

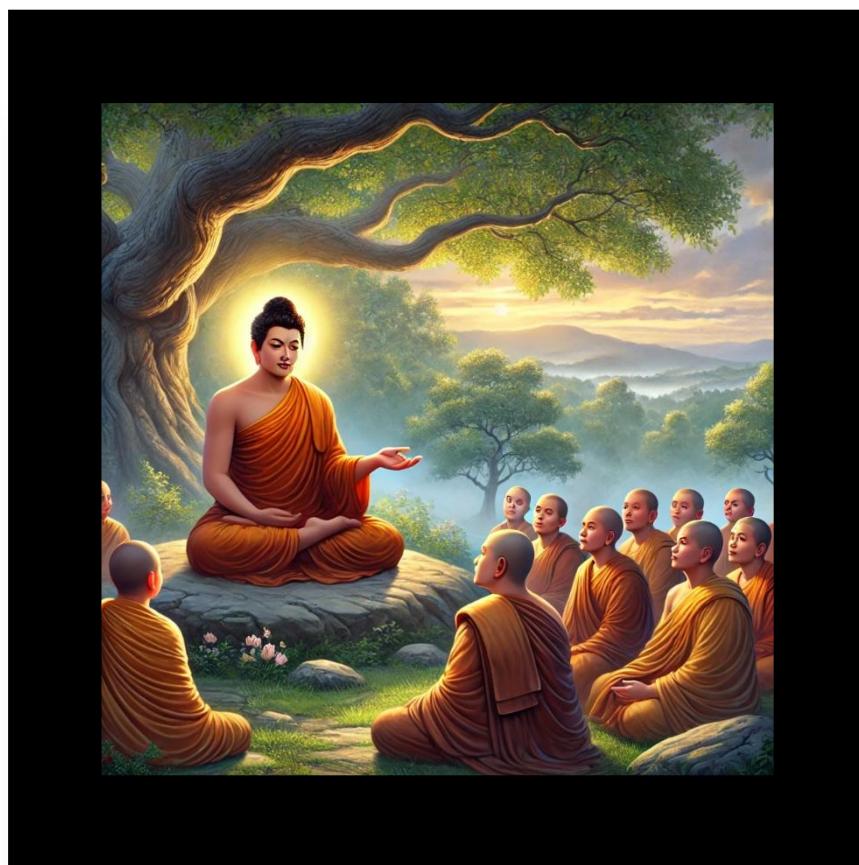
Section 11-1: Advice and Guidance to the Sangha

In this section, we delve into how the Blessed One lovingly guided and trained his disciples, nurturing their well-being and spiritual growth on the path to liberation. Here, we explore some of the most profound teachings of the Dhamma—teachings that continue to illuminate the journey of countless practitioners today.

Throughout the Tripitaka, the Buddha's compassionate care for his congregation—the Sangha—shines forth. With gentle admonishment and clear, practical instruction, he revealed every facet of the spiritual life, leaving nothing unaddressed. He showed his disciples the ropes of this noble path, guiding them step by step with unwavering care and profound wisdom. His compassionate guidance was always tailored to help them overcome the challenges of worldly suffering and move steadily toward liberation.

The Buddha's unique ability to nurture and uplift his disciples remains a timeless beacon of his greatness as a spiritual leader. Even today, more than 2600 years after his great Parinibbāna, the luminous Dhamma he imparted is still diligently practiced by his monastic disciples. His teachings continue to flourish in our present-day world, inspiring new generations to embrace the path of mindfulness, compassion, and awakening.

May this sacred guidance inspire you to walk the path with courage and clarity. Embrace the teachings with a loving heart, and let the eternal light of the Buddha's wisdom guide you toward a life of deep inner peace and liberation!



Blessed One lovingly advising his disciples¹

Freedom to Follow

The methods and techniques the Blessed One used to guide and train his disciples are truly remarkable. Among these, one of the most striking is the profound freedom inherent in the monastic path—the freedom not only to enter but also to exit the community at will. Throughout his dispensation, disciples embraced the monastic vows entirely of their own accord, a testament to the empowering nature of his teachings.

The Buddha's approach was always '**ehipassika**'—**come and see**—inviting each person to experience the truth for themselves. His teachings offered a genuine choice: to follow the path wholeheartedly or to return to lay life if it no longer resonated with one's inner calling.

To Follow the Middle Way—The Noble Eightfold Path

The Buddha shared his own journey toward truth with the Sangha, revealing the profound lessons he learned on the path to liberation. Born a prince, he enjoyed the abundance of worldly pleasures and fully understood how sensuality can entangle us in the cycle of suffering. Later, as an ascetic, he subjected himself to severe austerities, mistakenly believing that extreme self-denial would lead to enlightenment. Yet, through his unwavering wisdom and effort, he discovered a far superior path—the Middle Way—which frees us from the bonds of suffering.

The Blessed One taught his disciples to avoid both extremes: neither indulging in sensual pleasures nor pursuing self-mortification that torments the body and disrupts the mind. His own words testify to this balanced approach:

*"Bhikkhus, I strove indefatigably... 'Willingly, let only my skin, sinews, and bones remain, and let the flesh and blood dry up in my body, but I will not relax my energy so long as I have not attained what can be attained by manly strength, energy, and exertion.' It was by heedfulness that I achieved enlightenment, bhikkhus; it was by heedfulness that I attained the unsurpassed security from bondage..."*ⁱⁱ

He further explained the Middle Way:

*"Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. ..."*ⁱⁱⁱ

What are these two extremes? On one side, the pursuit of sensual happiness in pleasures—which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, and unbeneficial. On the other, the pursuit of self-mortification—which is painful, ignoble, and unbeneficial. Without veering toward either extreme, the Tathāgata has awakened to the Middle Way—a path that gives rise to vision and knowledge, leading ultimately to peace, direct insight, enlightenment, and Nibbāna.

As the Buddha reminds us:

*"Enamoured with their pleasures and wealth,
Greedy, dazed by sensual delights,
They do not realize they have gone too far
Like deer that enter a cleverly laid trap."*^{iv}

Let the Middle Way inspire your journey! Embrace balance in your practice and in your life, knowing that every mindful step you take steers you away from the extremes that bind you to suffering. In choosing this path of moderation, wisdom, and compassion, you nurture the seeds of liberation. May you walk this noble path with courage, grace, and unwavering resolve.

The Importance of Meditation Practice—Samādhi

Here we present an inspiring insight from **Bhikkhu Bodhi** on the significance of meditation for spiritual development:

“The methods of meditation taught by the Buddha in the Pali Canon fall into two broad systems. One is the development of serenity (samatha), which aims at concentration (samādhi); the other is the development of insight (vipassanā), which aims at understanding or wisdom (paññā). In the Buddha’s system of mental training, the role of serenity is subordinated to that of insight because the latter is the crucial instrument needed to uproot the ignorance at the bottom of samsāric bondage.

The attainments possible through serenity meditation were known to Indian contemplatives long before the advent of the Buddha. The Buddha himself mastered the two highest stages under his early teachers but found that, on their own, they only led to higher planes of rebirth, not to genuine enlightenment (MN 26.15–16). However, because the unification of mind induced by the practice of concentration contributes to clear understanding, the Buddha incorporated the techniques of serenity meditation and the resulting levels of absorption into his own system, treating them as a foundation and preparation for insight and as a ‘pleasant abiding here and now...’”^v

Commending Meditation

The Blessed One’s teachings gently remind us that samādhi and wisdom are inseparable allies on the journey to liberation. He encouraged his disciples to cultivate meditation, to quiet the turbulent mind and nurture a sanctuary of inner stillness. Through this practice, one learns to dissolve the clinging of lust, hate, and delusion—clinging that blinds us to the radiant truth of our own nature.

Deep meditation is the gateway to letting go of our desires and attachments. In that profound stillness, the seeds of true freedom and insight blossom, guiding us steadily toward the ultimate liberation of Nibbāna.

May this timeless wisdom inspire us all to embrace meditation as a daily practice—a sacred pause where the chaos of the world recedes, and the luminous clarity of the Dhamma shines forth. Let every moment of stillness be a step closer to inner peace and lasting freedom!

Meditation: The Heart of Spiritual Awakening

In the following sutta, we witness the profound wisdom of the Blessed One as he underscores the vital role of meditation—**Samādhi**, the stillness of mind—for true spiritual growth.

“...Bhikkhus, the safe and good path to be travelled joyfully has been reopened by me, the wrong path has been closed off, the decoy removed, the dummy destroyed... What should be done for his disciples out of compassion by a teacher who seeks their welfare and has compassion for them, that I have done for you, bhikkhus. There are these roots of trees, these

empty huts. Meditate, bhikkhus, do not delay or else you will regret it later. This is our instruction to you."^{vi}

The Union of Samādhi and Wisdom

Meditation is not merely a practice; it is the very foundation of wisdom. Without deep concentration, wisdom remains fragmented; without wisdom, meditation lacks true depth. The Blessed One declared:

*"There is no Samādhi in one who lacks wisdom,
Nor is there wisdom in him who lacks Samādhi.
In whom are both Samādhi and wisdom,
He is in the presence of Nibbāna."*^{vii}

The Direct Path to Liberation

The Buddha, out of boundless compassion, revealed the **Four Foundations of Mindfulness** as the clearest path to liberation. In both the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN:10) and the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN:22), he declared:

**"Bhikkhus, this is the direct path for the purification of beings,
for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation,
for the disappearance of pain and grief,
for the attainment of the true way,
for the realization of Nibbāna—namely, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness."**^{viii}

Even in today's fast-moving world, the Buddha's words remain as relevant as ever. Meditation is not an outdated or optional practice—it is the **direct path** to true peace and awakening.

Deep Meditation: The Shield Against Māra

The Buddha urged his disciples to develop **Jhāna**, the deep states of absorption, to overcome all hindrances and render Māra powerless. He gave this striking simile:

**"Just as a forest deer wanders confidently, free from the hunter's range,
so too, a bhikkhu, secluded from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome states,
abides in the first, second, third, and fourth Jhāna...
Such a bhikkhu has blindfolded Māra, making himself invisible to the Evil One."**^{ix}

This shows that meditation is not just about calmness—it is a fortress against suffering, protecting the mind from distractions, defilements, and worldly traps.

The Five Fruits of Deep Samādhi

When a dedicated practitioner cultivates **measureless Samādhi**, developing boundless love and wisdom, five profound realizations arise:

1. **"This Samādhi is presently pleasant and will bring future happiness."**
2. **"This Samādhi is noble and spiritual."**
3. **"This Samādhi is not practiced by the worldly and the heedless."**

4. “This Samādhi is peaceful and sublime, attained through deep tranquillity.”
5. “I enter and emerge from this state mindfully, with full awareness.”^x

This measureless Samādhi is closely linked with the *brahmavihāras*—the four divine abodes of Loving-kindness, Compassion, Appreciative Joy, and Equanimity. It is also the gateway to the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion, leading one closer to ultimate liberation.^{xi}

A Call to Action

The Blessed One’s words echo across time: “*Meditate, bhikkhus, do not delay or else you will regret it later.*” These words are not just for monks, but for all who seek truth and freedom. In an era where meditation is often overlooked, let us not forget the very practice that the Buddha himself declared to be **the path to Nibbāna**.

Do not delay—embrace the gift of meditation. May our hearts find peace, may our minds find clarity, and may the path of the Blessed One lead us beyond suffering to the unshakable bliss of liberation.

Recognizing the True Teaching of the Buddha

In the following suttas, the Blessed One compassionately guided his disciples on how to discern the **true Dhamma**—the genuine teaching that leads to liberation. By understanding these guiding principles, one can avoid pitfalls on the spiritual path and walk with confidence toward the ultimate goal.

The Eight Criteria for Recognizing the True Dhamma

The Buddha imparted this profound teaching to **Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī**, his stepmother, offering her a clear way to distinguish the path of truth from misleading teachings:^{xii} Gotamī, if you find that certain teachings lead:

- (1) To passion, rather than to dispassion,
- (2) To bondage, rather than to detachment,
- (3) To accumulation, rather than to renunciation,
- (4) To strong craving, rather than to fewness of desires,
- (5) To discontent, rather than to contentment,
- (6) To social entanglement, rather than to solitude,
- (7) To laziness, rather than to diligent effort,
- (8) To being difficult to support, rather than to being easy to support—

Then you should clearly recognize: ‘***This is not the Dhamma, this is not the discipline, this is not the teaching of the Teacher.***’

However, if certain teachings lead:

- (1) To dispassion, rather than to passion,
- (2) To detachment, rather than to bondage,
- (3) To renunciation, rather than to accumulation,
- (4) To fewness of desires, rather than to strong craving,
- (5) To contentment, rather than to discontent,
- (6) To solitude, rather than to social entanglement,
- (7) To diligent effort, rather than to laziness,

(8) To being easy to support, rather than to being difficult to support—
Then you should clearly recognize: '***This is the Dhamma, this is the discipline, this is the teaching of the Teacher.***'"

A Teaching to Venerable Upāli: The Path to Nibbāna

The Blessed One also gave a similar teaching to Venerable Upāli, ensuring that his disciples would always be able to distinguish the true path:

"Upāli, if you come across teachings that do not lead exclusively to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, and to Nibbāna, then you should clearly recognize: 'This is not the Dhamma, this is not the discipline, this is not the teaching of the Teacher.'

"However, if certain teachings do lead exclusively to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, and to Nibbāna, then you should clearly recognize:

'This is the Dhamma, this is the discipline, this is the teaching of the Teacher.'^{xiii}

The Timeless Relevance of the Buddha's Guidance

The Blessed One, out of boundless compassion, provided these criteria as an unfailing compass for seekers of truth. Even today, they remain a luminous guide, ensuring that the true Dhamma continues to be preserved and practiced in its purest form. May we always remember these wise instructions and walk the noble path with clarity and discernment. May the true Dhamma shine in our hearts, leading us ever closer to liberation.

The Full Understanding of Vital Factors: A Gateway to Spiritual Liberation

Throughout his life, the Blessed One repeatedly urged his disciples to gain deep insight into sensual pleasures, material form, and feelings. When these aspects of experience are fully understood as they truly are, their inherent impermanence and unreliability become evident. This realization unveils the path to liberation, leading one beyond suffering. The following sutta illuminates this profound truth.

The Buddha's Distinction: Understanding Leads to Liberation

Once, a group of bhikkhus on their alms round encountered wanderers from other sects who challenged them:^{xiv}

"Friends, the recluse Gotama speaks of the full understanding of sensual pleasures, material form, and feelings—we, too, speak of the same. What, then, is the distinction between his teachings and ours? What sets his instructions apart?"

Puzzled, the bhikkhus approached the Blessed One and relayed the encounter. The Buddha, in his infinite wisdom, clarified:

"Bhikkhus, if wanderers of other sects claim to teach full understanding, they should be asked: 'What is the gratification, what is the danger, and what is the escape in the case of

sensual pleasures, material form, and feelings?’

When questioned in this way, they will not be able to answer. Why? Because such understanding does not belong to them—it is not their domain.

Those recluses who fail to see the gratification as gratification, the danger as danger, and the escape as escape cannot fully comprehend these aspects for themselves, nor can they guide another toward full understanding—this is impossible.

“But those who truly see reality as it is—the allure, the peril, and the way out—are capable not only of liberating themselves but also of leading others toward the same realization. This is the great distinction of the Tathāgata’s teaching.”

[**Breaking Free from Sensual Attachments: The Path of True Renunciation**](#)

In the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta (MN:26), the Buddha further emphasized the need to transcend sensual entanglements and cultivate inner freedom:

“Recluses who are not bound by the five cords of sensual pleasure, who are not intoxicated or ensnared by them, but instead use them wisely—seeing the danger they hold and understanding the path of escape—are truly free.”

Of such noble ones, it may be rightly said: ‘**They have avoided calamity and disaster. The Evil One has no hold over them and cannot lead them astray.**’

[**The Timeless Relevance of the Buddha’s Teachings**](#)

The Blessed One’s guidance offers an unshakable foundation for those seeking true liberation. By clearly recognizing the fleeting satisfaction of worldly pleasures, the suffering they conceal, and the path to freedom, one gains the wisdom to walk unburdened toward Nibbāna.

May we all cultivate the insight to see things as they truly are, to discern the path of escape from suffering, and to walk this noble journey with wisdom and courage. May the Dhamma illuminate our path to ultimate peace!

[**The Fourfold Method: How the Buddha Trained His Disciples**](#)

In his boundless compassion and wisdom, the Blessed One guided his disciples using four distinct methods, adapting his approach to suit each individual’s disposition and capacity for growth. The following sutta reveals the depth of his skilful means in training those who sought the path to liberation.

“I discipline some gently, others sternly, and still others through a combination of both. But if a person refuses to be tamed by any of these methods, I ‘kill’ them.”^{xv}

Hearing this, Kesi, a renowned horse trainer, was taken aback. He asked:

“But Bhante, it is not allowable for the Blessed One to destroy life. Yet you say, ‘Then I kill him.’ What do you mean by this?”

The Buddha then explained:

“Indeed, Kesi, the Tathāgata does not take life. However, if someone refuses to be tamed—rejecting both gentle and stern instruction—then I no longer engage with them. I do not speak to them, nor do wise monks attempt to guide them further. In the Noble One’s discipline, this is what is meant by ‘killing’—it is the withdrawal of instruction when all skilful means have failed.”^{xvi}

The Buddha’s Four Methods of Training

1 The Gentle Approach – The Buddha patiently guided his disciples by emphasizing the benefits of wholesome conduct:

“Such is the merit of bodily good conduct and its results... such is verbal good conduct... such is mental good conduct... such is the realm of the devas and the rewards of human birth.”

2 The Stern Approach – At times, he used strong admonition to highlight the consequences of unwholesome actions:

“Such is the suffering caused by bodily misconduct... such is the result of verbal misconduct... such is the downfall of mental misconduct. Such are the torments of hell, the suffering of the animal realm, and the misfortune of the afflicted spirits.”

3 The Combined Approach – For some, he used both encouragement and warning, balancing inspiration with caution:

“This is the reward of good conduct, and this is the danger of misconduct. This is the path to the divine realms, and this is the descent into suffering.”

4 The Final Measure – When a disciple persistently refused to be guided, the Buddha would withdraw his teachings, allowing them to face the natural consequences of their choices. This, he described as a form of **‘killing’ in the Noble One’s discipline**—not a physical act, but a complete disengagement, as further instruction would bear no fruit.

A Masterful Teacher of the Path

The Buddha’s method was not rigid; it was a skilful art of guidance, designed to awaken wisdom in each individual. His compassionate training ensured that those who were willing to listen and learn could progress toward liberation.

May we too be receptive to gentle encouragement, firm admonition, and the guidance that leads to the highest freedom. May we never close our hearts to the truth but always walk the path with humility, wisdom, and diligence.

The Noble Qualities That Make the Sangha Worthy

Throughout his teachings, the Blessed One repeatedly encouraged his disciples to cultivate noble qualities that would make them worthy of honour and reverence. In the following suttas, we see how the Buddha admonished his monastics, emphasizing the virtues that elevate them as an unsurpassed field of merit for the world.

The Four Essential Qualities of a Worthy Monk

The Buddha declared:

“Bhikkhus, when a monk possesses four qualities, he is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, and worthy of reverential salutation. He becomes an unsurpassed field of merit for the world.”^{xvii}

What four?

- 1 Rectitude – Being unwavering in morality and integrity.
- 2 Speed – Swiftly engaging in wholesome actions without delay.
- 3 Patience – Bearing hardships with endurance and a steady mind.
- 4 Mildness – Being gentle, approachable, and free from arrogance.

With these four qualities, a bhikkhu becomes truly worthy of the highest offerings.”

Developing Four Additional Qualities

In another discourse, the Buddha further instructed his disciples on additional qualities they should cultivate:

“Bhikkhus, a monk should develop four qualities: (1) He listens, (2) He destroys, (3) He endures, and (4) He goes.”^{xviii}

- 1 **A bhikkhu listens** – When the Dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata is being taught, he heeds it, attends to it, directs his whole mind to it, and listens with eager ears.
- 2 **A bhikkhu destroys** – He does not tolerate the arising of sensual thoughts, ill will, or harmful intentions. He swiftly abandons, dispels, and eradicates such unwholesome states.
- 3 **A bhikkhu endures** – He patiently withstands cold and heat, hunger and thirst, the discomfort of insects, harsh speech, and even physical suffering without being disturbed.
- 4 **A bhikkhu goes** – He journeys swiftly toward that which he has never before reached in this long cycle of existence: the stilling of all mental formations, the relinquishment of all clinging, the cessation of craving, dispassion, and ultimately, Nibbāna.

Skilfulness in Action: The Path of the Wise

The Blessed One frequently advised his disciples to act with skilfulness and wisdom, ensuring that their conduct aligned with the highest ideals of the Dhamma.

The Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Qualities of One Who Walks the Path of Peace

In the *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha described the attributes to be developed by one who is skilled in goodness and aspires to freedom:^{xix}

- 1 **Able (sakko)** – Capable of carrying out tasks relevant to the spiritual life.
- 2 **Upright (ujūca)** – Unwavering in following precepts with proper conduct.
- 3 **Straightforward (suhujūca)** – Honest, transparent, and sincere.
- 4 **Obedient (sūvaco)** – Receptive to guidance and willing to learn.
- 5 **Gentle (mudu)** – Soft in manner and free from harshness.
- 6 **Humble (anatimānī)** – Modest and free from conceit.
- 7 **Content (santussako)** – Satisfied with whatever requisites he receives.
- 8 **Easily supported (subharo ca)** – Not burdensome to others.
- 9 **Unburdened (appakicco)** – Free from excessive duties and distractions.
- 10 **Simple in living (sallahukavutti)** – Leading a life of minimal needs.
- 11 **Restrained (santindriyo)** – Keeping the senses well-guarded.
- 12 **Wise and skillful (nipako)** – Possessing insight into the Dhamma.
- 13 **Modest (appagabbho)** – Free from arrogance and self-importance.
- 14 **Detached from worldly ties (kulesu ananugiddho)** – Avoiding excessive entanglement with laypeople.

15 Blameless in conduct (na ca khuddam samācare kiñci) – Not engaging in actions the wise would reprove.

16 Radiating loving-kindness (sukhino vā khemino hontu, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā) – Wishing for the happiness of all beings.

17 Free from deceit, hatred, and harm (na paro param nikubbetha) – Never deceiving, insulting, or wishing suffering upon others.

18 Extending boundless compassion (mettañca sabbalokasmim) – Spreading loving-kindness throughout the entire world.

19 Endowed with Right View (diṭṭhiñca anupagamma, sīlavā dassanena sampanno) – Grounded in wisdom and insight.

A Legacy of Worthiness

The Buddha's disciples were not merely monks or nuns by name, but individuals who embodied the **highest virtues, discipline, and wisdom**. They became beacons of inspiration, carrying forth the Dhamma in its purest form.

By cultivating these qualities, we too can follow the footsteps of the Noble Ones, making our lives a field of merit for the world. May we all develop these virtues, perfect our conduct, and attain the supreme peace of Nibbāna !

Avoiding Harmful Actions and Cultivating Beneficial Deeds

The Blessed One repeatedly urged the Sangha to be **mindful and reflective** in all actions—before undertaking them, while performing them, and after their completion. The following suttas illustrate the importance of wise discernment in our deeds.

The Four Deeds to Be Carefully Reflected Upon

The Buddha taught:

There are four kinds of deeds that one should carefully consider:^{xx}

1 Disagreeable to do and harmful – One reflects: "*This action is both unpleasant to undertake and leads to harmful results.*" Recognizing this, one should refrain from performing such a deed.

2 Disagreeable to do but beneficial – This reveals the distinction between a fool and a wise person regarding strength, effort, and determination.

- The fool does not reflect: "*Though this deed is difficult and unpleasant, it will bring good results.*" Thus, he avoids it, and his avoidance leads to harm.
- The wise person reflects: "*Though this deed is difficult and unpleasant, it will bring beneficial results.*" So, he courageously undertakes it, and his effort leads to well-being.

3 Agreeable to do but harmful – This too differentiates the wise from the foolish.

- The fool does not reflect: "*Though this deed is pleasant and easy, it will bring harmful results.*" Thus, he carelessly pursues it, bringing harm to himself and others.
- The wise person reflects: "*Though this deed is pleasant and easy, it will lead to suffering.*" Recognizing this, he refrains from engaging in it, and his restraint leads to benefit.

4 Agreeable to do and beneficial – Such an action should be **wholeheartedly pursued**, for it is both pleasant to undertake and brings good results.

Thus, wise reflection ensures that only skilful actions are performed while unskilful ones are avoided.

Guarding the Three Doors: Preventing Unskilful Actions

In the *Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN: 61), the Buddha advised Venerable Rāhula on the importance of careful reflection in bodily, verbal, and mental actions:

Before engaging in any action—whether through body, speech, or mind—one should reflect deeply:

- *Will this action lead to my own suffering, the suffering of others, or the suffering of both?*
- *Is this an unwholesome action that will bring painful consequences?*

If, upon reflection, one realizes: ‘Yes, this action will lead to harm and suffering,’ then such an action should be completely avoided.

However, if one sees: ‘No, this action will not cause harm; rather, it is wholesome and leads to happiness and good results,’ then such an action may be undertaken.”

By practicing **wise reflection**, one **guards the three doors**—body, speech, and mind—ensuring that all actions lead to one’s own well-being and the well-being of others.

Walking the Path of Wisdom

The path to liberation is not simply about avoiding wrongdoing but also about cultivating skilful, wholesome actions that lead to true peace. The wise reflect carefully before every deed, ensuring that their actions align with the Dhamma.

May we all be mindful in our thoughts, speech, and actions, walking the Noble Path with wisdom and compassion!

Practicing Heedfulness in All Deeds

The Blessed One taught:

"Bhikkhus, there are four occasions when heedfulness should be diligently practiced:

- 1 *Abandon bodily misconduct and cultivate wholesome bodily conduct—be heedful in this.*
- 2 *Abandon verbal misconduct and cultivate wholesome speech—be heedful in this.*
- 3 *Abandon mental misconduct and cultivate wholesome thoughts—be heedful in this.*
- 4 *Abandon wrong view and cultivate right view—be heedful in this.*

"When a bhikkhu has abandoned misconduct and cultivated virtue, has discarded wrong views and developed right view, he has nothing to fear—not even death itself."

By practicing **heedfulness (appamāda)** in body, speech, and mind, one safeguards the path to liberation, ensuring steady progress toward Nibbāna.^{xxi}

The Beauty of Restraint

Restraint in the eye is good; restraint in the ear is good;

Restraint in the nose is good; restraint in the tongue is good.

Restraint in deeds is good; restraint in speech is good;

Restraint in the mind is good; indeed, restraint in everything is good.

A monk who is restrained in all ways is freed from all sorrow.^{xxii}

By guarding the senses and living with discipline, one attains peace and freedom from suffering.

Guarding the Spiritual Life

As a compassionate teacher, the Blessed One often guided the Sangha in **avoiding obstacles** that could hinder spiritual progress. The scriptures reveal how heedlessness led some monastics into difficulty, while others, through wisdom, overcame dangers and remained steadfast in the Dhamma.^{xxiii}

The Four Perils That Can Lead One Astray

The Buddha likened the **spiritual path** to entering a vast body of water, where one must be wary of hidden dangers. He warned that four great perils could cause a monk to abandon the training:

- 1 Displeasure with the discipline and training** – Like a **strong wave** that sweeps one into the deep ocean, dissatisfaction with the monastic rules can lead one away from the Dhamma.
- 2 Discontentment with food and alms** – Like a **crocodile** that seizes and devours its prey, craving and resentment over one's sustenance can consume one's resolve.
- 3 Lack of restraint over the senses** – Like a **whirlpool** that pulls one under, unguarded senses can drag a monk into delusion and suffering.
- 4 Attachment to the opposite sex** – Like a **shark** that devours its victim, sensual entanglements can destroy one's spiritual life.

“Bhikkhus, these are the four perils faced by one who has gone forth out of faith into the homeless life in this Dhamma and discipline.”

The Path of One Who Dwells in the Dhamma

*“That monk who dwells in the Dhamma,
Who delights in the Dhamma,
Who meditates on the Dhamma,
Who remembers the Dhamma well,
Does not fall away from the sublime Dhamma.”*^{xxxiv}

By treasuring the Dhamma, reflecting on it deeply, and living in accordance with it, one **walks unwaveringly toward liberation**.

Growing in the Dhamma and Discipline

The Buddha, out of deep compassion, pointed out **eleven essential qualities** that enable a bhikkhu to grow, flourish, and reach fulfillment in the **Dhamma and Discipline**. These qualities serve as a guide for those seeking spiritual progress.^{xxv}

“Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu possesses these eleven qualities, he is capable of growth, increase, and fulfillment in this Dhamma and Discipline.”

- 1 Understands material form (rūpa) completely** – He gains wisdom regarding the nature of physical existence.
- 2 Distinguishes between the wise and the foolish** – He discerns wholesome and unwholesome influences.
- 3 Eliminates unwholesome actions** – He abandons thoughts rooted in sensual desire, ill will,

and cruelty.

4 Restraints the six sense faculties – He guards the doors of the senses to prevent temptation and distraction.

5 Teaches the Dhamma to others – In sharing the teachings, he deepens his own understanding.

6 Seeks the guidance of learned elders – He clarifies doubts by associating with wise members of the Sangha.

7 Draws inspiration from hearing the Dhamma – He finds joy and motivation in the words of the Buddha.

8 Practices the Noble Eightfold Path – He follows the way to liberation with steadfast effort.

9 Develops the Four Foundations of Mindfulness – He cultivates deep awareness and insight.

10 Exercises restraint in using the four requisites – He lives contentedly with what is necessary.

11 Respects elders in the Sangha – He pays homage to those who have long upheld the teachings.

By cultivating these **eleven qualities**, a bhikkhu becomes firmly established in the Path, ensuring steady progress toward Nibbāna.

Supporting the Growth of the Spiritual Path

The Blessed One further emphasized key factors that support spiritual development. He declared: ...^{xxvi}

It is possible, Ānanda, that a bhikkhu endowed with the following qualities will achieve growth, progress, and maturity in this Dhamma and Discipline:

- ◆ *Faith (saddhā)* – Having unwavering confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.
- ◆ *Virtue (sīla)* – Living a life of purity and restraint.
- ◆ *Much learning (bahusacca)* – Possessing deep knowledge of the Dhamma.
- ◆ *Being easy to correct (sovacassatā)* – Having humility and a willingness to accept guidance.
- ◆ *Good friends (kalyāṇamitta)* – Associating with those who uplift and support the spiritual life.
- ◆ *Energy (viriya)* – Maintaining diligent effort in practice.
- ◆ *Mindfulness (sati)* – Cultivating constant awareness.
- ◆ *Contentment (santussakatā)* – Being satisfied with little, free from worldly craving.
- ◆ *Few desires (appicchatā)* – Letting go of unnecessary wants and attachments.
- ◆ *Right view (sammā-ditṭhi)* – Seeing reality as it truly is, free from delusion."

A bhikkhu who develops these **ten qualities** lays a strong foundation for **progress and maturity** in the Dhamma.

The Complete Spiritual Life

To **consummate the holy life**, the Buddha advised the Sangha to **abandon five obstacles** and **develop five essential qualities**:^{xxvii}

"When sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness, and doubt are completely absent in a bhikkhu... when he possesses the virtue and samādhi of one beyond training... and when he attains liberation and knowledge, then he is truly called a consummate one in this Dhamma and Discipline."

◆ **The Five Hindrances to Abandon:**

- 1 Sensual desire (kāmacchanda)
- 2 Ill will (vyāpāda)
- 3 Dullness & drowsiness (thīna-middha)
- 4 Restlessness & remorse (uddhacca-kukkucca)
- 5 Doubt (vicikicchā)

◆ **The Five Qualities of One Beyond Training (Arahant):**

- 1 Virtue (sīla) – Perfect purity in conduct
 - 2 Concentration (samādhi) – Unwavering mental stability
 - 3 Wisdom (paññā) – Profound insight into the true nature of reality
 - 4 Liberation (vimutti) – Freedom from all defilements
 - 5 Knowledge & vision of liberation (vimuttiñāṇadassana) – Direct realization of Nibbāna
- When these five hindrances are abandoned and these five qualities are attained, the spiritual life is **fully perfected**.

May We All Grow in the Dhamma, Flourish in Virtue, and Walk Steadily Toward Liberation!

Skilful in Understanding One's Own Mind

The Blessed One repeatedly encouraged the **Sangha** to develop skill in understanding their own minds. He instructed: ^{xxviii}

"Bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu is not skilled in the ways of others' minds, he should train himself thus: 'I will be skilled in the ways of my own mind.' In this way, you should train yourselves..."

To illustrate this, the Buddha gave a beautiful simile:

"Just as a man or a woman who delights in adornments would look at their own reflection in a clean, bright mirror or a bowl of clear water—if they see dust or blemish, they make an effort to remove it; if they see no blemish, they rejoice, thinking, 'How fortunate I am to be clean!'

Likewise, **self-examination is essential for a bhikkhu** to cultivate wholesome qualities and remove unwholesome tendencies.

◆ **Ten Mental Factors to Reflect Upon:**

- 1 Do I have **desire** or am I free from desire?
- 2 Do I have **ill will** or am I free from ill will?
- 3 Do I have **dullness and laziness** or am I alert?
- 4 Do I have **restlessness and remorse** or is my mind calm?
- 5 Do I have **doubt** or am I firm in confidence?
- 6 Do I have **anger** or am I peaceful?
- 7 Do I have **defilements** or is my mind pure?
- 8 Do I have **bodily agitation** or is my body at ease?
- 9 Am I overcome by **laziness** or do I have energy?
- 10 Do I have **samādhi** or is my mind distracted?

By frequently examining one's own mind, one becomes a **master of inner awareness**, ensuring steady progress in the **spiritual path**.

Protectors of the Spiritual Path

Time and again, the Blessed One advised the Sangha to **live under a protector**, for those without guidance risk suffering. He declared:

"Bhikkhus, live under a protector, not without a protector. One without a protector lives in suffering. There are these ten qualities that serve as a protector (nāthakaraṇā dhammā)." xxix

- ◆ **The Ten Protectors of the Spiritual Life:**

- 1 **Live in good conduct**, seeing danger even in the smallest faults.
- 2 **Learn much and retain** what has been learned.
- 3 **Associate with good Dhamma friends** who uplift the spiritual path.
- 4 **Be easy to correct** and follow teachings with respect.
- 5 **Be skilled in the spiritual life**, supporting fellow monastics in daily duties.
- 6 **Love the Dhamma** and find joy in it.
- 7 **Exert energy** to abandon unwholesome qualities and cultivate wholesome ones.
- 8 **Be content** with material requisites.
- 9 **Develop strong mindfulness** in all activities.
- 10 **Cultivate wisdom** that discerns arising and passing away, leading to the end of suffering. A bhikkhu who cultivates these ten protectors **safeguards his spiritual life**, ensuring a steady journey toward liberation.

Engaging in Meaningful Discussion

The Blessed One often reminded the **Sangha** to avoid idle chatter and engage in discussions that nourish the mind. He instructed:

"Bhikkhus, when you gather together, you should do one of two things: either engage in a discussion on the Dhamma or maintain noble silence." xxx

He further advised against pointless topics, such as:^{xxxii}

- ◆ Talk about **kings, robbers, wars, or politics**
- ◆ Talk about **countries, cities, or worldly matters**

Instead, he encouraged meaningful discussions on **ten noble subjects**:

- ◆ **Fewness of desires** – Cultivating simplicity
- ◆ **Contentment** – Being satisfied with what one has
- ◆ **Solitude** – Appreciating seclusion for deep practice
- ◆ **Non-entanglement** – Avoiding worldly attachments
- ◆ **Arousing energy** – Maintaining effort in the Path
- ◆ **Virtuous behaviour** – Upholding purity in conduct
- ◆ **Concentration** – Deepening meditative absorption
- ◆ **Wisdom** – Developing right understanding
- ◆ **Liberation** – Striving for freedom from suffering
- ◆ **Knowledge and vision of liberation** – Realizing the fruits of the Path

Furthermore, the Buddha encouraged the **Sangha to inspire one another** by engaging in these noble discussions, strengthening their resolve in the **holy life**.

May We Dwell in Mindfulness, Seek the Right Protectors, and Speak Only What Elevates the Mind!

Things to Be Abandoned

In the sacred scriptures, we often hear the Blessed One declaring to his disciples that a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha arises in the world because birth, old age, and death exist. These conditions bring suffering, yet the Buddha, out of boundless compassion, reveals the path to abandoning them.

In the following discourse, the Blessed One teaches the Sangha how to transcend these afflictions. His profound advice can be summarized as follows: ^{xxxii}

1. To abandon **birth, old age, and death**, one must overcome **greed, hatred, and delusion**—the root defilements that keep beings bound to suffering.
2. To abandon **greed, hatred, and delusion**, one must overcome **personal-existence view, doubt, and a wrong grasp of behavior and observances**—misconceptions that obscure the path to liberation.
3. To abandon **personal-existence view, doubt, and a wrong grasp of behavior and observances**, one must overcome **careless attention, following a wrong path, and mental sluggishness**—hindrances that cloud wisdom.
4. To abandon **careless attention, following a wrong path, and mental sluggishness**, one must overcome **muddle-mindedness, lack of clear comprehension, and mental distraction**—obstacles that weaken mindfulness and insight.
5. To abandon **muddle-mindedness, lack of clear comprehension, and mental distraction**, one must overcome **a lack of desire to see the noble ones, a lack of desire to hear the noble Dhamma, and a mind bent on criticism**—attitudes that distance one from the path.
6. To abandon **a lack of desire to see the noble ones, a lack of desire to hear the noble Dhamma, and a mind bent on criticism**, one must overcome **restlessness, non-restraint, and immorality**—states that corrode inner peace.
7. To abandon **restlessness, non-restraint, and immorality**, one must overcome **a lack of faith, uncharitableness, and laziness**—barriers that prevent spiritual progress.
8. To abandon **a lack of faith, uncharitableness, and laziness**, one must overcome **disrespect, being difficult to correct, and bad friendship**—qualities that lead one astray.
9. To abandon **disrespect, being difficult to correct, and bad friendship**, one must overcome **moral shamelessness, moral recklessness, and heedlessness**—traits that entangle beings in suffering.

By systematically uprooting these defilements, one progresses towards the highest peace—the cessation of suffering, Nibbāna.

Reflections of One Who Has Gone Forth

Throughout the scriptures, the Blessed One frequently underscores the importance of recognizing what is unwholesome and cultivating wholesome qualities that uplift and purify the mind.

A monk or nun who earnestly reflects on the following matters each day will gradually abandon conceit and other defilements, thereby deepening their spiritual practice: ^{xxxiii}

1. **"I have entered upon a classless condition."**

Having renounced lay life, I no longer identify with distinctions of caste, wealth, education, or social status. The path of renunciation is beyond worldly divisions.

2. **"My living is dependent upon others."**

As a monastic, I do not use money and must humbly rely on the generosity of lay supporters, cultivating gratitude and contentment.

3. **"My behaviour should be different."**

Having left the household life, I must act with mindfulness, restraint, and dignity, upholding the monastic discipline.

4. **"Do I blame myself in regard to virtuous behaviour?"**

Have I upheld my precepts with integrity, or do I feel regret? Honest self-examination strengthens my virtue.

5. **"Do my wise fellow monastics, having investigated, reproach me regarding virtuous behaviour?"**

The wise ones serve as mirrors. If they find fault in me, I should reflect deeply and correct myself.

6. **"I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me."**

Life is impermanent. Contemplating this truth loosens my attachment and fosters true equanimity.

7. **"I am the owner of my kamma."**

My actions—good or bad—shape my future. Knowing this, I must be diligent in cultivating wholesome deeds.

8. **"How am I spending my nights and days?"**

Am I living heedfully, using my time wisely in meditation and study? Or am I wasting this precious opportunity?

9. **"Do I take delight in empty huts?"**

Seclusion is a refuge. Do I seek solitude to deepen my practice, or do I crave distractions?

10. **"Have I attained any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones?"**

At the end of my life, when my fellow monks question me, will I have realized something truly noble, or will I feel regret?

By reflecting on these truths, one nurtures wisdom, diligence, and renunciation, moving ever closer to liberation.

More Reflections for the Saṅgha

Throughout his teachings, the Blessed One frequently urged the Saṅgha to engage in deep reflection, guiding them towards wisdom, self-reliance, and the realization of the Dhamma.

Among the many reflections he recommended, one of the most profound is the practice of being an island unto oneself.

To Be an Island unto Oneself

The Buddha gave this timeless advice:^{xxxiv}

"Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge".

And how does a monk live as an island unto himself, with no other refuge?

Here, Ānanda, a monk abides contemplating the body as body—earnestly, with clear awareness and mindfulness—having put away all hankering and fretting for the world. Likewise, he abides contemplating feelings as feelings, mind as mind, and mind-objects as mind-objects... And those who, in my time or after my passing, live thus—if they are desirous of learning—they will reach the highest.^{xxxv}

With these words, the Blessed One emphasized the importance of self-reliance in practice, urging his disciples to take refuge in the Dhamma and diligently cultivate mindfulness and wisdom. Those who steadfastly follow this path will realize the highest truth, unshaken by the changing tides of the world.

Respect for Teachers, Elders, and Fellow Members of the Saṅgha

For the spiritual growth and harmony of the Saṅgha, the Blessed One frequently emphasized the importance of respect and reverence towards those worthies of honour.^{xxxvi}

At the heart of this teaching is the deep respect and obedience owed to the Teacher. The Buddha stressed that **honouring one's teacher** is essential, for such reverence nurtures humility, wisdom, and the capacity to receive profound guidance. Similarly, respecting elders in the Dhamma is of great importance, as they provide invaluable counsel and illuminate the right path for spiritual progress.

Beyond this, the Blessed One also urged the Saṅgha to **cultivate mutual respect among fellow monks and nuns**. Such conduct fosters harmony within the monastic community and serves as an inspiring example for the lay followers. A Saṅgha united in respect and goodwill flourishes in the Dhamma, leading to great spiritual benefits.

This truth is beautifully expressed in the following words of the Blessed One:

When a bhikkhu is reverential and deferential, and his behaviour is congenial to his fellow monks, it is possible for him to fulfill the duty of proper conduct.

Having fulfilled the duty of proper conduct, it is possible for him to fulfill the duty of a trainee.

Having fulfilled the duty of a trainee, it is possible for him to fulfill virtuous behaviour. Having fulfilled virtuous behaviour, it is possible for him to fulfill right view.

Having fulfilled right view, it is possible for him to fulfill right samādhi

Through reverence, humility, and harmony, the Saṅgha strengthens its foundation in the Dhamma, paving the way for deeper wisdom and the realization of Nibbāna.

▲ The Final Advice of the Buddha

Then the Lord said to the monks:

'Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay—strive on untiringly.'^{xxxvii}

Here is your beautifully refined and more inspiring version:

Reflection on the Ten Perceptions

In this discourse, the Blessed One urged his disciples to cultivate the following ten reflections, which lead to wisdom, detachment, and the realization of the Dhamma:^{xxxviii}

1. **Impermanence** – Seeing the fleeting and unstable nature of all things.
2. **Nonself** – Understanding that there is no enduring essence, and nothing can be truly controlled.
3. **Unattractiveness of the body** – Recognizing the body's true nature, free from illusion.
4. **The body's vulnerability** – Reflecting on how it is subject to illness, decay, and the elements.
5. **Abandoning unwholesome thoughts** – Purifying the mind by letting go of defilements.
6. **Dispassion and the peace of Nibbāna** – Seeing beyond worldly entanglements to the highest peace.
7. **The cessation of all acquisitions** – Reflecting on the freedom that comes from renouncing clinging.
8. **Non-delight in the world** – Understanding the world's limitations and not seeking refuge in it.
9. **The impermanence of all conditioned things** – Seeing that all formations are subject to arising and passing away.
10. **Mindfulness of breathing** – Cultivating present-moment awareness as a foundation for insight.

Through these reflections, one gradually deepens wisdom, abandons attachment, and moves towards liberation.

The Final Advice of the Buddha

As the Blessed One approached his Parinibbāna, he left his disciples with a final, profound exhortation—words that encapsulate the essence of the Dhamma and serve as an eternal guide for all who seek the path of awakening:^{xxxix}

"Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature to decay—strive on untiringly."

With these last words, the Buddha revealed the ultimate truth: everything conditioned is impermanent and bound to pass away. Yet, he also pointed to the way beyond suffering—unceasing diligence in the practice of the Dhamma.

This final message is a call to unwavering effort, an invitation to awaken. For those who heed these words and strive earnestly, the path to Nibbāna unfolds, offering the highest peace—freedom from all suffering.

May this inspiring message open the minds and hearts of all of the followers of the Blessed One to walk on this beautiful path with unwavering effort!

End Notes: Section 11-1

ⁱ AI generated image.

ⁱⁱ AN2: 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ SN56: 11 (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta)

^{iv} SN3:6.

^v Bhikkhu Bodhi (MN: Introduction)

^{vi} MN: 19 (Dvedhāvitakka Sutta)

^{vii} Dhp: 372.

^{viii} MN:10. * The Pali reads *ekāyano ayam bhikkhave maggo*, and virtually all translators understand this as a statement upholding satipatṭ hāna as an exclusive path. Thus Ven. Soma renders it: "This is the only way, O bhikkhus," and Ven. Nyanaponika: "This is the sole way, monks." Ñm, however, points out that ekāyana magga at MN 12.37–42 has the unambiguous contextual meaning of "a path that goes in one way only," and so he rendered the phrase in this passage, too. The expression used here, "the direct path," is an attempt to preserve this meaning in a more streamlined phrasing. See: MN: Notes: 135, p. 1076.

^{ix} MN: 26 (Ariyapariyesanā Sutta)

^x AN5:27.

^{xi} See: AN: Note: 992

^{xii} :AN8: 53.

^{xiii} AN7: 83.

^{xiv} MN: 13 (Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta).

^{xv} AN4: 111 (Kesi sutta)

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} AN4: 112.

^{xviii} SAN4: 114.

^{xix} Mettā Sutta is a discourse that gives guidelines for the development of spirituality and the importance of spreading loving kindness to all beings. See: Snp:1.8 & KN: Khuddakapatha: 9.

^{xx} AN4: 115

^{xxi} AN4: 116. *This refers to arahants... they do not fear death either in the future or in this present life, see: AN: Note: 797, p. 621.

^{xxii} Dhp:361

^{xxiii} AN4: 122. * In MN:67 (Cātumā Sutta) also described the 4 dangers in the same way.

^{xxiv} Dhp:364

^{xxv} MN: 33: (Mahāgopālaka Sutta) & AN11: 17.

^{xxvi} AN10: 82 (2 Ānanda sutta).

^{xxvii} AN10: 12.

^{xxviii} AN10: 51 (One's own mind sutta)

^{xxix} AN10: 51 (One's own mind sutta)

^{xxx} MN:26 (Ariyapariyesanā Sutta)

^{xxxi} AN10: 69 & 70

^{xxxii} AN10: 76.

^{xxxiii} AN10: 48.

^{xxxiv} DN:16 (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta)

^{xxxv} Ibid.

^{xxxvi} AN5: 21.

xxxvii DN: 16 (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta)

xxxviii AN10: 60 (Girimananda sutta)

xxxix DN: 16 (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta)