Introduction to the Buddhist Scriptures

Preface

This book is a follow-up of my book “The Buddha’s Path”, where I have explained the basic principles of the Buddha’s teachings. In this book I would like to introduce the reader to the Buddhist scriptures which contain the teaching of the Buddha. I will quote more extensively from the texts with the aim to encourage the reader to study the texts himself. In that way he can verify himself that the Buddha’s words were directed to the practice of what he taught, in particular to the development of right understanding of all phenomena of our life.

In the Appendix I have enumerated the texts of the Tipiìaka and their commentaries with their translations into English.

For the now following chapters I have used many ideas of the lectures for a radio program in Thailand by Sujin Boriharnwanaket. She quotes extensively from all three parts of the scriptures, explains their meaning and inspires people to relate them to their daily life. If we merely read the texts with the purpose of intellectual understanding, we fail to see the message they contain for our life at this moment and we do not understand the goal of the Buddha’s teachings.

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Chapter 1

Abhidhamma in the Scriptures

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (Saîåyatana Vagga, Kindred Sayings about Feeling, Book I, § 7, Sickness):

Once the Exalted One was staying near Vesålí, in Great Grove, at the Hall of the Peaked Gable.

Then the Exalted One at eventide rising from his solitude went to visit the sick-ward, and on reaching it sat down on a seat made ready. So seated the Exalted One addressed the monks, saying:--

“Monks, a monk should meet his end collected and composed [[1]](#footnote-1) . This is our instruction to you. And how, monks, is one collected?

Herein, monks, a monk dwells, contemplating the body in the body... feeling in the feeling... consciousness in consciousness... dhamma in dhamma, ardent, composed and thoughtful, having put away in this world the dejection arising from craving. Thus, monks, is a monk collected.

And how, monks, is a monk composed?

Herein, monks, in his going forth and in his returning a monk acts composedly. In looking in front and looking behind, he acts composedly. In bending or relaxing (his limbs) he acts composedly. In wearing his robe and bearing outer robe and bowl, in eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting he acts composedly. In easing himself, in going, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, in speaking and keeping silence he acts composedly. Thus, monks, is a monk composed.

Monks, a monk should meet his end collected and composed. This is our instruction to you.

Now, monks, as that monk dwells collected, composed, earnest, ardent, strenuous, there arises in him feeling that is pleasant, and he thus understands: ‘There is arisen in me this pleasant feeling. Now that is owing to something, not without cause. Owing to what? Owing to this same body. Now this body is impermanent, compounded, arisen owing to something. It is owing to this impermanent body, which has so arisen, that pleasant feeling has arisen as a consequence, and how can that be permanent?’

Thus he dwells contemplating impermanence in body and pleasant feeling, he dwells contemplating their transience, their waning, their ceasing, the giving of them up. As he thus dwells contemplating impermanence in body and pleasant feeling, contemplating their transience... the lurking tendency to lust for body and pleasant feeling is abandoned.

So also as regards painful feeling... the lurking tendency to repugnance for body and painful feeling is abandoned.

So also as regards neutral feeling... the lurking tendency to ignorance of body and neutral feeling is abandoned.

If he feels a pleasant feeling he understands: ‘That is impermanent, I do not cling to it. It has no lure for me.’ If he feels a painful feeling he understands likewise. So also if he feels a neutral feeling.

If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it as released from bondage to it.

So also, if he feels a painful feeling and a neutral feeling, he feels it as one released from bondage to it.

When he feels a feeling that his bodily endurance has reached its limit, he knows that he so feels. When he feels a feeling that life has reached its limit, he knows that he so feels. He understands: When body breaks up, after life is used up, all my experiences in this world will lose their lure and grow cold.

Just as, monks, because of oil and because of a wick a lamp keeps burning, but, when oil and wick are used up, the lamp would go out because it is not fed. Even so, monks, a monk, when he feels a feeling that his bodily endurance has reached its limit, that his life has reached its limit, when he feels a feeling that, when body breaks up, after life is used up, all his experience in this world will lose its lure and grow cold,- he knows that he so feels.”

This sutta contains the essence of the Buddha’s teaching: the development of satipatthåna, right understanding of mental phenomena and physical phenomena, which leads to the eradication of all defilements. Just as a lamp will go out when oil and wick are used up the person who has eradicated defilements will not be reborn.

The Buddha taught about the realities which can be directly experienced in daily life when they appear, such as seeing, hearing, feeling, hardness or sound. All these phenomena are real in the absolute or ultimate sense. Absolute or ultimate truth is different from conventional truth [[2]](#footnote-2). If one has never heard of the Buddha’s teachings one only knows what is real in conventional sense. We think of ourselves and of the world around us, of people, animals, trees, and they seem to last. The world, person, animal or tree are real in conventional sense. The world and everything in it can only appear because consciousness arises just for a moment, thinks about it and then falls away immediately. Consciousness, in Påli : citta, is real in the absolute sense. The Buddha taught that in the absolute sense our life consists of mental phenomena, in Påli: nåma, and physical phenomena, in Påli: rúpa. Citta is nåma, it experiences an object, whereas rúpa does not experience anything. There are no mind and body which last and which belong to a self or person; what we take for our mind and body are only different nåmas and rúpas, each with their own characteristic which can be experienced one at a time when it appears. They arise because of their appropriate conditions and then fall away immediately. They are impermanent and they do not belong to a self, they have no owner.

There is only one citta arising at a time, but each citta is accompanied by several mental factors, in Påli: cetasikas. Both citta and cetasika are nåma. Some cetasikas, such as feeling and remembrance accompany each citta, whereas unwholesome qualities such as attachment and aversion accompany only unwholesome cittas and wholesome qualities such as kindnes, generosity or understanding accompany wholesome cittas. Citta cannot arise without cetasikas and cetasikas cannot arise without citta, they condition one another. They arise together, experience the same object and then fall away together. Thus, what we call “person” is actually citta, cetasika and rúpa which arise and fall away. Citta, cetasika and rúpa are the three paramattha dhammas which are conditioned: they arise because of conditions and then fall away. There is a fourth paramattha dhamma which is unconditioned, which does not arise and fall away and this is nibbåna. Nibbåna is the reality which can only be experienced at the moment enlightenment is attained.

The development of right understanding of what is real in the ultimate sense is the only way leading to the eradication of defilements. When we study the scriptures, no matter whether it is the Vinaya, the Book of Discipline for the monks, the Suttanta or Discourses, or the Abhidhamma, we should never forget this goal. The Vinaya contains rules and guidelines for the monk’s behaviour which can help him to reach perfection, the state of the arahat, who has eradicated all defilements. The Suttanta or Suttas are discourses of the Buddha to people of different levels of understanding at different places. In these discourses the Buddha speaks about birth, old age, sickness and death. He speaks about the suffering in the world and the cause of all suffering which is craving. He explains what is unwholesome and what is wholesome or beneficial, he points out the danger of defilements and the way to eradicate them by the development of understanding of all that is real. The Abhidhamma contains the description of all mental phenomena and physical phenomena of our life, their different conditioning factors and the way they are related to each other.

In the Abhidhamma all paramattha dhammas, ultimate realities, are enumerated and classified in detail, but also in the Suttas the Buddha explained about paramattha dhammas, about nåma and rúpa, in order to help people to gain understanding. The Suttas are mostly, but not entirely, in terms of conventional language. The Buddha knew the different accumulated inclinations of people and thus he chose the wording best suited to the persons addressed. He spoke to monks, laypeople, brahmins and philosophers who adhered to other beliefs. He made use of parables or of examples of events in daily life in order to help people to understand paramattha dhammas. Right understanding of paramattha dhammas should be developed in order to eliminate wrong view of realities. The study of the Abhidhamma helps us to have more understanding of what the Buddha taught in the suttas.

Not all people were ready to grasp what paramattha dhammas are, and therefore the Buddha would give them a “gradual discourse”, or a discourse “in due order”. We read, for example in the “Verses of Uplift” (Khuddaka Nikåya, Minor Anthologies), Ch V, 3, that, when the Buddha was staying near Råjagaha, in Bamboo Grove, a leper, named Suppabuddha, saw from afar that the Buddha was teaching dhamma to a great many people. He wanted to draw near the crowd, hoping to obtain some food. He noticed that there was no alms-giving, but that the Buddha was teaching dhamma and then he decided to listen. We read:

Now the Exalted One, grasping with his mind the thoughts of all that assembly, said to himself: Who, I wonder, of those present is of growth to understand dhamma? And the Exalted One saw Suppabuddha, the leper, sitting in that assembly, and at the sight he thought: This one here is of growth to understand dhamma. So for the sake of Suppabuddha, the leper, he gave a talk dealing in due order with these topics: on almsgiving, virtue, the heaven world, of the danger, meanness and corruption of sense-desires, and the profit of getting free of them.

And when the Exalted One knew that the heart of Suppabuddha, the leper, was ready, softened, unbiassed, elated and believing, then he unfolded those dhamma-teachings which the awakened ones have themselves discovered, namely: Dukkha, arising, ending, the Way.

Then just as a white cloth, free from stains, is ready to receive the dye, even so in Suppabuddha, the leper, as he sat there in that very seat, arose the pure, stainless dhamma-sight, the knowledge that whatsoever is of a nature to arise, that also is of a nature to end. And Suppabuddha, the leper, saw dhamma, reached dhamma, understood dhamma, plunged into dhamma, crossed beyond doubting, was free from all questionings, won confidence, and needing none other in the Master’s message [[3]](#footnote-3), rose from his seat, advanced to the Exalted One and sat down at one side....

Suppabuddha listened to the Buddha’s exposition of the four noble Truths: dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the cessation of dukkha and the way leading to the cessation of dukkha which is the eightfold Path [[4]](#footnote-4). While Suppabuddha listened he attained the first stage of enlightenment, the stage of the sotåpanna. He could not have attained enlightenment if he had not known what dhammas, realities, are. While he was seeing and hearing he had to be aware of the nåmas and rúpas which were appearing and he had to penetrate their true nature. He could attain enlightenment because he had accumulated wisdom also in past lives.

We cannot understand the deep meaning of the suttas if we have no basic understanding of the paramattha dhammas as they have been described in the Abhidhamma. We cannot understand what has been stated in this sutta about Suppabuddha’s enlightenment if we do not know that citta, cetasika and rúpa, thus, paramattha dhammas, are the objects of insight. Suppabuddha had to clearly know the difference between the characteristics of nåma and rúpa as they appeared one at a time, and he had to realize them as conditioned realities before he could penetrate their impermanence, their nature of dukkha and of non-self [[5]](#footnote-5). It takes an endlessly long time, even many lives, to develop understanding. However, a moment of understanding is never lost, it is accumulated.

In the Seventh Book of the Abhidhamma, the “Paììhåna”, translated as “Conditional Relations”, different types of conditions for realities have been taught. One of these is the contiguity-condition (anantara-paccaya): each citta which arises is a condition for the succeeding one by way of contiguity-condition. Defilements and good qualities which arose in the past, even in past lives, are accumulated from one moment of citta to the next one, since each citta conditions the following one by way of contiguity-condition. The Abhidhamma clarifies how we accumulate different inclinations and how they condition the cittas arising at the present time.

We read further on that Suppabuddha went away after having heard the discourse and was then killed by a calf. When the monks asked the Buddha about Suppabuddha’s rebirth the Buddha explained that he was a sotåpanna, bound for full enlightenment. A sotåpanna cannot be reborn in an unhappy plane. The monks then asked why he was born as a poor, wretched leper. The Buddha answered that in a former life he had insulted a “Silent Buddha”. Because of that deed he was reborn in hell and in his last life he was born as a leper. In that life he became a sotåpanna and then he was reborn in a heavenly plane.

We read in this sutta about kamma which produces result, but it is a subject which is difficult to understand. The study of the Abhidhamma is most helpful to gain more understanding of the different conditions for the nåmas and rúpas of our life, including the condition of kamma which produces vipåka. We have read in the above-quoted sutta about the result Suppabuddha received when a calf caused his death. Not only pain felt at an accident is vipåka, but also seeing, hearing and the other sense-impressions are vipåka. They are vipåkacittas arising time and again in daily life. The Abhidhamma teaches in detail about all the different types of kusala cittas, of akusala cittas and of cittas which are neither kusala nor akusala, including vipåkacittas, and about all the different cetasikas which accompany cittas. We learn about the different objects cittas experience through the senses and the mind-door, and about the defilements arising on account of what is experienced. Also in the suttas we read about the experience of objects through the senses and the defilements which arise, but without the study of the Abhidhamma we cannot fully understand the sutta texts. I will illustrate this with a quotation from another sutta. We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (IV, Saîåyatana Vagga, Kindred Sayings on Sense, Second Fifty, Ch 5, § 98, Restraint) that the Buddha said to the monks:

I will teach you, monks, restraint and lack of restraint. Do you listen to it. And how, monks, is one unrestrained?

There are, monks, objects cognizable by the eye, objects desirable, pleasant, delightful and dear, passion-fraught, inciting to lust. If a monk be enamoured of them, if he welcome them, if he persist in clinging to them, thus should he understand: “I am falling back in profitable states. This was called ‘falling back’ by the Exalted One.”

(the same is said with regard to the other sense-doors and the mind-door.)

And how, monks, is one restrained?

There are objects cognizable by the eye... If a monk be not enamoured of them, if he welcome them not, ... thus should he understand: “I am not falling back in profitable states. This was called ‘not falling back’ by the Exalted One.” Thus, monks, is one restrained.

The Abhidhamma helps us to understand the different functions of cittas arising in a process of cittas which experience objects through the six doors. In a process of cittas which experience an object through one of the sense-doors there are moments of vipåka and there are kusala cittas or akusala cittas which arise on account of the object which is experienced. The cittas arising in such a process arise each because of their own conditions and in a fixed order; there is no self who can direct the arising of particular cittas. There is no self who is unrestrained or restrained. When we read about the monk who is enamoured of the objects experienced through eyes, ears, or through the other senses, we may not realize that we all have attachment time and again after seeing, hearing and the other sense-impressions. When we read the above-quoted sutta with understanding of different cittas arising in processes we will see that this sutta reminds us of our defilements arising in daily life, even at this moment. If we do not know that defilements and wholesome qualities are cetasikas, conditioned realities, we may take them for self. We may cling to a concept of self who is practising the eightfold Path, whereas in reality wholesome cetasikas are performing their functions. We read in the suttas about the exertion of energy or effort for what is wholesome and about right effort of the eightfold Path. If we do not know that effort is a cetasika which can arise with akusala citta as well as with kusala citta there are bound to be many misunderstandings concerning the development of kusala and in particular the development of the eightfold Path. We read, for example, in the “Gradual Sayings” (II, Book of the Fours, Ch II, § 3, Effort) [[6]](#footnote-6):

There are four right efforts, O monks. What four?

Herein, a monk rouses his will not to permit the arising of evil, unwholesome states that have not arisen- to abandon evil, unwholesome states already arisen- to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen- to maintain wholesome states already arisen and not allow them to disappear; he makes an effort (for it), stirs up his energy, exerts his mind and strives.

Someone may believe that whenever he tries to develop the eightfold Path there is right effort which is wholesome, but in reality there may be effort arising with akusala citta rooted in attachment, he may take effort for “my effort”. Right understanding of th eightfold Path arises because of its appropriate conditions, not by trying to make it arise. When awareness and right understanding of nåma and rúpa arise there is at that moment also right effort which accompanies the kusala citta. Thus, it is essential to study details of cetasikas which accompany the different types of citta. The study of the Abhidhamma can help us to have a more precise understanding of the realities of daily life.

Some people doubt whether the Abhidhamma is the Buddha’s teaching. The commentator Buddhaghosa explains [[7]](#footnote-7) that the Buddha, at the attainment of enlightenment, penetrated the truth of all realities, and that he in the fourth week after his enlightenment contemplated the contents of the seven books of the Abhidhamma. He preached the Abhidhamma first to the devas of the heavenly plane of the “Thirtythree”, headed by his mother. After that he conveyed the method of the Abhidhamma to Såriputta. The Abhidhamma has been taught by the Buddha himself, but the text of the Abhidhamma as we have it today goes back to the Buddha’s chief disciple Såriputta. When we study the Abhidhamma and the suttas and compare them, we will notice that also numerous suttas are in terms of paramattha dhammas, dealing with the khandhas (aggregates), the elements, the sense-fields (åyatanas) and the cittas. Also the Vinaya deals with cittas and with many different degrees of defilements which can accompany citta. The Vinaya reminds the monk to scrutinize himself, to be aware also of akusala cittas. While the monk goes out to collect almsfood and while he accomplishes his daily tasks he should develop mindfulness and understanding of nåma and rúpa. All three parts of the Buddhist scriptures are in conformity with each other, they help people to develop right understanding of all realities, each in their own situation of life. Historical reasons may not cure doubts about the authenticity of the scriptures, but careful examination and consideration of the contents of the Buddhist teachings themselves can convince us of their authenticity and their immense value for the development of the way leading to freedom from all suffering.

When someone takes up the first book of the Abidhamma, the “Dhammasangaùi “, translated as “a Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics” [[8]](#footnote-8), he may feel confused about the many classifications and enumerations of cittas, of their accompanying cetasikas and of rúpas. These are not abstract categories just to be read and memorized, but they are realities which arise time and again in daily life. When they appear they can be objects of awareness and right understanding. The development of satipaììhåna, direct understanding of nåma and rúpa as impermanent, dukkha and non-self, is the aim of the teaching of the Abhidhamma. The first book of the Abhidhamma should be read together with its commentary the “Atthasåliní”, translated in two volumes as “The Expositor”. The great commentator Buddhaghosa, who lived in the sixth century A.D. , edited this commentary. The footnotes of the translation of the first book of the Abhidhamma refer to the corresponding parts in its commentary, and the reader will see for himself that the commentary is most helpful for the correct understanding of the Abhidhamma [[9]](#footnote-9). Buddhaghosa came from India to Sri Lanka where he edited and rendered into the Påli language ancient Singhalese commentaries he found there. The commentaries to most of the Buddhist scriptures edited by him are based on the ancient commentaries. The “Visuddhimagga”, an encyclopedia of the teachings written by Buddhaghosa, which is translated as “The Path of Purification”, and also the “Abhidhammattha Sangaha”, a compendium of the Abhidhamma written by Anuruddha [[10]](#footnote-10), are of great assistance for the understanding of the Abhidhamma.

In the above-quoted sutta on restraint and lack of restraint we read that the monk who is not enticed by pleasant objects is restrained. Someone may have restraint by temporarily suppressing his likes and dislikes, but when there are conditions for defilements they will arise again. Only through the development of right understanding of realities can there be restraint which is enduring. The development of satipaììhåna is exclusively the teaching of the Buddha and thus this is implied in all parts of the scriptures, also when it is not expressively mentioned.

We read in the “Middle Length Sayings” (II, 97, Discourse with Dhånañjåni) that Såriputta taught the brahman Dhånañjåni when he was sick about the meditations which are the “Divine Abidings” of lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. With these meditations, when they are developed, jhåna or absorption can be attained. However, jhåna is not the goal of the Buddha’s teachings. We read that the Buddha said to Såriputta:

“But why did you, Såriputta, although there was something further to be done, having established the brahman Dhånañjåni (only) in the less, in the Brahma-world, rising from your seat, depart?”

“It occurred to me, Lord: ‘These brahmans are very intent on the Brahma-world. Suppose I were to show the brahman Dhånañjåni the way to companionship with Brahmå?’”

“Såriputta, the brahman Dhånañjåni has died and has uprisen in the Brahma-world.”

This sutta reminds us not to forget the goal of the Buddha’s teachings, that is: the eradication of wrong view and all other defilements through the development of right understanding of all that is real. We cannot understand any sutta if we do not begin to develop understanding of the nåma or rúpa which appears in our daily life.

In the following sutta the importance is stressed of listening to the teachings, considering them carefully, so that there are conditions for direct understanding of the truth. We read in the “Kindred Sayings”(II, Nidåna-vagga, Ch XX, Kindred Sayings on Parables, § 7, The Drum-peg) that the Buddha said to the monks:

Once upon a time, monks, the Dasårahas had a kettle-drum called Summoner. As it began to split the Dasårahas fixed in ever another peg, until the time came that the Summoner’s original drumhead had vanished and only the framework of pegs remained.

Even so, monks, will the monks become in the future. Those Suttantas uttered by the Tathågata, deep, deep in meaning, not of the world, dealing with the void, to these when uttered, they will not listen, they will not lend a ready ear, they will not bring to them an understanding heart, they will not deem those doctrines that which should be learnt by heart, that which should be mastered.

But those Suttantas which are made by poets, which are poetry, which are a manifold of words, a manifold of phrases, alien, the utterances of disciples, to these when uttered they will listen, they will lend a ready ear, they will bring an understanding heart, they will deem these doctrines that which should be learnt by heart, which should be mastered. Thus it is, monks, that the Suttantas uttered by the Tathågata, deep, deep in meaning, not of the world, dealing with the void, will disappear.

Wherefore, monks, you are thus to train yourselves:-- To these very Suttantas will we listen, will we give a ready ear, to these will we bring an understanding heart. And we will deem these doctrines that which should be learnt by heart, and mastered:-- even thus.

The Buddha’s teachings will disappear by wrong understanding of them and by wrong practice. Today we are fortunate that we still have access to the teachings. Therefore, we should not neglect to study, consider and develop understanding of whatever reality appears at the present moment.

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Chapter 2

The Long Road towards Clear Understanding

The Buddha had at his enlightenment penetrated the four noble Truths. He had become a Fully Enlightened One who could teach the truth to others and show them the Path leading to the eradication of defilements. In the scriptures we read about countless monks, nuns and laypeople, who listened to the Buddha and also penetrated the four noble Truths. They could do so because they had already during innumerable lives accumulated right understanding of all realities appearing through the six doors. We read time and again in the scriptures that the Buddha explained about the objects which are experienced through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. We read, for example, in the “Kindred Sayings” (V, Mahå-vagga, Book XII, Kindred Sayings about the Truths, Ch II, 4, Sphere of Sense) that the Buddha said:

Monks, there are these four ariyan truths. What four? The ariyan truth about dukkha, that about the arising of dukkha, that about the ceasing of dukkha, and the ariyan truth about the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha.

And what, monks, is the ariyan truth about dukkha?

Dukkha, it should be said, is the six personal spheres of sense. What six?

The sense-sphere of the eye, of the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind. This, monks, is called “the ariyan truth about dukkha.”

And what, monks, is the ariyan truth about the arising of dukkha?

It is that craving that leads back to rebirth, along with the lure and the lust that linger longingly now here, now there: namely, the craving for sensual delight, the craving to be born again, the craving for existence to end. This is the ariyan truth about the arising of dukkha.

And what, monks, is the ariyan truth about the ceasing of dukkha?

Verily it is the utter passionless cessation of, the giving up, the forsaking, the release from, the absence of longing for this craving. This is the ariyan truth about the ceasing of dukkha.

And what, monks, is the ariyan truth about the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha?

Verily it is this ariyan eightfold way, to wit: right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the ariyan truth about the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha.

These, monks, are the four ariyan truths. Wherefore, an effort must be made to realize: This is dukkha. This is the arising of dukkha. This is the ceasing of dukkha. This is the practice that leads to the ceasing of dukkha.

“Sphere of sense” is the translation of the Påli term “åyatana”. We read in the “Book of Analysis” (Vibhaòga), the second book of the Abhi-dhamma [[11]](#footnote-11), in Chapter 3, “Analysis of the Bases”, about the twelve åyatanas, here translated as “bases”. There are inner åyatanas and outward åyatanas. The inner åyatanas are the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind, which includes all cittas. The outer åyatanas are: visible object, sound, odour, flavour, tangible object and dhammåyatana. Dhammåyatana includes: cetasikas, subtle rúpas and nibbåna. Åyatana is the association of inner and outer åyatanas. Thus, åyatana always refers to the meeting, the association of several realities. When seeing arises there is the association of eyesense, visible object, seeing and its accompanying cetasikas. The classification by way of åyatanas shows us that seeing and all the other realities are associating because of conditions. Nobody can make them arise, they are not self. Here we see again that the Abhidhamma points to the goal, the development of right understanding.

Some people find it monotonous that in the scriptures it has been stressed again and again that the realities appearing through the six doors should be understood. There are no other realities besides those which appear one at a time through the sense-doors and the mind-door. The Buddha repeatedly spoke about those realities for fortyfive years so that people would begin to have right understanding of them.

We know that seeing is different from hearing, but when they actually appear we are ignorant of them. Citta arises and falls away very quickly; it seems that seeing and hearing occur at the same time, but in reality this is impossible. There can only be one citta at a time which experiences one object. The Buddha taught again and again about the realities appearing through the six doors in order to remind us of them; we are most of the time forgetful of them when they appear. We are absorbed in thinking of what we saw or heard, of concepts which are not real in the absolute sense, instead of developing understanding of absolute realities such as seeing, hearing or thinking.

We read in the above-quoted sutta about craving which is the second noble Truth. Craving for all the objects we experience arises time and again because it has been accumulated. We are not only attached to visible object, sound and the other sense-objects we experience, but also to seeing, hearing and the experiences through the other doors.

We read in the sutta about a threefold craving: craving for sensual delight (kåma-taùhå), for becoming (bhava-taùhå) and for non-becoming (vibhava-taùhå) [[12]](#footnote-12). Even when someone is not attached to sense-pleasures he may be attached to jhåna or absorption concentration and rebirth in higher planes of existence which is the result of jhåna. Then there is craving for becoming. This kind of craving may be without wrong view or with wrong view. When it is accompanied by wrong view it is clinging to eternity-belief, the belief in the existence of a persisting personality. The craving for non-becoming is always accompanied by wrong view, it is clinging to annihilation, the belief that there is annihilation at death.

So long as there is any form of clinging there are conditions for the continuation of the cycle of birth and death and thus there will be dukkha. The sutta exhorts us to develop the eightfold Path since this leads to the end of dukkha. Before the truth of dukkha can be realized right understanding of nåma and rúpa has to be developed stage by stage, and this is an endlessly long process. Also the Buddha had to accumulate understanding very gradually during his lives as a Bodhisatta before he could realize the four noble Truths. We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (I, Book of the Threes, Ch XI, Enlightenment, § 101, Before) that the Buddha said:

Before my enlightenment, monks, when I was yet but a Bodhisat, this occurred to me: What, I wonder, is the satisfaction in the world, what is the misery in the world, what is the escape therefrom?

Then, monks, this occurred to me: That condition in the world owing to which pleasure arises, owing to which arises happiness,- that is the satisfaction in the world. That impermanence, that suffering, that changeability in the world,- that is the misery in the world. That restraint, that riddance of desire and passion in the world,- that is the escape therefrom.

So long, monks, as I did not thoroughly comprehend, as it really is, the satisfaction in the world as such, the misery in the world as such, the escape therefrom as such, so long did I not discern the meaning of being enlightened with perfect enlightenment unsurpassed in the world with it devas, its Måras and Brahmås, together with the host of recluses and bråhmins, of devas and mankind. But, monks, when I fully comprehended, as it really is, the satisfaction in the world as such, the misery in the world as such, the escape therefrom as such,- then did I discern the meaning of being enlightened in the world... Then did knowledge and insight arise in me, thus: Sure is my heart’s release. This is my last birth. Now is there no more becoming again.

Seeking satisfaction in the world, monks, I had pursued my way. That satisfaction in the world I found. In so far as satisfaction existed in the world, by insight I saw it well. Seeking for the misery in the world, monks, I had pursued my way. That misery in the world I found. In so far as misery existed in the world, by insight I saw it well. Seeking for the escape from the world, monks, I had pursued my way. That escape from the world I found. In so far as escape from the world existed, by insight I saw it well....

With regard to the words, “Seeking satisfaction in the world, monks, I had pursued my way”, the commentary to this sutta (the Manorathapúraùí) states: “Ever since the time when he was the bråhmin Sumedha.” Aeons and aeons ago the Buddha was born as the brahmin prince Sumedha. During that life he made the resolve to become a Buddha in the future. We read in the above quoted sutta, “That satisfaction in the world I found. In so far as satisfaction existed in the world, by insight I saw it well.” The Buddha had to develop as a Bodhisatta right understanding of all realities, also of his defilements. He did not avoid being aware of sense-pleasures.

We read in the “Chronicle of the Buddhas”(II A, Account of Sumedha, Khuddaka Nikåya, Buddhavaÿsa, translated in “The Minor Anthologies of the Påli Canon, Part III) that Sumedha who lived in great luxury, decided to retire from worldly life in order to seek the way to the end of the cycle of birth and death. We read (vs. 7- 10):

Sitting in seclusion I thought thus then: “Again-becoming is dukkha, also the breaking up of the physical frame.

Liable to birth, liable to ageing, liable to disease am I then; I will seek the peace that is unageing, undying, secure.

Suppose I, casting aside this putrid body filled with various ordures, should go indifferent, unconcerned?

There is, there must be that Way; it is impossible for it not to be. I shall seek that Way for the utter release from becoming....

When he saw people clearing a way for the Buddha Dípaòkara he also helped clearing a section of the road. We read (vs. 52-57):

Loosening my hair, spreading my bark-garments and piece of hide there in the mire, I lay down prone.

“Let the Buddha go treading on me with his disciples. Do not let him tread in the mire- it will be for my welfare.”

While I was lying on the earth it was thus in my mind: If I so wished I could burn up my defilements today.

What is the use while I (remain) unknown of realizing dhamma here? Having reached omniscience, I will become a Buddha in the world with the devas.

What is the use of my crossing over alone, being a man aware of my strength? Having reached omniscience, I will cause the world together with the devas to cross over.

By this act of merit of mine towards the supreme among men I will reach omniscience, I will cause many people to cross over.

Cutting through the stream of saósåra [[13]](#footnote-13), shattering the three becomings [[14]](#footnote-14), embarking in the ship of Dhamma [[15]](#footnote-15), I will cause the world with the devas to cross over....

The Buddha Dípaùkara declared Sumedha to be a future Buddha. Sumedha reflected on the ten perfections [[16]](#footnote-16) he had to accumulate from life to life. He renewed his resolution to become a Buddha many times during the lives he met other Buddhas who came after the Buddha Dípaùkara. He had to listen to the Dhamma preached by them, he had to consider carefully what he heard and he had to be aware of nåma and rúpa over and over again.

When we read about the Bodhisatta who had to accumulate right understanding from life to life, we can be reminded that we cannot expect to realize the four noble Truths within a short time. It is difficult to penetrate the truth that all conditioned nåmas and rúpas are arising and falling away and that they are thus dukkha. Just a moment ago sound impinged on the earsense, but it is already gone. Seeing, hearing, hardness appear, but they disappear immediately. Thinking about the impermanence of realities is not the same as realizing their arising and falling away as they appear one at a time. Before paññå reaches the stage of insight which is the direct experience of the arising and falling away of nåma and rúpa, their different characteristics have to be clearly known. The intellectual understanding of whatever reality appears, pariyatti, has to be quite firm so that it can condition direct understanding as it is developed in satipaììhåna. This is called paìipatti which is often translated as practice. This again can condition paìivedha or penetration, which includes the stages of insight and enlightenment.

In the “Discourse on the Sixfold Cleansing”(Middle Length Sayings III, 112) the Buddha speaks about a monk who declares “profound knowledge”, who states that he has reached the end of birth, thus, that he is an arahat. The Buddha said that he might be questioned about his understanding so that one knows whether he speaks the truth. In this sutta we read about all realities appearing through the six doors which are the objects of right understanding, no matter whether someone is a beginner on the Path or an arahat.

We read that the Buddha said to the monks that one may ask the monk who states that he is an arahat the following question:

Your reverence, these four modes of statement have been rightly pointed out by that Lord who knows and sees, perfected one, fully Self-Awakened One. What four? That which when seen is spoken of as seen, that which when heard is spoken of as heard, that which when sensed is spoken of as sensed, that which when cognised is spoken of as cognised[[17]](#footnote-17) .

The Buddha said that the monk might be questioned as to what he knows and sees in respect to these “four modes of statement”, so that he can say that he is freed from the “cankers” with no grasping remaining. We read that that monk would be in accordance with dhamma were he to say:

“I, your reverences, not feeling attracted to things seen... heard... sensed... cognised, not feeling repelled by them, independent, not infatuated, freed, released, dwell with a mind that is unconfined. So, your reverences, as I know thus, see thus in repect of these four modes of statement, I can say that my mind is freed from the cankers with no grasping (remaining).”

The Buddha said that the monks should rejoice in that monk’s words and approve of them. Then a further question might be asked and this concerns his knowledge of the five khandhas or aggregates, here referred to as the “groups of grasping”[[18]](#footnote-18). We read that that monk would be in accordance with dhamma were he to say:

“I, your reverences, having known that material shape (rúpa)... feeling... perception(saññå) ... the habitual tendencies (saùkhårakkhandha, all cetasikas other than feeling and perception) ... consciousness, is of little strength, fading away, comfortless; by the destruction, fading away, stopping, giving up and casting out of grasping after and hankering after material shape... feeling... perception... the habitual tendencies... consciousness which are mental dogmas, biases and tendencies, I comprehend that my mind is freed....”

We then read that the person who declares himself to be an arahat might be questioned about the six elements of extension (or solidity), cohesion, radiation (temperature, appearing as heat or cold), motion [[19]](#footnote-19), space[[20]](#footnote-20) and consciousness [[21]](#footnote-21). Further on we read that the monk who declares himself to be an arahat might be questioned about his understanding of the twelve åyatanas, sense-fields. After that we read that he might be questioned about the tendency to pride. Pride or conceit is eradicated at the attainment of the fourth stage of enlightenment, the stage of the arahat. It cannot be eradicated at the attainment of the first three stages of enlightenment.

We then read about the monk’s life of non-violence and fewness of wishes, and of his observance of purity of síla, his moral conduct in speech and deeds. We read about his “guarding of the six doors” through mindfulness:

If I saw visible object with the eye I was not entranced by the general appearance, I was not entranced by the detail. If I dwelt with this organ of sight uncontrolled, covetousness and dejection, evil unskilled states, might flow in. So I fared along controlling it, I guarded the organ of sight, I achieved control over it...

The same is said with regard to the other doorways. There is no self who can control the sense-doors, but at the moment of awareness there is no akusala citta on account of the objects presenting themselves. Further on we read about the monk’s mindfulness in any situation, no matter what he is doing or what his posture is: walking, standing, sitting or lying down. We read, “I was one who comported myself properly”, and this refers to mindfulness and right understanding of realities which appear. We then read about his attainment of the “four meditations”, namely the four stages of rúpa- jhåna, fine-material absorption. Only the person who has accumulations for the attainment of jhåna can attain it, but he should not take his attainment for self, he should not cling to jhåna. The attainment of jhåna is not a necessary condition for the development of vipassanå and enlightenment. Further on we read that the monk said:

“Thus with the mind composed, quite purified, quite clarified, without blemish, without defilement, grown soft and workable, stable, immovable, I directed my mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the cankers. I understood as it really is: This is dukkha... this the arising of dukkha... this the stopping of dukkha... this the course leading to the stopping of dukkha. I understood as it really is: These are the cankers... this is the arising of the cankers... this the stopping of the cankers... this the course leading to the stopping of the cankers. When I knew and saw this thus, my mind was freed from the canker of the sense-pleasures and my mind was freed from the canker of becoming and my mind was freed from the canker of ignorance. In freedom the knowledge came to be that I was freed and I comprehended: Destroyed is birth, brought to a close the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or so. So, your reverences, as I know thus, see thus, in respect of this consciousness-informed body and all external phenomena, I can say that my tendency to pride that ‘I am the doer, mine is the doer’ has been properly extirpated”....

This sutta reminds us of the conditions which are necessary for the attainment of enlightenment. The objects of which right understanding is to be developed are so near: the five khandhas, the “sense-fields” or åyatanas, the elements, all the objects which impinge time and again on the six doors, but we have accumulated such an amount of ignorance. It is a long road, but even a short moment of right understanding is worth while because then there are conditions for having less ignorance.

We read in the above-quoted sutta that the monk, when he saw visible object, was not entranced by the general appearance nor by the detail. Seeing is a reality different from paying attention to the general appearance and the details of something. After seeing has fallen away we think of concepts of people and things. Concepts are not real in the ultimate sense and thus they are not objects of which right understanding is to be developed, but thinking is real and thus there can be awareness of it. We should not try to be aware only of seeing and avoid being aware of thinking, be it thinking with kusala citta or with akusala citta. We read in the “Theragåthå” (Psalms of the Brothers of the Khuddaka Nikåya), in Canto IV, 186, about the “Elder” Någasamåla who developed mindfulness and right understanding naturally, also when he was walking for almsfood. On his way he noticed a girl who was dancing. We read:

Bedecked with trinkets and with pretty frock,

Wreathed with flowers, raddled with sandal wood,

In the main street, before the multitude

A nautch girl danced to music’s fivefold sound.

Into the city I had gone for alms,

And passing I beheld the dancer decked

In brave array, like snare of Måra laid.

Thereat arose in me the deeper thought:

Attention to the fact and to the cause.

The misery of it all was manifest;

Distaste, indifference the mind possessed.

And so my heart was set at liberty.

O see the seemly order of the Dhamma!

The Threefold Wisdom [[22]](#footnote-22) have I made my own,

And all the Buddha bids me do is done.

Någasamåla could not help noticing the girl who was dancing, but he had wise attention to all realities of his daily life, he realized them as impermanent, dukkha and non-self. He had developed all stages of insight and because of his accumulated wisdom he could attain the stage of arahatship.

We may find it difficult to be mindful when we watch on T.V. different events such as a person who is dancing or singing, or when we are engaged in conversation with other people. However, this story reminds us that we should not look for particular situations we believe to be favorable for the development of understanding. Whatever situation we are in is conditioned already, and, no matter where we are, there are realities appearing through six doors: the khandhas, åyatanas or elements. In developing right understanding of any reality which naturally appears, we take one little step on the long road to the elimination of ignorance.

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Chapter 3

Wrong View and Right View

The Buddha, after his enlightenment, preached to a group of five bråhmins a discourse about the four noble Truths. These bråhmins became his first five disciples. We read in the “Book of Discipline” (Vinaya IV, Mahåvagga, 9-14) that one of the bråhmins, Kondañña, attained the first stage of enlightenment, the stage of the sotåpanna, and that he asked for ordination under the Lord. The Buddha continued to instruct the other disciples with dhamma-talk and then also Vappa and Bhaddiya attained the first stage of enlightenment and asked for ordination. As to the two other disciples, Mahånåma and Assaji, after they received more instruction with dhamma-talk, they also attained the stage of the sotåpanna and asked for ordination. We then read that the Buddha preached another discourse to the group of five monks, the “Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-self”, in which he explained that the five khandhas are non-self:

“Body, monks, is not self. Now, were this body self, monks, this body would not tend to sickness, and one might get the chance of saying in regard to body, ‘Let body become thus for me, let body not become thus for me.’ But inasmuch, monks, as body is not self, therefore body tends to sickness, and one does not get the chance of saying in regard to body, ‘Let body become thus for me, let body not become thus for me.’

Feeling is not self.... Perception (saññå) is not self.... the ‘habitual tendencies’ (saòkhårakkhandha) are not self....

Consciousness is not self.... Inasmuch, monks, as consciousness is not self, therefore consciousness tends to sickness, and one does not get the chance to say in regard to consciousness, ‘Let consciousness become such for me, let consciousness not become thus for me.’

What do you think about this, monks? Is body (rúpa) permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Lord.”

“But is that which is impermanent painful (dukkha) or pleasurable?”

“Painful, Lord.”

“But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, dukkha, of a nature to change, as ‘This is mine, this am I, this is my self’?”

“It is not, Lord.”

We then read that the Buddha asked the same concerning the other four khandhas. The Buddha continued:

“Wherefore, monks, whatever is rúpa [[23]](#footnote-23), past, future, present, or internal or external, or gross or subtle, or low or excellent, whether it is far or near-- all rúpa should, by means of right understanding, be seen, as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self...”

We then read that the Buddha said the same about the other four khandhas. After that the Buddha said:

“Seeing in this way, monks, the instructed disciple of the ariyans disregards body and he disregards feeling and he disregards perception and he disregards the habitual tendencies and he disregards consciousness; disregarding he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in freedom the knowledge comes to be: ‘I am freed, and he knows: Destroyed is birth, lived is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or such.’ ”

Thus spoke the Lord; delighted, the group of five monks rejoiced in what the Lord had said. Moreover, while this discourse was being uttered, the minds of the group of five monks were freed from the cankers without grasping. At that time there were six perfected ones in the world.

While the five monks were listening they were mindful and they developed right understanding of all realities appearing through the six doors. When they were hearing Dhamma they clearly understood hearing as an element which experiences sound, which is non-self. They clearly understood sound as only a kind of rúpa which can be heard. They penetrated the truth of non-self to such degree that they attained arahatship. They could do so after they had listened only for a short time because they had accumulated wisdom already during innumerable past lives. Ordinary people need to listen, to study and to consider the true nature of nåma and rúpa for a long time. Ignorance and wrong view are deeply accumulated and even when there is intellectual understanding of realities, the wrong view of self cannot be eradicated.

If we do not understand the five khandhas as they are, we are bound to take them for self. We read in the scriptures about “personality belief”, in Påli: sakkåya diììhi. We read, for example in the “Middle Length Sayings” (I, 44, Lesser Discourse of the Miscellany) that the lay follower Visåkha asked the nun Dhammadinnå different questions on Dhamma and one of these was how there comes to be personality belief. Dhammadinnå answered:

In this case, friend Visåkha, an uninstructed average person, taking no count of the pure ones, not skilled in the dhamma of the pure ones, untrained in the dhamma of the pure ones, taking no count of the true men, not skilled in the dhamma of the true men [[24]](#footnote-24), untrained in the dhamma of the true men, regards rúpa as self or self as having rúpa or rúpa as in self or self as in rúpa....

The same is said with regard to the other khandhas. When there is personality belief someone takes each of the five khandhas for self, or he may see “self” as the owner of the khandhas, or as their container, or as contained within them. The four kinds of wrong interpretation of reality which were just mentioned pertain to each of the five khandhas and thus there are twenty kinds of personality belief [[25]](#footnote-25).

There are many kinds of wrong view with regard to the five khandhas. When someone clings to the belief in a self which will last forever, to the eternity view, he fails to see that what we take for self are only nåma and rúpa which fall away after they have arisen. When someone clings to the belief in a self who will be annihilated after death, to the annihilation view, he fails to see that even now there are conditions for the arising of nåma and rúpa and that thus also after death there will be conditions for their arising. The dying-consciousness is succeeded immediately by the rebirth-consciousness of the next life.

In the “Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-Self” quoted above, we read that the Buddha said to the monks: “But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, dukkha, of a nature to change, as ‘This is mine, this am I, this is my self’?” This phrase, often recurring in the scriptures, is deep in meaning. “This is mine” implies craving which appropriates things as the property of self. “This am I” implies conceit, the tendency to compare oneself with others or to find oneself important. “This is myself” is a formulation of the personality view, the belief in an abiding self, subsequently identified with the five khandhas. We learn from the Abhidhamma that craving may arise with wrong view or without it. We may, for example, think of “my arms and legs” with attachment, without there necessarily being wrong view. We should know that there is not wrong view all the time when we think of ourselves. Conceit accompanies lobha-múlacitta, citta rooted in attachment. At the moment of conceit there cannot be wrong view at the same time. The ariyans who are not arahats may still have conceit; they have eradicated wrong view but they still may compare themselves with others.

Only right understanding of all realities appearing in daily life can eradicate the wrong view of self. When understanding has not been developed there is clinging to an idea of “I see” or “I hear”. Realities such as seeing or hearing arise because of their appropriate conditions, they do not belong to anyone. We cannot do anything about them, they are beyond control.

We read in the “Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant’s Footprint” (Middle Length Sayings I, 28) that Såriputta gave a Dhamma discourse to the monks. He spoke about the four noble Truths and stated that the five khandhas are dukkha. He explained that the four Great Elements are impermanent and dukkha. Then he spoke about the conditions for the arising of seeing. We read that Såriputta said:

Your reverences, just as a space that is enclosed by stakes and creepers and grass and clay is known as a dwelling, so a space that is enclosed by bones and sinews and flesh and skin is known as a material shape. If, your reverences, the eye that is internal is intact but external rúpa does not come within its range and there is no appropriate impact, then there is no appearance of the appropriate class of consciousness. But when, your reverences, the eye that is internal is intact and external rúpa comes within its range and there is the appropriate impact, then there is thus an appearance of the appropriate class of consciousness....

When the rúpa which is visible object impinges on the rúpa which is eyesense there are conditions for seeing-consciousness. Visible object arises and falls away in a group of rúpas, the four Great Elements and other rúpas, but only the rúpa which is visible object can contact the eyesense and can then be seen. Seeing which experiences visible object seems to last for a while, but in reality it falls away immediately. Because of the cetasika saññå, perception or remembrance, we remember concepts of people and things and since we keep on thinking about them, the falling away of seeing is bound to be covered up by thinking. When there is wrong view one takes visible object for a person or a thing. Through right understanding visible object can be known as visible object, a kind of rúpa, and seeing can be known as seeing, a type of nåma. Seeing is vipåkacitta, the result of kamma. Seeing which arises because of conditions is beyond control, non-self.

Further on in the above quoted sutta we read that Såriputta explained in the same way the conditions for the experiences through the ear and the other doorways. We cannot control which kamma produces which vipåka, kamma is anattå and vipåka is anattå. We are inclined to think of situations, for example, of losing possessions or of meeting particular people, as vipåka. A situation is not an ultimate reality. Each situation is actually different sense impressions, which are vipåkacittas, and moments of thinking which are not vipåka but kusala cittas or akusala cittas. When sitting in a car, we may be afraid of an accident, but if there is right understanding of kamma and vipåka, there will be less fear. When it is the appropriate moment for kamma to produce vipåka, vipåkacitta will arise. If we do not go by car we may receive unpleasant sense impressions somewhere else.

The sotåpanna has realized all stages of insight before he attained enlightenment. As explained before, the first stage is clearly knowing the difference between the characteristic of nåma and the characteristic of rúpa. The second stage is understanding nåma and rúpa as conditioned realities. This is not thinking of the conditions for the nåma and rúpa which appear, it is the understanding which is the result of direct awareness of nåma and rúpa as they appear in daily life. When we see, we may, for example, think, “This is vipåka”, but thinking is not the keen understanding which arises when there is awareness of seeing at the present moment.

If there is no clear understanding of kamma and vipåka as anattå there is bound to be fear of losing possessions or dear people. Fear is conditioned by attachment to the pleasant feeling we derive from our possessions or from the company of dear people. Fear of death stems from anxiety about what will happen to the “self” after death, thus anxiety about what does not exist.

We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (Book of the Fours, Ch XIX, Fourth Fifty, § 4, Fearless) that the bråhmin Jåùussoni said to the Buddha that anyone who is subject to death has fear at the thought to death. The Buddha explained that someone may be afraid, but that there are also people who have no fear of death. We read that the Buddha said:

“In this case, bråhmin, a certain one is not freed from passions, not freed from lusts, not freed from desire, affection, from thirst and fever, not freed from craving. Then a grievous sickness afflicts such a one. Thus afflicted by grievous sickness it occurs to him: Alas! the passions that I love will leave me, or I shall leave the passions that I love. Thereupon he grieves and wails, laments and beats the breast and falls into utter bewilderment. This one, bråhmin, being subject to death, is afraid, he falls a-trembling at the thought of death.

Again, bråhmin, here a certain one who regards body is not freed from lusts... is not freed from craving. Then a grievous sickness afflicts him. Thus afflicted it occurs to him: Alas! the body that I love will leave me, or I shall leave the body that I love. Thereupon he grieves... and falls into utter bewilderment. This one, bråhmin, being subject to death, is afraid, he falls a-trembling at the thought of death.

Yet again, bråhmin, here a certain one has done no lovely deed, has done no profitable deed, has given no shelter to the timid; he has done evil, cruel, wrongful deeds. Then a grievous sickness afflicts such a one. Thus afflicted by grievous sickness it occurs to him: Alas! I have done no lovely deed, I have done no profitable deed, I have given no shelter to the timid. I have done evil, cruel, wrongful deeds. To the doom of those who do such deeds hereafter I am going. Thereupon he grieves ... and falls into utter bewilderment. This one, bråhmin, being subject to death is afraid, he falls a-trembling at the thought of death.

Yet again, bråhmin, here a certain one is doubtful, full of perplexity, has come to no conclusion as to true dhamma. He grieves and wails, laments and beats the breast and falls into utter bewilderment. This one also, being subject to death, is afraid, he falls a-trembling at the thought of death....

Thus these four, being subject to death, are afraid....”

The Buddha then explained that the person who is freed from desire, who does not cling to the body, who has done wholesome deeds and who is free from doubt with regard to the Dhamma is not afraid at the thought of death. We read about the person who is freed from doubt:

“Once more, bråhmin, here a certain one is not doubtful, is not full of perplexity, has come to a conclusion as to true dhamma. Then a grievous sickness afflicts him. Thus afflicted by grievous sickness it occurs to him: Surely I have no doubt, I have no worry, I have come to a conclusion as to true dhamma. Thus he grieves not, wails not, nor beats the breast, nor falls into utter bewilderment thereat.

This one, bråhmin, though subject to death, fears not, falls not a-trembling at the thought of death. So these are the four who fear not.”

“It is wonderful, worthy Gotama! It is marvellous, worthy Gotama! May the worthy Gotama accept me as one who has gone to him for refuge from this day forth so long as life may last.”

We read that the person who is free from doubt has no fear of death. The person who has attained the first stage of enlightenment, the sotåpanna, has eradicated doubt with regard to the Dhamma. He has no doubt as to the four noble Truths, he has no doubt as to the truth that all realities are anattå. Doubt can be eliminated by the study of the Dhamma, by discussions about it, by considering the Dhamma and developing right understanding of nåma and rúpa. Right understanding has to be developed during one’s activities, no matter one is cleaning one’s house, washing one’s cloths, preparing food or eating it. Some people believe that one’s daily activities are a hindrance to the development of right understanding but there is no need to delay its development. If someone knows that paramattha dhammas, nåma and rúpa, are the objects of mindfulness and right understanding, there are conditions for their arising at any time.

We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (Book of the Sixes, Ch II, § 9, Mindfulness of Death) that the Buddha said to the monks that mindfulness of death is very fruitful, that it leads to the deathless, which is nibbåna. Different monks spoke about the way they were mindful of death. We read:

“Herein, lord, such is my thought: Were I to live but one day and night, and I were to ponder over the word of the Exalted One [[26]](#footnote-26) , much would be done by me-- thus, lord, I make mindfulness of death become”.

And another said: “I too, lord, make mindfulness become.“

“How so, monk?”

“Herein, lord, such is my thought: Were I to live for a day only, and I were to ponder over the word of the Exalted One, much would be done by me....”

And another said: ”Such is my thought: Were I to live long enough to eat one alms-meal...” And another: “... to munch and swallow four or five morsels...” And another: “... to munch and swallow only one morsel...”

And another said: “I too, lord, make mindfulness of death become.”

“How so, monk?”

“Lord, such is my thought: Were I to live long enough to breathe in after breathing out, or to breathe out after breathing in, and I were to ponder over the word of the Exalted One, much would be done by me-- thus, lord, I make mindfulness of death become.”

And when he had thus spoken, the Exalted Onbe said to the monks:

“Monks, the monk who makes mindfulness of death become thus: ‘Were I to live but one day and night and I were to ponder over the word of the Exalted One ...’ or he who thinks thus: ‘Were I to live for a day only ...’ or ’ long enough to eat one almsmeal...’ or “long enough to munch and swallow four or five morsels ..., and I were to ponder over the word of the Exalted One, much would be done by me’- those monks are said to live indolently; slackly they make mindfulness of death become for the destruction of the cankers.

But the monk who makes mindfulness of death become thus: ’Were I to live long enough to munch and swallow one morsel...’; and he who thinks thus: ‘Were I to live long enough to breathe in after breathing out, or to breathe out after breathing in, and I were to ponder over the word of the Exalted One, much would be done by me’- those monks are said to live earnestly; keenly they make mindfulness become for the destruction of the cankers.

Wherefore, monks, train yourselves thus:

We will live earnestly; keenly will we make mindfulness of death become for the destruction of the cankers. Train yourselves thus, monks.”

Death can come at any moment . Only the monk who realizes that the time to develop right understanding is short, even as short as it takes to eat one morsel of food, or as short as it takes to breathe in or to breathe out, and that he therefore should not waste his time, is diligent. The Buddha said, “Train yourselves thus”. If someone reads these words with wrong understanding he will believe that there is a self who can control the arising of mindfulness. The Buddha explained time and again that all realities are non-self and thus also mindfulness and understanding. He did not have to repeat this truth each time he gave a discourse. The monks had no misunderstanding about the Buddha’s words. They were a condition for them to be mindful of whatever reality appeared.

This sutta can remind us to develop right understanding of realities even when we are eating. What we call morsel of food consists of the four Great Elements and other rúpas. Through touch the rúpas which are hardness, softness, heat or cold may appear. They arise because of conditions and appear just for a moment. They are ultimate realities which can be object of mindfulness and understanding without having to name them or to think about them. Flavour is another kind of rúpa which is experienced through the tongue by the citta which tastes. The rúpa which is flavour is different from the nåma which experiences it. Tasting is a type of vipåkacitta experiencing an object through the tongue. At that moment there is no like or dislike. When the food we are eating is delicious, lobha, attachment, is likely to arise, and when the food is unappetizing anger, dosa, may arise. Dosa may appear in angry speech. Feeling arises at each moment, it can be pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent. Feeling is a type of nåma, non-self, and as understanding develops we will be less inclined to cling to an idea of “I feel”. The cetasika which is remembrance, saññå, arises each moment, but usually we are forgetful of it. Because of saññå we recognize what food we are eating, we remember how to use knife, fork and spoon. No matter what we are doing there are five khandhas arising and falling away. The classification of conditioned realities as five khandhas, one rúpakkhandha and four nåma-kkhandhas, can remind us not to be forgetful of what appears. There are the khandha of feeling and the khandha of remembrance all the time, but if understanding of them does not develop we will continue to take them for self. Apart from feeling and saññå, there are other cetasikas, classified as the khandha of “mental formations”, saòkhårakkhandha. Good qualities and bad qualities are included in saòkhårakkhandha. We should not try to find out which khandha a particular reality is.

All realities which are rúpakkhandha do not experience anything, they have no sensitivity, whereas the realities which are classified as the four nåma-kkhandhas are realities which experience something. Feeling is an experience, saññå is another experience, cetasikas such as lobha or dosa, classified as saòkhårakkhandha, are experiences, and cittas are experiences. In order to realize nåma and rúpa which appear at this moment as anattå, we have to understand first of all the difference between the reality which does not experience anything and the reality which is an experience. If we do not distinguish between the characteristics of nåma and rúpa, we will continue to cling to a self. The clinging to a self is the cause of a great deal of worry and disturbance. When we suffer from painful feeling or sickness we are inclined to think of a self who suffers. In reality there are only the five khandhas which arise just for a moment and fall away. We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (III, Khandhå-vagga, Kindred Sayings on Elements, First Fifty, Ch 5, § 43, An Island to Oneself [[27]](#footnote-27)) that the Buddha said:

Monks, be islands unto yourselves, be your own refuge, having no other; let the Dhamma be an island and a refuge to you, having no other. Those who are islands unto themselves... should investigate to the very heart of things: “What is the source of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair? How do they arise?”

Here, monks, the uninstructed worldling, with no regard for the Noble Ones... regards body as the self, the self as having body, body as being in the self, or the self as being in the body. Change occurs in this man’s body, and it becomes different. On account of this change and difference, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair arise.

(Similarly with feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness.)

But seeing the body’s impermanence, its changeability, its waning, its ceasing, he says, “formerly as now, all bodies were impermanent and unsatisfactory, and subject to change.” Thus, seeing this as it really is, with perfect insight, he abandons all sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. He is not worried at their abandonment, but unworriedly lives at ease, and thus living at ease he is said to be “assuredly delivered”.

(Similarly with feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness.)

Chapter 4.

The Daily Life of the Monk

We read in the Commentary of the “Theragåtha” (Psalms of the Brethren) that Jenta was wondering whether he would leave the world. After he heard the Buddha preach he entered the order and attained arahatship. We read in Canto CXI, Jenta, the following verse uttered by him [[28]](#footnote-28):

Hard is the life without the world, and hard

In truth to bear house life. Deep is the Dhamma;

Hard too is wealth to win. Thus difficult

The choice between the life of monk or layman [[29]](#footnote-29).

I ought to bear unceasingly in mind

(And see in everything) impermanence.

The life of laymen is difficult, they have to exert themselves to earn their living. The monk’s life is also difficult, he is dependant on laymen for the obtainment of the four requisites of robes, food, dwelling and medicines. No matter whether someone is monk or layman, he experiences objects through the six doors, and on account of these objects attachment tends to arise. If one does not develop satipaììhåna, defilements will increase evermore and thus life will become more and more difficult. Jenta did not merely think, “Everything is impermanent”. Thinking about impermanence is not the same as the penetration of the characteristic of impermanence, of the arising and falling away of each reality which appears. The Dhamma is subtle and deep. Although the Dhamma is near, we do not understand it: we do not understand seeing which appears now or hearing which appears now; they arise and fall away, they are impermanent. Jenta had developed vipassanå and he had penetrated the three characteristics of impermanence, dukkha and anattå of all realities which appeared in his daily life. Otherwise he could not have attained arahatship. Even a short reminder of impermanence, as we find in Jenta’s verse, is very beneficial, it can be a condition for us not to delay developing right understanding of whatever reality appears at the present moment. It is of no use to worry about the difficulty of its development. There can be a beginning of understanding realities.

One may find it difficult to develop understanding of realities while one is working, while one is in a hurry or while one is speaking. Not only laypeople, but also monks have many tasks to perform. It is very useful to read about the monks’ daily life in the Vinaya [[30]](#footnote-30). The monks had to sweep around their dwelling places, they had to clean their dwellings, they had to wash their robes, but they had to perform their tasks with understanding and mindfulness of nåma and rúpa. We read in the “Book of Discipline” (IV, Ch II, Observance, 118):

Now at that time the Observance-hall in a certain residence came to be soiled. Incoming monks looked down upon, criticised, spread it about, saying: “How can these monks not sweep the Observance-hall?” They told this matter to the Lord. He said: “I allow you, monks, to sweep the Observance-hall.”

The Buddha had to give the monks permission to perform such tasks as sweeping or cleaning, but he would not have given them permission to do these chores if mindfulness during their work was impossible. The Vinaya is the “Middle Way”; the observance of the rules should go together with the development of right understanding of whatever reality naturally appears in daily life.

We read in the “Kindred Sayings”( IV, Part II, Kindred Sayings about Feeling, 3, § 26) that the Buddha said:

There are these three feelings, monks. What three? Pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling.

Whatsoever recluses or brahmins [[31]](#footnote-31) understand not as they really are the arising, the destruction, the satisfaction and misery of, the escape from, these three feelings, those recluses and brahmins are approved neither among recluses as recluses nor among brahmins as brahmins. And those venerable ones have not understood of themselves, have not realized, the profit of being recluses or brahmins, nor have they lived in the attainment thereof.

But those recluses and brahmins who have done so, are approved both among recluses as recluses and among brahmins as brahmins. And those venerable ones have understood of themselves, have realized, the profit of being recluses or brahmins, and having so attained do live in the present life.

Feeling arises with each moment of citta but we are usually unaware of the different feelings. The monks who were not mindful and did not understand the true nature of feeling, as impermanent, dukkha and anattå, were not approved of. In order to be a true recluse they should develop right understanding of nåma and rúpa.

We read in the “Gradual Sayings”( II, Book of the Fours, Ch II, § 2, Virtue [[32]](#footnote-32)):

Devoted to virtue you should dwell, O monks, devoted to the discipline of the Order and restrained by that discipline! Perfect be your conduct and behaviour! Seeing danger even in the smallest transgression, you should train yourselves in the rules which you have accepted! But if a monk lives like that, what should he further do?

If a monk, while walking, standing, sitting or reclining, is free from greed and hatred, from sloth and torpor, from restlessness and worry, and has discarded sceptical doubt, then his will [[33]](#footnote-33) has become strong and impregnable; his mindfulness is alert and unclouded; his body calm and unexcited; his mind concentrated and collected.

A monk who in such a manner ever and again shows earnest endeavour and moral shame, is called energetic and resolute.

Controlled when walking, standing, sitting and reclining,

Controlled in bending, stretching of the limbs,

Careful observer of the world around him:

He knows how khandhas arise and cease.

He who thus lives with ardent mind

And calm demeanour, free from restlessness,

Who trains himself in quietude of mind,

With constancy and perseverance-

As “Ever-resolute” that monk is known.

In the “Mahå-satipaììhåna sutta” (Dialogues of the Buddha II, no. 22) and in the “Satipaììhåna sutta” (Middle Length Sayings I, no. 10) the Buddha also explained that the monk should practise “clear comprehension”, sati and right understanding, in all postures. When we read in the above-quoted translation the word “controlled”, we should remember that there is no self who controls; the word “controlled” implies mindfulness of realities. We are walking, standing, sitting or reclining, bending and stretching during the day, and at all those moments realities are appearing through the six doors. Right understanding can be developed naturally, no matter what one is doing. When we read about the tasks the monks had to perform we can read such passages with right understanding of the goal of monkhood: the development of right understanding to the degree of arahatship. The Buddha did not have to repeat all the time: “do your tasks with mindfulness”, because he had explained this already.

In the beginning the Buddha had not laid down rules of conduct, but when monks deviated from their purity of life there was an occasion to lay down rules. We read in the “Book of Discipline”( I, Suttavibhaòga, Defeat I, 9) that Såriputta said to the Buddha:

“It is the right time, lord, it is the right time, well-farer, at which the lord should make known the course of training for disciples and should appoint the Påìimokkha, in order that this Brahma-life may persist and last long.”

“Wait, Såriputta, wait, Såriputta. The tathågata will know the right time for that. The teacher does not make known, Såriputta, the course of training for disciples, or appoint the Påìimokkha until some conditions causing the cankers appear here in the Order. And as soon, Såriputta, as some conditions causing the cankers appear here in the Order, then the teacher makes known the course of training for disciples, he appoints the Påìimokkha in order to ward off those conditions causing the cankers....

The rules of Påìimokkha, a collection of precepts, were recited twice a month. We read about the purposes of the rules the monks had to observe in the “Gradual Sayings” (Book of the Twos, Ch XVII, § 1, Results):

Monks, it was to bring about these pairs of results that the Observances were enjoined on his disciples by the Tathågata. What two?

The excellence and well-being of the Order...

The control of ill-conditioned monks and the comfort of good monks...

The restraint, in this very life, of the åsavas, guilt, faults, fears and unprofitable states: and the protection against the same in a future life.

Out of compassion for householders, and to uproot the factions of the evilly disposed...

To give confidence to believers, and for the betterment of believers...

To establish true Dhamma, for the support of the Discipline...

Monks, it was to bring about these pairs of results....

As we read, one of the results is the restraint of the åsavas, biases. The rules help the monk to be mindful and to develop right understanding in order to eradicate all defilements. The rules for the monk should not be separated from the development of satipaììhåna.

We read in the “Book of Discipline”(III, Suttavibhaòga, Training, 195) about a group of six monks who had bad manners while eating. We read:

... Now at that time the group of six monks, while eating, put the whole hand into the mouth...

“I will not put the whole hand into the mouth while eating,” is a training to be observed.”

One should not put the whole hand into the mouth while eating. Whoever out of disrespect puts the whole hand into the mouth while eating, there is an offence of wrong-doing.

There is no offence if it is unintentional, if he is not thinking, if he does not know, if he is ill, ... if he is mad, if he is the first wrong-doer....

We read time and again, when there is reference to a bad deed, that the Buddha asked whether the person who did a bad deed had the intention or volition to do such a deed. He should scrutinize himself as to this. From the Abhidhamma we learn that akusala kamma is actually unwholesome intention, akusala cetanå cetasika. We read that there is no offence when someone is the first wrong-doer. The reason is that at that moment there is no rule yet which can be transgressed.

Further on we read about other rules, given on account of bad manners of the “group of six monks”. We read, for example, about the following rules:

... “I will not talk with a mouthful in the mouth,” is a training to be observed....

...”I will not eat tossing up balls (of food),” is a training to be observed...

...”I will not eat stuffing the cheeks,” is a training to be observed...

...”I will not eat smacking the lips,” is a training to be observed...

...”I will not eat making a hissing sound,” is a training to be observed...

...”I will not eat licking the fingers,” is a training to be observed...

...“I will not eat licking the bowl,” is a training to be observed...

These are only a few examples of rules of conduct to be observed while eating. The monk should see danger in the smallest faults. When he is mindful of nåma and rúpa also while eating he will not eat thoughtlessly. The almsfood he receives is a gift of the faithful layfollowers and he should be worthy of this gift. It should remind him of the obligation of striving after the goal of monkhood. When the food is delicious lobha is likely to arise, but he can be mindful of lobha and realize it as only a type of nåma.

We read in the “Book of Discipline”(IV, Mahåvagga, I, The Great Section, 45-54) about rules concerning the conduct of the newly ordained monk towards his preceptor, a person who gives guidance to him. We read:

“Monks, I allow a preceptor. The preceptor, monks, should arouse in the one who shares his cell the attitude of a son; the one who shares his cell should arouse in the preceptor the attitude of a father. Thus these, living with reverence, with deference, with courtesy towards one another, will come to growth, to increase, to maturity in this dhamma and discipline...”

Here, the Buddha reminds the monks again of the purpose of the rules: growth and maturity in this “dhamma and discipline”. The pupil has to perform many tasks for the preceptor, but not without mindfulness of nåma and rúpa. We read:

“The one who shares a cell, monks, should conduct himself properly towards the preceptor. This is the proper conduct in this repect: having got up early, having taken off his sandals, having arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, he should give tooth-wood, he should give water for rinsing the mouth, he should make ready a seat. If there is conjey [[34]](#footnote-34), having washed the bowl, the conjey should be placed near (the preceptor). When he has drunk the conjey, having given him water, having received the bowl, having lowered it, having washed it properly without rubbing it, it should be put away. When the preceptor has got up, the seat should be removed. If that place is soiled, that place should be swept....

Further on we read about many other tasks the newly ordained monk had to perform for his preceptor. He should prepare a bath for him, and arrange for everything the preceptor needs in the bathroom. He should clean the dwelling place and sweep it when it is soiled. He should open the windows by day if the weather is cool and close them at night. If the wheather is warm, he should close the windows by day and open them at night. He should not only look after the preceptor’s material needs, but he should also help him as regards his spiritual needs. We read (49):

If dissatisfaction has arisen in the preceptor, the one who shares his cell should allay it or should get (another) to allay it, or he should give him a talk on dhamma. If remorse has arisen in the preceptor, the one who shares the cell should dispel it, or he should give him a talk on dhamma. If wrong views have arisen in the preceptor, the one who shares the cell should dissuade him (from them) or should get (another) to dissuade him (from them), or he should give him a talk on dhamma....

We then read about the obligations of the preceptor towards the monk who shares his cell. He should help him with regard to the recitation of the texts, exhort and instruct him. He should also help him in material way and look after him when he is sick.

Reading the details about the many tasks the monks had to perform in their daily life is useful for laypeople as well. The Buddha exhorted the monks to develop satipaììhåna during all their activities and this can remind laypeople that, no matter what they are doing, there are realities appearing through the six doors which can be objects of right understanding. There are nåma and rúpa when one cleans one’s house, open and close windows or look after sick relatives. The Vinaya does not contain merely rules, but also discourses in which the Buddha explained about absolute realities which can be objects of mindfulness and right understanding. There is also Abhidhamma in the Vinaya; the Buddha explained about the four noble Truths, about the five khandhas, about all the objects impinging on the six doors. Thus, the Vinaya, the Suttanta and the Abhidhamma are in conformity with each other.

We read in the Book of Discipline (IV, Mahåvagga, I, The Great Section, 21) that the Buddha, while he was staying near Gaya with thousand monks who had formerly been “matted hair ascetics”, addressed these monks:

Monks, everything is burning. And what, monks, is everything that is burning? The eye, monks, is burning, visible objects are burning, seeing-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, in other words the feeling which arises from eye-contact, be it pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning. With what is it burning? I say it is burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of stupidity; it is burning because of birth, ageing, dying, because of grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair.

The ear... sounds...the nose...odours... the tongue... tastes... the body... tangible objects... the mind... mental states... mind-consciousness is burning, mind-contact is burning, in other words the feeling which arises through mind-contact, be it pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning. With what is it burning? I say it is burning with the fire of passion, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of stupidity; it is burning because of birth, ageing, dying, because of grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair.

Seeing this, monks, the instructed disciple of the ariyans disregards the eye and he disregards visible objects and he disregards seeing-consciousness and he disregards eye-contact, in other words the feeling which arises from eye-contact, be it pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too he disregards. And he disregards the ear... sounds... the nose... odours... the tongue... tastes...the body... tangible objects... the mind... mental states... mind-consciousness... mind-contact, in other words the feeling that arises from mind-contact, be it pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too he disregards; disregarding, he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in freedom the knowledge comes to be, “I am freed”, and he comprehends: Destroyed is birth, lived is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or such.”

And while this discourse was being uttered, the minds of these thousand monks were freed from the cankers without grasping.

In this passage the Buddha taught Abhidhamma: he taught about cittas experiencing objects through the six doors, he taught about cetasikas such as contact, feeling, lobha (attachment), dosa (aversion) and moha (ignorance), and he taught about rúpas such as the sense objects and the senses; in short, he taught about absolute realities. He showed the danger of lobha, dosa, and moha, which arise on account of what is experienced through the six doors. So long as there are defilements there will be birth, old age, sickness and death, and all the suffering inherent in the cycle of birth and death. Right understanding of each reality which appears leads to detachment. The monks who listened were mindful of seeing, visible object, hearing, sound, of all nåmas and rúpas which appeared at that moment. We tend to cling to ourselves, we think of the body as if it belongs to us, we think of our eyes, ears, arms and legs, and we forget the conditions from which it originates. The rúpas we call our body are rúpas produced by the four factors of kamma, citta, food and temperature. No matter whether we walk, stand, sit or lie down, bend or stretch, the rúpas of the body which arise and fall away are produced by these four factors. A dead body cannot move, there are only rúpas produced by temperature. We are inclined to forget that earsense is a particular rúpa in the ear produced by kamma throughout our life, and that it arises and falls away. Earsense can only be contacted by sound. Sound is a rúpa which can be heard by hearing-consciousness. We are inclined to take hearing for self but we can verify that it is a type of nåma arisen because of its appropriate conditions. The monks who listened developed right understanding even to the degree of arahatship. They were freed from birth.

The goal of monkhood is arahatship and therefore the monks who were not arahats yet had to listen to the teachings, consider them and develop satipaììhåna. They recited the Buddha’s teachings, they held Dhamma discussions and they taught the Dhamma. We read in the “Dialogues of the Buddha”(III, no. 29, The Delectable Discourse) that the Buddha said to Cunda that he, the Buddha, had come to his journey’s end, but that there were senior monks who were well trained, who had attained arahatship and were able to propagate the Dhamma. He said that there were also monks of middle age and standing who were his disciples and who were wise. He said that among his disciples there were also novices, sisters, laymen and laywomen. His religion (brahmacariya, the “brahman life”) was in every way successful, complete, well set forth in all its full extent. Further on the Buddha said to Cunda:

Wherefore, Cunda, do you, to whom I have made known the truths that I have perceived, come together in company and rehearse all of you together those doctrines and quarrel not over them, but compare meaning with meaning, and phrase with phrase, in order that this pure religion may last long and be perpetuated, in order that it may continue to be for the good and happiness of the great multitudes, out of love for the world, to the good and the gain and the happiness of devas and men!

It was the task of the Sangha, the Order of monks, to preserve the teachings and to hand them on to future generations. Many of the Buddha’s disciples had attained arahatship and among them Såriputta and Moggallåna were the Buddha’s chief disciples. They were called by the Buddha “model and standard” for the other monks. Såriputta, who was called the “marshall of the Dhamma” was the guardian of the welfare of the monks [[35]](#footnote-35). With his penetrative understanding and ability to teach he explained in detail the sermons which the Buddha had preached in brief. The systematization of the Abhidhamma texts also originated with Såriputta [[36]](#footnote-36). Såriputta and Moggallåna had passed away before the Buddha and thus they did not attend the Great Council which was held at Råjagaha, shortly after the Buddha’s passing away. We read in the “Expositor” (Atthasåliní I, Introductory Discourse, 27):

Thus at the time of the Rehearsal at the First Council, held by the five hundred, the company of the self-controlled [[37]](#footnote-37), who recited under the presidency of Mahå Kassapa did so after previous determination: “This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya [[38]](#footnote-38); these are the first words, these the middle words, these the later words of the Buddha; this is the Vinaya-Piìaka, this the Suttanta-Piìaka, this the Abhidhamma-Piìaka, this the Dígha Nikåya (Dialogues of the Buddha), the Majjhima Nikåya (Middle Length Sayings), the Saÿyutta Nikåya (Kindred Sayings), the Anguttara Nikåya (Gradual Sayings), the Khuddaka Nikåya (Minor Collection); these the nine parts, to wit, the Suttas, etc. [[39]](#footnote-39) ; these the eighty-four thousand units of text.”

All this was rehearsed in seven months. Mahå Kassapa interrogated Upåli, a monk who knew the Vinaya by heart, on the entire Vinaya. After that he interrogated Ånanda on the rest of the teachings [[40]](#footnote-40). Ånanda, who had been the Buddha’s personal attendant during his last twentyfive years and who had attained arahatship on the eve of the Council, had a powerful memory of all that was spoken by the Buddha, even eighty-four thousand units of texts; he remembered where a sermon was spoken and on what occasion. The discourses of the first four Nikåyas start with Ånanda’s words: Thus have I heard, in Påli: Evaÿ me suttaÿ. This indicates that he only rehearsed what was spoken by the Buddha.

We read further on in the “Introductory Discourse” of the “Expositor” about the importance of understanding Abhidhamma:

...And tradition has it that those bhikkhus only who know Abhidhamma are true preachers of the Dhamma; the rest, though they speak on the Dhamma, are not preachers thereof. And why? They, in speaking on the Dhamma, confuse the different kinds of kamma and of its results, the distinction between nåma and rúpa, and the different kinds of dhammas. The students of Abhidhamma do not thus get confused; hence a bhikkhu who knows Abhidhamma, whether he preaches Dhamma or not, will be able to answer questions whenever asked. He alone, therefore, is a true preacher of the Dhamma.

Even today the Sangha, the Order of monks, should continue to preserve the Buddha’s teachings by the study and the practice of the Dhamma.

We read in the “Gradual Sayings” (II, Book of the Fours, Fourth Fifty, Ch XVI, § 10, The Wellfarer’s Discipline) that there are four things which lead to the vanishing of Saddhamma, true Dhamma: the monks learn by heart a text that is wrongly taken, the monks are incapable of being instructed, the monks who know the teachings by heart do not dutifully hand on a text, and the monks are backsliding, and do not make an effort to win the goal. We then read :

Now, monks, these four things conduce to the support, to the non-confusion, to the not vanishing away of Saddhamma. What four?

Herein the monks get by heart a text that is rightly taken, with words and sense that are rightly arranged. Now if words and sense are rightly arranged the meaning also is easy to follow...

Then again the monks are easy to speak to, possessed of qualities which make them easy to speak to; they are tractable, capable of being instructed...

Yet again those monks who are of wide knowledge, versed in the doctrines, who know Dhamma by heart, who know the Vinaya by heart, who know the summaries by heart,- these dutifully hand on a text to another; thus, when they pass away, the text is not cut down at the root, it has something to stand on...

Yet again the elder monks live not in abundance, they are not lax, they take not the lead in backsliding (to the worldly life), they shirk not the burden of the secluded life, they set going an effort to reach the unattained, to win the goal not won, to realize the unrealized. So the generation that follows comes to depend upon their view. That generation also lives not in abundance... but makes an effort to realize the unrealized...

So these, monks, are the four things that conduce to the support, to the non-confusion, to the not vanishing away of Saddhamma.

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1. Collected and composed are in this text the translation of : with sati sampajañña, with mindfulness and understanding. The four applications of mindfulness which then follow have been explained in my book “The Buddha’s Path”, Ch 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I explained the difference in my book “The Buddha’s Path”, Ch 3 and 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. He had personal conviction of the truth. The sotåpanna has eradicated doubt about realities and he has an unshakable confidence in the Triple Gem. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As I explained in “The Buddha’s Path”, Ch 1 and 2, realities which are impermanent are unsatisfactory, dukkha. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As I explained in “The Buddha’s Path”, Ch 7, insight is developed in different stages. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I am using the translation of Ven. Nyanaponika, in Anguttara Nikåya, An Anthology I, Wheel no. 155-158, Kandy. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In the “Expositor I, Introductory Discourse. See further on in this chapter about the person of Buddhaghosa. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. and as “Enumeration of the Ultimate Realities”, as translated by U Kyaw Kine. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In my “Abhidhamma in Daily Life” I tried to give an introduction to the study of the Abhidhamma. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The time this was written is not sure, but it must have been between the 8th and 12th century A.D. It has been translated into English and published by the P.T.S. with the title of “Compendium of Philosophy”, and by Ven. Nårada, Colombo, under the title of “A Manual of Abhidhamma”. It has also been translated by the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi as “A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma”. Moreover, it has been translated together with its commentary as “Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma” and “Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma”, by R.P. Wijeratne and Rupert Gethin. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This book can be read together with its commentary, the “Sammohavinodaní”, attributed to Buddhaghosa and translated as “The Dispeller of Delusion”, in two volumes. The commentary is most helpful for the understanding of the Abhidhamma, that is, the understanding of one’s own life. Buddhaghosa illustrates the meaning of the realities taught in the “Book of Analysis” in a lively way with examples from daily life. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These three are often mentioned in the scriptures. See also, for example, the “Book of Analysis”, Ch 4, § 2, the Truth of the Cause. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The cycle of birth and death. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In the sensuous planes of existence, the fine-material planes of existence (result of rúpa-jhånas) and the immaterial planes of existence (result of arúpa-jhånas). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The eightfold Path. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. These are: liberality, síla, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving kindness and equanimity. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. As to the term “sensed”, in Påli: mutaÿ, we read in the “Dhammasangaùi”(Book II, Ch IV, § 961) that odour, taste and tangible object are rúpas which are “sensed”. As to the term “cognized”, this means: known through the mind-door. By way of the “four modes of statement” it is explained that all realities have to be known as they are. Seeing and the object which is seen, hearing and the object which is heard, all realities have to be clearly understood. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. As explained in “The Buddha’s Path”, all conditioned nåmas and rúpas have been classified as five khandhas. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. These are the four “principle rúpas” or “Great Elements”. Three of them can be experienced by touch, namely, solidity, heat and motion. Cohesion cannot be experienced by touch. Rúpas do not arise singly, they arise in groups of different compositions. Each group consists of the four principle rúpas and in addition several other rúpas. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The rúpa which is space, in Påli: åkåsa, separates the different groups of rúpas from each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Including all cittas. Apart from the classification of realities by way of six elements there are other ways of classifying realities as elements. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Namely: remembrance of former lives, the divine eye which is seeing decease and rebirth of beings according to kamma, and extinction of all defilements. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The text has “body”, but I prefer to retain the Påli term rúpa, since rúpakkhandha includes all paramattha dhammas which are rúpas, those of which the body consists as well as those outside. The body as a whole is a concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In Påli: sappurisa, which term denotes the disciple of the Buddha who has realized the truth. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See also the Dhammsasaùgani, Book III, § 1003, Theory of Individuality, which is here the translation of sakkaya diììhi. This term is in the suttas sometimes translated as “person-pack view”. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The P.T.S. translation has here: Were I day and night to abide mindful of the Exalted One’s word... Instead of this I prefer the the translation of an almost identical sutta in “The Book of the Eights”, Ch VIII, § 3, Mindfulness of Death. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. I am using the translation by Walshe, in Saóyutta Nikåya, An Anthology, Part III, Wheel, 318- 321, Kandy. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. I slightly modified the P.T.S. translation by Mrs. Rhys Davids, in order to make it more readable. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The translation has: The choice of one or other how to live. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Translated as 6 volumes of “The Book of the Discipline”, in the P. T. S. edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In Påli: bråhmaùa, referring not only to a member of the Brahman caste, but also to someone who leads a pure life. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. I am using the tramnslation by Ven. Nyanaponika, in Anguttara Nikåya, An Anthology I, Wheel 155-158, B.P.S. Kandy. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The P.T.S. edition has here: energy. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. rice gruel [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See “The Life of Såriputta” by Ven. Nyanaponika, Wheel no. 90-92, B.P.S. Kandy. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Ch 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Arahats. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The whole of the teachings is also referred to as “The Dhamma and the Vinaya”. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. These nine parts, sometimes mentioned in the Discourses (for example, Middle Length Sayings, no. 22), are: suttas without verses and suttas with verses, expositions (veyyåkarana) which includes the Abhidhamma, Jåtaka (Birth stories) and other parts. See for a more detailed explanation the “Expositor” I, Introductory Discourse, 25-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See the Book of Discipline V, Cullavagga, Ch XI, and the “Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning”, commentary to the “Good Omen Discourse” of the “Minor Readings”, Khuddaka Nikåya. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)