "All you are describing is what is known as 'communicating'".

Exactly! These suttas are and are intended to be passed along as "communications". Not as dried up sticks and ashes.

*V: Can you give an example of the teacher referencing common personal experiences to focus attention on the fact that the listener has the experience?
And what does it mean to "permit belief"?*

Suppose you were a musician or painter and the teacher had knowledge that an experience you describe, of, say, becoming a detached observer of the creation of your work, and he were to recognize in this the characteristics of, say, the second burning (*ghana*).

He might say, "And, by letting go of Vitakka and Vicara, he enters on and lives in the second Burning; in much the same way that an inspired musician or painter, becoming a detached observer of the creation of his work has abandoned Vitakka and Vicara, and enters the second burning. That is the second burning you are experiencing there. Make note of that. Make note of how you attained this state, what prolonged it, what brought it to an end."

The person, at least for the moment, is given permission to consider that this state of which they have personal experience is the same as that described as the second burning. Given a moment or two like that, free from the need to doubt one's own accomplishments, one can view the experience in the light of it being the second burning and decide if it fits in with the rest of what one understands about the burnings and the system

If this is done over a longish series, there is a cumulative effect, the listener is just able to listen along and go to the next level as it is described without doubts or questioning (as the transition from the one state to the next will be being described in the commentary, from a level that relates to their common experience).

Again, this is no more than relating to the other person's experiences, except on a level where the person has largely avoided (or, more common, does not have the vocabulary to describe) conscious awareness of the experiences.

But the Buddha has said, and this can be pretty easily worked out for yourself, that there is virtually no experience of this world (other than birth in the Pure Abodes⁷) that one has not already, in this long running on, experienced sufficiently to allow for it to be let go of with no loss.

V: - *Excerpt from MN 121, Ven. Thanissaro trans.*

"He discerns that 'Whatever disturbances would exist based on the effluent of sensuality...the effluent of becoming... the effluent of ignorance, are not present. And there is only this modicum of disturbance: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.' He discerns that 'This mode of perception is empty of the effluent of sensuality ... becoming ... ignorance. And there is just this non-emptiness: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.' Thus he regards it as empty of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: 'There is this.' And so this, his entry into emptiness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, pure — superior & unsurpassed."

V: *So, the best kind of "emptiness" (ie. pure, superior & unsurpassed) is the mode of perception that is empty of the effluent of sensuality, becoming and ignorance? And by being empty of these three, it is therefore empty of the concept/idea of self? But it sounds like there are two things of which this mode is empty, ie. craving and self. Sounds to me like "sensuality and becoming" refer to "craving" (craving for the pleasures of the senses and craving for "self") and "ignorance" ie. ignorance in believing in a "self". Or is it all pertaining only to the concept of "self"?*

V: *Also, if you read the Sunna Sutta (below), it seems to be exclusively about "not-self".*

Then Ven. Ananda went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "It is said that the world is empty, the world is empty, lord. In what respect is it said that the world is void?"

"Insofar as it is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self: Thus it is said, Ananda, that the world is empty. And what is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self? The eye is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Forms ... Eye-consciousness ... Eye-contact is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self.

"The ear is empty ...

"The nose is empty ...

"The tongue is empty ...

"The body is empty ...

"The intellect is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Ideas ... Intellect-consciousness ... Intellect-contact is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Thus it is said that the world is empty."

- SN 4.35.85, Ven. Thanissaro trans.

I hear this question as: "Is being empty of wanting, becoming, and blindness the same as being empty of self?" And the answer to that is "yes".

I think the problem in seeing this clearly from this quote comes in with the translation of the word "*asava*" as "effluent". This word means "to flow" as with sap or an infected wound and is usually translated by me as "the no-goods". With this translation it is possible to hear this as saying that the "ignorance" is one thing and the "effluent of ignorance" is another thing (I don't think that is what the translator had in mind, but that is how the words can be read).

What is being said here is that the highest emptiness is one that is free of ignorance, etc; with the idea that the wanting, etc. can be one thing and the *asava* of the wanting can be another; there is a subject (perceiver), verb (effluent), object (wanting) relationship implied which hides a subtle belief in self.

Ignorance (*avijja* — blindness), in this system, is always stated as the ignorance of the **Four Truths** or the equivalent (as opposed to being stated as being possessed of a belief in self). Understanding the Four Truths one understands not that "Once there was a self and now there is no self"; but that there was never anything there that was the self of one from the beginning.

So, effectively, an emptiness free of ignorance is an emptiness free of ideas of self. It is really just two ways of describing the same thing.

*V: Using the example of "wanting" in lieu of "ignorance", can it also be said that an emptiness free of wanting is an emptiness free of self? Is this because without self, wanting cannot exist? Or without wanting, self cannot exist? If the "root" is *tanha*, then it seems that one should work on an emptiness free of "wanting", then self cannot exist? I hope i'm not getting caught up in a tangle of views all over again.*

Essentially getting rid of blindness (I think this is a better word than ignorance; one can be ignorant, then read about the Four Truths and no longer be ignorant, but not be much better off; but if one goes from ignorance of the Four Truths to seeing the Four Truths you have gone somewhere), gets rid of wanting and becoming (we are talking about the state of having totally eliminated blindness, the state of the arahant... one can "see" the four truths and still not quite have eliminated all blindness — that is to say in the way it is applied to every aspect and detail of living) ... remember the second truth is the truth of the origin of pain, and the third truth is the way to end becoming.

You don't want to get caught up in trying to "trace back the origin of the world" (your effort to determine which is first, *tanha* or self). It is circular, a chicken and egg sort of thing. But when pressed one time, the Buddha did say that the beginning point is *tanha*.

In any case, using the emptiness technique, one does not focus on either *tanha* or self, one focuses on a progression of ever more narrow perceptions of the world.

¹ *Editor's note* : MN 121, 122, and more resources at http://buddhadust.net/backmatter/indexes/idx_sunnata_resources.htm

² The *asavas*
(<http://buddhadust.net/backmatter/glossology/glossology/asavas.htm>)

³ With "Earth", [The Four Great Elements](#)

(http://buddhadust.net/backmatter/glossology/glossology/maha_dhatu.htm)

⁴ For this list of terms see: [Examination of the Mulapariyaya](#)

(http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/bd_dhammatalk/dhamma_talk/examiningthemulapariyaya.htm)

⁵ This is a standard progression found throughout the suttas. To study it in detail work through [The Pali Line](#) from [High Get'n High](#) to the End. (http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/the_pali_line/course/highgetnhigh.htm#PartIII)

⁶ OK, let's just say that he was pretty good for this day and age.

⁷ For the purposes of this discussion this can be considered to be that knowledge and experience attainable from listening to a Buddha or a Buddha's disciple — such knowledge and experience one may not have experienced previously.

Keep on trucking

Observing Uposatha

So far this little venture into the practice of Observing Uposatha has been one of the most interesting actual "puttings into practice" of the Dhamma that I have experienced in a long time.

The last time I seriously "went at it", was in the early 80s when I first started to put together the materials that you see on these pages. It was my thinking at that time that the thing America needed most was a book. A bible. There was nothing of any manageable size out there. So I let my business go and spent my time between sit down practice and attempting to codify the system. I also included the practice of observing Uposatha.

The benefits to me of observing Uposatha at that time were in the area of understanding the hold food has on us. Not working, I eventually ran out of money completely. I am still surprised by the length of time it took me to run out of money... even in New York City, I lasted four years without work, and I didn't start out with any saved cash. But eventually I ended up face-to-face with the fact that I relied totally on the good deeds of a few people who looked in on me now and again.

My rent was paid for, for a time, by a good friend who was a business associate who still found my advice valuable; another good friend came to visit once a week with a good meal, other people managed to slip me some food now and again, my Mother (who did not know what was happening) decided to share a small inheritance between myself and my brother and that was a life-saving \$100 a month. A friend who had been in Auschwitz told me that at that time I looked like one of the survivors.

It was harrowing, and humiliating; but what I learned could not be put down in words in a million books. We eat salt and sweet (you need a piece of fast food chicken and a danish with butter to survive). The Greeks who run the all night breakfast places in New York, and who are a grumpy lot at best, suddenly become the warmest people in the world when they see you are in poverty. I saw a beggar go into a high class Deli and ask for a piece of cheesecake and when he saw that he was going to get it, demand in a loud voice: "And Make it Fresh! Too!" and I totally understood! It wasn't a Buddhist thing to do, but I did understand the anger and confusion the man was undergoing, and the resentment of "God" and the world for his plight and the way he was being treated because of it. When you are hungry you go to bed early and you get up very early... the Deli opens at 3:00 you can get a coffee and a danish; so you get up at two to wait for three. When you get lucky, if you're not careful and moderate

you eat carelessly and shortly thereafter need to deal with the runs (for a great read along these lines, read "Hunger" by Knut Hamsun).

The problems getting food were not the worst of it: for me the worst of it was seeing how far I would go to get a cup of coffee. I was a Buddhist, but I was a layman. I had the proverbial stick on fire at both ends and smeared with dung in the middle... no good no way. I completely feared actually "begging" because I understood even then the concept of "worthy". I could see that people worked to keep from experiencing what I was experiencing, but that this work that they did was keeping them from experiencing the benefits of what I was seeing: the world from the bottom of the barrel where everything is right side up. To be "worthy" to beg from people making such effort and experiencing such sacrifice, one needed to be almost completely perfect in behavior and working on what wasn't. I could see the Gates of Hell right there next to that cup of coffee. So I didn't beg. But boy did I learn to "signify"!

I learned why the Bhikkhu is a beggar and not a monk. It is the "position" that is important; of the lowest occupation: it is only there that you see the way the people really are.

It's like the story of the king in the story of the Arabian Nights. The king wants to see what the people really think of him. He goes out at night disguised as a poor man and hears what they really have to say.

Sakka, King of the Gods, is said, when he Revisits, to assume the shape of a beggar (a bum). There is one theory out there that hypothesizes that it is this myth of Sakka Revisiting that is the story being Re-enacted by Gotama. I happen to agree with this theory.

And I learned to rely on my Kamma. The Power is never stronger than when one is really in need.

This my Jamaican Sorcerer friend told me: you need to "call" on your Kamma. When you are hungry, you learn to "call". And if you have been prudent, and have listened to those wise ones who were instructing you when you were a blind fool, you built up some strong good kamma in giving to powerful individuals and making it a goal to become a Master Giver, and you then learn to trust this past work to take care of you... and when, on occasion, it lets you sit and suffer, you trust that too: it ends; it is the ending of some bad kamma.

And, of course, I learned why Food, AHARA, is #1¹.

Eventually what I needed to learn from that course of action had, apparently, been learned, and, just sort of as a capper, the day before I was to be evicted from my apartment in New York with nowhere else to go (my business friend who had been paying my rent was long before driven off by me as had almost everyone else ... at the point where my "balance of payments" with them was just about to go seriously out of kilter...) a friend of mine called my mother and explained that I was in serious need of a rescue mission.

In all, I spent one night homeless (even what happened during that one night would fill books).

This time, the lesson Uposatha observance seems to be teaching me is the hold sleep has on us.

I am encouraging everyone to take advantage of this technique. I believe I have earned the right to claim that I am suggesting a good technique from experience of it. What I think I also need to say here, and the reason for this long shpiel, is that in urging you-all to practice this practice, I am not, at the same time, making any claims to being perfect at it myself. I am in the "strategizing against my weaknesses" stage. And I know from experience with this stage that there will be a long period of back-and-forth — do'n good down here, Boss!; Not do'n so good down here, Boss!

What I can say about sleep at this point, is that even in practicing at the sloppiest level one emerges for the better.

These are the big three for laymen: food, sleep and sex. I think it is necessary, both with ourselves and with others who are interested in making progress in this system, to urge total, unflinching 100% dedicated effort, and to be completely tolerant of failure.

OK?

Work'n on it down here, Boss!

"Put on Hold"

V: *Anyone who has had to literally "watch what they eat" all their lives, knows the hold that food has on a person on a day to day basis (not to the extent that I'm sure you're referring to, but the "pull" is very noticable. In fact, I've often found that eating nothing is much easier than eating a little.) I'm wondering though, what is the significance of knowing this? I can understand the practice of abstinence, letting go in the "here and now" of sorts, but what is the purpose of knowing that these things have a hold?*

You are specifically asking about knowing about the "hold".

Even if one were to just practice this practice for only so short a time as it takes to snap the fingers, and one were to notice this "hold", the fear of the unknown future should wake them up to the fact that they had better learn how to lessen this hold.

I mentioned the hard lesson of seeing first hand to what lengths I would go to get a cup of coffee: I have been working on my coffee addiction ever since². Some person living the fat and happy middle class American life who was suddenly wiped out by a stock market crash and faced with homelessness and hunger would have a thousand thousand times less to worry about if he had trained himself to eat just sufficiently to sustain the body as opposed to indulging in the pleasures of eating. Knowing about the hold, you are able to ask yourself: what are the dangers that such a hold poses to one suddenly faced with the situation where food is hard to come by?

And then, again, you can tie this into a hopeful future as a Buddhist: knowing about the hold, one can prepare for the day when one might make the transition from the lay life to the life of the Bhikkhu where one meal a day is the standard, and that meal is whatever is put into the bowl, no picking and choosing... if you had practiced this before hand, it would be one less thing that would be interfering with the opportunity you had gained by becoming a bhikkhu.

V: The one time I actually did make it through the entire night without falling asleep was one of the worst nights I'd ever spent. If I read or meditated, I got very sleepy, so I couldn't do either, which left for one very loooong night. (I paced a lot to stay awake) How does one emerge for the "better" from this?

Because one is able to notice the hold, and, hopefully, rise to the challenge.



One over-all note with regard to this practice. I think it is significant that the day the Buddha chose to use for his "Observance" day was the preparation day of the soma ceremony. Emphasis on "preparation". The idea of such "cleansing" rituals (u aposa taka batha) was to prepare one for the effects of some kind of hallucinogenic drug. Food and such in the body prior to the taking of such chemicals distort the experience (not to mention usually cause intense vomiting or, at the least nausea). So here

the point is not to be looking for any benefits during the observance, but to be looking at how the practice has affected the time thereafter.

¹ *Editor's note:* more about ahara at

http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/the_pali_line/course/gradualnidana.htm#ahara

² One cup in the morning, black with 1T sugar as of: Friday, March 14, 2003

One cup in the morning, black with 2T sugar as of: Tuesday, February 16, 2010 6:04 AM ... hum ...

I have found as a general rule, if I am faced with a letting go that is not a matter of breaking a rule, it is much more difficult to let go than when what is being let go is also something not allowed.

Understanding understanding (Part I)

Understanding, Not Blind Acceptance

Preface

This comes from a long discussion, one of the first that appeared on the BuddhaDust Forum when there was a public forum. For presentation, here in this section the dialog has been severely edited to remove extraneous detail — the issues themselves were hard enough to follow! In addition to editing the materials as originally presented, certain clarifying statements have been made and certain of "A's" own statements have been edited to more clearly state his case. This makes this dialog a bit "unreal," but hopefully more helpful to the reader coming on this cold. This issue was not successfully resolved. A is still, as of this writing, working on his understanding as he has been doing for the more than 40 years I have known him. The fact that he continues 'at it' puts him way out ahead of the pack in my book.



A: I am beginning to like the Alice-in-Wonderland feel of it as I plunge into this material that is for me both utterly convincing and, seemingly, utterly beyond my willingness at this time to accept.

I ask myself: How can something be both convincing — "utterly" so — and yet not convincing enough, in fact so much so that I felt just as strongly about not being able to assent as I was about the compelling arguments to assent?

As a beginner who has dabbled (I admit this has to be part of my difficulty) with the Buddhist teachings over many years, I am now asking myself what is it that keeps me dabbling, interested, accepting but not accepting? What is it, exactly — as exactly as I can make it exact — that allows me to say I am totally convinced by the Dhamma but totally unconvinced that it can be the total answer.

The problem, as I see it, is the conflict within me between head and heart; the head saying one thing and the heart saying another.

My head tells me yes, the arguments are convincing and I am convinced — in the head.

But the heart/feelings/intuitive mind/self, Self-I-don't-know-what tells me 'no', 'it's not so'. It can not be so. It can not be that "The All" is Dukkha — I guess one would have to say that I simply refuse to see myself, as included in the all, as just Dukkha — that nothing has a purpose beyond what seems like the one purpose of getting out of the Dukkha as quickly as possible, that what is real is only the realization that nothing's real (but how then does one exclude the realization itself from being equally unreal?'), that we are just aggregates colliding with other aggregates in a shadowland with no substance.

Will the difficulty I'm having with the very first of the Noble Truths² prejudice my understanding to the extent that it will be impossible for me to accept or maybe even understand anything else?

Or will my suspension of disbelief, as much as I'm capable of doing this, and I'm not sure I can, concerning this First Truth, allow me to understand enough of other matters so that the truth underlying this Truth becomes, finally, clear and acceptable?

I am willing to accept, must accept — for sanity's sake — whatever is clearly and convincingly shown to be so. Head and heart, though I see them as different faculties/powers, need to work together.

Is there a particular approach that can be used in studying the material that would help one who is having difficulty in accepting, and most likely not understanding, the very first step?

First of all let me say that just on an intellectual basis, if what the Buddha is saying is correct, then the problem we are dealing with here is **The Most Difficult Problem of All** to grasp. What is the order of the day, therefore, is congratulations and encouragement to anyone who is making an effort to understand.

I mention this not just to encourage you, but because it is a vital part of the solution to the problem to recognize that life without complete knowledge of what is going on in life is not worth living (or at least is a very risky proposition). That the first priority of the living is to answer these important questions:

Why isn't Everything going Exactly the way I want it to?

Why must there be *any* Pain at all?

Why must we die?³

— and here I am talking about "knowing for one's self" not accepting the word of another that it's OK because this is the way God intended it to be, or some such.

You have done a lot of the groundwork in even bringing yourself to the realization that you are of two minds about the situation. The phenomena of finding yourself having two extreme and opposing positions with regard to the Dhamma is a familiar one, and one which would be expected if what the Buddha says is true: **if there were only the one side or the other to hold the mind captive, there would be no problem.**

So, having made yourself aware of "doubt", what is the logical next step?

Each extreme must be made to answer to the arguments of the other extreme.

Here, in broad brushstrokes is what I propose as needed arguments at each end of the spectrum of your doubt:

On the side where the emotions rule, where you see the joys of life and are firmly convinced that the Dhamma must be wrong and that there must be some answer that acknowledges the truth of the Goodness of life and the transcendence of the human spirit; the mind must be brought to deal with the hard realities.

Try to think of the situation of the hard-core drug addict. Drugs are drugs not because they are the unpleasant experiences that the authorities would like people to believe that they are. I have had very little experience with heroin, but I have been told by people who were addicts that there is no more pleasurable experience in the world. There is no getting such an individual to stop by telling him that what he is doing is wrong and is entirely evil. He knows better. And yet, in the end, he will have gained nothing but passing pleasure and will have piled up a mass of un-dealt-with pain. And what will have been the source of that pain? It will have been his desire for that pleasant experience of that drug.

On the side where the intellect rules, where you see the logic and force of argument of this system, try to remember that what is being said here is that there *is* an answer. This is not just an: "it's all shit and you're stuck with it" story.

The All is in Pain! But "You are not that All". That is the message.

The Buddha is teaching a method for the **ending** of Dukkha, Pain. Just because the logical outcome is not stated in terms of great pleasure to be experienced by the individual does not mean that a sort of great happiness is not the goal: What do you imagine the situation to be that is entirely and completely without Pain?

A: Thanks for the reassuring words. I needed to hear that my difficulty was not unique with me.

You asked: "What do you imagine the situation to be that is entirely and completely without pain?" I would have to say that I don't know what it would be like. In searching for experiences I've had that could tell me something about what it would be like, those that come closest to a pain-free experience would be those that were deeply peaceful (am I making a distinction without a difference?), with a sense of being content, fully content with that moment — and not knowing why or even caring why. Those moments, experienced by most at one time or another, would necessarily be moments, it seems to me, where all wants have either temporarily disappeared for whatever reason or been temporarily satisfied. These moments seem to correlate with the dropping of wanting more than what we have at any given time. Not wanting more than it is possible to get at any given time seems to be the key. A recent book put it somewhat like this: want what you get rather than making the effort to get what you want. Does this eliminate pain? I don't know, but it probably would eliminate some. But I would have to say, again, that I don't know the answer to your question.

Moments where all wants have disappeared is pure Buddhism. Period. That's Nibbana.

A: Would you clarify what is meant by "You are not that All"? I was surprised to hear this. I guess this is because I have yet to fully grasp the "no self" teaching.

What is meant by the statement: "You are not that All" is:

There is the eye and sight and the contact of the two,
arising from that is perception, sensation and consciousness.
Implanting into that the idea that it is "I" that is the one that is seeing,
or that what is seen is in some way "Mine"
is the process of identification⁴ which completes the illusion that is the
basis for forming the concept of "myself";
the same process occurs with the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.
This is what is known as "The All" because outside of this there is
nothing that can be said to "be."

It is said that "You are not that All" because there is nothing in this that
can be said to be the self of you in anything other than conventional ways
of speech⁵.

This All is not the Self of You.

The Self of You is not "in" this All.

The Self of you does not have this All in It.

You are not some derivative of this All.

And this is not saying that you do not exist (but you didn't ask that).

A: When you say that "...if what the Buddha is saying is correct, the problem we are dealing with here is the Most Difficult Problem of All to grasp," are you referring to anyone who attempts to grasp/know it? Or are you referring only to those who are blinded by worldly concerns and defilements?

Here I am speaking both in terms of understanding the Dhamma specifically and I am speaking in terms of ordinary reality. Somehow in the world everyone has the idea that living comes first and then, if at all, understanding why one is living, where, even using the logic of the ordinary world it would seem that to squeeze the essence from living, one should have a perfect grasp (even a good grasp would do) of what that essence was.

But almost nobody does that, so it must be difficult!

And then we have the case of those who do understand the importance of the inquiry: for them there is constantly slipping from one extreme point of view to the other, so difficult is it to grasp the idea that it is holding on to points of view that is the root of the problem!

V: *This is an interesting conflict, ie. the "head" vs the "heart", because I believe the "two" are one and the same thing⁶. I've spent (and still do spend) a lot of time exploring my own emotions and have discovered that "my emotion" always begins in the mind. My body may react as a result, for example, like tears welling in the eyes, but I have found it all starts with a thought of pleasure or aversion in "my" mind.*

And with regard to your objection to the idea that nothing has a purpose beyond getting out of the Dukkha as quickly as possible, isn't that what everybody tries to do anyway? Tries to get out of the "Dukkha" as quickly as possible? The problem is that almost everybody tries to get out of the Dukkha by grasping at the pleasurable things of this world, only to find that they don't last either.

But could it be that it is not so much that the "world" is Dukkha that is a problem for you, but perhaps the idea of "not-self" is the real issue with which you are struggling and unable to accept? I ask this because of your comment "that what is real is only the realization that nothing's real (but how then can one exclude the realization itself from being equally unreal?), that we are just aggregates colliding with other aggregates in a shadowland with no substance."

Is that what is (as you put it) "for me both utterly convincing and, seemingly, utterly beyond my willingness at this time to accept."? Just a thought.

A: *Thanks for your insight. I do think that the "not self" idea, as you suggested, is very much a part of my struggle to understand the teachings. I do not see it, however, as being the only hard truth for me. The "Dukkha" idea I find, in some ways, even more baffling, but they both are contenders for top spot in my "don't understand" file.*

Let me try to explain my difficulty with the "not self" idea. If what is meant by that is that the self I normally identify with is not real, is constantly changing and not permanent, even though I usually think and feel that it is real, unchanging and permanent, I can say to that, yes; I've experienced what to me seems like the truth of that "not self." It's the additional denial, if I understand this correctly, that there is anything there that can be called a self/ Self which transcends the individual self that I have mistakenly identified with, that I have found hard to accept.

I find the idea itself (of self and not self) confusing. Even before the attempt to understand, I'm not sure what it is I'm trying to understand.

In Hinduism, they have the Atman idea and this is rejected, I believe, by Theravadins but accepted in some fashion by other Buddhists, mostly in the Mahayana.

Somewhat further confusing for me was a remark of Michael's that the anatta idea does not mean No Self, but means that there is nothing there that can be called a self. If by this is meant there is no individual self, then is this not the same view as the Hindu view which believes in a universal self shared by all. But since the "not self" idea is often said to be the most difficult to grasp, I suspect that something more, or something less, or maybe something entirely different from the Atman idea is meant here⁷.

As important as the "not self" idea is in my attempts to understand, the "Dukkha" idea is also, I think, a big part of the difficulty. The two ideas are clearly related, and maybe, if the "not self" was less of a problem, more clearly seen, the "Dukkha" problem would cease to be a problem.

V: *I believe that there are two issues here that are causing confusion.*

The first is that perhaps there is confusion as to exactly what is "The All"? Please correct me if this is a wrong assumption.

Here is a quote from footnote #6 from the Mulapariyaya (Thanissaro translation) which may help explain what is meant by "The All"...

| "What is the All?
| Simply the eye & forms,
| ear & sounds,
| nose & aromas,
| tongue & flavors

body & tactile sensations,
intellect & ideas.

This is termed the All.

Anyone who would say, 'Repudiating this All, I will describe another,' if questioned on what exactly might be the grounds for his assertion, would be unable to explain, and furthermore, would be put to grief. Why is that? Because it lies beyond range." — SN XXXV.23"

Given that "The All" is as stated above, then your comment "I simply refuse to see myself, as included in the all, as just Dukkha", seems to me to indicate that you in fact do think that there is something in "The All" that is you. This is the second issue that seems to me is causing confusion, the idea that there is a "self" in "The All".

A: *Yes, there is a confusion as to exactly what is "The All." And I think my confusion here about the self stems from my confusion about The All.*

If The All, as stated above, is The All (and not some other possibility) then yes, I am forced to admit that there must be something in that All that is the self of me. I cannot not admit this. The sense of "I am" is, rightly or wrongly, so real to me that I must acknowledge that this "I am-self" exists, must exist in some [way with regard to the] All, whether in the All described above or in some other All.

It would be easier for me if I could separate these two issues into two questions: What is the All, and What is the Self? Would not the answer to either question determine or at least greatly influence the answer to the other? I will begin with the All question.

If by The All is meant the All of what can be known by eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and intellect, then yes, I do see myself in this All. It is a self that is sorrow and pleasure ridden, fearful and full of doubts, constantly changing, a self of a thousand faces. It is a self I claim as mine, thinking it to be as permanent and as real as I feel myself to be, even though, or in spite of, the changes I clearly experience⁹.

No, I do not see "my" self in this All. [Mine] is a self without concern for either sorrow or pleasure, without fear or doubt, never changing, a self with no face. (This occasionally though infrequently has been my experience in meditation and, I believe, is the experience of most meditators¹⁰.)

If by The All is meant the All of what can be known by other than eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and intellect (which possibility seems to be denied by the material) then there needs to be some clarification, it seems to me, concerning what is meant by "there is something" and by "that is you." The best I have been able to come up with, right now, is that either something identifies with the objects in this All world, and suffers, sometimes rejoices, with the varied play of the objects in my particular, personalized All

world; or something occasionally identifies not with the objects in this All world but with nothing at all, with no thing that has been described above as being part of The All world. There does seem to be a yes and a no regarding the self, depending on whether something identifies or does not identify with the All as described.

In other words, is there not two "somethings" here, but one something manifesting in two different ways? One way, seemingly, does not identify with the All described; is this the self usually described as the Higher Self, Self with a Cap S, the Universal Self, the Atman, Pure Consciousness, Buddha Nature, as well as other names that could be named that might in some minds carry the same meaning but be repudiated by the more orthodox, such as Holy Spirit or Christ Consciousness in Christianity. And is the other way — the way that does identify with the All — usually described as the small self, with a lower case s, the ego self, the unawakened self, the individual self, and maybe even the suffering and blind self?

I don't know if it's best to stick to just asking questions or whether in a case where I am totally unclear about something, which is the case here, I should attempt to frame that confusion by showing what I do think I understand. I do think it best that I await your suggestions about this before continuing on.

Just strictly as a matter of historical interest, in such a situation as this, what would have been done in the old days would have been nothing at this point. It would be up to A to ask me to answer. It might have happened that the situation would come up in conversation at a later time, and the Buddha might have said something like: "Well, had A asked me this question, this is the way I would have responded." So (and making no comparisons of myself with the Buddha!) this is what I would have answered had the question been asked of me:

This is where the two roads diverge: Are you going to rely on what you cannot know for yourself or are you going to rely on what you can know and see for yourself?

To conclude that one must rely on what one cannot know and see for one's self because there is a logical possibility that there is what cannot be known and seen for one's self is to deny the possibility that one is able to save one's self, to bring Pain/Dukkha to an end through one's own efforts.

This is to deny that there has ever been one out there who was Arahant or "Buddha", awakened to the truth, one who knows and sees for himself, and to say that those who have said that "One can know and see for one's self," are speaking untruth.

This is to claim to know that anyone else who has claimed to know the answer is wrong.

This is to put one's self above others and to put others below one's self, and is, in effect, to state that one, one's self knows the answer which is contradictory to the stand one is one's self taking.

All this seems to my mind like a very dangerous position to be holding.

This is also a stand that is specifically refuted by the Buddha as not being conducive to effort at self improvement, not to mention the fact that it leaves one in despair.

This is a system which depends on one premise: an individual, by way of effort, can know and see for himself. If this is not a proposition on which you can rely, then this is not a system for you.

This is a deep teaching, difficult to understand, but not impossible to understand, and not impossible to understand before one is able to achieve its purpose.

What is not difficult to understand about this teaching (in spite of it being known by us primarily through translations) is that it says what it means: When the word "All" is used, the word means all. All is everything. Everything means everything. There is nothing outside of everything that is a something.

When it is said that "There is, in this All, No Thing that is the Self of one (Atman, soul, true self, Buddha Nature, The One, Merger with Brahma, or stated in any other way - whether a distinct phenomena or a co-founding of various elements)" that is what it means.

When it is said that it is *not* the case that there is *no* self, that is what it means.

This is how this is to be understood:

The Concept "Self" (or in a similar way "existing") is an idea that depends on Point of View.

The ordinary man takes a look at his body or his mind (usually, sometimes his sense experiences, sometimes his emotions — see The *Satipatthana* for these) and says: It's obvious that there is a self there.

The scientist takes a look at the molecular structure down to atoms and sub atomic particles and even beyond and can find in there no self and comes to the conclusion: There is No Self¹¹.

For one who sees the scientific point, there can be no coming to the conclusion that there is a self, for one who sees the common view there can be no coming to the conclusion that there is no self.

So this is dealt with Here, In This System, This Way: There Is a Middle Way (This is *not* a term intended to imply moderation¹²):

This comes to be as a consequence of That,
as a consequence of the coming to an end of That, This Ends.

Working backwards from the observable fact of death: one sees:

- Were there no Birth there would be no Death.
- Were there no Living there would be no Birth.
- Were there no Coming to Be there would be no Living
- Were there no Effort to come to Be there would be no Coming to be.
- Were there no Desire there would be no Effort to come to be
- Were there no Sense Experiences there would be no Desire
- Were there no Contact of Sense Organ with Object of Sense there would be no Sense Experience
- Were there no joining up of Mind and Matter there would be no Sense Organs
- Were there no Consciousness by Self there would be no joining up of Mind and Matter
- Were there no Identification of Self with Anything at all there Would be no Consciousness by Self
- Were there no Blindness as to where it would end up, there would be no Identification of Self with anything at all.

So seeing one is repelled by Points of View and one abandons's ones downbound angry ways, wantings and depression and Letting Go of

Argument and Contention and Wrestling with Views, and forgoing triumph in victory and humiliation in defeat, and Letting Go of the Fear and Trembling grounded in the false security of reliance on the promises of others, one Rises *up* Downbound by Nothing At All In the World.

This is freedom.

And in freedom seeing freedom, one knows "This is being free."

and one knows:

Rebirth has been left behind!

The Best Life Has been Lived.

Done is Duty's Doing.

No More It'n and At'n (being any kind of an "it" at any place of "at-ness")
For Me!

This is what is meant when the Buddha says that "Any Beggar, Beggars, who comes along saying, 'Putting aside that All, I will show you another All,' would be unable to do so and, furthermore would find himself over the Abyss.

Any person who came along saying: "I will enter into a reasonable, rational discussion with you," and then, faced with a reasonable, rational conclusion with which they disagree, resorted to the irrational and unreasonable; about such a person — seeing this situation as it really is — a person could rightly conclude that they are just faced with Mara trying to entrap them in confusion.

A: I certainly will admit to my confusion, and to feeling very much under the sway of Mara. I also think that my thinking may have been irrational and unreasonable, though of course it was meant to be rational and reasonable. I cannot agree, however, with the view that I disagreed with anything. It may have appeared that way because of my unskilled dialectic or because, though having no answers that are my own, I often bring up answers — not my own, I want to emphasize — to better understand the answers being discussed. They are not meant to be used to counter any position or way of knowing but to allow me to see where the new position or way of knowing fits into what I do know about, not with what I agree with. I have to admit, even here, the possibility that maybe to the discerning understanding I was unconsciously disagreeing with some of the material. If that is the case, then I need to work on seeing that. But I need to state again that at least on the conscious level, there are no answers with which I agree, and therefore none from which I disagree.

A: I would like to clarify my understanding of what it means to "argue the case of the doubter." How does one properly respond in a dialogue where the goal is to understand the truth?

I see two issues here: one concerns the method of resolving doubt by means of asking questions; the second concerns the method of resolving doubt by means of "arguing the case of the doubter."

I can see that the best method of resolving doubts when one is in doubt concerning the specifics of the other's position is to ask questions (using statements only as they relate to those questions, to clarify, when necessary, the intent of the questions), and then to evaluate the answers given; and to continue the questioning and evaluating process until one has understood, or thinks one has understood, and then accept or reject or suspend judgment. Until this happens, I can see that there is no good reason to argue the case of the doubter. I see that is what I was doing and I thank you for pointing this out. I was clearly making statements in support of a contrary position, when I had yet to understand the initial position.

But do I understand you to mean that it is always wrong — less suited to the task at hand — to argue the case of the doubter? (By doubter, I have in mind someone who, while doubting, is affirming something in opposition to what is being doubted.) Is it never appropriate to weigh together any number of understandings in order to see which one is most weighty and convincing?

I think the question of whether or not to take an opposing position in a debate depends on the context and whether or not one is, in fact, a doubter (are you debating facts or ideas?). Venerable Punnaaji, in a debate some time ago made statements in opposition to those of the Pope. The Pope, by making certain statements in public, had invited rebuttal. The Pope had made certain factual and conceptual errors and it was proper that the true facts be stated. But Ven. Punnaaji in this case, had no doubt.

But even in the case where one is sure of one's position, the strongest method of debate will be to ask the opponent questions until he is driven to a point where the um . . . "fallibility". . . of his position is clear to anyone with intelligence¹³.

Weighing together the number of understandings on an issue in order to see which one is most weighty and convincing is, essentially, meditation, thinking things over. Spoken, it becomes idle talk, and is a waste of other people's time, or is a subtle, perhaps subconscious, argument and contention.

A: *Are you saying also that it is impossible for someone to argue the case of the doubter, the case of any opposing position, without taking that position as one's own? There is, then, no playing devil's advocate simply to bring all the points of an argument, especially the most contrary ones, to the table? Is this approach never necessary, never*

worthwhile, or even possible as you pointed out in my case without becoming Mara's accomplice?

This is the risk: the mind is organized around its ideas, points of view. To debate a point of view is essentially to threaten the existence (speaking conventionally here!) of the one with whom one is debating. Should one successfully argue one's case, one will have lead another (and here, maybe more than one or two) in their direction. One could do this irresponsibly or responsibly; fooling around, or with conviction. To argue the opposing case in a case where the opposing case is not even believed in by one's self, even if for the sake of clarification for one's self is to ignore the risks to others and therefore would be to be debating irresponsibly. (To dislodge someone from the point of view on which they are grounded without providing a substitute position on which to ground themselves, is essentially to cast them into oblivion, at least temporarily... for the millisecond it will take them to find another point of view onto which to cling.)

So essentially the answer is that it is not possible to responsibly neither take the position as one's own or to be arguing the case of Mara — it's one or the other. The furthest I can see one might go along these lines would be to be putting the opposing statements in the form of hypotheticals or hypothetical questions.



What we have here is an issue that is nicely dealt with using your own idea of a Greater Self and a Lesser Self.

In this system we have what I would call a lesser conscious self and a fully conscious self (speaking in conventional terms!). The lesser conscious self being less conscious not because of the absence of consciousness but because of the presence of masses of wrong ideas. For me there is no question that your "greater self" is well motivated and sincere. Where the devil steps in is when you go from having doubt about a thing and asking questions until that doubt is resolved, to arguing the case of the doubter.

It is a common situation here that a learner, going from the situation of the ordinary individual to crossing beyond points of view about self does so in stages.

First there may be a dramatic breakthrough or there may only be an almost imperceptible breakthrough then there follows what can be a very long time of wavering between seeing and not seeing until the not-self view finally prevails. During the periods of doubt, this individual will continue to "feel" as though there is a self somewhere there.

But here we do not rely on "feelings" as the verification of a thing. Feelings can be seen to be unreliable, and the truth they might verify cannot be seen for one's self. Therefore, to argue that without being able to see it for one's self, one should accept the testimony of the feelings, is to argue the case of the irrational and unreasonable and is just simply Mara attempting to delude.

If there were an ultimate A there, at this point we could say "A is", but these arguments and such *not* being the A of A, we do not say "A is Mara," we say that Mara was manifesting himself through A's arguments. Hearing these arguments, we can conclude that Mara is standing before us at that time.

A: I think that it is reasonable for some, maybe most, to rely on some authority that they can trust if they believe that they will not be able or willing to know and see for themselves.

It may be a fact that people will rely on authority, but that does not make it reasonable, and I would say that anyone capable of making the evaluation that they are not able or willing to know and see for themselves has already proven the opposite case.

A: For myself, I will take the "road less traveled": I am going to rely on what I can know and see for myself. And if I cannot do this to my satisfaction, then I probably will rely on what I cannot know and see for myself. Or I will do something else.

Well the reasonableness of this position depends on the criteria you set for your satisfaction. For me not knowing, in the face of someone telling me that knowing is possible is a challenge that could be backed down from only after having thoroughly comprehended the position of the challenger and having dismissed it, thoroughly knowing it to be nonsense. Death is going to be the victor here with regard to this body. That is a certainty. In a case such as this, to back down in the face of a challenge that promises to ultimately upset that victory with regard to my subjective condition in the world is to give up hope.

A: You say: "When the word "All" is used, the word means all. All is everything. Everything means everything. There is nothing outside of everything that is a

something." — I think I got it! Thanks to your "This is how this is to be understood." But it is so simple that I question whether this is in fact what is being said.

What I said could not be any clearer. Simple in fact, but look at yourself: extraordinarily hard to comprehend. You struggle in the face of outright blazing sunlight to find the fog!

A: *If what is is beyond points of view (a truism because a view is not that which is being viewed), it becomes equally obvious that one can never say anything is that is a point of view. So if we depend on points of view to know, we will never get to know what is. "Is" and "is not" "exist" only in mind. (Is this anywhere close to what is being said here?)*

We are not trying to find an ultimate "is" here. See [AN 7.51](#) for a good explication of why not. The idea of Nibbana, or the ultimate goal in the Pali, is stated in the negative: "it is not this." We are not trying to "get" a vision of anything or to find an ultimate truth; or to see any ultimate reality or the existence of anything; we are only focused on getting rid of wrong ways of seeing things. Seeing by way of a perspective (point of view) is seeing with a bias that obscures the truth of things. We get rid of that. We do not take on something else to replace that.

A: *To use material from footnote #6 from the Mulapariyaya: "Anyone who would say 'Repudiating this All I will describe another,' if questioned on what exactly might be the grounds for his assertion, would be unable to explain....Why is that? Because it lies beyond range." If my understanding of this is accurate, or at least accurate enough to "continue on this way a bit farther" than I need to ask you about the word "All."*

You say: When the word "All" is used, the word means all. All is everything. Everything means everything. There is nothing outside of everything that is a something." What does it mean to say that "There is nothing outside of everything that is a something"?

If this something is a view of "isness", then I think I understand. Otherwise not.

You are apparently misreading the thought there as 'there is "a nothing" outside of everything that "is a something." That is not what that sentence says. There isn't anything outside of the All. How can that be said any more clearly? All means All.

A: *When you say that the All as described (eye & form, etc.) is everything are you saying that these things (eye & form, etc.) can be known without using points of view and that they are therefore the only things that can be known?*

A: *One final point that has been bothering me about the meaning of "is." I bring it up it because it seems to deny my understanding explained above, and also to deny the All explanation. The words are, supposedly, those of the Buddha. (I suspect they are not from the Pali scriptures.)*

"There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded; were there not, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made, and the compounded."

A: *It makes sense to me, or would have before, but in the light of what I think I now understand, it does not. Is this authentic dhamma?*

This is the wonder of Power. At the time you were posting the message that is the subject of this message, I was reading the *Itivuttaka*, or the "As It Was Said" which is the origin of this quote. I had stopped at that quote and had begun to write about it as a matter of controversy concerning this issue! And the issue is exactly what is the meaning of "is"; here "atthi"

PED: [Sanskrit: asti; Latin: sum-est; Gothic: im-ist; Anglo Saxon: eom-is; English: am-is] to be, to exist.

I am not really going to argue about the meaning of atthi. But as a matter of record, what this word breaks down to, the way I hear it is: "at this" with "this" being the index finger pointing up, which becomes "a stand" or "to stand" (up, upright, um, this erect). In this sense there is in the basic word no implication of any kind of ultimate existing thing — a way of saying "it is" without using the idea of "being". I believe there is a relationship here to "to breathe" and to the idea of self, "attan" to our "animation"; to the idea of attaining the goal: "attha" and to the number "8" a.t.tha. And in these related ideas is the implication of the infinite or unlimited and that which is to be the goal and here we may actually be seeing the very origin in language of these views.

And, additionally, this is considered part of the Pali Canon, supposedly having been recited at the First Council.

So here you all have a choice to make because I am going to say that either this is not Dhamma or it was intended to be understood by way of conventional speech. Where it is correct, in my opinion, and that from which I would say it was taken, is in the poetic lines at the end of the translation where "is" does not enter the picture.

First: This is the *only* occurrence of this statement in the entire Pali Canon.

Second, the Nidana is not the same as that for the rest of the suttas recited at the First Council, and I believe that is a clear indication that this was an add-on. This material is being stated as if being repeated by the laywoman *Khujjuttara* and that is exactly what I think is the case: this is the same misunderstanding as is being made by you here.

Third is that there are other instances of such kinds of statements made in the Itivuttaka that are to be found nowhere else in the Canon. I think the work is suspect, and according to the rules laid out by the Buddha himself: Even if what is being said is being said as being heard face-to-face with the Buddha, comparing sutta with sutta, what does not agree with sutta is to be put to one side as being not-dhamma.

You all will need to make up your own minds.

Sources: Pali Text Society: The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon: As It Was Said, Woodward, trans, pp142

Pali Text Society: The Itivuttaka, Peter Masefield, trans (new), pp 34

Here is the Pali:

Ajātasuttaṃ Vuttañhetāṃ Bhagavatā, vuttamarahatāti me sutāṃ:
 "Atthi, bhikkhave ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ. No c'etaṃ,
 bhikkhave, abhavissa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ, nayidha
 jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha.
 Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ,
 tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyatīti.
 Etamatthaṃ Bhagavā avoca. Tatthetaṃ iti vuccati
 Jātaṃ bhūtaṃ samuppannaṃ, kataṃ saṅkhatamaddhuvaṃ;
 jarāmarasasaṅghāṭaṃ, rogaṇi'ṇaṃ Āhāranettippabhavaṃ, nālaṃ
 tadabhinandituṃ; tassa nissaraṇaṃ santaṃ, atakkāvacaraṃ dhuvaṃ.
 Ajātaṃ asamuppannaṃ, asokaṃ virajaṃ padaṃ; nirodho
 dukkhadhammānaṃ, saṅkhārūpasamo sukho" ti.
 Ayampi attho vutto Bhagavatā, iti me sutanti.

Peter Masefield trans:

The Unborn Sutta

This, unquestionably — so has there been heard by me — was stated by the Lord, was stated by the Arahant, viz. "There exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned. For if there were not, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there could not be

made known here the escape from that which is born, from that which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned. Yet since there exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there is therefore made known the escape from that which is born, from that which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned.' This matter the Lord did state; it was in connection therewith that this was so stated.

"That which is born, that which is become, that which is co-arisen, that which is created, that which is conditioned, that which is unstable, that which is the bridge between birth and death ' this seat of disease, with nutriment and the lad as its source, is perishable. It is nothing in which to rejoice.

The escape from this is calm, beyond the sphere of logic, being that which is stable, that which is unborn, that which is not co-arisen; grief-free, dustless, this tract is the cessation of states involving Dukkha, the pacification of formations, bliss.

This matter, too, was stated by the Lord, so has there been heard by me.

F.L. Woodward, trans. Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol 333, The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part II: As It Was Said, pp142 (abbreviations are the authors)

This was said by the Exalted One, said by the Arahant; so I have heard:

Monks, there is an unborn, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. Monks, if that unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded were not, there would be apparent no escape from this that here is born, become, made, compounded. But, monks, since there is an unborn . . . therefore the escape from this that here is born . . . compounded is apparent.

This is the meaning . . .

The born, become, produced, compounded, made,

And thus not lasting, but of birth-and-death

An aggregate, a nest of sickness, brittle,

A thing by food supported, come to be, --

'Twere no fit thing to take delight in such.

Th'escape therefrom, the real, beyond the sphere

Of reason, lasting, unborn, unproduced,

The sorrowless, the stainless path that ends

The things of woe, the peace from worries, — bliss.

Just to double check my facts, I did a search of the entire sutta pitaka for the words "atthi, bhikkhave (my spelling dictionary asks if I mean "thickheaded" for bhikkhave), ajatam" and for "ajatam" and the four words preceding and following it, and for the four words together: "ajatam, abutam, akatam, and asankhatan". The word ajatam connected to the word atthi occurs only in this book and the other in this collection (Versus of Uplift) and in the commentaries. The word ajatam occurs frequently throughout the suttas (as I am assuming do the other words individually). The four words together occur only in the books of this collection and in commentaries.

Ground rules, as spelled out in the Forum Introduction,¹⁴ permit me to exclude this work as authoritative, on this basis alone. But I, myself do not rely on this basis alone. It is really only a matter of words; we are after all talking about the UN-born, UN-living, UN-made, and UN-identified with (and I agree that these words are synonyms for Nibbana). To speak of such a thing in any other than conventional terms as "existing" is a stretch. But words are important in the sense that we get from this very discussion; where an incorrect use leads to a conceptualization which is misleading.

We have one more fact that must be considered when deciding our take on this issue: Khujjuttara is said by the Buddha, in the Book of Ones to be well read (to have heard much).

This is what I think is going on: Khujjuttara listened to the Buddha when he was discoursing with others. She memorized what she heard and repeated it to her Mistress Samavati and her retinue. Some one of these individuals (or one who followed such a one) remembered the material with an incomplete understanding. (This does not, of course, explain the occurrence of the idea in the commentaries; but perhaps the occurrence of the term in the commentaries explains the occurrence of the term in these books — my distrust of the commentaries comes from unhappy experience following method suggested in them and the numerous places where I just find the commentary flat out unbelievable or wrong).

Finally, as I mentioned previously, the work was incorporated into the whole. But in spite of the claim that it was repeated by Ananda at the First Council, it does not follow the style of Nidana of the First Council (and I place a great deal of weight on the Nidana because it, in effect, is a swearing that a certain thing is a thing truly heard; here, one does not want to have the eye of the Buddha on one for having sworn that what one is saying was said by the Buddha if it is not the case. I find the same

kind of twisting about to get around the Nidana in the Abhidhamma and distrust that work partly for that reason as well.)

Finally, let me give my way of stating what I think was intended here:

"Were it to be said, beggars, that there is no unborn, unliving, unmade, unidentified-with, then no escape from the born, living, made and identified-with could be pointed out; but since it is not said that there is no unborn, unliving, unmade, unidentified-with, therefore the escape from the born, living, made, and identified-with can be pointed out."

Again, this is one of those lines (and there will be others) where each individual is going to have to decide for themselves, see for themselves the consequences of going that way or This Way.

Edit: Monday, August 15, 2016 7:11 AM

This topic has revibrations throughout this site right on up to the present day. At this time I would translate the relevent passage thus:

Atthi, bhikkhave ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhaṭaṃ.
There exists, beggars, unbirth, unliving, the undone, un-own-making.

Which could be made smoother as: "There is being unborn, not-living, the un-done, not own-making."

In the same way that we do not think the statement 'There is birth' points to a realm out there somewhere called 'birth'; there is no reason to think that this statement is pointing to a realm out there, an existing place or state, that is 'an unborn' that is another name for Nibbana.

Translating in this way solves the problem and eliminates the need to reject the Itivuttaka.

For more on how this issue is important to the understanding of Nibbana, the goal of the Buddha's system, see the discussion: [Is Nibbana Conditioned](#).¹⁵

¹ A here needs to let go of the idea "real" and "unreal." This is not the issue here. What is being said is that what is here is an illusion. An illusion can be unreal for one who believes in the ultimate reality of the illusion, but the illusion as an illusion can be real.

² "This is the Ariyan Truth of Dukkha: Birth is Dukkha, Aging is Dukkha, Sickness is Dukkha, Death is Dukkha; Grief and Lamentation are Dukkha; Pain and Misery are Dukkha; Despair is Dukkha. Not getting what is wished for is Dukkha; Getting what is not wished for is Dukkha. In a word: This Entire Stockpiled Shitpile is a heap of Flaming Dukkha!"

³ Put in terms of the Dhamma: Why is there birth? Old Age? Sickness? Death? Grief and Lamentation? Pain and Misery? Despair? Not getting what is wished for?

⁴ *Editor's note* : here this is a translation for sankhara, or what Michael calls « sankharaming »

⁵ How is this to be understood? By way of ordinary logic: That which is the self, or that which could be considered one's own must, by definition, be under one's control. The eye and so forth can be shown to be out of one's own control. Therefore the eye and so forth cannot rightly be said to be the self or one's own or one would be required to assert the absurd proposition that the 'self comes and goes in me'. (*Editor's note: Full demonstration found in MN 148*). However, in this system, we also acknowledge "conventional reality," so we allow that the statement can be made: "I am" or "My" this that or the other, as long as it is understood to be just a manner of communication, not a matter of philosophical truth.

⁶ *Editor's note* : bringing attention to the fact that this is a third person jumping in the conversation, going by the name of V.

⁷ See: Anatta = "Not-Self" not "No Self.

(*Editor's note: in the previous volume, or at*

http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/bd_dhammatalk/dhamma_talk/not_self.htm)

Yes, the idea is different than the Hindu Atman idea (or any form of self, universal or otherwise), and no, it is not being said that there is no self. The difficulty here is focus: A is looking intently for this "I" that isn't said to exist and isn't said to not exist. The error is the focus on the idea of existing.

- buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/the_pali_line/course/thepaliline.htm#attadipa
- buddhadust.net/dhamma-

-
- buddhadust.net/dhamma-vinaya/ati/sn/04_salv/sn04.44.010.than.ati.htm

What is being said is 'stop paying attention to the idea of whether or not the self exists!' The idea of the existence or nonexistence of self depends on having a point of view about the matter. It's like saying about a stream, in one moment in time: 'The stream exists just like this.' That is to ignore the reality that the stream is not any one single way for even a split second. The way the Buddha is dealing with this issue is to refute the incorrect proposition that "It is," while at the same time countering the proposition that he is saying that "It is not." He abstains from either end of the debate and simply explains the mechanics of the stream: When this is, that becomes, upon the ending of this, the ending of that...in other words, the *Paticca Samuppada*.

⁸ Here again the focus is the problem. This is not a system which attempts to discover whether things exist or not, whether those things are the all or the self. This is a system which is directed at solving the problem of pain. To solve the problem of pain, the issue of the existence and non existence of the all and the self are dealt with by way of showing that this debate depends on holding a point of view about the matter and that the very holding of a point of view about the matter obscures the ability to see the reality which is that it is not that things exist and it is not that things do not exist, but that when the conditions for the existence of things come together, things become; when those conditions end, things end.

⁹ This is to rely on the feelings to spite the mind. **A** is here holding the position "the self comes and goes in me."

¹⁰ This and the following two paragraphs are engaging in speculation, taking an experience and generalizing that to a Truth, a True Self. This system does not rely on speculation. Speculation is regarded as unreliable on the grounds that conclusions reached from logic and reasoning can be incorrect. Here experience is taken at face value. The face value of the experiences described here are that these experiences were temporary and not under the control of self and therefore do not warrant being classed as self or belonging to self.

¹¹ This argument is also put another way: For one who sees how things come to be (that is, by way of Dependent Origination, the *Paticca Samuppada*) it is not possible to hold the position that there is no self. For

one who sees the passing away of things, it is not possible to hold the position that there is a self.

¹² See “The Middle Way”:

http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/bd_dhammatalk/beginners_questions/middle_way.htm

¹³ See MN 75: Magandiya and MN 93: Assalayana for good examples of this sort of debate.

¹⁴ *Editor’s note:* Not the rules of the forum per se, but, according to Michael, how to conduct Dhamma research to determine whether or not what one is studying is Dhamma. Recommended reading at <http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/method/dhamma-vicaya.htm>

¹⁵ *Editor’s note :* Available in the previous volume, or at http://buddhadust.net/dhammatalk/dhammatalk_forum/dhamma_talk/dt_009.conditioned.vs.own-made.htm

Understanding understanding (Part II)

A: After being with this material for the past week, reading and rereading the posts, writing and rewriting my response, I finally saw that there is no possibility of my understanding very much about the no-self issue until I understand clearly how "is" is understood in this forum.

I don't mean to imply double talk here, but there were times when I had the impression, while reading your response to my questions, that I was trying to understand your words by using meanings you were not intending, and that these words had meanings not just different, but radically different from what I "knew" the words to mean'.

I am going to focus on understanding the meaning of just one of your sentences:

"I said that seeing a thing as 'existing' or as being 'self' depends on point of view."

I understand the following words "Seeing a thing as 'existing' ... depends on point of view" as meaning that without point of view — the seeing of the thing from a point external to the thing — there would be no seeing a thing as existing, and with no seeing a thing as existing, there would be no thing existing. In other words, the ending of points of view would be the ending of things existing. Is this correct?

Is the understanding I'm aiming for here, what you have described as Nana — "book knowledge ... correct but theoretical understanding of the system and how it works" — not with panna (wisdom) or with vijja (direct knowledge).

If this is correctly described, then full understanding must wait until later, much later. But you have indicated that one can understand even at this basic level "before one is able to achieve its purpose." So I'm assured there's no whistling in the wind here.

No. There is whistling in the wind here. "Seeing a thing as existing" does not mean that because one has a point of view one is therefore able to see a thing's "existence"; and it also does not mean the contrary, that in not having a point of view there would be no thing there to see. The idea is that the very idea of "existing" itself (the conception in mind of things having existence or non-existence; not their real existence or non-existence) depends on having a point of view (e.g., that things can or do exist or have existence).

When I say "seeing a thing as existing", that is the description of a point of view, that is not a statement about ultimate realities². The idea is that having the view is independent of, irrelevant to the situation. Extra baggage. And worse than extra baggage, having a view leads to identification with that view and one becomes pleased when the view is

confirmed, and displeased when it is refuted, desires arise from both the pleasure and the displeasure; from the desires arises action in pursuit of those desires; from the action follows new becoming, from new becoming new having become (or rebirth into a new situation) from this aging sickness and death, grief and lamentation, pain and misery and despair.

A: In order to understand, theoretically, as fully as possible the meanings generally given for the word "existing" (exist and existence) and related words, and to better understand in what ways the Pali meaning differs, if it does, from the generally understood meanings, I have checked out the meanings in three dictionaries. A summary listing of the findings follows.

American Heritage (Unab.). Existence: "The fact or state of existing." Exist: "To have being or actuality; to be. (From root sta, to stand.) Being: "That which can be conceived as existing; the essence of existence." Actual: "In existence, real, factual." Real: "Being or occurring in fact or actuality; having verifiable existence." Fact: "Something that has been objectively verified; that has real, demonstrable existence." Verify: "To determine or test the truth or accuracy of, as by comparison, investigation, or reference." Truth: "Fact, actuality, reality." Reality: "That which exists objectively and in fact." Objectively: "Having actual existence or reality...as distinguished from having a mental concept, idea or belief."

Webster's 2nd Ed. (Unab.). Existence: "State of being actual; reality as opposed to appearance." Exist: "To have actual or real being."

OED. Exist: "To stand out, be perceptible, have objective being." Existence: "The state of being existent." Existent: "having being or existence. Often emphasized by actuality, really, truly, etc."

First, let me say that I found it very interesting to read that existence comes from the root "to stand" which as you will note, is the same root as the Pali has for *atthi*, "thi" being to stand. I am amazed that I never heard "stance" there before.

So it would seem that the word "existence" would mean: to stand outside or independently; where the Pali would mean "at the standing position". I think this tells us much about the origination of points of view concerning being.

A: The above shows, I think, that most often when we use the word "exist" we are referring to something we believe has, as noted by the OED, actual, real, true, objective being; these terms all repeat the same refrain: some "isness" external to the mind is necessary if we are to say that something exists.

Exactly! The operant word here being "believe".

A: But it also seems to leave room for including the purely mental existent in the definition: "That which can be conceived as "existing."

Here we have room for what is called in this system: "conventional speech". We need to be able to say "He is now living..." etc, in order to communicate with one another. This is, as long as it is understood to be the use of a conventional expression, and not the declaration of a philosophical position, acceptable.

A: How we are to understand "objective being" is not defined except by its opposition, implied, to subjective being.

On the whole, I think one could say the definitions agree that whatever the nature of objective being, its being objective, that is, external to the mind, is thought to be necessary for it to be called "existing."

This is where the trouble starts. To enter the debate about existence is already to have accepted the proposition of "real", "ultimate" existence (the concept of "No Existence" depends entirely on the concept of "Existence"). This is something that is just off track in this system.

A: This understanding, I admit, doesn't mean very much and certainly doesn't point us in the direction of truth; we don't go, or shouldn't go, to dictionaries for truth. I want merely to orient my understanding, by the use of these definitions, so that when I find these critical words being used in the Pali, I will be able to place it within the context of what I already know, theoretically, about it. I believe this will help. Am I thinking correctly here?

The answer to your question is that it is irrelevant. We are not talking about existence or non-existence here, we are dealing with points of view about existence or non-existence. That is where the trouble starts and is brought to an end.

Backtracking to A's question to answer his request for a definition of 'is', in DN 15 Gotama states the limits of what can be considered 'existing' or an 'existing being':

"To this extent only, Ananda, is there birth, aging, death, disappearance and reappearance; to this extent is there verbal expression; to this extent is there getting to the root; to this extent is there knowing; to this extent is there scope for discriminating and drawing distinctions; to this extent is there this run'n round showing up as some sort of being this at some place of being at...that is to say: only just as far as mentality/materiality with recognition."

—DN 15, *Olds, trans.*

A: *When you say "'seeing' a thing as existing...depends on..." rather than "its 'existence' depends on..." are you making a distinction here we should note?*

Absolutely. My effort here is always to make every word count. We are not talking about, or attempting to discover, ultimate existence or non-existence. We are attempting to demonstrate the problems caused by points of view about existence and non-existence. I am saying that having an opinion that a thing exists is itself a point of view. Having the point of view has nothing to do with a thing's existence or non-existence. We are saying here that that whole set of ideas is points of view. One person concludes (arrives at a point of view about the existence of a thing) that a thing exists because he understands the phenomena one way (I look at the body and I say "how can I say it doesn't exist?). Another looks at the same thing and comes to another conclusion: I see nothing there that is the same from one micro millisecond to the next, how can it be said to have existence?

Both are arguing an irrelevant issue. (Not irrelevant to us because we are attempting to free ourselves from the grip of this argument!)

If points of view were relevant, and the guy who thought he existed were correct, the guy who thought he did not exist could not exist, etc.

A: *Could you have said, "its existence depends on point of view"? Or is this not possible because one cannot say anything about a thing's existence except when it is "seen" as being existent?*

No. That would have been to have taken up one side of the argument of existence or nonexistence. Its existence has nothing to do with the point of view. The point of view is a point of view. It is the point of view we are discussing. We are saying that seeing a thing as existing depends on having a point of view. We can say that one cannot say that a thing exists without

having a point of view about existing. We do not say anything about a thing's existing or not.

A: If this is so, does this mean that one must leave unsaid what is not nana-seen but directly seen (experienced?) because the 'what' of experience is beyond existence and non-existence? As a consequence, one refrains from saying either?

No. We can speak of what we understand through book knowledge as what is understood through book knowledge. We can speak of what is understood through directly seen experience as directly seen experience. There is nothing in this that allows for drawing the conclusion that the 'what' of experience is beyond existence and non-existence. And one does not refrain from saying anything but what is not true, idle, useless, provocative, or speculative.

This is the point: because the idea that a thing has an ultimate reality or existence is not possible to demonstrate to the exclusion of the opposite view, to hold a view one way or another is to always be partly wrong, and in being partly wrong and holding on to that as "true" we are setting ourselves up in opposition to those of other views. This is an act of "identification". We have attached ourselves to a way of seeing, and one becomes pleased when the view is confirmed, and displeased when it is refuted, desires arise from both the pleasure and the displeasure; from the desires arises action in pursuit of those desires; from the action follows new becomings, from new becomings new having become (or rebirth into a new situation) from this aging sickness and death, grief and lamentation, pain and misery and despair.

A: In terms of the definitions, is the Pali saying that what is normally called objective existence, ultimate reality, is for the Pali an understanding that cannot be "nana-seen," but can be "vijja-seen, which is beyond the range of what can be spoken; and of what cannot be spoken, nothing can be said about its existence or non-existence?

Absolutely not. The Pali is saying that one cannot speak of your "objective existence" without reliance on a point of view; that reliance on a point of view is a bias which obscures what is really happening which is not classifiable by the concepts "existence" or "non-existence", that is to say, causation: **This being, that becomes, upon the ending of this, the ending of that.**

A: So, is it correct to say that we can not speak of seeing anything, and affirming the reality of anything, that is beyond nana-seeing, a seeing that does see in terms of "is" and "is-not?" And is it correct to say that we can speak of seeing something, and

affirming the reality of something, that is within the range of nana-seeing because it does see in terms of "is" and "is-not"?

I do not understand what you mean by "nana-seen". Nana is "Book Knowledge". We could understand the theory of ultimate existence with Nana. I don't know where you get the idea that what you call "nana-seeing" has anything to do with seeing in terms of "is" and "is-not." We cannot "see" ultimate reality, ever, because it depends, entirely, on having a point of view ("existence", your external ultimate reality, is a point of view, not a real thing). The Pali is not dealing with the issue of existence, period (except, as I said before, as an issue to get away from). Neither ultimate nor conventional. Here we are after a condition which is described as "The End of Dukkha." The End of Pain. The Deathless. Beyond Time. Free. What? The Unborn, Uncreated, Unmade, Unconfounded. None of these descriptions imply any position with regard to existence.

If you understand book learning to be the standard for conventional knowledge and conventional speech, it might be possible to say that Nana sees in terms of "is" and "is not." If that is how you are seeing this, then, yes, the position here is that understanding that we are not speaking about ultimate, we can use words like "I am" and "Please give me my money," etc. But I suspect the way you have it is a remnant of clinging to the hope of finding somewhere an is that is. People do not "see", whether with vijja or Nana or in any other way, an existence. They "believe" there is an existence there. In the Pali we need to communicate like anyone else, so we use the term "is" and "exists" while understanding that these are just words used for convenience.

A: *You say that "seeing a thing as existing...depends on point of view." Is seeing at this level always dependent on points of view? At this level, can there be a seeing that is not from a point of view? If we did not have points of views, would we be seeing directly?*

First, the meaning is here again that which I explained above: not that "seeing" depends on point of view; but that "seeing a thing as existing" is a point of view. One does not "see" the existence or non-existence of things. One "holds the point of view" that a thing exists or does not exist. This, at any level. Holding points of view obscures seeing things (not existence!) directly, so, yes, if we did not hold on to points of view, we would be seeing directly.

How is this to be understood? At the level of the ordinary common man, that is, one who is seeing by way of the eye and sights, etc, then this seeing actually depends on point of view. Were there no point of view

there to begin with, there would be no blindness as to how things really are. With no blindness there would be no identification with the eye and sights, etc., with no such identification, there would be no subjective experience of pleasure or pain connected with sight, with no experience of pleasure or pain there would be no desire, with no desire there would be no grasping after the desired or trying to get away from the unpleasant, with no grasping there would be no becoming, with no becoming, no birth, with no birth, no aging, sickness and death, grief and lamentation, pain and misery and despair.

If we did not have points of view we would be seeing directly, without the intermediary of the organs of sense.

A: Are these two: "seeing a thing as existing" and "seeing a being as self" the same thing? Since they both depend on point of view, can we say that seeing self is seeing existence, and seeing existence is seeing self? Is it then correct to say that since these two "existences" are mind generated, are not objectively real, are dependent on point of view, then if one were to drop the point of view, both "existence" and "self" would cease to have meaning?

While "existing" and "self" are obviously not the same precisely, the root is the same and the purpose is the same and the rest of your conclusions here are correct. Again, they are irrelevant issues when it comes to Ending Dukkha (not irrelevant in terms of the need to understand and solve the problem).

A: A final point: It seems as if points of view are the bad guys here--all of them needing to be gathered together and deposited under some neat delete icon and doubled clicked with brio. Is there a legitimate use for them? What would become of the world without them? I can't imagine a world without them.

Clinging to points of view is the error. It's not because there are points of view out there that beings come to a bad end. It is because they identify with points of view. To go further and speculate about a world without them is to go too far with this. Such a thing will not happen.

A: In trying to grasp the Pali way of knowing, I came up against what seems a contradiction but most likely is an explainable paradox. To say that anything, (even to say that nothing, no thing,) is a sign of anything, but is only what it is ... isn't this a point of view?

A: I'm thinking here of your response to V's question concerning the earth realm³. You say:

"By having brought your mind to focus down on dirt, what you will have done is gained nothing — there is nothing possible in the perception of dirt that was not present all along. What you will have done is eliminate from your mind all the stuff that is not concerned with the perception of dirt."

A: I can see that "eliminating from the mind all the stuff that is not concerned with the perception of dirt" is not a point of view, but isn't the instruction to do this based on a point of view? That is, the view seems to be that this perception of dirt as dirt is alone what can be known (there is no sermon hidden in the dirt). It may be that this is so, but to say so, isn't this a point of view? Isn't any "say so" a point of view, and isn't the Pali itself a collection of points of view?

It's clear to me that what one comes to know as a result of the Pali teaching does not depend on point of view, one's experience is then what is depended on. But how does one know, for sure, that one's experience is to be depended on? How does one know that "dirt is only dirt"? For sure? And, again, to say that it is only dirt, is this not indulging in views? Or is it sometimes OK to do this? Or am I missing something about points of view? Are not points of views another term for concepts?

You seem to have said in various passages what I have pointed to above, but I still am not able to put it all together. For example, You say on this same page: "...from any point along the way, you could go straight to the Signless, or to the Pointless, or to the Empty...and you would still need to come to the conclusion: This too was confounded, made to become, subject to ending." (Is it correct to say here that because the goal was conceptualized — seen as signless, pointless, empty — its achievement is now not possible?) If this is so — if to conceptualize (have a view of anything?) keeps us from realizing the truth of anything — isn't the following statement, which follows the one above, also a point of view that will keep us from realizing its truth: "There is nothing at all there that can be conceived of in any way whatsoever..."?

You need to complete that last sentence for the meaning to be that intended by the statement.

The complete statement is:

There Is Nothing At All There That Can Be Conceived of In Any Way Whatsoever wherein is delight, wherein is content, but that from its changing and becoming otherwise there will not arise grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair.

And: it is not possible to say that The Goal is conceptualized — or to conclude, once this premise has been accepted that the goal is not achievable. This is why it was so important to deal with the "atthi" issue

earlier. Nowhere in this system is the goal ever stated in anything other than in terms of what it is not. One lives in the Fullness of Emptiness, Empty of what is not the Goal, not Full of Empty Habits. Holding on to a view will prevent one from attaining the goal, if, after having conceptualized a method in which conceptualizing itself is seen as the problem, one follows the method, one is not left with a conceptualized conclusion because what one has done is take a course of action, one is not sitting behind a point of view and intellectualizing. . . ahum.

A: I suspect I'm getting confused here with conventional usage and Pali usage, and maybe with a misunderstanding of what perception is. Are the above quoted statements perceptions or conceptions? What is a perception? Since it is distinguished from sensation as one of the aggregates, does it then have some conceptual overtones, that make it seem like a point of view but is not? And finally, back to the statement that began this thread for me: "Seeing a thing as existing depends on point of view." Isn't this statement itself a point of view?

Conventional usage and Pali usage are about the same:

Vedana, veda + dana; the given thrill, or experience is the sensation of pleasure or pain or the absence of either of these two

Sannā, or "sa = one; na = know -ing" is raw perception: "One sees yellow; one sees white; one sees blue-green"

Viññāṇa, or "vi = double, knowing knowing" is awareness of knowing.

Diṭṭhi, or "point of view" is just a higher order functioning of the mind.

All depend, originally, on diṭṭhi.

The three (vedana, sannā, and viññāṇa) are an inseparable process that was set going earlier as a consequence of having acted on a point of view: an earlier sankaraming, which was itself conditioned by blindness to the consequences.

It is at the point of "sankaraming" that the process of binding one's self up in the consequences takes place, so once done, it must be lived out. For the Arahant, who has broken the idea that there is any reality to the idea that this is "Really" himself, this is "that which remains" and he understands its origin and does no new sankaraming. His actions thenceforth are "selfless"; "acts of abstention" or, understanding the time-limited nature of the body (or even after-death remnants such as consciousness in the various realms), doing that which is one's duty in the

compassionate care for its basic needs (no extra stuff that doesn't just happen to fall to one's lot); when the body (etc) comes to an end, he knows there will be no taking up of any new body (etc), and he is therefore sometimes known as "one bearing his last body".



As I hear you, you are asking these questions:

"What is it that the Pali tells us can be known?"

Your questions about what "Is" is are essentially misdirected. You are trying to determine what the essential "is" is; the Buddha, in dealing with this issue is not trying to answer this question, he is telling us why we should not be asking it: we should not be asking it because there is no way to determine the answer without first superimposing a point of view and by superimposing a point of view one has biased the results.

Of "What is" we can know that its Mechanism of Action is conditional. "This Being, That Becomes; from the Ending of This, The Ending of That."

So, of "What is", the Pali tells us that what can be known is that It Changes, because it changes it is out of our control and cannot therefore justify the proposition that it belongs to or is in any way connected with the idea of "one's own"; and that whatever is attached to that which changes and is not one's own by way of the Point of View: "This is myself", "This is Mine," will end up experiencing Pain.

Therefore, in the Pali, The Essential Thing we are to Know and See is the Painful nature of being attached to whatever it may be that may be.

"Isn't the Pali, while telling us that Points of View are misleading, determining it's own position and constructing it's methodology based on Points of view?"

A, please do not take offence if I tell you that this is, for sure, taking an argumentative stance⁴. I am not saying that it is dealing with an issue that should not be dealt with in one's thinking: it should be. But the methodology is not that which one has been asked to use in determining the validity of the position: The Buddha asks not a leap of faith, but a testing through trial and error.

Without saying to yourself that it is true, follow the suggested methodology — in brief, Let it Go — and see for yourself if it does not accomplish what it says it will accomplish: bringing about the end of Pain.

If I tell you there is a staircase here, at the top of this staircase is a light switch which will illuminate the room at the top of the staircase and you, remaining at the foot of the staircase argue about the possibility of such a light switch existing, about what it means to climb a staircase, about what materials the staircase were made of, about what the essential nature of the switch might be, about the mechanics of its wiring, about what the light might illuminate, and so on; you will never know because you have not even taken the first step up the staircase⁵.

This is a system that requires "doing it".

The Buddha, after achieving the end result for himself, constructed a system which would take the individual buried deep, deeply attached to the world, from his present condition in the world, whatever level that might be, to the end result.

This system uses "Point of View," "ditthi", like the staircase. Those who are deeply attached to points of view cannot simply abandon their point of view without some kind of leverage to do so. They have a point of view in the first place in order not to face what they do not understand. So the Point of View used in this system is one which:

1. Explains the Danger of Points of view
2. Explains the mechanism of action of that Danger as originating in Points of View
3. Explains the nature of the method for letting go of Points of view, and
4. Provides a mechanism for systematically dealing with the issue of letting go of every aspect of every condition of life where Points of View should be let go of, Including, and Concluding In, the Letting Go of All Points of View Whatsoever, including, the Point of View on which the system itself is based.

What mechanism?

Samma Point of View, *Sammā Dittṭhi*. A view, or set of views artificially constructed in a way which self-destructs. The system uses a point of view

to get rid of points of view. In fact it is made clear by the simile of the raft that even *sammā dīṭṭhi* can be dangerous if it is held onto after it has accomplished its purpose.

The difficulty here is greatly complicated by translating the term "sammā" as "Right". It is not an incorrect translation, in that the word comes from the carpenters' term: Upright, Perpendicular, or Straight; but today nobody hears that meaning and what is heard in its place is Righteous, Correct, The Only Way, and so forth. The latter is incorrect. A better meaning is from another way the word has come down to us: sum, summa, summit, the highest, or peak or consummate, meaning the most expeditious. I use "high" only because "con-summit" is awkward to my ear.

With regard to the method described in the *Emptiness Sutta*: Here your attention has been misdirected. The idea is not to describe the nature of what is, it is to describe the method of getting rid of attachment to what interrupts Objective Detachment or emptiness. The only thing being said about focusing on earth is that it is the method for ending attention to the forest, etc.

One measures one's success, or, the dependability of one's experience, or the dependability of the system — based on whether or not, if one follows it to the letter, it accomplishes the stated goal.

Here the goal is stated to be the ending of Pain by way of the ending of the conditions that bring about Pain. So here we judge by asking: Did good conditions increase and bad conditions decrease? And we define good conditions as the ending of bad conditions and bad conditions as Pain and its cause: Attachment.

When you ask: How does one know that "dirt is only dirt"? you are reading meaning into things that isn't there. It is not being stated that "Dirt, is only dirt" in a philosophical sense. It was being stated that what was meant by focusing on dirt was to focus on dirt, and not on "the fundamental 'grounds' of things, and so forth. There are schools of Buddhism out there that do say things that sound like this, and that might be the source of your thinking that this is being said here.

¹ I had the same impression...that you were hearing words that had no relationship to the ones I was using.

² This is the very edge of madness here! I can actually see how **A** is misunderstanding the words I am using, but I am having a devil of a time figuring out how to state the matter in a way that avoids the danger of the same misunderstanding. Try the simile of the stream again. What we are saying is that it is not possible to say that there is a stream there because that would necessitate the freezing in position of all the water molecules, currents, banks, etc that make up that stream. It is because it is impossible to point to the existence of a single thing there that is a stream that we cannot argue the existence or non-existence of the stream. When some beggar comes along and says "I am going to cross the stream" he is speaking conventionally. We understand what he is talking about without arguing the ultimate existence of the stream. Arguing the ultimate existence of the stream will not help him cross the stream. When some person comes along saying there is ultimate existence to the stream, we say: he comes to that conclusion dependent on a point of view which ignores the molecular and transitory nature of that stream. In this way we can point to his conclusion about the existence of the stream as incorrect. When some beggar comes along having heard this argument and says: "There is no stream there." we say he has arrived at this conclusion based on a point of view. He has looked only at the molecular and transitory nature of the stream and seeing the error of holding the viewpoint that the stream exists, forms the opinion that it does not exist. We then need to point to the ordinary reality, where, if there were no stream there, he would not need a boat to cross it, and such like.

³ See the « Emptiness » chapter.

⁴ And I am absolutely certain that it is this tenancy towards argumentativeness that is obstructing A's ability to comprehend.

⁵ The Pali has another simile for this which I remember now: a man is struck with a poisoned arrow, but before he will allow the doctor to remove the arrow, he asks about the length of the shaft, the nature of the poison, the doctor's qualifications, etc etc., meanwhile, of course, the poison has done its work.

The Magandiya Spell

Māgandiya Suttaṃ (MN 75)

Translated from the Pali by Michael Olds

Please, my friends, do not read this spell with haste. This is a thrilling sutta, enough to raise the hair on the back of your neck. Read this slowly. Savour it. Here you can see The Bhagava at work. There is nothing here of technical talk, only just an ever so gentle but ever so relentless bringing Magandiya up to such terrifying heights that there is no choice for him as to his next direction. The Master Potter in his Kiln room, forming and Firing his Pot.

I HEAR TELL:

Once Upon a Time, The Lucky Man, Kuruland, come a revisit'n.

Now a market town of the Kurus was named
TheWordisMyWork/Pleasure'stheWord¹ and there,
in the kiln shed of a Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan,
The Lucky Man had spread out a grass matting.

Then The Lucky Man,
rising up in the early pre-dawn,
attending to bowl and robes,
entered Kammassadhamma Town,
and after his beggar's rounds,
after the meal,
having gone deep into the forest,
he sat down at the root (mula) of a tree to spend the afternoon.

At the same time,
the bum, Nonose,
who was always pacing back and forth and wandering around
came upon the kiln shed
of the Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan
where he saw that grass matting.

"For whom is this grass matting spread,
good Bharadvaja?

It is the bedding of some beggar, methinks,
says he to the Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan."

¹ *Word is My Work*

"There is this shaman Gotama, Magandiya,
 Son of the Sakkyans,
 having broken off from the Sakkyan Clan to become a homeless beggar.

They say this Gotama is the Lucky Man,
 The Potter,
 The Lightning Bearer,
 an Arahant,
 The #1-Highest-Self-Awakened-One,
 Master of Conduct,
 Seer of the Worlds,
 The Well-Gone,
 None-Better as a Dhamma-Trainer,
 Teacher of Gods and Man,
 The Buddha,
 The Bhaggava.

This is that good Gotama's bedding."

"A low sight indeed,
 is this we see,
 good Bharadvaja;
 this bedding of that bhunahuno wet blanket,
 the good Gotama."

"Watch out for your words, Magandiya!

Watch out for your words!

Many are the Wise Nobles,
 wise Brahman,
 wise Householders,
 wise Shaman who have found peace of mind
 having been skillfully trained by Gotama
 in the methods of this aristocratic Dhamma."

"I'd tell that broke-tooth Gotama straight to his face,
 good Bharadvaja,
 if I were to see him:
 'The Shaman Gotama is a kill-joy.'

How come?

Because this is what an investigation of our suttas would say."

"If you have no objection, good Magandiya,,
I would repeat this to the Shaman Gotama."

"Feel free, honorable Bharadvaja,,
to repeat what I said."

Then, as the afternoon turned into evening,
The Lucky Man,
rising up from his seat at the root of that tree,
emerged from the forest,
returned to the kiln shed
of the Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan,
and sat down on the grass matting he had spread out there,
and a short time later the Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan approached,
gave salutation,
and sat down on a low seat to the side
at a respectful distance.

"There, after the exchange of greetings and polite talk,
The Lucky Man said:
There was some conversation between you and the wanderer Magandiya,
was there not, Bharadvaja,
concerning this spreading of grass?"

Well, Bharadvaja was flabbergasted!

"Why, that was the very thing
I had come to discuss with you, Good Gotama!" says he.

"You must have read my mind!"

But before they could get into that,
this conversation was interrupted
by the arrival of the wanderer Magandiya
who, always pacing back and forth
and wandering around
had returned once again
to the kiln shed
of the Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan.

There he too gave salutation
and exchanged greetings and polite talk
and sat down on a low seat to the side
at a respectful distance.

And this is the exchange that followed:

"The Eye, Magandiya,
 enjoys formed material,
 loves formed material,
 delights in formed material;
 so the Tathagata gets it by the teeth,
 puts a guard over it,
 watches over it
 and teaches Dhamma for it's restraint.

Is this what you intended, Magandiya,
 when you said:

"The Shaman Gotama is a bhunahu,
 life-stiffler?"

"This is it!

Good Gotama, it was just because of this
 that I said:

"The Shaman Gotama is a life-stiffler.'

How come?

Because this is what an investigation of our suttas would say."

"The Ear,
 Nose,
 Tongue,
 Body
 and Mind, Magandiya,
 enjoy their respective objects of sense,
 love their respective objects of sense,
 delight in their respective objects of sense,
 so the Tathagata gets them by the teeth,
 puts a guard over them,
 watches over them
 and teaches Dhamma for their restraint.

Is this what you intended, Magandiya,
 when you said:

"The Shaman Gotama is a life-stiffler?"

"This is it!

Good Gotama, it was just because of this
that I said:

"The Shaman Gotama is a life-stiffler."

How come?

Because this is what an investigation of our suttas would say."

"What do you think, Magandiya?
Here someone thoroughly indulges eye-consciousness,
enrapt in lust for the wished,
pleasing,
liked,
that which carries pleasure.

Then, after a time,
having discovered, as it really is,
the origins of,
subsidence of,
taste of,
wretchedness of
and escape from
formed materials,
he lets go of hunger for formed materials,
consuming passion for formed materials,
and, with thirst gone,
he lives subjectively at peace in heart.

What do you think about
sucha one as suchas this, Magandiya?"

"Not a thing, Good Gotama."

"What do you think, Magandiya?
Here someone thoroughly indulges ear,
nose,
tongue,
taste
and mental consciousness,
enrapt in lust for the wished,
pleasing,
liked,
that which carries pleasure.

Then, after a time,
 having discovered, as it really is,
 the origins of,
 subsidence of,
 taste of,
 wretchedness of
 and escape from sounds,
 scents,
 tastes,
 touches
 and mental objects,
 and, with thirst gone,
 he lives subjectively at peace in heart.

What do you think about
 sucha one as suchas this, Magandiya?"

"Not a thing, Good Gotama."

"Even so, Magandiya, in a similar way,
 I once lived in a house
 provided with the five pleasure-cords;
 hemmed in by,
 thoroughly indulging in eye-consciousness,
 enrapt in lust for the wished,
 pleasing,
 liked,
 that which carries pleasure;
 thoroughly indulging ear,
 nose,
 tongue,
 and body consciousness,
 enrapt in lust for the wished,
 pleasing,
 liked,
 that which carries pleasure."

"I had three palaces, Magandiya;
 one for the summer,
 one for the winter
 and one for the rains.

During the four months of the rains,
 I lived in that palace

surrounded by female entertainers,
and not once during the four months
would I descend from that palace."

"Then, after a time,
having discovered, as it really is,
the origins of,
subsidence of,
taste of,
wretchedness of
and escape from sense pleasures,
with thirst gone,
I lived subjectively at peace in heart."

"Then, seeing other beings
not free from lust for pleasures,
hungry for pleasures,
being eaten away by pleasures,
being burnt up by pleasures,
thoroughly indulging in sense pleasures,
I neither partook of those delights
nor experienced envy of those who did."

"How come?"

"Because there is, Magandiya,
happiness other than sensual pleasure,
other than unskillful ways,
the sweet,
godlike pleasure to be had
by getting high.

Finding happiness in this happiness
I have no thirst for
and do not partake in
what has been left behind."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
as it might be
that a rich householder
or householder's son,
a man of wealth and possessions
provided with the five pleasure-cords who,
thoroughly indulging in eye-consciousness,

enrapt in lust for the wished,
 pleasing,
 liked,
 that which carries pleasure;
 thoroughly indulging ear,
 nose,
 tongue,
 and body consciousness,
 enrapt in lust for the wished,
 pleasing,
 liked,
 that which carries pleasure;
 but a man well behaved in body,
 well behaved in speech,
 well behaved in thought,
 at the break-up of the elements
 at the death of the body
 might find consciousness again
 in a good birth,
 a heavenly location,
 the company of the Gods of the Three and Thirty.

And there in Nandana Grove,
 accompanied by nymphs,
 he might partake of and enjoy
 the five pleasure-cords of the gods."

"Then, he might see a householder or householder's son
 provided with and indulging in
 the five pleasure-cords of humans."

"What do you think about this, Magandiya?
 Would that young god there in Nandana Grove
 accompanied by nymphs,
 partaking of and enjoying the five pleasure-cords of the gods
 envy that householder's or householder's son's enjoyment
 of the five pleasure-cords of humans?
 Would he return to human enjoyments?"

"No, Good Gotama, he would not.

How come?

Because god-like pleasures are way beyond,
much higher than human pleasures."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
I once lived in a house
provided with the five pleasure-cords;
hemmed in by,
thoroughly indulging in eye-consciousness,
enrapt in lust for the wished,
pleasing,
liked,
that which carries pleasure;
thoroughly indulging ear,
nose,
tongue,
and body consciousness,
enrapt in lust for the wished,
pleasing,
liked,
that which carries pleasure."

"Then, after a time,
having discovered,
as it really is,
the origins of,
subsidence of,
taste of,
wretchedness of
and escape from sense pleasures,
with thirst gone,
I lived subjectively at peace in heart."

"Then, seeing other beings
not free from lust for pleasures,
hungry for pleasures,
being eaten away by pleasures,
being burnt up by pleasures,
thoroughly indulging in sense pleasures,
I neither partook of those delights
nor experienced envy of those who did."

"How come?"

"Because there is, Magandiya,
 happiness other than sensual pleasure,
 other than unskillful ways,
 the sweet, godlike pleasure
 to be had by getting high;
 finding happiness in this happiness
 I have no thirst for
 and do not partake in
 what has been left behind."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 as there might be some leper here,
 his limbs covered in sores,
 covered in rot,
 worm-eaten,
 tearing at the face of his wounds,
 scratching them open with his nails,
 burning his body over a charcoal pit."

"Bye and bye
 this man's friends and acquaintances and blood-relatives
 set him up with a medicine man
 and this medicine man makes up an herbal potion
 and by way of that potion
 he is completely released from his leprosy,
 well, and happy,
 self-reliant,
 able to come and go as he likes."

"Then he might see another leper,
 his limbs covered in sores,
 covered in rot,
 worm-eaten,
 tearing at the face of his wounds,
 scratching them open with his nails,
 burning his body over a charcoal pit."

"What do you think about this, Magandiya,
 would that man envy
 that leper's use
 of a charcoal pit
 as his medicinal treatment?"

"No. Good Gotama

How come?

There being sickness,
a medicine is needed;
there not being sickness,
no medicine is needed."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
I once lived in a house
provided with the five pleasure-cords;
hemmed in by,
thoroughly indulging in eye-consciousness,
enrapt in lust for the wished,
pleasing,
liked,
that which carries pleasure;
thoroughly indulging ear,
nose,
tongue,
and body consciousness,
enrapt in lust for the wished,
pleasing,
liked,
that which carries pleasure."

"Then, after a time,
having discovered,
as it really is,
the origins of,
subsidence of,
taste of,
wretchedness of
and escape from sense pleasures,
with thirst gone,
I lived subjectively at peace in heart."

"Then, seeing other beings
not free from lust for pleasures,
hungry for pleasures,
being eaten away by pleasures,
being burnt up by pleasures,
thoroughly indulging in sense pleasures,

I neither partook of those delights
nor experienced envy of those who did."

"How come?"

"Because there is, Magandiya,
happiness other than sensual pleasure,
other than unskillful ways,
the sweet,
god-like pleasure
to be had by getting high;
finding happiness in this happiness
I have no thirst for
and do not partake in
what has been left behind."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
as there might be some leper here,
his limbs covered in sores,
covered in rot,
worm-eaten,
tearing at the face of his wounds,
scratching them open with his nails,
burning his body over a charcoal pit."

"Bye and bye
this man's friends and acquaintances and blood-relatives
set him up with a medicine man
and this medicine man makes up an herbal potion
and by way of that potion
he is completely released from his leprosy,
well, and happy,
self-reliant,
able to come and go as he likes."

"Then come along two strong men
who grab him by the limbs
and drag him towards that pit of charcoal."

"What do you think about this, Magandiya,
would that man not twist his body
This Way and that?"

"Yes, Good Gotama.

How come?

Contact with Fire is painful,
it burns and is very injurious."

"What do you think about this, Magandiya,
in this case
is it only just now
that contact with fire is painful,
burns
and is very injurious,
or was it the case before this
that contact with fire was painful,
burned
and caused injury?"

"Both now and before, Good Gotama,
contact with fire is painful,
burns
and is very injurious.

It is because this leper,
his limbs covered in sores,
covered in rot,
worm-eaten,
tearing at the face of his wounds,
scratching them open with his nails,
is out of control,
that he perceives contact with the painful
as contact with the pleasurable."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
in the long distant past
contact with sense pleasures was painful,
burned
and caused injury;
in the distant future, too,
contact with sense pleasures will be painful,
burn,
and cause injury;
and so too in the present
contact with sense pleasures is painful,
burns,
and causes injury."

and those, Magandiya,
 not free from hunger and thirst
 for sense pleasures,
 being eaten away,
 being burned up by sense pleasures,
 are out of control
 and perceive contact with the painful
 as contact with the pleasurable."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 as there might be some leper here,
 his limbs covered in sores,
 covered in rot,
 worm-eaten,
 tearing at the face of his wounds,
 scratching them open with his nails,
 burning his body over a charcoal pit;
 but the more, Magandiya,
 this leper here,
 his limbs covered in sores,
 covered in rot,
 worm-eaten,
 tears at the face of his wounds,
 scratching them open with his nails,
 and burns his body over a charcoal pit,
 the more infected,
 foul-smelling
 and rotten
 his wounds become
 and sorry is the satisfaction he gets
 from scratching
 and burning his body
 in that pit of charcoal."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 those beings not free
 from hunger and thirst
 for sense pleasures,
 even while being eaten away,
 being burned up by sense pleasures,
 pursue sense pleasures,
 and the more those beings,
 not free from hunger and thirst

for sense pleasures,
 while being eaten away,
 being burned up by sense pleasures,
 pursue sense pleasures,
 the more their hunger and thirst
 for sense pleasures grows
 and the more they are eaten away
 and burned up
 by sense pleasures
 and sorry is the satisfaction they get
 from the five pleasure-cords."

"What do you think about this, Magandiya,
 have you ever heard of or seen
 a King or the Chief Minister of a King
 provided with the five pleasure-cords;
 hemmed in by,
 thoroughly indulging in
 the five pleasure-cords,
 who, not having let go
 of hunger and thirst for sense pleasures,
 not having put out the burning
 of sense pleasures,
 that lived
 or lives
 with thirst gone,
 subjectively at peace in heart?"

"No, Good Gotama."

"That is good, Magandiya, that is good.

Neither have I heard of or seen
 a King or the Chief Minister of a King
 provided with the five pleasure-cords;
 hemmed in by,
 thoroughly indulging in
 the five pleasure-cords,
 who, not having let go
 of hunger and thirst for sense pleasures,
 not having put out the burning
 of sense pleasures,
 that lived

or lives
with thirst gone,
subjectively at peace in heart."

"But, Magandīa,
those Shaman and Brahmins
who lived,
or who are living
having let go
of hunger and thirst for sense pleasures,
having put out the burning of sense pleasures,
having discovered,
as it really is,
the origins of,
subsidence of,
taste of,
wretchedness of
and escape from
sense pleasures,
with thirst gone,
live subjectively at peace in heart."

Non-disease the highest gain
The highest pleasure, Nibbana
And of Ways, the Eight Dimensioned
A peaceful deathless journey is

"This is wonderful, Good Gotama,
this is marvelous!
This is really well spoken, Good Gotama!"

Non-disease the highest gain
The highest pleasure, Nibbana.

"We too have this in our tradition
as a saying of the teachers of our teachers."

"But, Magandīya, this saying
of the teachers of your teachers
that you have heard:
'Non-disease's the highest gain,
the highest pleasure, Nibbana,'
what is your understanding of this 'non-disease',
what is your understanding of this 'Nibbana?'"

Well, at this Magandiya strokes his limbs
 [stroke arms, stroke legs like some woman in a skin-cream commercial]
 and says:

"This is that 'non-disease', Good Gotama,
 this is that 'Nibbana,'
 for I now enjoy the pleasure
 of perfect health."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 as some man here,
 born blind,
 unable to distinguish the light from the dark,
 unable to see deep dark blue shapes
 or golden shapes,
 or blood red shapes
 or bright orange shapes,
 unable to see what was on the level
 or what was not on the level,
 unable to see the stars
 or the moon and sun,
 hearing some sighted man say:
 'Indeed a well made clean white robe
 is a pleasurable thing!'
 goes around searching for such a white thing.

But then another person might come along
 with an 'holy oil and charcoal dust anointed'
 piece of sturdy-cloth,
 a Deceiver who says:
 'Here you are, my good man,
 this is a well made clean white robe!'

And he might accept it
 and taking it
 and dressing himself in it
 and dressed
 and proud of himself
 he might,
 unable to contain his pride in himself
 burst out saying:
 'Indeed a well made clean white robe
 is a pleasurable thing!'"

"What do you think about that, Magandiya,
 did that man,
 born blind,
 knowing and seeing
 accept that oily and sooty
 piece of rough-wear,
 take it
 and dressing himself in it
 and dressed
 and proud of himself,
 unable to contain his pride in himself
 burst out saying:
 'Indeed a well made clean white robe
 is a pleasurable thing!'
 Or was this done
 out of faith in that sighted man?"

"It was not out of knowing and seeing,
 that that man,
 blind from birth
 accepted that oily and sooty
 piece of rough wear
 and dressing himself in it
 and dressed
 and proud of himself,
 unable to contain his pride in himself,
 burst out saying:
 'Indeed a well made clean white robe
 is a pleasurable thing!'
 It was out of faith in that sighted man."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 wanderers of other views
 are blind,
 without sight,
 without knowing non-disease,
 without seeing Nibbana,
 they say:"

'Non-disease's the highest gain,
 the highest pleasure, Nibbana.'

"But, Magandiya,
it was this that was said
by the Arahants and Buddhas of Old:"

'Non-disease the highest gain
The highest pleasure, Nibbana
And of Ways, the Eight Dimensioned
A peaceful deathless journey is.'

"And here this is come down
to the ordinary common man,
and you, Magandiya.

And of this body,
which is a living disease,
a living boil,
a living sting,
a living Abyss of Hell,
a living sickness,
of this living disease,
living boil,
living sting,
living Abyss,
living sickness,
you say:
'This is that 'non-disease', Good Gotama,
this is that 'Nibbana,'"

"That Aristocratic Eye
does not exist in you, Magandiya,
by which you might see
with the eyes of an Aristocrat,
Non-Disease and Nibbana."

"I am so inspired, Good Gotama
that I believe the Good Gotama
could so teach me Dhamma
that I might know non-disease,
see Nibbana."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
as there might be some man here,
born blind,
unable to distinguish

the light from the dark,
 unable to see deep dark blue shapes
 or golden shapes,
 or blood red shapes
 or bright orange shapes,
 unable to see what was on the level
 or what was not on the level,
 unable to see the stars
 or the moon and sun,
 and bye and bye
 this man's friends and acquaintances and blood-relatives
 set him up with a medicine man
 and this medicine man makes up an herbal potion,
 but is unable to clear up his sight,
 is unable to make him see."

"What do you think about that, Magandiya,
 would that medicine man,
 because of this
 experience fatigue and annoyance?"

"Even so, Good Gotama."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 were I to teach you Dhamma, saying:
 "Thus is non-disease;
 thus is Nibbana,'
 and you did not understand
 "Thus is non-disease;
 thus is Nibbana,'
 this would fatigue and annoy me."

"I am so inspired, Good Gotama
 that I believe the Good Gotama
 could so teach me Dhamma
 that I might know non-disease,
 see Nibbana."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 as some man here,
 born blind,
 unable to distinguish the light from the dark,
 unable to see deep dark blue shapes
 or golden shapes

or blood red shapes
 or bright orange shapes,
 unable to see what was on the level
 or what was not on the level,
 unable to see the stars
 or the moon and sun,
 hearing some sighted man say:
 'Indeed a well made clean white robe
 is a pleasurable thing!'
 goes around searching for such a white thing.

But then another person might come along
 with an oily and sooty piece of rough-wear,
 a Deceiver who says:
 'Here you are, my good man,
 this is a well made clean white robe!'

And he might accept it
 and taking it
 he might dress himself in it.

Then bye and bye
 this man's friends and acquaintances and blood-relatives
 set him up with a medicine man
 and this medicine man makes up an herbal potion,
 administers emetics and purgatives,
 satisfy his eyes
 by dropping medicinal oils into them,
 administers drugs through the nose
 applies collyrium to the eyes,
 and because of this
 he might be able to make him see,
 clear up his sight.

With the clearing up of his sight,
 that man might let go
 his longing and love
 for that oily and sooty piece of rough-wear,
 but react with anger
 to that man that deceived him
 with the oily and sooty piece of rough cloth
 saying
 'Here you are, my good man,

this is a well made clean white robe!"
 considering him as no friend,
 considering him an enemy,
 he might even take his life."

"In the same way, Magandiya,
 were I to teach you Dhamma,
 saying:

"Thus is non-disease;
 thus is Nibbana,'
 you might understand
 'Thus is non-disease;
 thus is Nibbana.'

With the clearing up of your sight
 you might let go
 of your longing and love
 for the five stockpiled piles of Dukkha,
 but you might think:
 'For a long time I have been done in,
 deceived,
 cheated by my mind,
 for, of a mind to get forms,
 I grasped,
 of a mind to get sense experience,
 I grasped,
 of a mind to get perception,
 I grasped,
 of a mind to get a personalized world,
 I grasped,
 of a mind to get consciousness,
 I grasped;
 grasping rebounded in living;
 living rebounded in birth;
 birth rebounded in old age and death,
 grief and lamentation,
 pain and misery
 and despair.
 Such was the origin
 of this whole mess of pain."

"I am so inspired, Good Gotama
 that I believe the Good Gotama

could so teach me Dhamma
that I could hope to rise above such murk."

"In this case then, Magandiya,
make friends with good men;
from making friends with good men, Magandiya
comes hearing True Dhamma;
from hearing True Dhamma, Magandiya,
comes taking up the Dhamma within the Dhamma;
from taking up the Dhamma within the Dhamma
will come knowing for yourself,
will come seeing for yourself
that these are a disease,
a boil,
a sting
but that here this disease,
this boil,
this sting
can be uprooted absolutely.

From the eradication of grasping,
the eradication of living;
from the eradication of living,
the eradication of birth;
from the eradication of birth,
the eradication of aging and death,
grief and lamentation,
pain and misery
and despair.
Such is the eradication
of this whole mess of pain."

"Most Excellent, Good Gotama,
Most Excellent!"

"In the same way
as if someone had turned the upside down upright;
or had opened the closed;
or explained The Way
to someone who was lost;
or brought an oil lamp into the dark
so that those with eyes in their heads that could see
could see material shapes;

in the same way
 the Good Gotama has set up,
 opened up,
 explained,
 and illuminated Dhamma
 in a multiplicity of ways."

"I take refuge in the venerable Gotama,
 in the Dhamma,
 in the Order of Beggars."

"May I gain the going forth
 under the good Gotama,
 may I gain ordination."

"He who, of other views
 wishes for the going forth
 in this Dhamma/Vinaya, Magandiya,
 is given probation for four months.
 At the end of four months
 the Bhikkhus,
 approving of him,
 may allow the going forth,
 may grant him ordination.

Nevertheless here I see room
 to allow for differences in individuals.

If, Good Gotama,
 those of other views
 who wish for the going forth in this Dhamma/Vinaya
 are given probation for four months,
 and at the end of four months
 the Bhikkhus,
 approving of him,
 may allow the going forth,
 may grant him ordination,
 I will undergo probation
 for four years,
 and at the end of four years
 the Bhikkhus,
 approving of me,
 may allow the going forth,
 may grant me ordination

But as I hear tell,
 The Beggar Magandiya received orders at that time
 at the hands of the Buddha himself,
 and living by himself,
 above it all,
 APPAMATTA,
 carefully,
 energetically,
 resolutely,
 shortly realized and attained for himself
 by his own higher powers
 that goal which justifies even young men of good families
 giving up the household life for homelessness,
 and so living
 he knew for himself:

'Left Behind is birth.
 Lived is the Best of Lives.
 Done is Duty's doing.
 No more this side or that,
 no more being any kind of an It
 in any place of Atness for me!'

And that is how Magandiya became
 one who was numbered among the Arahant

Discussing the Magandiya Sutta

I just want to point out a couple of things about this sutta:

In the crudest of condensations, the opening of the sutta goes like this:

Magandiya: That Buddha is a killjoy.

Gotama: Did you call me a killjoy because I speak of controlling the senses and letting go of thirst (*tanha*) for sense experience?

Magandiya: Yes

Gotama: What do you say about a person that has thoroughly enjoyed sense experience and then moves on?

Magandiya: Nothing.

At exactly this first exchange Magandiya has been defeated. He was either just shooting off his mouth and didn't understand what he was saying, or he held a double standard, one for Gotama specifically and one for others who do the same thing.

At this point Magandiya is stuck and there is nothing really more for him to do but to get up and run away or to sit it out. And Gotama relentlessly ups, and ups and ups and ups and ups the wager from there.

There is a point where I actually really did experience my hair rising on the back of my neck. It's in the section after the simile with the leper where the cured leper looks back on the still sick leper. Gotama asks Magandiya if he thinks the cured leper is envious of the sick leper's use of the charcoal pit as medicine:

Check out the line: **There being sickness, a medicine is needed; there not being sickness, no medicine is needed..** (Here Magandiya has seen *Dhamma*, he has seen the *Paticca samuppada*: This being, that is; this ceasing, that ceases) If you have allowed yourself to dwell in this sutta, become absorbed in the story, picture it in your mind, you will, yourself have had the real possibility here to see Magandiya at the very moment of *Stream Entry*. And not only this: you too could, if you will drive yourself to see this here, be enabled by this sutta, even some 2600 years later, to Enter the Stream because of it. This is Magic of the first order. There is *nothing* that could be more convincing that we have here the true word of the Buddha, and that it is in the Suttas (the ways the Dhamma is *used*), not in commentaries or Abhidhamma, that the true magic of this system is to be found...my say!

And, PS: remember we have discussed the Charcoal Pit as a simile for woman.

Now at this point Magandiya has broken through the "self view" although he appears to be unaware of it, but this is not the end of his trip; to this point he has not understood the goal, which is evident by the way he responds to the questions concerning "This non-disease; this Nibbana".

Here the Buddha appears to throw Magandiya right back to the beginning, telling him flat out he has no understanding of things. Who see it? This is the "stitch" — the *nidana* — the knot that ties him down. Magandiya has been brought up in a straight line from the first encounter. Had the issue been dropped before the ancient saying of the Buddha's of Old; he could have thought he had had a profoundly elevating experience which he understood completely: (essentially a confirmation of his own view, but on what he thinks of as a higher level, that is that Nibbana is experienced by way of the maximum experience of the senses) Then he is told he understands nothing. What is the effect of that? To make him aware of what he has just been told (he either leaves the discussion at this point believing he understands nothing — and having been absolutely crushed in debate — or looks at what has just happened and for ways to turn it into a learning experience). The Buddha makes it conscious by making him ask, makes him state his intention to make an effort, and makes sure that there is no adverse consequence in terms of suicidal inclinations at the discovery he will make that he has been, essentially, a fool his entire life.

He is then given the *paticca samuppada*, (which we have seen he has demonstrated a capability of understanding), in terms of the 5 stockpiles of living (*Khandhas*). And all's well that ends well.

...but who was the Brahman of the Bharadvaja clan, and what became of him?

Developing psychic powers and jhāna practice that leads to Awakening

An analysis of Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 128

After first having understood the goal, having trained in ethical thinking and behavior, having trained in self-control to the point where living intent on the goal is such as to be able to say of one's self that one is living carefully, ardently and self-directed [*pabīṭattā*]:

Intent on stilling, calming and tranquilizing the breath or on some other subject that absorbs the attention, at a point where one is fully alert and attention has been fully focused on that object to the exclusion of external distractions, there will occasionally appear a brilliant flash of white light [*obbhāsa*] something like a flash of sunlight in a dark room; and there will occasionally appear clear mental visions [*dassanaṃ ca rūpānaṃ*] and seeing forms (in the mind). But these will quickly vanish.

To extend the duration of these phenomena it is necessary to ask yourself: what were the signs [*nimitta*] of the driving forces, what was it that resulted in the vanishing of the light and the perception of shapes?

Note the direction of this thinking: it is not "how do I prolong the light/visions", but "what brought them to an end?" The implied presumption is that the light/visions will be there in one who is in a state of calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation [*samādhi*] if what is causing them to vanish is eliminated.

They may have vanished because of doubts [*Vicikicchā*]. "What was that?" "Was that a flash of sunshine breaking into my hut? or was that a real vision?" "Was that a vision or was that just a daydream?" "Can I have possibly got to the point where I can see 'the Light' and see real visions?" Doubt having arisen, one's state of calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation [*Samādhi*] has been broken.

As one deals with doubt, the light and visions may re-appear for a time and again vanish. So one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of distraction, inattention, or lack of mental study [*amanasikāra*]. One must clear the decks for the development of the state of calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation that is required for the development of psychic powers, *jhānas* and release. Examine your environment to exclude external distractions. Meditate in a

room empty of decorations, do-dads, mementos. Let it be known that you are not to be disturbed. As for internal inattention, in the early stages it will be necessary to exert energy as an act of will to bring back focus on one's object; later it will be a matter of bringing one's self to a state of recollection of what one is about.

As one deals with distraction and inattention, and doubt, the light and visions may re-appear for a time and again vanish. So one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of sleepiness and sluggishness of mind [*thinamiddha*].

Sleepiness and sluggishness of mind can result from over-eating and indulging in the pleasure of sleeping. Over-eating that can result in sluggishness can be over-eating just as little as a mouthful more than is needed to sustain the body. Or eating even a very small amount at the wrong time (especially of sugary foods and drink): after one's main meal before noon. Sleepiness can be the result of regret. In that case regret must be put out of the mind by understanding and compensatory actions. Sleepiness can be a result of poor posture. Sit down sitting up straight, legs crossed, head, neck and body such as to bring the spine into alignment. Not abandoning proper posture prematurely when it has become painful will soon cause the pain to disappear and alertness return. Squirming and worming around will perpetually disturb the impassivity that is a pre-requisite of a state of calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of fright [*Chambhitatta*].

At the realization that what one is about in this business of cultivating the mind to calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation that will lead to the deathless and living outside of time, apart from sense pleasures, the pleasures of existence and all the fun, joys and delights you have experienced since Time beyond recollection, there may arise sudden fear of losing all this, otherwise known as the fear of death.

The Buddha likens this state to that of one who has been travelling along peacefully who is suddenly attacked from both sides by a band of murderous thieves.

Both sides because at this point one sees the dangers in indulgence in sense pleasures on the one side and thinks that on the other side giving it all up is like death.

At this point you must still, calm and tranquillize both the body and mind and bring your attention to the idea that there is nothing there that is or ever has been stable, of enduring pleasure or that belongs to the self. In other words you must realize that this calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation leading to Ultimate Freedom from Pain, Deathlessness and Living Outside Time, is what you have been telling yourself is what you really want. You have finally come face to face with yourself. And you must prevail in this battle between giving up and self-indulgence at this point.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of jubilation [*Ubbillan*]. Jumping for joy (without the shouting and jumping). Eureka! I've got it! I'm an Arahant at last! I have found Nibbana!

Calm down. You're not there yet. You've only just started.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear and jubilation, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of slipping into corruption [*Dutthullan*]. Those visions can be a temptation or be steered into the tempting. Indulgence in sexual fantasy at an intense level presents itself. [Lust] One may discover the ability to work revenge for imagined wrongs in ways unthought of before. [Hate] Power can be tempting. Ingenious ways of attaining power and wealth present themselves and before one realizes it one is off on a completely irrelevant track. Having come this far one is seeing ever higher levels of temptation and so, why not? Go a little farther, see what else is on offer. [Blindness]. It's time to retrench. Take a look. You need to convince yourself of the sincerity of your seeking Nibbana. The lasting pleasure promised by these things is an illusion. Let them go.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear and jubilation and corruption, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of excessive exertion of energy, drive [*Accāraddha-viriya*].

They may have vanished because of too slack exertion of energy, drive [*Atilina-viriya*].

In the case of excessive energy, mind, focus the mind on developing calm; still, calm and tranquillize the breathing; Let It All Go! The three factors of self awakening: impassivity (being unaffected by the onslaught of sensations), serenity (calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation, i.e. [*samādhi*]) and detachment.

In the case of too slack energy, mind, focus the mind on insight; the three factors of self-awakening: investigation of Dhamma (dig around on this site, we got plenny'nuf satisfactmactory mastication factory; find something that sounds interesting and bear down on it), energy building (energy is created by the expenditure of energy), and enthusiasm (dig around in your memory for examples of the benefits you have experienced from this practice; focus for a time on these benefits).

The Buddha gives two similies for the problem of balancing energy:

1. Grasping a bird too tightly will kill it; grasping it too lightly and it will fly away.
2. Stringing a lute too tightly or too losely will both distort the sound it produces.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear and jubilation and corruption and excessive energy and too slack energy, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of an overriding appetite [*Abhijappā*].

Some desires are so all-pervasive in one's life that they have become unnoticable and only come to consciousness when either they become realizable or when detachment from them becomes possible. The desire for power. "At last I have attained such an advanced state in meditation that I can say I am the best of all." Appetite for fame. Need for approval. Fear of destitution and the resulting appetite for safe refuge. Appetite for sexual gratification, gratification of the senses, at a level way beyond the ordinary. Even appetite to be evil in extraordinary ways. Strong over-riding appetites either to get or get away from. Suddenly awakening to

such appetites can throw one off track and require a complete re-evaluation of one's intent when it comes to seeking Enlightenment.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear and jubilation and corruption and excessive energy and too slack energy and over-riding appetites, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of diverse perceptions [*Nānatta-saññā*]. At this level worlds open up to perception. Each of these worlds purports to be the highest and best and to provide long life and well-being and invites one to explore and abide there a while... becoming, of course, subservient to the powers that be there. Here the meditator needs to exert his ability to generalize. The Buddha has spoken of all things that have come into existence as being transitory, essentially painful, and not belonging to self: i.e., not what one has set out to find. If this world offering itself to one's perception is one defined as being in existence, then back off, let it go, do not risk the huge amounts of time lifetimes in these worlds takes up. You may not easily find again a world in which a Buddha's Dhamma is taught. Go as far as you can letting go of it all without thought of indulgence.

Again, as one deals with sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear and jubilation and corruption and excessive energy and too slack energy and over-riding appetites and diverse perceptions, the light and visions may reappear for a time and then vanish and one must once again examine the situation.

They may have vanished because of excessive indulgence in knowing shapes [*Atinijjhāyitattaṃ rūpanaṃ*].

Perhaps you have gone too far in this business of trying to sustain the perception of light and shapes?

The problems from this point are:

Perception of light but not shapes: the result of over-focus on the light;

Perception of shapes but not light: the result of over-focus on perception of shapes;

Weakness in the perception of light and shapes; the result of weakness in one's state of calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation.

At this point you have developed another practice: by the elimination of diversions [*Nīvaraṇā*] or the corruptions of the heart [*cittassa upakkilesa*]: sluggishness and distraction and doubt and fear and jubilation

and corruption and excessive and slack energy and over-riding appetites and diverse perceptions, one has developed one's state of calm impassive wakeful serene focused observation in three ways:

1. Accompanied by thought and pondering [*saṇṭapaka* and *saṇṭāra*]. SA-VITAKKA: With-re-talking; Word-thought or formulated thought; SA-VICĀRA With-re-tour-ing, turning over in the mind, wandering thoughts; and pondering situations and issues.

Accompanied by thought only — without pondering;

Accompanied by pondering only — without word-thought.

2. Accompanied by enthusiasm [*Sapphika*]

With enthusiasm settled down.

3. Wakeful serene focused observation together with pleasure [*Sāta-sahagata*]

Detached wakeful serene focused observation [*Upekkhā-sahagata*].

And what more remains to be done?

Recognizing at this point that this is freedom

and in this freedom, seeing freedom

knowing that in this way one may bring about

the leaving of rebirth behind

the culmination of living the Godly Life

the completion of one's duty,

and the end of being any sort of 'it' at any place of 'atness.'

Appendix

More essays can be found at:

http://buddhadust.net/dhammataalk/dhammataalk_forum/df_toc.htm

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