

Section 12: The Similes and Metaphors of the Buddha

The Blessed One, with his boundless wisdom and compassion, often used similes, metaphors, and parables to illuminate the profound truths of the Dhamma. His teachings, like a vast and shimmering ocean filled with precious treasures, are adorned with rich and brilliant imagery that clarifies deep and subtle truths.

With skilful means, the Buddha conveyed the essence of the Dhamma through vivid comparisons, making the profound comprehensible, the abstract tangible, and the distant near. The scriptures abound with these exquisite similes, each like a radiant jewel reflecting the light of wisdom. Here, we present a few, showcasing the Buddha's extraordinary mastery in using similes to awaken insight and inspire liberation.

Similes Illustrating the Length of an Aeon (Kappa)

An **aeon** is an unimaginably vast span of time, extending far beyond ordinary human comprehension. The Buddha, ever intent on guiding beings toward liberation, frequently expounded on the immense suffering endured throughout the endless cycles of samsāra. Again and again, he urged us to strive for liberation from sensual desires and conditioned existence. To illustrate the staggering length of samsāra, the Blessed One offered the following profound similes:

The Great Stone Mountain

Imagine a colossal mountain of solid rock,
One yojana long (15 km), one yojana wide, and one yojana high.
Once every hundred years, a man strokes it lightly
With the finest Kāsi cloth—soft as a whisper of the wind.
By this slow and delicate touch, the mountain may one day wear away,
Vanishing into dust.
Yet even then, an aeon would not have reached its end! ⁱ

A Large City Filled with Mustard Seeds

Imagine a mighty city, encircled by iron walls,
One yojana long, one yojana wide, and one yojana high.
Inside, the space is filled—densely packed—
With mustard seeds, as numerous as the stars in the sky.
Once every hundred years, a man removes a single seed.
Slowly, painstakingly, the great heap diminishes,
Until, at last, not a single mustard seed remains.
Yet even then, an aeon would not have come to an end! ⁱⁱ

The Sand in the River Ganges

From the sacred source of the Ganges,
Where its waters first emerge,
To the place where it merges with the vast ocean—
Imagine the immeasurable grains of sand

That line its shores, carried in its currents,
Stretching beyond sight, beyond reckoning.
If one were to attempt to count them,
Even by hundreds, thousands, or hundreds of thousands,
Still, the aeons that have passed
Would be even greater in number ! ⁱⁱⁱ

The Heap of Bones

Among the many similes the Blessed One used to illustrate the vast expanse of saṃsāra, the following offers a hauntingly powerful image of its unimaginable length:

The bones left behind by a single being,
Through the countless births of just one aeon,
Would amass into a great mountain—
So declared the Enlightened One.
This heap of bones would rise as high
As the towering Vepulla Mountain,
Standing proudly to the north of Vulture's Peak,
Amidst the rugged Magadhan hills. ^{iv}

This profound simile reveals the staggering reality of our endless wandering in birth and death. If even a single being leaves behind such a mountain of bones, how much greater is the suffering endured across countless lifetimes? With deep compassion, the Buddha taught this to awaken urgency in our hearts—to inspire us to break free from this unending cycle and seek the path to liberation.

A Call to Liberation

Through these striking images, the Buddha revealed the unfathomable duration of saṃsāra—the endless wandering through birth, aging, and death. In the face of such an immeasurable expanse of suffering, the Blessed One exhorted his disciples to **strive diligently for liberation, to break free from the cycle of existence, and to attain the Deathless—Nibbāna.**

May these profound similes serve as a reminder of the urgency of the path and inspire all beings to walk the noble way to freedom.

Similes Used for Sensual Desires

The Dog and the Bone

The Buddha used this simile to illustrate that sensual pleasures can never bring true satisfaction. As long as one remains attached to them, suffering persists, and desires remain unfulfilled. ^v

Imagine a hungry dog waiting outside a butcher's shop. A worker from the shop throws the dog a meatless bone. Overjoyed, the dog licks and bites the bone, hoping to satisfy its hunger. However, the bone contains no meat, offering nothing to fulfill its craving. Still, the dog does not let go. Why? Because it falsely believes that by holding and licking the bone, it will find

satisfaction. Lacking wisdom, the dog does not realize that the bone is empty, and in the end, it becomes exhausted and disappointed.

A noble disciple, however, does not fall into the same delusion. When encountering sensual pleasures, he does not grasp at them blindly. He remembers the Buddha's teaching: *Sensual pleasures are like a meatless bone—offering much suffering and despair, while the danger in them is great.* With wisdom, he sees their true nature and does not become attached.

Simile for Good Friendship

The Buddha frequently emphasized the importance of good friendship in the spiritual path. The following simile highlights its significance.^{vi}

Just as the dawn is the forerunner of the rising sun, good friendship is the precursor to the arising of the seven factors of enlightenment. When a person associates with a wise friend who follows the Dhamma, he too will gradually develop and cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment.^{vii}

Simile of the Peaked House

The Buddha often used the simile of the peaked house to illustrate profound Dhamma teachings. Imagine a peaked house where all the rafters converge at the roof peak. If the roof peak is removed, the entire structure collapses. This powerful imagery conveys deep insights into the nature of ignorance, Nibbāna, and wisdom.

Ignorance as the Roof Peak

The peaked house serves as a metaphor for how all unwholesome states are rooted in ignorance. Just as the rafters of a house are connected to the roof peak, all defilements converge upon ignorance. When ignorance is abandoned, all defilements disappear.

"Bhikkhus, just as all the rafters of a peaked house lead to the roof peak and join upon it, and all collapse when the roof peak is removed, so too, all unwholesome states are rooted in ignorance and converge upon ignorance. When ignorance is uprooted, all defilements disappear."^{viii}

Nibbāna as the Roof Peak

The Buddha likened Nibbāna to the roof peak, emphasizing that the seven factors of enlightenment naturally lead to liberation. Just as all the rafters of a peaked house slant towards the roof peak, a bhikkhu who cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment inclines towards Nibbāna.

"Bhikkhus, just as all the rafters of a peaked house slant, slope, and incline towards the roof peak, so too, when a bhikkhu develops and cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment, he slants, slopes, and inclines towards Nibbāna."^{ix}

Wisdom as the Roof Peak

Once the roof peak is firmly set in place, the other rafters can be positioned steadily. Similarly, when the faculty of wisdom is established, the other four faculties—faith, energy, mindfulness, and samādhi—become stable and well-developed.

"Bhikkhus, just as in a house with a peaked roof, there is no stability of the rafters until the roof peak is set in place... but when the roof peak is secured, the rafters hold firmly, so too, so long as noble knowledge (wisdom) has not arisen in a noble disciple, the other four faculties

lack stability. But when noble knowledge has arisen, then the other four faculties become steady and strong.”^x

By deeply contemplating this simile, one gains a clearer understanding of the significance of wisdom, the perils of ignorance, and the inevitable progression towards Nibbāna when the right conditions are cultivated.

Similes Illustrating the Growth and Decline in Dhamma

The following similes highlight how a moral person flourishes in the Dhamma, while an immoral person declines. ^{xi}

The Tree with Sufficient Branches and the Tree with Deficient Branches

The Blessed One said:

“Bhikkhus, for an immoral person, one deficient in virtuous conduct, right samādhi lacks its proximate cause. Without right samādhi, the knowledge and vision of things as they really are cannot arise. Without this knowledge and vision, disenchantment and dispassion fail to develop. Without disenchantment and dispassion, the knowledge and vision of liberation remains unattainable.

Just as a tree lacking branches and foliage cannot grow to its full potential—its shoots, bark, softwood, and heartwood remaining underdeveloped—so too, an immoral person, deficient in virtue, lacks the necessary conditions for the path to liberation.”

“Bhikkhus, for a virtuous person, one established in moral conduct, right samādhi finds its necessary support. With right samādhi, the knowledge and vision of things as they really are arises. With this knowledge and vision, disenchantment and dispassion develop. With disenchantment and dispassion, the knowledge and vision of liberation is realized.

Just as a tree rich in branches and foliage grows to its full potential—its shoots, bark, softwood, and heartwood thriving—so too, a virtuous person, grounded in moral conduct, possesses the essential conditions for the path to liberation.”

(note: the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*)—the chains binding them to samsāra—gradually weaken and fall away. Through morality (*sīla*), concentration (*saṃādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), one purifies the mind, ultimately breaking free from all suffering.

How a Noble Person Associates with the Ignorant

To illustrate how a Noble One interacts with ignorant people, the Blessed One used the following simile:

The Swan and the Milky Water

On one occasion, Venerable Nāgasamāla was accompanying the Buddha as his attendant. When they reached a crossroads, the Blessed One pointed out the right path and said, “Nāgasamāla, this is the way we should go.” However, Venerable Nāgasamāla insisted on taking a different route.

When he went his own way, bandits lying in wait attacked him and broke his alms bowl. Wounded and humbled, he returned to the Buddha and recounted what had happened.

The Blessed One then uttered this profound Udāna, likening the wisdom of the Noble Ones to a swan that drinks only the milk when it is mixed with water:

“Walking together, dwelling as one,
The Perfect One moves among the ignorant.
Yet, seeing clearly, he abandons all evil,
As the milk-drinking swan leaves water behind.”^{xii}

How to Stop Craving

To illustrate how one can put an end to craving, the Buddha used the following simile:

Stopping a Flowing River

Once, Ajita, a student of the Brahmin Bāvari, approached the Buddha and asked how to halt the powerful river of craving.

The Blessed One explained that just as a flowing river can be stopped by a strong barricade, the torrents of craving can be restrained by mindfulness and wisdom.

“Whatever streams flow through the world,
Mindfulness is the barrier that holds them back.
This, I declare, is the way to restrain the streams—
They are closed off by the power of wisdom.”^{xiii}

Thus, with mindfulness and wisdom, one can stem the flood of craving and cross to the other shore—free, unshaken, and at peace.

The Nature of Existence

To illustrate how renewed existence comes to be, the Blessed One used the simile of a seed growing in a field: The Buddha said:

“...Ānanda, for beings shrouded in ignorance and bound by craving, kamma is the fertile field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture that nurtures its growth. When these conditions are present, consciousness takes root in a new realm—whether inferior or superior—and thus, the cycle of renewed existence continues. In this way, Ānanda, existence arises.”^{xiv}

Just as a seed, when sown in fertile soil and nourished by water, sprouts and grows, so too does existence continue for those entangled in ignorance and craving.

The Power of Heedfulness^{xv}

To emphasize the supreme importance of heedfulness, the Buddha used the following similes, revealing that this single quality, when cultivated, leads to both present and future well-being.

The Footprint of an Elephant

“...Just as the footprints of all land-dwelling creatures fit within the footprint of an elephant, and the elephant’s footprint surpasses them all in size, so too, heedfulness is the one quality that, when developed and perfected, brings both worldly benefit and ultimate liberation.”^{xvi}
As the mighty elephant leaves the deepest and most enduring impression on the earth, heedfulness leaves the greatest impact on one’s journey through samsāra, shaping both this life and those to come.

The Roof Peak of a Peaked House

“...Just as all the rafters of a peaked house lean toward its central roof peak, supporting and converging upon it, so too, heedfulness is the single quality upon which all wholesome qualities rest and toward which they incline.”^{xvii}

Just as the roof peak holds the structure together, heedfulness is the pinnacle of virtues, supporting and strengthening the path to awakening.

The Rarity of Gaining a Human Rebirth

The Blessed One frequently emphasized how rare and precious it is to be born in the human realm and to encounter the Dhamma. Through the following similes, he illustrated this profound truth:

[The Blind Turtle](#)

On one occasion, the Buddha asked:^{xviii}

“Imagine a man were to throw a yoke with a single hole into the vast ocean, and the winds carried it in all directions—east, west, north, and south. Now, suppose there were a blind turtle that surfaced just once at the end of every hundred years. What do you think, bhikkhus? Would that blind turtle ever, by chance, place its neck through that yoke?”

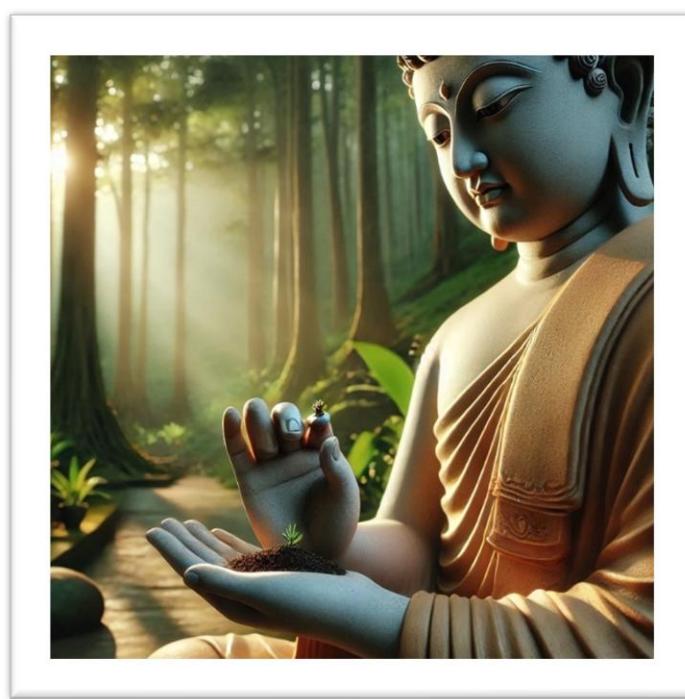
The bhikkhus replied:

“Venerable sir, perhaps after a very long time, such a thing might happen.”

The Buddha then declared:

“Bhikkhus, the blind turtle is more likely to place its neck through the yoke than a fool, once fallen into lower realms, is to regain a human birth. Why is that? Because there is no practice of the Dhamma there.”^{xix}

Just as the chances of the turtle finding the yoke are nearly impossible, so too is the opportunity to be reborn as a human after falling into the lower realms—making this life an invaluable chance to practice the Dhamma.



A Bit of Soil^{xx}

A Bit of Soil

On another occasion, the Buddha took a small pinch of soil on his fingernail and asked:
“Bhikkhus, what do you think? Which is greater—the tiny bit of soil on my fingernail or the vast earth?”

The bhikkhus replied:

“Venerable sir, the great earth is far greater.”

The Buddha then explained:

“So too, bhikkhus, those who, upon passing away from the human realm, are reborn as humans again are few—like the soil on my fingernail. But those who fall into lower realms are as vast as the earth itself.” ... ”^{xxi}

This rare human birth should not be taken for granted, for it is the gateway to liberation.

The Urgency of Abandoning Identity View (Sakkāyaditṭhi)

To emphasize the importance of abandoning identity view, the Buddha used the following powerful similes:

“If a person were struck with a sword, he would rush for treatment to save his life. Likewise, if one’s clothes caught fire, one would immediately throw them off to avoid being burned. In the same way, one walking the path to liberation must act swiftly to uproot identity view and strive to attain stream-entry without delay.”^{xxii}

Just as we would not hesitate to remove burning clothes or seek aid for a mortal wound, we must make haste in cutting through delusion—before this precious opportunity slips away.

The Perils of Ungratefulness and Lack of Mindfulness

Ungratefulness—A Mark of Low Character

Ungratefulness is a quality that stains the heart, obscuring the virtues of humility and wisdom. Like a tree that bears no fruit despite being nurtured, an ungrateful person fails to appreciate the kindness that sustains them. The Buddha, in his boundless compassion, warned of the dangers of ingratitude with a striking simile: ^{xxiii}

The Jackal

A jackal, known for its cunning and opportunistic nature, may still retain a sense of gratitude when it finds food or shelter. Yet, the Blessed One pointed out that an ungrateful monk—one who fails to appreciate the profound gifts of the Dhamma and the kindness of others—sinks even lower than a jackal:

“There may be some gratitude and thankfulness in that old jackal, but there is no gratitude and thankfulness in a certain person here claiming to be a follower of the Sakyamuni... Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: ‘We will be grateful and thankful, and we will not overlook even the least favor done to us.’”

Gratitude is the mark of a noble heart. It is not merely a pleasant emotion but a force that uplifts the mind, deepens wisdom, and fortifies virtue. Just as a river nourishes the land it touches, gratitude enriches the mind, fostering contentment and joy. A person who cherishes even the smallest act of kindness blossoms with inner beauty and strength.

An ungrateful heart, however, is like a cracked vessel—it cannot hold the waters of wisdom. No matter how much guidance and support it receives, it remains empty. A monk who forgets the kindness of his teachers, supporters, and the immeasurable gift of the Dhamma risks falling into arrogance and heedlessness, straying far from the path to liberation. Thus, the wise remember: gratitude is not a burden, but a blessing; not an obligation, but a source of great merit.

The Danger of Carelessness in Mindfulness

The Buddha also cautioned against the dangers of heedlessness, for a moment of carelessness can undo years of effort. Just as a single spark can ignite a forest fire, a single lapse in mindfulness can give rise to unwholesome thoughts that consume the mind. To illustrate this, the Blessed One gave a powerful simile:

The Cat Who Swallowed a Mouse

A greedy cat, upon catching a mouse, swallows it whole, eager to devour its prey. Yet, because it fails to chew, the mouse remains alive inside its stomach. Gnawing from within, the mouse eventually kills the cat.

In the same way, a monk who enters a village for alms without mindfulness is like the cat. If he allows his senses to wander and encounters a woman dressed lightly, lust may arise in his heart. Though subtle at first, unchecked desire gnaws at his resolve, weakening his determination. If he does not guard his mind, this poison will spread, leading him away from the holy life and blocking the path to the cessation of suffering.

“Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: ‘We will enter a village or town for alms with body, speech, and mind guarded, with mindfulness set up, restrained in our sense faculties.’”^{xxiv}

Mindfulness is the gatekeeper of wisdom, the guardian of the heart. Just as a wise king places trusted sentinels at the gates of his city, a monk places mindfulness at the doors of his senses. With mindfulness established, sights, sounds, and sensations pass through without disturbing the mind, just as a lotus remains unstained by the water in which it grows.

Heedlessness, however, is the enemy of progress. A single unguarded moment can lead to downfall, just as a charioteer who loosens his grip on the reins loses control of his horses. But the one who remains ever watchful, who walks with mindfulness and restraint, will find peace unshaken—like a mountain standing firm amidst the winds of the world.

“Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus: ‘We will enter a village or town for alms with body, speech, and mind guarded, with mindfulness set up, restrained in our sense faculties.’”

Mindfulness is the guardian of the heart, the shield against defilements. Like a vigilant watchman protecting a city from intruders, a mindful monk safeguards his senses, ensuring that no unwholesome thoughts take root. With unwavering awareness, he walks the path to true peace and freedom.

A Life of Gratitude and Mindfulness

Thus, the Blessed One exhorted his disciples to cultivate both gratitude and mindfulness, for these qualities protect and uplift the heart. Gratitude nourishes wisdom, ensuring that one walks the path with humility and reverence. Mindfulness strengthens resolve, shielding the mind from defilements and distractions.

Just as the sun and moon illuminate the sky, gratitude and mindfulness illuminate the path to liberation. Those who cherish these qualities walk with joy, their hearts radiant with the light of the Dhamma, ever moving toward the shore of Nibbāna.

The Power of Kamma—The Inescapable Law of Cause and Effect

The Buddha, with his perfect wisdom, revealed that all beings are the heirs of their actions. Just as a seed sown in fertile soil will inevitably bear fruit, every deed—whether wholesome or unwholesome—produces corresponding results. Through vivid similes, the Blessed One illuminated the workings of kamma, teaching that skilful actions lead to happiness and unskilful actions lead to suffering.

The Inescapable Consequence of Wrongdoing

Wronging the Innocent Brings One's Own Ruin

The Buddha used a striking simile to illustrate the inevitable repercussions of harming the pure and innocent. Just as dust thrown into the air ultimately falls back upon the one who casts it, an evil deed done to a faultless person will return to its doer with inescapable force:

**“If one wrongs an innocent man,
A pure person without blemish,
The evil falls back on the fool himself
Like fine dust thrown against the wind.”** ^{xxv}

This profound truth reminds us that cruelty, deceit, and injustice can never truly harm the virtuous. Even if the innocent suffers temporarily, their purity protects them in the long run, while those who commit wrongdoings inevitably suffer their own downfall.

Hatred, malice, and envy are like fiery embers held in one's own hand—though they may be intended for another, they first burn the one who carries them. Thus, the wise refrain from harming others, knowing that every action, word, and thought will return, like a shadow that never leaves.

Kamma—The Sure Fruits of One's Deeds

Every Action Brings Its Due Result

The Buddha further emphasized the certainty of kamma through another powerful analogy found in the *Dhammapada*. He revealed that just as an ox pulling a cart cannot escape the weight of its burden, so too a person cannot evade the results of their own deeds: ^{xxvi}

**“If a person does evil, the fruit of that evil follows him,
Like the cart-wheel follows the foot of the ox.”**

In the same way that the ox cannot shake off the cart that it drags, a person who has done wrong cannot escape the consequences of their misdeeds. Even if the results do not manifest immediately, they remain bound to the doer, awaiting their time to ripen.

Yet, the Buddha also offered a reassuring truth—wholesome actions bear results just as surely as unwholesome ones:

**“If a person does good, the fruit of that goodness follows him,
Like a shadow that never leaves.”**

Just as a shadow cling to a person, wholesome kamma remains with the doer, bringing peace, joy, and future well-being. A person who cultivates generosity, virtue, and wisdom need not fear the future, for they walk upon a path of safety and light.

[The Path to Liberation—Choosing One’s Destiny](#)

Understanding the law of kamma inspires both caution and confidence. It teaches caution because harmful deeds, even if done in secrecy, will bear fruit in due time. And it inspires confidence because good deeds, even if unseen by others, will never be lost.

Thus, the wise carefully guard their actions, knowing that each thought, word, and deed shapes their future. By cultivating generosity, virtue, and wisdom, they sow seeds of happiness that will ripen into joy, peace, and ultimately, liberation.

Just as a farmer carefully tends to his crops, ensuring a rich harvest, one who cultivates skilful actions secures a future of unshakable well-being. And just as fire burns those who play with it carelessly, one who indulges in unwholesome deeds will surely face suffering.

Thus, the Blessed One declared:

**“By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled.
By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one purified.
Purity and impurity depend on oneself—
No one can purify another.”** ^{xxvii}

May we all strive to walk the path of wisdom and goodness, ensuring a future free from suffering and filled with boundless peace.

[Loving-Kindness \(*Mettā*\)—An Unshakable Heart](#)

The Buddha frequently emphasized the boundless power of *mettā* (loving-kindness), encouraging his followers to cultivate this sublime quality to attain great benefits and profound spiritual fruits. Just as a radiant sun dispels darkness effortlessly, a mind suffused with *mettā* remains unshaken by the unskilful actions of others.

Through vivid similes, the Blessed One illustrated the immeasurable strength of a heart filled with unconditional loving-kindness. When one develops limitless *mettā*, no harm, insult, or ill will can disturb the mind—just as the vast earth, boundless space, and a well-rubbed catskin bag remain unaffected by external forces.

[Be Like the Earth—Vast, Unshaken, and Impartial](#)

The earth is vast and all-sustaining. It bears the weight of all beings, whether good or evil, without complaint. People may dig into it, trample upon it, or cast filth upon it, yet the earth remains unmoved.

The Buddha gave this simile to illustrate the unshakable nature of *mettā*: ^{xxviii}

"Suppose a person came with a hoe, intending to remove all the earth into the basket he carries. No matter how much he tries, he cannot unearth the entire ground."

In the same way, when a person has cultivated boundless *mettā*, the harsh words and actions of others will not disturb them. Just as the earth does not recoil in anger when someone spits upon it, a loving heart does not react with hatred when faced with hostility.

A person who has fully developed *mettā* is like a great mountain—unmoved by the winds of praise or blame. They respond to aggression with understanding, to cruelty with compassion, and to hostility with peace.

[Be Like Space—Unstained and Beyond Defilement](#)

Space is vast, formless, and ungraspable. No matter how much dust is thrown into the air, space remains untouched. A person may bring a palette of colours, wishing to paint pictures upon space, but it is impossible—space cannot be tainted.

Likewise, the Buddha taught:

"Suppose a person came with many colours of paint and tried to decorate space. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot alter or stain it." ^{xxix}

Just as space remains pure and open, a heart filled with *mettā* cannot be stained by hatred, anger, or resentment. Even if others try to provoke or harm, the practitioner of *mettā* remains free—unaffected by the impurities of the world.

This simile reminds us that external conditions do not determine our peace; rather, it is the state of our mind that shapes our experience. A mind rooted in loving-kindness is like an open sky—boundless, free, and beyond defilement.

[Be Like a Well-Rubbed Catskin Bag—Soft, Resilient, and Unbreakable](#)

The Buddha used another striking simile to describe the resilience of a mind steeped in *mettā*:

"A well-rubbed catskin bag does not crack or tear, no matter how much one tries to break it with a stick." ^{xxx}

A heart trained in *mettā* is supple and unbreakable, like well-tanned leather that resists wear and tear. Even under pressure, it does not rupture. Likewise, when one cultivates loving-kindness deeply, even the harshest treatment from others cannot damage their inner peace.

This simile teaches us that *mettā* is not just gentleness—it is also strength. It is not passivity, but an unshakable resilience in the face of harm. Just as water remains fluid and yielding yet wears down even the hardest rock, a loving heart is soft yet indomitable.

[The Boundless Power of Mettā](#)

When one cultivates limitless *mettā*, the mind becomes vast like the earth, free like space, and resilient like a well-rubbed catskin bag. No matter what challenges arise, they do not disturb the heart.

A person who embodies *mettā* walks through the world with fearlessness and grace. They neither cling to praise nor recoil from blame. They radiate goodwill even toward those who seek to harm them, for they understand the truth: hatred only ceases through love, not through more hatred.

The Buddha declared:

"Hatred is never overcome by hatred, but by love alone—this is an eternal law." ^{xxxi}

Thus, the practice of *mettā* is not just an act of kindness—it is a path to liberation. It purifies the mind, dissolves ill will, and leads to deep inner peace. Those who walk this path attain great blessings, for they dwell in harmony with the Dhamma, unshaken by the storms of the world.

May All Beings Be Happy!

May we all cultivate boundless *mettā*, embracing all beings with goodwill and compassion. May we become like the earth—patient and unwavering; like space—vast and undefiled; and like a well-rubbed catskin bag—soft yet indestructible. In doing so, may we find unshakable peace and walk the noble path to liberation.

The Mind—The Key to Liberation

The Buddha often emphasized that the mind is the source of both suffering and liberation. When the mind is untrained, it wavers like a flickering flame in the wind, easily disturbed by desires, aversions, and distractions. But when properly cultivated, the mind becomes unshakable—firm like a mountain, clear like a polished mirror, and steady like the deep ocean.

For one walking the spiritual path, strengthening the mind is essential. It requires a solid foundation, just as a structure needs a firm base to stand strong. Through illuminating similes, the Buddha revealed the nature of a trained mind and the obstacles that cloud its clarity.

The Mind Needs a Strong Foundation

The Pot and Its Stand

The Buddha compared the mind to a pot and the Noble Eightfold Path to its stand:^{xxxii}
“Just as a pot without a stand is easily knocked over, while one with a stand is difficult to knock over, so the mind without a stand is easily knocked over, while the mind with a stand is difficult to knock over.”

A pot without a firm base can be tipped over with the slightest touch. Similarly, a mind without a stable foundation is easily disturbed by worldly conditions—praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain.

But what provides stability to the mind? It is the Noble Eightfold Path:

- **Right View** gives wisdom, helping one see the world as it truly is.
- **Right Intention** directs the mind toward renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness.
- **Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood** provide moral discipline, creating a life free of regret.
- **Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration** develop mental strength, making the mind unshakable.

A practitioner who establishes their mind on this path stands firm amidst the storms of life. No matter how strong the winds of suffering blow, they remain unmoved—rooted in wisdom and virtue.

The Five Hindrances—Clouding the Mind’s Clarity^{xxxiii}

To cultivate a strong and peaceful mind, one must first remove the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇā*), which obstruct insight and inner stillness. The Buddha used powerful similes to illustrate how these mental defilements distort perception, preventing one from seeing reality clearly.

1 Sensual Desire—A Bowl of Coloured Water

“Just as one cannot see their reflection in a bowl of water mixed with bright colors, a mind clouded by sensual desire cannot perceive the truth.”

When the mind is entangled in craving—whether for pleasures of the senses, material possessions, or worldly attachments—it becomes distorted, seeing only what it wants to see.

Like dyed water, which alters the appearance of what is submerged in it, sensual desire colors perception, leading to delusion.

To overcome this, the Buddha encouraged *sense restraint* and the contemplation of impermanence, recognizing that all pleasures are fleeting and cannot bring lasting satisfaction.

2 Ill Will—A Bowl of Bubbling, Boiling Water

"Just as one cannot see their reflection in a bowl of water bubbling with heat, a mind inflamed with anger cannot perceive the truth."

Hatred and resentment generate turbulence in the mind, making it restless and agitated. Like boiling water that distorts everything reflected in it, anger skews perception, causing one to see enemies where there are none and to exaggerate faults in others.

The antidote to ill will is the cultivation of *mettā* (loving-kindness), which softens the heart and brings peace.

3 Dullness and Drowsiness—A Bowl of Water Covered in Weeds

"Just as one cannot see their reflection in water covered with algae and weeds, a mind clouded by dullness cannot perceive the truth."

Sloth and torpor weigh down the mind, making it sluggish and unresponsive. When drowsiness takes over, wisdom fades, and the mind sinks into lethargy—like a pond choked with vegetation, where no light can penetrate.

To dispel dullness, one must cultivate *energy* (*viriya*), practice mindfulness, and engage in contemplation of death (*maraṇasati*), which awakens a sense of urgency on the path.

4 Restlessness and Remorse—A Bowl of Water Stirred by the Wind

"Just as one cannot see their reflection in water disturbed by the wind, a mind afflicted with restlessness cannot perceive the truth."

When the mind is restless—constantly worrying about the past, anxious about the future, or caught in distractions—it lacks stability. Like water stirred by the wind, it cannot settle, making concentration impossible.

To calm restlessness, one must develop *samādhi* (mental stillness) through meditation, particularly *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing), which anchors the mind in the present moment.

5 Doubt—A Bowl of Muddy Water

"Just as one cannot see their reflection in water made thick with mud, a mind clouded by doubt cannot perceive the truth."

Doubt arises when one lacks confidence in the path, the Dhamma, or one's own abilities. It leads to hesitation and confusion, preventing progress. Just as mud obscures the water's clarity, doubt prevents the mind from seeing clearly.

To overcome doubt, one must cultivate *wisdom* (*paññā*), reflect on the teachings, and seek guidance from wise and noble friends (*kalyāṇamitta*).

The Path to a Clear and Unshakable Mind

Just as a lake must be free from colour, heat, weeds, wind, and mud to reflect a clear image, the mind must be free from sensual desire, ill will, dullness, restlessness, and doubt to see the truth.

When the five hindrances are removed, the mind becomes like a still, clear pool—able to reflect reality as it is. In this state, one develops deep concentration, insight, and ultimately, liberation.

The Buddha declared:

"The mind is luminous, but it is defiled by passing impurities. When these impurities are removed, the mind shines brilliantly." ^{xxxiv}

Thus, by cultivating a strong foundation in the Noble Eightfold Path and removing the five hindrances, one attains a mind that is steadfast, peaceful, and radiant—leading to the highest happiness, Nibbāna.

May We All Attain the Strength of a Clear and Still Mind

May we develop unwavering mindfulness, purify the mind from all hindrances, and walk firmly upon the path to liberation. May we train our minds to be like a well-supported pot—unshakable, strong, and rooted in wisdom.

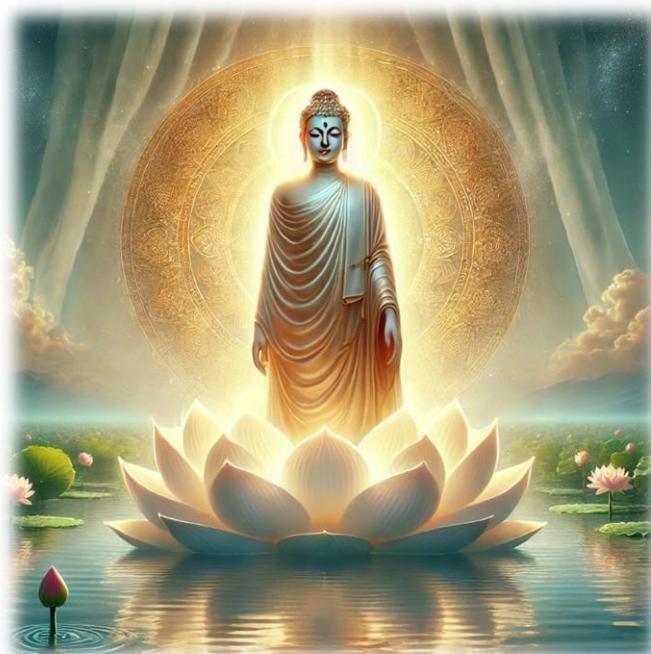
The Supreme Purity of the Buddha

The Buddha, the perfectly enlightened one, is the embodiment of purity, wisdom, and compassion. Having transcended all defilements, he stands radiant and untainted—like a lotus in full bloom, rising above the waters of the world.

The Simile of the Lotus Flower

The lotus is a powerful symbol of spiritual awakening. Though it is born in the mud and grows in the water, it rises above both, untouched and unsullied, unfolding its delicate petals in pristine beauty.

Likewise, the Buddha was born into this world—a world filled with greed, hatred, and delusion. Yet, through his supreme awakening (*Sambodhi*), he rose above all impurities, completely free from defilements. His wisdom and compassion, vast and boundless, illuminate the world like a fully blossomed lotus, untouched by the stains of suffering.



The Buddha standing radiant and untainted, like a lotus in full bloom, rising above the waters of the world ^{xxxv}

*"Just as a beautiful white lotus,
Untouched by the water, remains pure,
So too, I am not soiled by the world.
Therefore, O Brahmin, I am a Buddha."*^{xxxvi}

His mind, free from attachment and aversion, remains ever-luminous. His heart, filled with boundless loving-kindness, embraces all beings. He is the refuge for those lost in the darkness of ignorance, guiding them toward the shore of liberation.

**Just as a lotus is not soiled by the water,
so the Buddha remains unstained by the world.**

[The Buddha—The Unsurpassed Teacher of Gods and Humans](#)

The world may be clouded by suffering, but the Buddha's presence shines like the morning sun, dispelling the darkness of delusion. Through his infinite wisdom and unwavering purity, he reveals the noble path, showing the way to true peace and ultimate freedom.

Just as the lotus flourishes above the water, untainted by the mud below, so too does the Buddha stand supreme in the world—peerless, unshakable, and utterly pure.

May we, inspired by his great purity, strive to walk the path he illuminated, cultivating wisdom and virtue until we too rise above the world's defilements—like a lotus in full bloom.

Homage to the Buddha, the Perfectly Enlightened One!

[The Noble Eightfold Path—The Way to Liberation](#)

The Noble Eightfold Path is the Buddha's supreme teaching, the path leading to the cessation of suffering and the highest peace—*Nibbāna*. Like a guiding light in the darkness, it illuminates the way for those who seek freedom from the endless cycle of birth and death.

The Buddha often used vivid similes to illustrate how one who earnestly cultivates this path is inevitably drawn toward liberation, just as natural forces always move toward their destined course. Inclining Toward *Nibbāna*

◆ [The River Ganges Slanting to the East](#)

Just as the mighty River Ganges inevitably flows eastward, ultimately merging with the vast ocean, so too does a person who earnestly cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path naturally incline toward *Nibbāna*—the supreme peace beyond suffering.^{xxxvii}

◆ [A Tree Sloping to the East](#)

If a great tree leans eastward and is cut down, it will fall in that direction. Likewise, when a person develops the Noble Eightfold Path with steadfast determination, they will unavoidably move toward complete liberation.^{xxxviii}

These similes remind us that just as nature follows its course without resistance, so too does the sincere practitioner, through right view, right effort, and right mindfulness, progress steadily toward enlightenment.

[Purifying the Mind—Letting Go of Defilements](#)

◆ [The Upside-Down Pot](#)

A pot turned upside down releases its water and refuses to take it back. In the same way, one who follows the Noble Eightfold Path abandons all unwholesome states of mind—greed, hatred, and delusion—never allowing them to return.^{xxxix}

◆ **The Worn-Out Ship**

A ship that has been long exposed to the ocean's waters, when brought to dry land, rots away and crumbles. Similarly, when a person diligently follows the Noble Eightfold^{xli}

The Noble Eightfold Path is the only way out of this endless wandering. It is not merely a set of teachings, but a direct path to awakening—a path walked by the Buddha and countless enlightened ones before us.

Samsara—The Endless Wandering

The cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) has no discernible beginning; beings wander through countless lifetimes, propelled by craving and ignorance. The Buddha illustrated this endless journey with striking metaphors, emphasizing the urgency of seeking liberation.^{xlii}

◆ **Even the Great Ocean Will Disappear, but Samsara Will Not End**

In the distant future, the vast ocean will dry up, vanishing without a trace. Yet, for those who have not realized the Four Noble Truths, the journey through birth and death will continue.

◆ **Even Mighty Mountains Will Crumble, but Samsara Will Not End**

One day, the great mountains, like Mount Sineru, will erode and perish, reduced to dust. Yet, for those still bound by craving, samsara will stretch on without end.

◆ **Even the Earth Itself Will Perish, but Samsara Will Not End**

In time, even this great earth will disintegrate. But for beings caught in ignorance, rebirth will continue, lifetime after lifetime.

◆ **The Leashed Dog—The Cycle of Rebirth**

A dog tied to a post, circling around and around, never breaking free, is like a being trapped in samsara. As long as one remains bound by attachment and delusion, the cycle of birth and death continues unbroken.^{xliii}

Let us strive with diligence, cultivate right view, practice mindfulness, and let go of all that binds us to suffering. Just as the river reaches the ocean, just as the tree falls in the direction it leans—so too, with sincere effort, we shall reach the supreme peace of Nibbana.

May all beings break free from samsara and attain the highest bliss!



The Endless Cycle: A Cosmic Wheel of Birth and Death—Turning Again and Again, Until One Finds the Path to Liberation^{xliii}

The Importance of Virtue (*Sīla*)

Virtue (*sīla*) is the foundation of spiritual development. Time and again, the Buddha emphasized that just as a strong foundation supports a magnificent structure, so too does moral conduct support the higher stages of the path. Without virtue, wisdom and concentration cannot flourish. With virtue, one walks the path with unshakable stability, progressing toward true liberation.

Virtue—The Foundation of All Spiritual Growth

- ◆ Like the Earth That Sustains All Life

Whatever plants and trees grow and flourish, they do so by being firmly rooted in the earth. Likewise, virtue is the ground upon which the entire Noble Eightfold Path is cultivated. Without it, spiritual growth withers; with it, the path to Nibbāna thrives.^{xliv}

- ◆ Like the Mighty Nāgas Nourished by the Himalayas

The nāgas, powerful serpentine beings, draw their strength from the majestic Himalayas. From the mountain streams, they enter great rivers and finally merge with the vast ocean, achieving their full potential.

In the same way, a person established in virtue embarks on the Noble Eightfold Path, progressing step by step, until they reach the boundless ocean of liberation, attaining the noble state of an awakened one.^{xlv}

These similes remind us that virtue is not merely a rule to follow—it is the very nourishment that allows spiritual progress to unfold. Virtue is the path to true nobility

The Buddha declared that one does not become noble by birth, wealth, or status, but by virtue and wisdom. Just as a tree flourish when its roots are deep and strong, so too does a practitioner thrive when their life is firmly rooted in ethical conduct.

Virtue is not a restriction; it is a liberation. It frees the mind from regret, purifies the heart, and allows wisdom to shine forth. With virtue as our foundation, we are destined to reach the highest goal—unshakable peace and freedom beyond all suffering.

May we all cultivate virtue with diligence, blossom in the noble path, and attain the radiant peace of Nibbāna!

The Growth of a Bhikkhu or Bhikkhunī in the Buddha's Dispensation

The Buddha used a profound simile to illustrate the development of a monk or nun who earnestly follows his path.

- ◆ The Coral Tree (*Pāricchattaka*)—A Symbol of Spiritual Blooming

In the heavenly Nandana Grove of the *Tāvatimsa* deva realm, the magnificent Coral Tree (*Pāricchattaka*)^{xlvii}.blooms with extraordinary brilliance. When it fully blossoms, its radiance extends fifty *yojanas* in all directions, and its fragrance spreads a hundred *yojanas* with the wind.^{xlviii}.

Likewise, when a disciple of the Buddha first aspires to leave the household life and enter the path of renunciation, they are like a tree whose leaves are beginning to turn yellow—signaling the readiness to let go. As they develop virtue, concentration, and wisdom, they flourish on the path.

Finally, when they completely uproot all defilements and attain liberation, they fully blossom, radiating the majesty of enlightenment—just like the Coral Tree in the celestial realms, bringing light and fragrance to the world.

With that inspiring words we will end the Part 1 of this series (from section 1-12) of the Buddha: from his birth, renunciation, enlightenment, creation of four-fold assembly his teachings and his similes illuminating the profound truths of the Dhamma.

Part 2 of the series will cover the 45 years of vassa residence of the Buddha and significant events of that period. (see from section 13 onwards).

Dear Readers, we wish you a journey filled with wisdom, clarity, and boundless joy and strength to continue on this beautiful path! 

End Note: Section 12

ⁱ SN15:5 (The mountain sutta)

ⁱⁱ SN15: 6 (mustard seed sutta).

ⁱⁱⁱ SN15:8 (River Ganges sutta)

^{iv} SN15:10 * In Iti:24 also mentioned similar simile.

^v MN:22 (Potaliya Sutta).

^{vi} The Buddha said: “Ānanda, this is the entire holy life...that is good friendship” SN45:2.

^{vii} [SN46:12](#) The Simile of the Sun (1)

^{viii} SN20:1.

^{ix} SN 46: 7

^x SN48:52.

^{xi} AN5: 24.

^{xii} Ud: 8.7

^{xiii} Snp: 5.1.

^{xiv} AN3:76 (Existence sutta)

^{xv} AN6:53 (Heedfulness sutta)

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} MN:129 (Bālapañcita Sutta) * Same simile is used in : SN56:47 & 48(Yoke with a Hole suttas).

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} AI generated image

^{xxi} SN56:102.

^{xxii} SN:1: 21 (A sword sutta)

^{xxiii} SN20:12 (2). * It says that the monk referred here was Devadatta; Spk relates an anecdote about a jackal who had been rescued from a python by a farmer. When the python grabbed the farmer, the jackal, out of gratitude, went to the farmer's brothers and led them to the scene, thereby enabling them to rescue the farmer, see: SN: Note: 377.

^{xxiv} SN20:10.

^{xxv} SN1:22 (It touches sutta).

^{xxvi}DhP: 1 & 2.

^{xxvii} Dhp: 165.

^{xxviii} MN: 21 (Kakacūpama sutta)

^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxxi} Dhp:5

^{xxxii} [SN45:27](#) (The sutta on Pots).

^{xxxiii} AN5:193.

^{xxxiv} AN1:49

^{xxxv} AI created image

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- xxxvi AN4:36
- xxxvii [SN45:91](#) (slanting to the east sutta)
- xxxviii [SN45: 152](#).
- xxxix [SN45:153](#).
- xl [SN45:158](#).
- xli SN22:99,
- xlii SN:22: 100 (The leash sutta).
- xliii AI created image.
- xliv [SN45:150](#).
- xlv [SN45:151](#) & SN46:1
- xlvi *pāricchattaka* is a tree growing in the Nandana Grove in the Tāvatīṣa heaven. It is a hundred leagues in circumference and at its foot is Sakka's stone seat. The *pāricchattaka* is said to be one of seven trees that last throughout the eon, see: AN: Note: 1586
- xlvii AN7:69.