

# **PROTO-BUDDHISM**

**AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM FOR  
DECODING THE BUDDHA'S DISCOURSES**



**VENERABLE MADAWELA PUNNAJI**

**BUDDHISM DEMYSTIFIED BOOK 4**

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā SamBuddhassa*

Obeisance to the Holy One, Spiritually Emancipated One, the Harmoniously Self-Awakened One

*Sabbadānam Dhammadānam Jināti*

The Gift of Dhamma Excels all Gifts

This book is offered as a free gift

May all sentient beings be well, peaceful and happy!

May all beings find freedom from suffering!

May all beings attain the supreme salvation of Nibbana!

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VENERABLE MADAWELA PUNNAJI

26 November 1929 – 28 July 2018

#### DEDICATION

In memory of our beloved teacher

The unique, the extraordinary, the irreplaceable

At whose feet we learned the *Dhamma*

Who lit a candle to dispel the darkness

And so, helped the blind to see

May the light of his wisdom continue to shine forth

And quench the suffering of those able to see

May he rejoice in any merits of this publication

May all beings everywhere be delivered from suffering!

## **EDITOR'S PREFACE**

“Venerable, the holy life starts because of helpful spiritual friends, companions, and comrades.”

“Not really, Ānanda! Not really, Ānanda! The holy life is completed because of helpful spiritual friends, companions, and comrades. When a Renunciate has a helpful spiritual friend, they will devotedly and tirelessly cultivate the Supernormal Eightfold Way.”

*Upaḍḍha Sutta, Samyutta Nikāya 45.2*

Venerable *Madawela Punnaji* was a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk of the *Theravāda* school. He passed away peacefully in his sleep on 28 July 2018, having delivered a sermon to a group of his students. For those of us blessed enough to learn from him, these words spoken by the Buddha so long ago, about the power of spiritual friendship, is our lived experience today. For he was a *kalyāṇa mittā* beyond compare, who revolutionized our spiritual life.

This book is a posthumous publication bought to fruition by a group of the author's devoted pupils. For some, this book will be a treasury of previously unpublished material, shedding novel light on the profound and exacting discourses of the Buddha. It will be intensely provocative for others, querying long-held sentiments and opposing normative modes of Buddhist ideology and application. For others still, the notions expounded in the book will seem heretical to Buddhist tradition, resulting in their dismissal as the views of a recalcitrant monk.

Wherever the reader's reaction may fall on this spectrum, we trust that investing some time with an open mind could be well worth the labor, particularly for those drawn to the early, pre-sectarian Buddhist theories, practices, and texts. Whatever the reader's ultimate deductions about this book, we have faith that one and all can acquire something of significance. At the least, a more vibrant delineation of one's views, at the most the paradigm shift argued for by the author. We can discover through dialogue with those with divergent views.

This book is based on thirteen previously unpublished translations of *Pāli Suttas* (the Buddha's discourses preserved in the ancient *Pāli* language) into English, created by the author throughout his life, and preserved for posterity by Mr. Mahendra Wijayasinghe (Ph.D.), during his thirty years of friendship with the author. Our gratitude to him for his unfailing service to our teacher over such a long period is hard to express in words. He was also the first reader of the draft of this book and the driving force behind the diagrams.

The book's interpretative sections are compilations of lectures given by the author and extracts from previous publications. We especially acknowledge Brother Billy Tan for his unflagging endeavor to preserve and propagate Venerable *Punnaji*'s teachings. He also granted permission to use many diagrams he created.

The lectures were transcribed from the audio by Mrs. Dulika De Alwis from Sri Lanka. We thank her for her kind assistance while living a busy household life. Without her many hours of hard work this book would not have been possible. The *Cūla Vedalla Sutta* and the *Mahā Vedalla Sutta* were transcribed by Ms. Jennifer Wong and edited by Mr. Vong Choon Choy. We also appreciate their input.

We acknowledge the efforts of everyone at the Paramita Meditation Centre in *Kadugannawa*, Sri Lanka. Their hard work, care, and support provided the nurturing, space, and freedom necessary for creating this book. We also acknowledge everyone at the BMV including Brother Sumananda Premseri, Uncle Vijaya and Allyson Chow for their assistance with the publication of this book.

We thank Christopher Titmuss for his feedback on the first draft of the book.

We also thank Dr. Anoja Attele, Dr. Pankaja Kalukottege and Mr. Mahendra Wijayasinghe for sponsoring the printing of this book. Without their kind generosity this project could not have been brought to fruition.

Finally, but especially, reverence to Venerable *Meewathure Dhammadinna* for her lifelong care. I express my gratitude to her for the serendipity of introducing me to the author's teaching. Apart from the boon of life which she also bestowed, this has been the most seismic gift I have ever received.

May the merits of their generosity bring them and their loved ones good health, peace, and happiness. May they all progress towards the supreme salvation of *Nibbāna*.

This book is organized into ten chapters based on the above-mentioned material, moving from a description of who a Buddha is to a step-by-step systematic explanation of his teachings, as understood by the author. It does not aim to be a comprehensive re-translation of the vast canon of the Buddha's discourses. Instead, each chapter seeks to address what the author considered to be errors in the current rendition and analysis of the Buddha's sermons. These are highlighted in a section headed "Prevalent Error to be Addressed" at the beginning of each chapter.

These ideas are offered with a heartfelt wish that they may aid dialogue and comprehension of the liberating wisdom of the Buddha so that human anguish can continue to be quenched by his message. We hope that others will benefit just as much as we have from the author's unyielding effort to unearth the meaning of the elusive discourses of the Buddha. Our deepest wish is that the spirit of his contribution, the heart of his profound thinking, and his ecumenical approach live on to help all genuine seekers of the Buddha's wisdom. The author was always humble enough to acknowledge that he may not be correct in his interpretations of the Buddha's teachings. He asked us all to corroborate his views in the crucible of our own experience. We invite the reader to take this opportunity to judge for oneself, with an open mind, the ideas presented herein.

Finally, it would be amiss if I did not take this singular opportunity to pay homage to my teacher. Rare is the experience that transcends our expectations. Knowing and learning from him was such an encounter. He is my life's defining event and the vortex around which it continues to revolve. I would not be who I am today without him. He was the most pioneering teacher I ever met. He possessed a dazzling intellect, didactic flair, and an irreverent sense of humor that still makes me smile when I recall times in his presence.

As a novice and naive seeker of a way out of the slag and dross of the human predicament, he opened my eyes to the necessity of examining the limits of parochial ways of framing the Buddha's teachings. That, after two thousand six hundred years, if we are to uncover and discover the Buddha's teachings, we must engage with a restive and critical spirit, even in the face of criticism. He taught me not to be indentured to customs but instead to let the sovereignty of the *Suttas* burn with due intensity. Thus, he expanded the interpretive boundaries of the Buddha's teachings and opened up frontiers of fresh debates. He also showed by his effort right up to the moment of his death that these ideas must be disseminated to others.

In the Orient, when someone passes away, we wish that they attain the supreme salvation of *Nibbāna*. We need not make such a wish. In the Occident, we want the departed to rest in peace. He is unlikely to be resting. We can only express our veneration for his humanity and philanthropy. The Buddha said it is not easy to repay those who help us understand his teachings. The creation of this book has been a small attempt to express our gratitude and repay this debt.

Our teacher created an innovative spiritual paradigm that a small community has been fortunate enough to enter. He initiated our grandest conversation. Our deepest yearning is that this book may be a catalyst for others who are interested in joining this dialogue. Your camaraderie and contribution are urgently needed!

May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful! May no harm come to them. May all beings everywhere be emancipated from suffering!

*Dhammadhanti*

Editor

*Kadugannawa, Sri Lanka*

11 December 2024

## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS PROTO-BUDDHISM?

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

Today, a person interested in Buddhism may experience some perplexity upon discovering a plethora of Buddhist brands. In addition to the triumvirate of ancient Buddhist schools (*Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna*) and their numerous sub-schools, Westernised secular Buddhist movements have also materialized more recently. While each group speaks much wisdom, it can be taxing to establish what, if anything, can be authentically called the teachings of the Buddha. An error in the East is to be incarcerated by the Buddhist tradition one is born into. An error in the West is embracing what is most trendy and easily accessible or adopting a mix-and-match style, without probing the origins of ideology and practices.

Before any of us invests our rationed time and energy in Buddhism, it may be worthwhile to examine the origins, differences, biases, and harmony between the assorted Buddhist congregations. Not all time-honored dogmas need to be accepted at face value. Instead, we need to approach all traditions with a spirit of critical inquiry and ask if an ecumenical attitude is viable. This introductory section aims to be a point of departure to aid the reader in this pressing task.

Here the author points out that inaccuracies in modern renditions of the *Suttas* are not merely due to linguistic adversities but stem from blunders in interpretation, which are both the cause and outcome of the internecine disintegration of the Buddha's followers into many sects after his passing. The author also contends for an ecumenical methodology he calls 'Proto-Buddhism' as a possible way towards clarity and peace.

## SECTARIAN BUDDHISM AND PROTO-BUDDHISM

It should be made clear at the outset that our aim is not to uphold, defend, criticize, or condemn the position of the schools of Buddhism. Our purpose is only to make a critical examination of the teachings of the Buddha and the formal literature, in an attempt to discover the Buddha's original message in its pristine purity, for the benefit of everyone interested. Whatever the results of this research may be, we are using our human powers of comprehension, following the advice of the Buddha in the *Kālāma Sutta*<sup>1</sup>:

*Oh, Kālāmas, do not accept hearsay, dogmas, tradition, or authority of scripture (etc.) as truth; but when you see for yourself that certain principles of behavior are good, wise, and beneficial, then only should you enter and abide in them.*

The reader needs to recognize at the outset that this book distinguishes between the early teachings of the Buddha, and the sectarian *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* teachings, which we find to be different. The earliest teachings are in the oldest sections of the *Pāli Sutta Piṭaka* and *Vinaya Piṭaka*, preserved by the *Theravādins* and their parallels in Chinese (*Agamas*), Sanskrit, and Tibetan. The later exegetical, sectarian *Theravāda* teachings are the teachings found in the *Theravāda* Commentaries (*atthakatha*), the Path of Purification (*Visuddhimagga*), and the so-called Higher Teachings (*Abhidhamma*), as well as the later sections of the *Sutta* and *Vinaya*. Similarly, all other schools and sub-schools have such late, exegetical literature which contains their sectarian positions. We call the former early teachings "Proto-Buddhism," and the latter "Sectarian Buddhism." There is an important reason for doing so. The former texts are considered by most scholars to be chronologically earlier in origin than the latter and therefore the best available source of what the Buddha himself may have taught.

For convenience in expression, we use Proto-Buddhism to refer to the earlier form and Sectarian Buddhism to refer to the latter. By the term Proto-Buddhism, we mean the prototype from which all the sectarian types of Buddhism have originated, namely: *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna*. These are merely different interpretations of the original teachings, often colored by the various cultures that uphold them.

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<sup>1</sup> AN 3.65

Today, it is often thought that Buddhism contains numerous myths, traditions, and mystical practices. On close examination of the early teachings of the Buddha, however, we begin to recognize the error in this prevalent view. Therefore, it is vitally important to avoid confusing sectarian Buddhism, as it is practiced in different cultures today, with what was taught and practiced by *Gotama* the Buddha and his disciples more than twenty-five centuries ago. What is practiced today in the three primary cultural forms of Buddhism, whether *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, or *Vajrayāna*, are mainly rituals and ceremonies with symbols of worship, accompanied by emotionally held traditional dogmas. This type of Buddhism is not different from any other religion with various dogmas, rituals, and symbols of worship, which serve humankind only as a placebo, temporarily reducing the anxieties and worries of life regarding the here and hereafter. A marked distinction succinctly presented would be that the early Buddhists sought refuge in the wisdom of the Buddha, while many modern Buddhists seem to seek refuge in his supposed supernatural powers, just as theistic religions have always done.

The early teaching of the Buddha was a psychological solution to the troubles and tribulations of life. It is only through a thorough examination of the early teachings of the Buddha in comparison with the beliefs and practices of modern-day Buddhists that one may recognize the distinction between Proto-Buddhism and sectarian Buddhist traditions and practices. Without adequately understanding this critical distinction between early Buddhism and culturally oriented sectarian Buddhism, it would not be possible to comprehend the crucial psychotherapeutic basis of the teachings of the Buddha. This book attempts to point out that the teachings we call Proto-Buddhism are incredibly different from sectarian Buddhism. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that whenever the term "Buddhism" is used subsequently in this text, the early teachings of the Buddha are referred to, and not to any form of Modern Buddhism prevalent among people of any Buddhist culture today.

We mention as a warning that the ideas set forth here may affect the sentiments of devout Buddhists, but they are presented here for examination at a mature intellectual level, rather than at an emotional level, where heated disputations can be involved. Emotional reactions are not only contrary to Buddhist principles but also hinder the understanding of the matter presented. In support of our position, we recall the words of the Buddha in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> DN 1

*Renunciates, if anyone should speak against me, the Teachings, or the Order; you should not, on that account be hurt, and bear anger or feelings of ill will. If you do so, that would only stand in the way of your mental discipline. If, when others speak against us, you feel angry, would you then be able to judge if that criticism of theirs is well said or ill-said?*

To understand the full significance of this, it is necessary to discuss the history of Buddhism in India.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism, as it is well known, begins with the Buddha. Modern historical findings point out that within the first few centuries after the demise of the Buddha, the community of his followers, the *Saṅgha*, split into two: the *Theras* and the *Mahāsaṅghika*. From that time on, further divisions within these two schools resulted in as many as twenty different sects of Buddhism. Then, of course, each sect had to defend themselves. Each sect began to record, define, and support their views in texts that came to be called the *Abhidhamma*. They started saying that they do not teach the lower teachings but the higher teachings in the *Abhidhamma*. This is the origin of the *Abhidhamma*, which was supposed to be the higher teachings of the Buddha. Prof. Y. Karunadasa, head of the Pāli University of Sri Lanka, in his paper called *The Dhamma Theory, the Philosophical Cornerstone of the Abhidhamma*, says:

*During the first two centuries following the Buddha's parinibbana, there took place, within the early Buddhist community, a move towards a comprehensive and precise systematization of the teachings disclosed by the Master in his discourses. The philosophical system that emerged from this refined analytical approach to the doctrine is collectively called the Abhidhamma. Both the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda, the two major conservative schools in the early Saṅgha, had their own Abhidhammas, each based on a distinct Abhidhamma Piṭaka. It is likely too that other schools had also developed philosophical systems along similar lines, though records of them did not survive the passage of time.<sup>3</sup>*

To gain the Buddha's authority for their *Abhidhamma*, the *Theras* also presented a story about the teaching coming directly from the Buddha. They claimed that the Buddha visited the *deva loka* (celestial world) to preach the *Dhamma* to his mother,

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<sup>3</sup> The Wheel Publication No. 412/413 (Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy)

who was reborn there at the time, and that these teachings, which were difficult for mere humans to grasp, are what is contained in the *Abhidhamma*. They said the Buddha summarized what he told his mother to *Sāriputta*, his chief disciple, and *Sāriputta*, in turn, elaborated on this and gave it to the community of monks. Ven. *Narada* says in his book, *Manual of Abhidhamma*:

*Commentators state that the Buddha, as a mark of gratitude to his mother, who was born in the celestial plane, preached the Abhidhamma to his mother and other devas continuously for three months. The principal topics (matika) of the advanced teaching such as moral states (kusala dhamma) and indeterminate states (abyakata Dhamma) etc., were taught by the Buddha to Venerable Sāriputta Thera, who subsequently elaborated them in the six books that comprise the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Katha vatthu being excluded)*<sup>4</sup>.

Unfortunately, this story does not stand on firm ground because later, other Buddhist schools differed in beliefs but claimed to be of the *Theravāda* school. Each school had its own *Abhidhamma*, which was different from the others. Their *Abhidhamma* was essentially the dogmatic interpretation of the Buddha's original teachings of each particular school of thought.

Venerable *Nyanatiloka*, in his *Guide through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, though he does not think that the *Abhidhamma* is a 'corruption or distortion of the Buddha's doctrine,' still agrees that:

*The third collection of the Pāli Tipiṭaka, or 'Triple Basket,' the so-called Abhidhamma Piṭaka, belongs—at least in its form handed down to us—undoubtedly to a younger period than the other two collections, a fact which one who really has penetrated to the true spirit of the emancipating doctrine of the Buddha never will contest*<sup>5</sup>.

While these divisions were going on, they seemed to lose sight of the goal that the Buddha pointed to, which was *Nibbāna*. Instead of seeking *Nibbāna*, they were seeking truth through logical argument. They were also taking unilateral views. In this way, with time, Buddhism, which was initially a kind of psychotherapy, or a process of psychological evolution, that transformed the mind of a normal human

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<sup>4</sup> *Nārada, A Manual of Abhidhamma – An Outline of Buddhist Philosophy* (Buddhist Publication Society:1975) p 5

<sup>5</sup> *Nyanatiloka, Guide through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Buddhist Publication Society: 1979) p 9

being to a supernormal level, now turns into a speculative philosophy, and religion of faith, worship, and prayer.

Over time another thing happened. A school branched off from the *Theravāda* school, called the *Sauthrāntikas*, which went against the *Abhidhamma*. They said the *Abhidhamma* was not the teaching of the Buddha. They stuck exclusively to the *Sutta Piṭaka*. When this happened, the *Suttas*, which were ignored, began to get recognition, and the *Mahāyānists* started manufacturing *Sutras* of their own. *Mahāyānists* claimed their *Sutras* came directly from the Buddha. They even created a story, just as the *Theravādins* did, to show how their *Sutras* came directly from the Buddha. The story of the *Mahāyānists* was as follows:

A few days after the Buddha's final passing away, the community of disciples had their first council. Then devas in the celestial world too had a council, to collect what the Buddha had said in the celestial world, to the devas. The information gathered thus consisted of the *Sutras* of the *Mahāyānists*. These *Sutras* were not brought to the human world all at once because human minds were not ready to comprehend them. So, they were stored in the world of *Nagas*. It was after five centuries that it was brought to the human world. This is a marvelous story that brought the authority of the Buddha to the *Sutras* of the *Mahāyānists*. A similar story explains how the Buddha *Amitabha* came to be worshiped by the *Mahāyānists*. There is a story in the life of the Buddha where *Ajatasattu*, the Son of King *Bimbisara*, when his father crowned him, imprisoned his father until he died in prison. The *Mahāyāna* story says:

When *Bimbisara* was in prison, the Buddha visited him and told him: "You had to go through this due to past karma, but there is a Buddha known as *Amitabha*, who has taken a vow not to enter *Nirvāna* till all beings have entered *Nirvāna*. If you recite his name, you will be reborn in that world, and with the help of Buddha *Amitabha*, you will enter *Nirvāna*. So, keep repeating his name." This story about *Amitabha* is entirely unknown to the *Theravādins*, though the story of *Ajatasattu* and what he did to his father is well known. This type of story building is sometimes called a "harmonious strategy" (*samyak prāyoga*). It is seen as harmless and beneficial, even though it may be fiction. The Buddha, however, never used such strategies if we go by the *Suttas* in the *Sutta Piṭaka* and their parallels.

## **PEACE AND CLARITY**

If followers of the Buddha had maintained unity and harmony, there would never have been any schisms in the *Sangha*, and we would never have been confused with so many schools of thought, all claiming to teach us the actual teaching of the Buddha. All traditional Buddhists should realize that what has been handed down to them traditionally, in their culture, may not necessarily be the original teachings of the Buddha.

In conclusion, we might observe that this early Buddhist position of non-sectarianism could be termed Proto-Buddhism. This realization brings a new dimension to the study of Buddhism. However, we don't need to draw any definite, one-sided conclusions, this way or the other, on this matter, presently. That is not the aim of this book or non-sectarianism. We aim to present some of the observations made during our studies to the reader. Whatever conclusions there be, to be drawn from this material, that task is left for scholars and thinkers more competent than the writer. The writer presents this book as his humble contribution towards a better understanding of the profound teachings of the Buddha.

## BUDDHIST WHISPERS

Have you ever played the children's game called Chinese whispers? In this game, a message created by a person is whispered from one person to the next until the last person to receive the dispatch divulges out loud what they heard it to be. Seldom is the message the same as that whispered by the initiator. It is frequently so warped that it scarcely resembles the original. Unfortunately, this game seems to parallel the fate of the transmission of the Buddha's message over the centuries.

### THE FIRST COUNCIL

The early Buddhist chronicle and chronology are not set in stone. The available sources at times provide conflicting narratives. Absolute certainty about events and dates remains elusive. This is unlikely to change. This caveat needs to be kept in mind. Nevertheless, according to Buddhist tradition, a gathering of five hundred fully awakened monks occurred three months after the Buddha's *Parinibbāna* (passing away) to settle, collate, and organize the Buddha's teachings<sup>6</sup> in an attempt to achieve orthodoxy. While the historicity of this event cannot be established conclusively, this process likely occurred over an extended period, perhaps even starting during the Buddha's lifetime and continuing through to the sectarian era<sup>7</sup>.

Whatever the case may be, eventually, the discourses attributed to the Buddha were collated together in either four or five divisions. They came to be known as "*Suttas*" (Referred to as *Agamas* in the modern *Mahāyāna* tradition). The monastic guidelines were similarly collated and called the "*Vinaya*." As time went by, newer sections were added even to these early collections. The earliest strata of pre-sectarian extant texts are recognized and preserved by modern Buddhist schools, although available in different languages and utilized to different extents. Although the earliest source of the Buddha's teachings in all modern schools, they have been subsumed by later exegetical literature to a large degree.

While the oldest sections of the *Suttas* and *Vinaya* are our earliest and most reliable source of Buddha's teaching, they are not infallible, as evidence shows they have also suffered from the vagaries of oral transmission and sectarian meddling<sup>8</sup>. Even some sections of the *Suttas* and *Vinaya* are now thought to be later additions. Thus,

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<sup>6</sup> Vin, Kd 21

<sup>7</sup> See *Bhikkhu Sujato, A History of Mindfulness*, (Santipada, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

we need not adopt a fundamentalist attitude towards these texts and they need not be treated as divine revelations. Nevertheless, a remarkable degree of concordance across the parallel texts preserved by each school makes them the best available source of the Buddha's teachings<sup>9</sup>.

## THE SECOND AND THIRD COUNCIL

Within a hundred years of the Buddha's life, the disorder began. This seems to be the beginning of division and dispute within the early Buddhist communities. According to most available accounts, the second council was held about one hundred years after the time of the Buddha to resolve a dispute about the monastic rules. This dispute was successfully settled<sup>10</sup>. After the second council, the catalyst for the spread of Buddhism beyond India was the conversion of Emperor Asoka to Buddhism and the missionary activities instigated by him. It is also possible that during his reign and with his patronage, a third ecumenical council was held to resolve disharmony within the Buddhist monastic community<sup>11</sup>.

## THE ABHIDHAMMA

Sometime after the Buddha, disagreements about the interpretation of the teachings arose, resulting in schisms within his monastic community and the rise of the sectarian period of Buddhism<sup>12</sup>. Due to conflicting accounts in existing sources, it cannot be established conclusively when and why<sup>13</sup>. Each sect began to define, defend, and organize its views in texts that came to be known as the *Abhidhamma*. Thus, although the early *Sutta* and *Vinaya* are held in common between schools, their *Abhidhamma* texts differ, containing their sectarian interpretations and biases, but came to be regarded as higher teachings than the earlier *Suttas*<sup>14</sup>.

Emperor Asoka spread Buddhism to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, the heart of the modern *Theravāda* Buddhist School. The *Sutta*, *Vinaya*, and *Abhidhamma* (referred to now as the "Tipiṭaka" or Canon) belonging to one of the Western Indian *Theravāda* sects was received in these countries, in an ancient Indic lexicon today referred to as *Pāli*.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.10, 17

<sup>10</sup> Vin, Kd 22

<sup>11</sup> See Bhikkhu Sujato, *Sect and Sectarianism*, (Santipada, 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

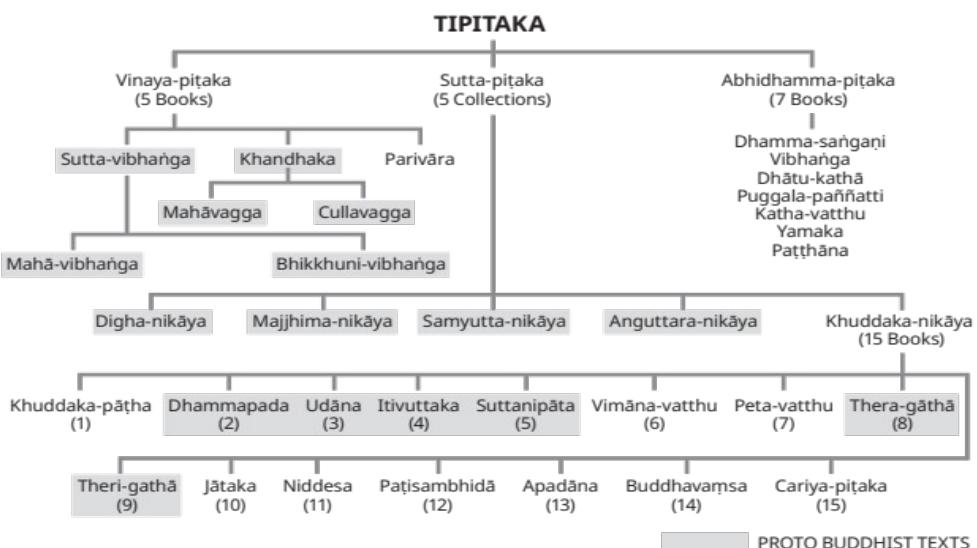
<sup>14</sup> A History of Mindfulness, p.33

## THE COMMENTARIES

In these countries, particularly in Sri Lanka, local monks created texts explaining the three primary received texts, partly due to further sectarian divisions. These are now referred to as commentaries and sub-commentaries (*atthakatha* and *tikka*). An Indian monk named *Buddhagosa* arrived in Sri Lanka in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD and translated the Sinhalese commentaries of one Sri Lankan sect into *Pāli*<sup>15</sup>. He also composed the most famous commentary called the *Visudhimagga*. These have been preserved until the present day. Modern *Theravāda* is primarily based on a combination of their *Abhidhamma* and interpretations of the *Suttas* originating from these commentaries, although these are all chronologically later sectarian texts.

Although there is much in common in the texts, theory, and practice between the three major *Theravāda* countries, differences also exist. Some *Theravādins* say that you should go to Sri Lanka to learn the *Suttas*. To understand the *Abhidhamma*, you should go to Myanmar, and to know the *Vinaya*, you should go to Thailand. These differences in emphasis further complicate any attempts to identify the authenticity of modern Buddhist doctrine and practice.

**DIAGRAM 1: Proto-Buddhist sections of the *Theravāda Tipiṭaka* (Canon)**



<sup>15</sup> See *Bhandaṭacariya Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Nānamoli, (Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre, 1956)

## **MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM**

Eventually, around the time of Christ, the *Mahāyāna* school of Buddhism arose in India, based on the *Bodhisattva* ideal and perfection of the *Paramis*, creating texts that they referred to as 'Sutras'.<sup>16</sup> This school also split into sub-schools later, and many exegetical sectarian texts were created. Examples are the works of *Nāgārjuna*, *Asaṅga*, and *Vasubandhu*<sup>17</sup>.

Unlike in the modern *Theravāda* school, which has preserved the texts of only one ancient sect, when this *Mahāyāna* version of Buddhism spread to China and beyond, Chinese travelers transmitted texts from many other schools to China for translation into Chinese. Thus, in the modern *Mahāyāna* Canon, there are translations of six *Vinayas* belonging to different early sects, although only one is utilized as the basis for their practice<sup>18</sup>. Although a broader range and quantity of pre-sectarian texts are preserved in the modern *Mahāyāna* Canon, it is the later uniquely *Mahāyāna* texts that are given pride of place in ideology and practice. Within *Mahāyāna*, there was again divergence into different sects, with, for example, the formation of *Chan/Zen* Buddhism, which also contains several schools. These sub-sects also have literature written by their masters, which usually dominates their approach to Buddhism.

## **VAJRAYĀNA BUDDHISM**

Most likely due to geographical barriers, Buddhism was transmitted to Tibet from India and China much later. By then, texts known as *Tantras* that had developed in India began to influence and merge with Buddhism<sup>19</sup>. This may have resulted in the development of the *Tantric* Buddhist School, which was transmitted to Tibet. Tibet also had an indigenous shamanic religion called *Bon*, and what we now see as the Modern *Vajrayāna* or the Tibetan school of Buddhism may be a mixture of *Tantric* Buddhism and *Bon*<sup>20</sup>. The early strata of pre-sectarian texts are preserved to a lesser extent in Tibetan, and their Tantric texts composed by later writers are given prominence. Even within modern Tibetan Buddhism, four different schools exist.

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<sup>16</sup> Mahayana. (2023, October 6). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahayana>

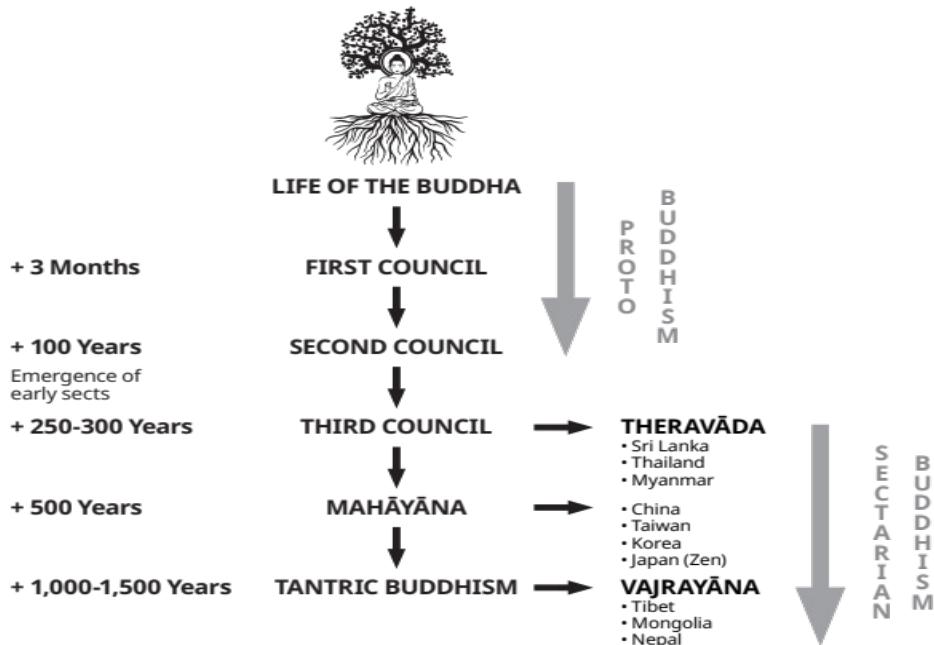
<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> *Sect & Sectarianism*, p.23

<sup>19</sup> Vajrayana. (2023, October 11). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vajrayana>

<sup>20</sup> Bon. (2023, October 9). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bon>

## DIAGRAM 2: An overview of Buddhist history



### THE BUDDHA'S LITMUS TEST

Today, some *Theravādins* claim that theirs is the purest form of Buddhism, some *Mahāyānists* claim theirs is the most selfless form of Buddhism, while some *Vajrayānists* claim theirs is the most evolved form of Buddhism. However, a critical examination of Buddhist history reveals the sectarian biases of all these claims. It is clear that 'Buddhism' as a category has not remained static and essential but has been and is fluid and discursive, changing with time and context. We would not expect otherwise. Yet, this does not mean that we cannot search for that which persists and continues through a discriminatory, ecumenical approach to the texts.

So, in this proliferation of sects and their texts, how may a modern person find clarity and guidance? Fortunately for us, the Buddha himself can come to our rescue. In his final days, as recorded in the *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*<sup>21</sup>, the Buddha is supposed to have imparted one last piece of advice to his followers before peacefully passing away:

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<sup>21</sup> DN 16

*When a Renunciate says: 'Friend, I have heard this first hand from the Holy One: this is his experience, these are his disciplinary principles, this is his message.' You should neither accept nor reject what that Renunciate said. Instead, you should carefully memorize what you heard and then compare it with the Suttas or Vinaya. If it doesn't match the Sutta or Vinaya, you can conclude: 'This is not the word of the Holy One. That Renunciate has misunderstood it.' Then you can reject it. If it matches the Sutta or Vinaya, you can conclude: 'This is the word of the Holy One. That Renunciate understood it.' You can remember it.*

It's not that we need to reject sectarian exegetical texts in total but we need to be discriminatory and search for consistency with early Buddhism by applying this litmus test. All modern Buddhist schools are heirs to this unifying advice and the texts needed to apply this test.

## **CONCLUSION**

From this brief historical survey of ‘Buddhist whispers,’ the reader may see why the author sought to discover what he called ‘Proto-Buddhism,’ the ecumenical prototype from which all later sectarian forms of Buddhism were built. In the author’s view, by applying the litmus test laid down by the Buddha himself, we can seek to uncover and discover the best evidence of what the Buddha may have taught. Whilst there is movement in some Buddhist circles towards such an atavistic approach, the author argues that despite identifying the earliest pre-sectarian strata of texts, uncovering their meaning has still eluded modern Buddhists. It is to an exposition of the author’s interpretation of these early pre-sectarian texts that the rest of this book is dedicated.

## LOST IN TRANSLATION

### A NOTE ABOUT THE TRANSLATIONS

The word *Sutta* means formula. In current literature, the word *Sutta* is wrongly compared to suture. A suture is a thread used in stitching. Suture is a Latin word. In Sri Lanka, when we say the "theorem in geometry," it is always called the *Sutta*. That is because a theorem has been formulated. When a formula is used, people should express that idea in those exact words. Now, for example, if you are studying the Laws of Newton, the first law of Newton is, that "a body tends to remain in a state of rest or of uniform motion unless impressed by an external force." Now, that is to be memorized because it has to be said in those specific words. If you use any other words, the meaning can change. In the same way, the doctrinal, non-narrative, sections of the *Suttas* are formulae. That is why the same thing is repeated *ad verbatim* in so many *Suttas*. Therefore accurate translation of *Suttas* from the *Pāli* is critical because it is a formula. The moment you use a different translation, it gives a different meaning.

Thus, with a humble apology, we explain why we use uncommon terminology in our writings to translate the orthodox *Pāli* terms. We have aimed to lay before the reader, in a precise manner, the exact message conveyed by the Buddha in his well-chosen words. To do so, we have even made a tireless effort to understand the meaning expressed by the Buddha in his carefully designed *Pāli* sentences. In addition, we have also tried to convey to the reader the exact meaning spoken by the Buddha, using the appropriate English terminology, rather than repeating the words used by the early translators, which often misleads the reader.

This does not mean that we are attempting to pick holes in the tremendous work done by these great men and women. We must say that we are greatly indebted to the well-known English translators such as Mr. & Mrs. Rhys Davids, F. L. Woodward, I. B. Horner, and many others for getting the English reading public interested in the teachings of the Buddha. This work is made possible and built on their endeavors. However, these translations made by the early translators contained several errors, some of which modern translators still repeat. We are very thankful to these early translators, and we cannot blame them for their mistakes because they faced many difficulties. They had to learn *Pāli* from *Sinhalese* monks who did not know English. They had to use *Sinhalese* translators who knew English, though their knowledge of *Pāli* could still be questionable. This explains the difficulty

these English translators would have had in learning the *Pāli* language and even translating the words of the Buddha. This is why we must appreciate the work done by these translators despite their shortcomings. They have produced much important literature that we still keep using.

While recognizing with gratitude the great work done by these men and women, we should not forget to rectify the possible errors in the English translations. Present-day readers want to know the genuine teachings of the Buddha as clearly as possible. Therefore, there is a great need to attend to the mistakes for their benefit.

We must also note that the success of a translation depends on the translator's ability to comprehend the meaning expressed in a *Pāli* sentence more than their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. In other words, we believe that a translation should express the meaning. Very often, the idea is lost if one translates word for word. If a translator cannot comprehend the meaning conveyed by a sentence, the translation is misleading. How an idea is expressed in a European language varies from how it is said in an Indian language. In other words, it is essential to know the idiom of the language. This is why it is challenging to extract the meaning of a *Pāli* statement, even if a translator has studied the grammar and vocabulary of *Pāli*.

*Sanskrit*, *Pāli*, and *Sinhalese* are very closely related languages. The grammar, as well as the idiom in these three languages is very similar. Often, the same word is used to express an idea in these languages, though slightly differently. This is why a translation made by a person with an adequate command of English and *Pāli* whose mother tongue is *Sinhalese*, could be more successful than a translation of others proficient in the *Pāli* language but insufficiently familiar with its idiom.

Moreover, there is also another problem commonly encountered by translators of the teachings of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha are profound, philosophical, psychological, and even contain concepts used in modern scientific thinking. Therefore, a person unfamiliar with at least the basics of these subjects would find it challenging to comprehend the whole meaning of some of the ideas expressed by the Buddha, even though they may be familiar with the *Pāli* language or even linguistics. Without fully comprehending the meaning of a *Pāli* statement, it would not be easy to translate it effectively. We do not claim to be experts in these high-flown subjects, but the author has spent almost his entire life studying some of these subjects, with the hope of comprehending the profound teachings of the Buddha. In addition, the author has also tested these ideas by putting them into practice to verify the validity of the genuine teachings. A discerning reader will recognize this fact as they read through the pages of this book.

To assist them, translators, Oriental and Occidental, often relied upon the commentaries to clarify the meaning of *Suttas*. This method has led them astray. From the prior discussion, the reader may realize that the commentaries belong to the later sectarian strata of texts and are therefore not a wholly reliable source for clarifying the meaning of *Suttas*. The commentaries are loaded with sectarian bias. In many instances, the commentaries do not say something conclusive regarding the meaning of deep *Suttas*. The commentaries give some possible interpretations, and the reader finds themselves at a loss to choose the correct one. Sometimes the commentaries go out on a tangent. Why the commentaries are silent on some deep *Suttas* is also a problem for modern-day scholars<sup>22</sup>.

For the benefit of those puzzled by our use of new terminology, we will explain why we use the new terms instead of the commonly used ones. It would also be profitable to keep an open mind while reading and carefully note the new meanings conveyed by the new translations, which may be quite different from the meaning conveyed by the standard translations the reader is familiar with. The reader would also have an opportunity to judge whether or not the new translations give a more enlightening meaning than the former. Thus, they can bear witness to the validity of the translation and the Awakening of the Buddha.

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<sup>22</sup> See *Bhikkhu Katukurunde Nāṇananda, Nibbāna*. (Katukurunde Gnanananda Sadham Senasun Bharaya: 2016) Vol I, p. 2

**PART I**  
**FOUNDATION**

## CHAPTER 1

### THE BUDDHA

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

Let's begin our expedition through Proto-Buddhism. Exploring Buddhism involves an attempt to comprehend the nature and achievement of the Buddha. Today, this can be a thorny task. In death saints have the bothersome habit of becoming entombed by myth. Now there are many Buddhisms and therefore many Buddhas.

Some ideas about the Buddha seem to be venerable embellishment rather than credible reporting. These ideas originate from later texts that began to appear about four centuries after the Buddha. The author has written that much of this later hagiography is “impressive wrapping of an extraordinary product. The proper consideration is not whether such descriptions are true or false but what meaning they attempt to convey. Such wrappings address the emotions rather than the intellect.... (but we should) recognize the importance and usefulness of metaphor and allegory.”

What is the extraordinary gift revealed by discarding this wrapping that has accumulated over time? The earliest texts reveal that he was not an ordinary human as some in the West may like to think. Nor an embodied God as some in the East like to believe. The implications of this are not merely theoretical. How practitioners conceptualize the Buddha determines the goal orientation of their practice, as the Buddha represents the model his followers seek to emulate. In this chapter, the author argues for a conceptualization of the Buddha based on Proto-Buddhist texts. A humanistic figure, supernormal without being supernatural, representing the highest point in the evolution of human consciousness. A conceptualization that reflects an ideal not an idol, a prototype to which modern practitioners can aspire to and embody themselves.

## FINDING THE BUDDHA AMONG THE BUDDHISTS

The verse contemplating the qualities of the Buddha

A new translation by the author

'In this way, the Holy One is spiritually emancipated, harmonious and self-awakened, endowed with conscious behavior, immaculate, penetrated the world, unsurpassable trainer of personalities, educator of celestial and terrestrial beings, awake and holy.'<sup>23</sup>

We are starting from the beginning, in the sense that we will discuss the Buddha. The practice of Buddhism begins with taking refuge. We sometimes recite:

*Buddhaṇ saranaṇ gaccāmi* – I go for refuge in the Buddha, the Harmoniously Awake One.

*Dhammaṇ saranaṇ gaccāmi* – I go for refuge in the *Dhamma*, the Supernormal Reality.

*Saṅghaṇ saranaṇ gaccāmi* – I go for refuge in the *Saṅgha*, the Supernormal community.

That means we take refuge in the awakening of the Buddha, the wisdom of his experience called the *Dhamma*, and the fellowship of disciples living according to this wisdom called the *Saṅgha*. That is the starting point of the practice. This triumvirate of refuges is called the triple gem.

### THE CONCEPT OF BUDDHA

What exactly are we taking refuge in? The term Buddha is popularly associated today with a historical person who lived more than 2,500 years ago in India by the name of *Gotama*, sometimes called the historical Buddha *Sakyamuni*. Buddha was not his name, but his title, which means Awakened One. What this chapter attempts to discuss is not the life history of this person called the Buddha but the meaning of the term Buddha. There are many books about the life of the Buddha, but there is less discussion about the meaning of the term Buddha. Our aim is not to discuss "who" the Buddha was but "what" a Buddha is. Just as the God who created the

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<sup>23</sup> AN 11.12

universe may or may not be real, the concept of God is a real one that exists in some people's minds. In the same way, whether the historical Buddha has been authenticated or not, the concept of Buddha is a real one. It is this concept that we are concerned about here. Just as the idea of God is vital to some people, the idea of Buddha is important to Buddhists.

The idea of a Buddha is a concept formed by human beings. It is a concept of a person who is perfect in wisdom, compassion, and goodness. This concept becomes an ideal. Religion is an effort to reach that state of perfection and people practice religion to realise that ideal. The practice of Buddhism is not just obeying rules laid down by a creator or even the Buddha. Religion is a method of evolution of the human being. Humans need to evolve. All the ills we find in the world are because the human being is not fully evolved. Humans are indeed the most evolved of all species but still, the human being is not fully evolved. The evolution needed is not physical but it is an evolution of the mind. The evolution of consciousness. When human beings begin to evolve psychologically rather than physically, they evolve individually not in groups or as a species. From time to time, through the practice of religion, some human beings evolve to very high levels psychologically. When a person evolves to the highest point, where one becomes perfect, they are called a Buddha. That is the meaning of the title Buddha. The Buddha is a human being who has become perfect. Human beings have the potential to reach the state of perfection and the Buddha and his awakened disciples are the proof of that.

Although some critics see this as the deification of a human being or think that humans can't achieve perfection, Buddhists see it as the ultimate stage in the evolution of a human being. By understanding the Buddha we understand our potential. Then we can get the courage and confidence to realise this potential. This supernormal state could be called superhuman but not supernatural. Some critics also say that there are differences in the concept of Buddha even among the different schools of Buddhism. They say that *Mahāyāna* Buddhism has deified the Buddha, but *Theravāda* Buddhism regards the Buddha as a human being. This, too, is a mistaken view. This mistake will become clear from the discussion below.

We are interested in presenting in this chapter the concept of Buddha as it is found in the earliest writings preserved by the various Buddhist schools, which, all scholars agree, contain the earliest teachings of the Buddha. We shall call these early Buddhist teachings, Proto-Buddhism because it is the prototype from which all modern schools of Buddhism arose. Of course, the concept of Buddha was in existence in India even before the historical Buddha Gotama. Gotama only

matched this concept and was therefore entitled, Buddha. *Gotama* also defined this concept, elaborated on it, and identified himself with it.

Let us now examine this all-important concept of Buddha. The best way to introduce this concept is through the following condensed dialogue from the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*<sup>24</sup>:

The *Brahmin Dona*, noticing the very extraordinary footprints of *Gotama* and fascinated by his serene bearing, determined that he could not be human and questioned *Gotama* as follows:

"Could you be a *deva* (deity)?" "No indeed. *Brahmin*. I could not be a *deva*."

"Could you be a *gandhabba* (angel)?" "No indeed, *Brahmin*, I could not be a *gandhabba*."

"Could you be a *yakka* (devil)?" "No indeed, *Brahmin*, I could not be a *yakka*."

"Then are you a human being?" "No indeed, *Brahmin*, I could not be a human being."

"What then could you be?"

"*Brahmin*, those tendencies whereby, if they were not removed, I would be a *deva*, or *gandhabba*, or *yakka*, or human being, I have eradicated never to grow up again, like a palm tree stump. Just as red, blue, or white lotus, though born in the water, growing up in the water, reaches above the surface and stands unsullied by the water; just so *Brahmin*, though born in the world, grown up in the world, having overcome the weaknesses of the world I abide unsullied by the world. Take it that I am Buddha (Awakened One), *Brahmin*."

The Buddha was born as a human being, but he transcended all human weaknesses, biological impulses, and even divine failings and became perfect. He has risen even above the deities. This is not the deification of a human being by his faithful devotees. It is the evolution of a human being by transcending all human weaknesses. This is also the definition of the concept of Buddha. The significance

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<sup>24</sup> AN 4.36

of this concept of Buddha to the Buddhists and all humanity is that, as the Buddhists believe, it is possible for a human being to reach a state of perfection, through human endeavor, without the help of any supernatural agency. This may look impossible or absurd to non-Buddhists brought up in a monotheistic tradition. Still, from a Buddhist point of view, it is not more absurd than believing that such a perfect being exists out there in heaven, invisible and unknown to imperfect human beings. That human beings are helplessly under the mercy of this perfect creator who punishes and rewards the flawed human beings he created according to his whims. However, a Buddhist by definition believes in the concept of Buddha as the ultimate point in the evolution of the human being.

The advantage of being such a believing Buddhist is that they will understand that their problems could be solved by transcending their human weaknesses by following the Buddha's humanistic technique. Such a Buddhist will begin to grow, evolve, and develop his mind. Instead of praying and waiting until a supernatural God thinks it fit to bestow his grace upon him, either by forgiving his sins or by purifying him through his supernatural powers.

Believing in the possibility of human perfection, through human effort, is the humanistic approach to perfection as opposed to the theistic approach, through dependence on supernatural power. Therefore, Buddhism may be called a humanistic religion. If Buddhism and the concept of Buddha can be understood this way, the modern humanistic mind can appreciate the important message that the historical Buddha brought to the world.

## **TATHĀGATA**

In the *Suttas*, the Buddha is also called *Tathāgata*, which carries a deep meaning. The word can be broken down in two ways. *Thath + āgatha* or *Thathā + gata*. *Thath* or *Thathā* means the English word "that," "that" refers to an object perceived by the senses or the objective world around us. *Agatha* means come. *Gatha* means gone, in the past tense. The idea conveyed by these words is the sense of arrival or entry. We can take it as "come to that" or "gone to that," "that" being the objective world or reality, which means one who has arrived at reality. The word 'Realized One' conveys this meaning. Usually, it is translated as "the one thus-gone".

The uniqueness of the Buddha and his benefit to the world is expressed in the following passage from the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*. This passage employs the word *Tathāgata* to describe the Buddha<sup>25</sup>:

There is one person whose birth into the world is for the welfare of many folks, for the happiness of many folks, who is born out of compassion for the world, for the profit, welfare, and happiness of *devas* and humankind. Who is that one person? It is the *Tathāgata*, the Perfect One, the Harmoniously Awakened One.

The manifestation of one person is hard to find in the world. Of what person? Of the *Tathāgata*, the Spiritually Emancipated One, the Harmoniously Awakened One.

One person born into the world is an extraordinary man. What person? The *Tathāgata*, the Spiritually Emancipated One, the Harmoniously Awakened One.

The death of one person is to be regretted by many folks. Of what person? Of a *Tathāgata*, the Spiritually Emancipated One, the Harmoniously Awakened One.

One person born into the world is unique, without peer, without counterpart, incomparable, unequaled, matchless, unrivaled, best of bipeds, is he. Who is that one person? It is a *Tathāgata*, the Spiritually Emancipated One, the Harmoniously Awakened One.

The manifestation of one person is the manifestation of a mighty vision, a mighty light, a mighty radiance, of six things unsurpassed. It is the realization of the four-fold analysis: the penetration of various data, of the diversity of data: the realization of the fruits of understanding and freedom: the realization of the fruits of stream winning, of once-returning, of non-return, of *arahantship*. Of what person? Of a *Tathāgata*, the Spiritually Emancipated One, the Harmoniously Awakened One.

For further explanation of this *Sutta* by the author, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gyi8YPAUkuI>

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<sup>25</sup> AN 1.170-1.186

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUDDHA

The great importance of a Buddha as the light of the world is expressed as follows<sup>26</sup>:

So long as the moon and the sun arise not in the world, so long is there no shining forth of great light, of great radiance. Then there is gloom and darkness, no telling whether it is night or day, no telling of months or half-months, no telling of the seasons of the year.

But when the moon and the sun shine in the world, then is there a shining forth of great light, of great radiance. Then is there no more gloom and darkness, no more murk of gloom and darkness, one can tell whether it is night or day, one can tell the months and the half-months and the seasons of the year.

Just as long as a *Tathāgata* arises not in the world, even so, there is no shining forth of light, of great radiance, then is there gloom and darkness, a murk of gloom and darkness, then is there no proclamation of Four-fold Supernormal Reality, no teaching, no setting forth, no establishing, opening up, analyzing and making of them plain.

But as soon as a *Tathāgata* arises in the world, then is there a shining forth of great light, of great radiance. Then there is no more gloom and darkness. No more murk of gloom and darkness; then is there proclamation of the Four-fold Supernormal Reality, teaching, setting forth, establishing, opening up, analyzing, and making them plain.

The Buddha is the most remarkable being according to the following passage<sup>27</sup>:

As compared with creatures, whether footless, bipeds, quadrupeds, or those with many feet, form or formless, sense or void of sense or indeterminate in sense, a *Tathāgata*, a Perfect One, a Harmoniously Awakened One is reckoned the best. Those who appreciate the Buddha appreciate the best. Of those who appreciate the best, the result is the best.

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<sup>26</sup> SN 56.38

<sup>27</sup> AN 4.34

## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE BUDDHA

The concept of Buddha though it was elaborated in detail by *Gotama*, was not exclusively Buddhist. At the time of *Gotama*, several leaders in India claimed to be omniscient and possess psychic powers. In the *Suttas*, we find that the Buddha does not claim omniscience<sup>28</sup>. Despite this, later Buddhists from various schools would claim that the Buddha was omniscient. Instead, he speaks about a specific ability to know the past and the future, not only one's own, but also that of others. In other words, he could see the cycle of birth and death that runs governed by the power of *kamma*. It is important to note that his idea of *kamma* and rebirth is not borrowed from others but is based on his own experience.

In speaking about his unique understanding and inner transformation, he uses a different term than omniscience (*sabbannu*) in the following passage from the *Samyutta Nikāya*<sup>29</sup>:

King *Pasenadi* of *Kosala* once visited the Buddha and questioned him thus:  
"Does Master *Gotama* also not claim unsurpassable and harmonious awakening?"

"If there be anyone, sire, to whom such awakening might rightly be attributed, it is me. I, sire, have attained that unsurpassable harmonious awakening (*Anuttara sammā sambodhi*)."

In describing the extraordinary attainment of the Buddha, this passage<sup>30</sup> says:

Renunciates, the world is fully comprehended by a *Tathāgata*. From the world, a *Tathāgata* is released. Renunciates, a *Tathāgata* fully comprehends the arising of the world: the arising of the world is abandoned by a *Tathāgata*. A *Tathāgata* fully comprehends the ending of the world: the ending of the world is realized by a *Tathāgata*. Renunciates, a *Tathāgata* fully comprehends the practice going to the end of the world: the practice going to the end of the world is made to become a *Tathāgata*."

Renunciates, whatsoever in the whole world, with the world of *Maras*, *Brahmas*, together with the host of recluses and *brahmins*, of *devas* and

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<sup>28</sup> MN 71

<sup>29</sup> SN 3.1

<sup>30</sup> AN 4.23

humankind, is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, searched into, pondered over by the mind, - all that a *Tathāgata* fully comprehends."

Renunciates, in the whole world, with the world of *Devas*, *Maras*, *Brahmas* of *devas* and humankind, a *Tathāgata* is a conqueror of the unconquered, seer of whatever there is to see, the wielder of power.

The supremacy of the Buddha is indicated in the following passage from the *Anguttara Nikāya*<sup>31</sup>:

Renunciates, the Lion, king of the beasts, comes from his lair at eventide, and he stretches himself. Having done so, he surveys the four quarters in all directions. Then utters his Lion's roar thrice. Thrice, having roared his Lion's roar sallies forth in search of prey.

Now Renunciates, whatsoever brute creatures hear the sound of the roaring of the Lion, king of the beasts, for the most part, they are afraid: they fall to quaking and trembling. Just so Renunciates, when a *Tathāgata* arises in the world, spiritually emancipated, harmonious and self-awakened, endowed with conscious behaviour, immaculate, penetrated the world, unsurpassable trainer of personalities, educator of celestial and terrestrial beings, awake and holy, He teaches the *Dhamma*: such is personality, such is the origin of personality, such is the ending of personality, such the practice leading to the ending of personality.

Then Renunciates, whatever devas there be, long-lived, beautiful and happy, for a long time in lofty mansions, too on hearing the Dhamma, the teaching of the *Tathāgata*, are mostly afraid. They fall to quaking and trembling, saying, "It seems sirs, that we who thought ourselves permanent are after all impermanent, that we who thought our-selves stable are after all unstable, that we, who thought ourselves lasting, are after all not to last. So, it seems, sirs, that we are impermanent, unstable, not to last, oppressed by a personality." Thus potent, Renunciates, is the *Tathāgata*, over *Devas* and humankind, of such mighty power and majesty is he.

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<sup>31</sup> AN 4.33

## CONCLUSION

These ideas expressed in the preceding quotations are further elaborated in other *Suttas*. This shows that the concept of Buddha in early Buddhism was the concept of an extraordinary human being who has transcended all human and divine weaknesses and has reached a state of perfection. Deities are seen in Buddhism not only as imperfect but also as mortal. The Buddha however transcends death with the attainment of *Nibbāna*. This is not a union with God, but the complete cessation of the three natural influences called the influence of sense desires (*kāma āsava*), the influences of existence (*bhava āsava*), and the influence of being unconscious of one's experience (*avijjā āsava*)<sup>32</sup>. (See Appendix 1)

The practice of Buddhism is based on this concept of Buddha and the self-confidence, self-reliance, and desire to evolve that result. Buddhism is a humanistic religion that defines religion as the psychological process of evolution of the human consciousness to a state of perfection called *Nibbāna*. The person who has reached that state of perfection is called Buddha, the Awakened One. It is imperative to distinguish between this concept of Buddha, which gives hope to humanity, from the person *Gotama* who attained this state. According to the *Suttas*, there have been several Buddhas before *Gotama*, and there will be other Buddhas after him<sup>33</sup>.

The teaching of *Gotama* is nothing but an explanation of how we too can become like him and bring all suffering to an end. All human problems could be solved only through this process of evolution. The concept of Buddha is the ideal of perfection Buddhists look up to which can be reached through human effort here and now. The historical Buddha *Gotama* testified to this fact through his own experience and the experience of his many victorious disciples.

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<sup>32</sup> AN 6.63

<sup>33</sup> DN 14

## ***Tevijjavaccha Sutta (MN 71)***

This *Sutta* is a critical introduction to the Buddha. It's called the *Tevijjavaccha Sutta*. I translate *Tevijja* as the threefold consciousness. *Te* means three. *Vijja* is usually translated as knowledge but I translate it as consciousness. Knowledge is something we can get from reading a book but something much deeper is meant here. *Vacchagotta* is the person who came to the Buddha and asked questions.

### **A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>34</sup>**

SO I HAVE HEARD. At one time the Buddha was staying near Vesālī, at the Great Wood, in the hall with the peaked roof. Now at that time the wanderer Vacchagotta was residing in the Single Lotus Monastery of the wanderers.

Then the Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Vesālī for alms. Then it occurred to him, “It’s too early to wander for alms in Vesālī. Why don’t I visit the wanderer Vacchagotta at the Single Lotus Monastery?” So that’s what he did.

Vacchagotta saw the Buddha coming off in the distance, and said to him, “Let the Blessed One come, sir! Welcome to the Blessed One, sir! It’s been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. Please, sir, sit down, this seat is ready.”

The Buddha sat on the seat spread out, while Vacchagotta took a low seat and sat to one side. Then Vacchagotta said to the Buddha: “Sir, I have heard this: ‘The ascetic Gotama claims to be all-knowing and all-seeing, to know and see everything without exception, thus: ‘Knowledge and vision are constantly and continually present to me, while walking, standing, sleeping, and waking.’’ I trust that those who say this repeat what the Buddha has said, and do not misrepresent him with an untruth? Is their explanation in line with the teaching? Are there any legitimate grounds for rebuke and criticism?”

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<sup>34</sup>*Tevijjavaccha Sutta: To Vacchagotta on the Three Knowledges (MN 71)*, translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Sujato. Sutta Central, 3 June 2024,

<https://suttacentral.net/mn71/en/sujato>

<https://suttacentral.net/mn71/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

“Vaccha, those who say this do not repeat what I have said. They misrepresent me with what is false and untrue.”

“So how should we answer so as to repeat what the Buddha has said, and not misrepresent him with an untruth? How should we explain in line with his teaching, with no legitimate grounds for rebuke and criticism?”

“‘The ascetic Gotama has the three knowledges.’ Answering like this you would repeat what I have said, and not misrepresent me with an untruth. You would explain in line with my teaching, and there would be no legitimate grounds for rebuke and criticism.

For, Vaccha, whenever I want, I recollect my many kinds of past lives. That is: one, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand rebirths; many eons of the world contracting, many eons of the world expanding, many eons of the world contracting and expanding. I remember: ‘There, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn somewhere else. There, too, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn here.’ And so I recollect my many kinds of past lives, with features and details.

And whenever I want, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, I see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. I understand how sentient beings are reborn according to their deeds.

And I have realized the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life. I live having realized it with my own insight due to the ending of defilements.

‘The ascetic Gotama has the three knowledges.’ Answering like this you would repeat what I have said, and not misrepresent me with an untruth. You would explain in line with my teaching, and there would be no legitimate grounds for rebuke and criticism.”

When he said this, the wanderer Vacchagotta said to the Buddha, “Master Gotama, are there any laypeople who, without giving up the fetter of lay life, make an end of suffering when the body breaks up?” “No, Vaccha.”

“But are there any laypeople who, without giving up the fetter of lay life, go to heaven when the body breaks up?”

“There’s not just one hundred laypeople, Vaccha, or two or three or four or five hundred, but many more than that who, without giving up the fetter of lay life, go to heaven when the body breaks up.”

“Master Gotama, are there any Ājīvaka ascetics who make an end of suffering when the body breaks up?” “No, Vaccha.”

“But are there any Ājīvaka ascetics who go to heaven when the body breaks up?”

“Vaccha, when I recollect the past ninety-one eons, I can’t find any Ājīvaka ascetics who have gone to heaven, except one; and he taught the efficacy of deeds and action.”

“In that case, Master Gotama, that sectarian fold is empty even of the chance to go to heaven.” “Yes, Vaccha, that sectarian fold is empty even of the chance to go to heaven.”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the wanderer Vacchagotta was happy with what the Buddha said.

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

### The three-fold consciousness

This *Sutta* points out crucial facts. There are these three things the Buddha has become directly conscious of through his own experience. The first one is that the Buddha is conscious of his past lives as far back as he pleases. There is no end to his ability to recall his past. The second thing is that when a person dies, he is conscious of where that person is reborn. He can see as if he's looking at someone going from one room to another. If we stand at the door between two rooms, we can see how a person goes from one to the other. In the same way, the Buddha can see how when a person dies, he is reborn in another life. That ability helps him to understand what today is called *kamma* and rebirth. He knows that *kamma* and rebirth are a fact through his own experience.

Concerning the third consciousness, the above translation says that " I have realized the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life. I live having realized it with my own insight due to the ending of defilements." A

translation like defilement doesn't bring out the real meaning of the *Pāli* word. Other translators use the word taint. The *Pāli* word being translated is *āsava*. The word *āsava* doesn't mean defilement or taint. An *āsava* is a 'flowing in' or an 'influx.' It comes from the root word 'sru,' which is to flow. *Sava* is to flow out, while *āsava* is to flow in. The more appropriate translation would be influence; an influence flows into us from the outside environment. The flow continues within the organism and goes out as the action. It is a complete flow, coming in and going out of the organism. An *āsava* is mainly the internal part of the whole flow. This is a very crucial idea that is not understood by some Buddhists who read these translations in English.

**TABLE 1: Comparative translation of *āsava***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations	Author's Translation
<i>āsava</i>	canker, taint, fermentations, outflows, defilements	influence, influx, inflow

### **What is an influence?**

Sigmund Freud, the Psychologist, spoke about emotions and how emotions create problems. He also talked about the necessity to gain control over emotions, but he thought that emotions cannot be eliminated because emotions are built into our system. That the body has all the organs necessary for emotions to be aroused<sup>35</sup>.

We have firecrackers that we light to celebrate special occasions. They contain a kind of gunpowder, and when it is ignited, the sounds and the lights come out. Similarly, according to Freud, our body has the organs necessary to produce anger, fear, sexual desires, or worries. All those emotional disturbances arise because the body contains all the conditions required for emotions to surface. Therefore, Freud thought we could not eliminate emotions. When I first went to the United States to talk about Buddhism, I said the Buddha eliminated all lust (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). One man laughed at this. He asked me how could these emotions be stopped. He said Freud thought that these emotions could not be eliminated.

It was only later that I realized a new psychology had come up after Sigmund Freud. It was Cognitive Psychology. They began to realize that it is true that the

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<sup>35</sup> Sigmund Freud. (2023, September 29). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund\\_Freud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud)

body contains all the organs necessary to produce emotions. However, the body does not produce emotions unless you start thinking about the world in a way that triggers an emotion. In other words, an emotion depends on how your thinking interprets your circumstances<sup>36</sup>. It is imperative to understand that. Today in Cognitive Psychotherapy, they try to make people change the way they interpret their circumstances<sup>37</sup>. By changing the way they interpret events, emotional disturbance can be stopped. The Buddha pointed this out more than 25 centuries before Westerners understood it. He explained this and used it to eradicate all emotional disturbances and calm the mind.

This is crucial to understand about rooting out all emotions. Emotions arise because of the influence of events in the world around us. When something happens in the external world, we begin to interpret that through our thinking and according to this interpretation an emotion is aroused. An emotion is therefore influenced by the outside environment. It is not something that comes from the inside and goes out. However, Sigmund Freud used the word 'instinct,' which means it starts from inside.

The Buddha says that our mood in its original state is pure. It is things that come from outside that pollute the mood<sup>38</sup>. It's like water. Water is a pure substance. It gets polluted only from foreign matter coming into it. But completely pure water can't be found in the natural state, it is always mixed with something. In the same way, although the mind is originally pure it is never found in the pure state naturally. Just as water can be purified by filtration or distillation, in the same way, the mind can be purified through a proper technique. That proper technique is commonly translated as the Nobel eight-fold path. Suffering is bought to an end by stopping the *āsava* or the influence that the outside world has on our inner experience because it is that influence that leads to emotions and suffering.

Although my ideas go against the traditional interpretation, I think the famous formula translated as dependent origination, is a deep analysis of how the influence of the environment or the *āsava* leads to suffering. The influence of the environment on us which leads to emotion and suffering is actually what is called a chain reaction, like the different parts of a chain. This reaction is a series of reactions. It starts with the environment. The first reaction to the environment within us is perception, then cognition/conception, then emotion, and then action.

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<sup>36</sup> Cognitive therapy. (2023, May 23). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive\\_therapy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_therapy)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> AN 1.49-52

That is why the Buddha called it an influence, your actions have been influenced by what happened outside. An *āsava* is the inner part of this chain reaction. In my view, it is this same chain reaction that is described in dependent origination. We can see this very clearly in the *Sammāditthi Sutta*<sup>39</sup>. We will discuss this further in chapters 5, 6, and Appendix 1.

What the Buddha points out is that this influence of the environment is disturbing our whole body and mind. It can even result in stress, suffering, crime, wars, terrorism, and all the destruction in the world. It is all due to the emotions aroused by the influence of the environment. That stressful emotional disturbance is what the Buddha called *dukkha*, which is normally translated as suffering. The Buddha aims to stop this *dukkha*. To stop *dukkha* the chain reaction or the influence of the environment leading to emotions must be stopped.

### **DIAGRAM 3: Influence of the environment**



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<sup>39</sup> MN 9

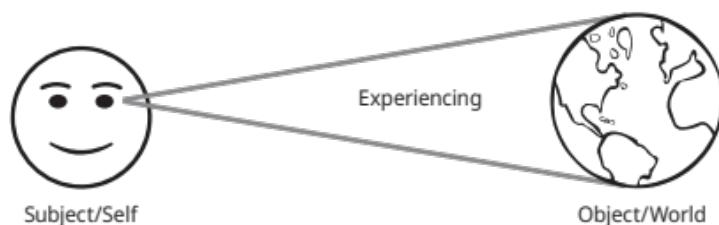
## Existential thinking and experiential thinking

The main idea in this *Sutta* is that the Buddha has three essential consciousness. The first two support the notion of *kamma* and rebirth. The third consciousness is the solution to the suffering of human existence, which the Buddha called *dukkha*.

A *Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* is called the *Sabbāsava Sutta*<sup>40</sup> (See Appendix 1). The word *āsava* is used in the title of this *Sutta*. In the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, the Buddha points out that the ordinary person thinks: "Did I exist in the past, how did I exist in the past, in what way did I exist in the past, will I exist in the future, in what form will I exist in the future, do I exist now and in what form do I exist now." In other words, the normal person is thinking about the past, present, and future. That way of thinking confirms the idea 'I exist,' and there is a self that is reborn. If you hold on to the concept 'I exist,' you can't gain freedom from suffering. To be thinking in terms of *kamma* and rebirth is to be unable to gain freedom from suffering.

Why is this? The Buddha then points out that the *Ariya sāvaka* (supernormal disciple) doesn't think that way. They think only in terms of what is stress, what is the cause of stress, what is the ending of stress, and what is the way to end stress. If one begins to think in that way, that person's stress will come to an end. Although *kamma* and rebirth is a fact that the Buddha has seen through his own experience, you cannot gain freedom from suffering if you keep thinking in terms of *kamma* and rebirth. If you want end suffering, you have to start thinking differently, and that is to avoid thinking existentially. What do we mean by existentially? To exist is to see things in terms of the existence of a self and a world or subject and object. We are always thinking in terms of the self and the world. When we learn the English language, we learn the subject, the object, and the verb. This is the usual way that thoughts are formed in our minds. We can illustrate this in a diagram as follows:

**DIAGRAM 4: The structure of normal existential thinking**



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<sup>40</sup> MN 2

However, if continued, this way of thinking cannot bring suffering to an end. In some very important *suttas*, like the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*<sup>41</sup> and *Cūla -Sihanada Sutta*<sup>42</sup>, the Buddha said that thinking in terms of either existence or non-existence is a mistake. It is a mistake because we must avoid these extremes and think according to what is normally called dependent origination. This is thinking experientially instead. What is that? The experiential way of thinking is to see that what we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch is only a sensory experience. Seeing is an experience, and hearing is an experience, etc. Usually, we think 'the self' and the 'world' exist first, and then the self sees or experiences the world. This means the self and the world exist first, then the self and world meet, and the self sees or experiences the world. That is how people think.

But that is incorrect. What the Buddha is showing us in dependent origination is that the seeing or experience comes first, and it is in the seeing or experiencing that the self is created and the world is created. In the process of experiencing, 'the self' comes into being, and the 'world' comes into being. When that is properly understood, then the idea of existence disappears. It is only when that idea of existence disappears that you are free, not only of existence but also of suffering and even death. If you are free from existence, who is there to suffer? Or die? This is also the meaning of *Suññatā* or emptiness, when experience becomes empty of the self and world, which is described in the *Suñña Sutta*<sup>43</sup> and *Mogharāja Sutta*<sup>44</sup>.

There are two perspectives of the world. One the Buddha called the worldly perspective and the other one he called the transcendent perspective<sup>45</sup>. If you ask me, 'Did you take your meals today in the morning?' I have to say 'yes'. However, that is not the transcendent perspective. This is because I am talking about a self existing in the past. The past, present, and future is time. Time and space is not the transcendent perspective. Science is based on time and space but all that is just a construct of perception. Even *kamma* and rebirth is the worldly perspective<sup>46</sup>.

This is why there is a new kind of science called quantum physics. Gradually they are discovering that whatever is perceived is ultimately a creation of the process of perception. These are not truths. But still, in our ordinary life, we have to use these

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<sup>41</sup> SN 12.15

<sup>42</sup> MN 11

<sup>43</sup> SN 35.85

<sup>44</sup> Sn 5.15

<sup>45</sup> MN 117

<sup>46</sup> MN 117

ideas like time and space. Without using those concepts, we cannot live. This is the worldly reality.

Existence is called *bhava* and its opposite non-existence is called *vibhava*, both are wrong perspectives.<sup>47</sup> The freedom from both existence and non-existence is called *bhava nirodho*. This is why the Buddha says '*bhava nirodho nibbanam*'.<sup>48</sup> Thus, what is called *Nibbāna* is freedom from existence. I call this shifting from the paradigm of existence to the paradigm of experience. Paradigm means your frame of mind, how you see things. The paradigm shift means you shift from existence to experience. Even this feeling of existence is an influence that is coming from outside. Realising this is awakening from the dream of existence. This is why the Buddha is called Buddha. Buddha means one who has awakened. This is the Buddha's third consciousness described in this *Sutta*. We will discuss this very profound idea further in later chapters.

### The three-fold consciousness

In summary, the Buddha claims to be conscious of three things:

1. *pubbenivāsānussati* (recollection of previous lives)
2. *dibbacakkhu* (seeing how beings are reborn according to *Kamma*)
3. *āsavākhaya* (cessation of all influences)

The most critical is the third where the Buddha realizes what is usually translated as the four noble truths and becomes free of all environmental influences, even the feeling of existence. I think I have explained some crucial concepts above. Another question that *Vacchagotta* asks is whether the person who usually leads the household life, that is the common way of living today, whether by living in that way a person can bring all suffering to an end. And the Buddha says no, it is not possible to gain freedom from suffering by living that way. You have to give up the household way of living. But everyone cannot do that. This is why it is a gradual process of evolution of the human being. Giving up the household life and giving up the pursuit of sensual pleasure is a necessary step in awakening from the dream of existence. The typical household life is based on being in the dream of existence. This is essential to understand, and I hope you have understood. We can end our discussion of this *Sutta* here.

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<sup>47</sup> MN 11

<sup>48</sup> SN 12.68

## **Question and Answer**

**Q:** You mentioned the influence earlier. You said existence is also an influence. Is that influence an external or an internal influence? And which contributes more?

**A:** The *Pāli* word *āsava* is referring to something coming from the outside. An internal conception is present because your past experiences might distort the interpretation of the current experience. Regarding which influence is more powerful, I would say both are powerful.

## ***Mahā Sīhanāda Sutta (MN 12)***

### **The Lion's Roar – The Tenet of the Great Proclamation**

We are going to discuss a fascinating *Sutta* called the *Mahā Sīhanāda Sutta*. This *Sutta* describes the Buddha. Many people have heard about the Buddha, but few people know what the powers of the Buddha are. It is slightly different from explaining what a Buddha is, which we explored previously. Usually, we are not talking about the powers of the Buddha but his goodness, wisdom, and compassion. Some people think that the Buddha was like a philosopher who sat under a tree instead of on an arm chair. Some even claim that because the Buddha was a philosopher, Buddhism isn't a religion, it's only a philosophy. This *Sutta* is about the powers of the Buddha and we see that he was not just a speculative philosopher and Buddhism therefore can't be reduced just to a philosophy.

Most religions worship power when they worship a God, a supernatural being who has magical powers. Why do people worship power? Because they have a feeling of powerlessness or insecurity or lack. Human beings have a sense of weakness, and this feeling of weakness starts in childhood. A child feels weak and is dependent on the parents for many years. Only when children become adults, do they begin to realize that their parents are as helpless as themselves. They can't get help from their parents anymore. The child may be even stronger than their parents, and the parents may be now old and weak. When the child has become an adult and becomes stronger, what can the adult do when they face trouble? It's useless running to their parents. The only thing they can do is pray to an invisible God. No one has seen this God. They have only seen pictures of God or statues of God, or there is just a blind belief in a mighty God.

People need this belief in God because they are feeling insecure. It is the insecurity of life that has created this thing called religion. All cultures believe in supernatural beings, but no one can point to this magical being. This is why modern people have begun to doubt religion altogether. Now they pursue science. Science has taken the place of religion today. They have computers, and they have these wonderful telephones which can show pictures or even when they speak to someone they can see through the phone the image of that person who is speaking. All kinds of wonderful things are happening. But how is it happening? It was created by human intelligence, and therefore people are now having faith in human intelligence.

Human intelligence has become God now. There has been a shift from theistic thinking to humanistic thinking.

The real help given to us by the Buddha is the wisdom of the Buddha. His power comes from his wisdom. Even some modern Buddhists tend towards worshiping power today. They don't understand the teaching, which is humanistic, not theistic. Buddhism is a genuinely humanistic religion. The Buddha is talking about the value of human intelligence and appreciating the power of the human mind. That is what the Buddha is all about, and that is what we are going to discuss.

This *Sutta* is called the "Lion's Roar." The Lion is the most powerful animal in the jungle. The Buddha's proclamation of power is compared to a Lion's roar because they say that when Lions begin their journey, they start with a roar. Similarly, the Buddha sometimes starts his teaching journey by describing who he is.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>49</sup>**

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at *Vesālī* in the grove outside the city to the west. Now on that occasion *Sunakkhatta*, son of the *Licchavis*, had recently left this *Dhamma* and Discipline. He was making this statement before the *Vesālī* assembly: "The recluse *Gotama* does not have any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. The recluse *Gotama* teaches a *Dhamma* merely hammered out by reasoning, following his own line of inquiry as it occurs to him, and when he teaches the *Dhamma* to anyone, it leads him when he practices it to the complete destruction of suffering."

#### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

*Vesālī* is a place in India. During the time of the Buddha, there was a group of people called the *Licchavis*. *Vesālī* was the part of India that this group of people governed. It was a union, not controlled by one individual but a collection of individuals who were supposed to be kings or princes, and it was a cooperative government. *Sunakkhatta* was a person who belonged to this group of people called the *Licchavis*. He had been a follower of the Buddha, but he could not understand the teachings of the Buddha properly and came to some wrong conclusions. He began to speak about his idea of the Buddha to others.

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<sup>49</sup> "Mahā Sīhanāda Sutta: The Great Discourse on the Lion's Roar" (MN 12), translated from the Pāli by Nānamoli Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.012.ntbb.html>

He was making this statement before the *Vesālī* assembly. There were people gathered, and he said that the recluse *Gotama* does not have any superhuman states or powers, any distinction in knowledge, and that he didn't have wisdom and vision worthy of noble ones. He said that the recluse *Gotama* teaches *Dhamma* hammered out by reasoning. Here the translation of the *Pāli* words is not so bad. It somehow brings out the idea. 'Hammered out by reasoning' means that he has been using the power of reasoning, which means rationalism. Then he says the Buddha is following his line of inquiry as it occurs to him, and when he teaches the *Dhamma* to anyone, it leads him when he practices it to the destruction of suffering. So, he points out that this teaching aims to bring all suffering to an end. *Sunakkhatta* condemned the Buddha and claimed he was just a speculative philosopher.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

Then, when it was morning, the venerable *Sāriputta* dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went into *Vesālī* for alms. Then he heard *Sunakkhatta*, son of the *Licchavis*, making this statement before the *Vesālī* assembly. When he had wandered for alms in *Vesālī* and had returned from his alms round, after his meal he went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told the Blessed One what *Sunakkhatta* was saying.

The Blessed One said: "Sāriputta, the misguided man *Sunakkhatta* is angry and his words are spoken out of anger. Thinking to discredit the *Tathāgata*, he actually praises him; for it is praise of the *Tathāgata* to say of him: 'When he teaches the Dhamma to anyone, it leads him when he practices it to the complete destruction of suffering.'

"Sāriputta, this misguided man *Sunakkhatta* will never infer of me according to *Dhamma*: **'That Blessed One is accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed.'**

#### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

The section above in bold is a translation of a verse that you may be familiar with. You may have heard chanting of this verse contemplating the nine qualities of the Buddha in *Pāli*:

*Itipi so bhagavā arahām sammāsambuddho vijjācaranāsampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi, satthā devamanussānaṁ, buddho bhagavā’ti*

It is vital to understand this statement describing the Buddha. I translate these words in a slightly different way than the translation given above.

### **1. Bhagavā**

‘*Itipi so*’ means in this way. The word ‘*bhagavā*’ is translated above as Blessed One. This word is better translated in modern English as holy. The word holy means the same thing as ‘*bhagavā*.’ Holy is a significant word. There was a writer who wrote a book on this subject, called ‘The idea of the holy.’ Holy means something very sacred, which is also very religious. We have to use words like sublime or holy because of the spiritual significance of the term ‘*bhagavā*.’ Religious purity of mind is the meaning of holy. So *bhagavā* can be translated as holy.

### **2. Arāham**

‘*Ara*’ means a fetter. If you tie a dog to a post with a rope, that rope is a fetter, and the dog cannot run about. Another word is bond. A bond is what binds a person. *Ara* refers to a bond or fetter. The word ‘*han*’ means to break or destroy. You can break a bond or break the rope that ties the dog to a post. That breaking is what is meant by *han*. ‘*Arāham*’ means the breaking of the bond. The word ‘*Arāham*’ is used to refer to the Buddha. It means he is the breaker of bonds. An excellent way to capture the meaning of that word is spiritually emancipated. The above translation of accomplished doesn’t convey the meaning of this word.

Emancipated from what? Emancipated from the feeling and idea of existence. We feel we are existing. We are bound to that idea of existence. *Arāham* means that the emotional bonds that tie us to the idea of existence have been broken. Ten fetters or bonds bind the human being to the idea of existence, and those ten bonds have to be broken. (These ten bonds are further discussed in chapter 8). *Arāham* means someone who has broken those ten bonds.

### **3. Sammā sambuddho**

*Sammā sambuddho* means one who has awakened from this dream of existence by his efforts, without the assistance of a teacher. The prefix *sammā* indicates that this type of Buddha lives in the community or in harmony with others rather than

choosing to live exclusively in solitude like silent Buddhas. So, we can translate this phrase as harmonious and self-awakened.

#### **4. *Vijjā carāna sampanno***

‘*Vijjā*’ means conscious. *Carāna* means behavior. *Vijjā carāna sampanno* means the behavior and consciousness are going together. They are united. What does that mean? Some people may be very well educated in the *Dhamma*, but their behavior is entirely different. Even though you are educated in the *Dhamma*, you may behave incorrectly. In other words, most of our behavior is unconscious. But the Buddha is acting according to what he has understood. His behavior is fully conscious. The term ‘*sampanno*’ means living with consciousness. Knowledge is not the same thing as behavior. You might even criticize me and say you are talking about one thing, but your behavior is different. That is because we are not always behaving in the way we are talking about. The Buddha behaves in the way that he is talking about, he is endowed with conscious behaviour.

#### **5. *Sugato***

This is translated as sublime above, but it consists of ‘*su*’ and ‘*gato*.’ *Su* means good, and *gato* means gone to. That means ‘gone to goodness.’ In other words, become good. Most people are both good and bad, sometimes doing good things, and sometimes doing bad things. Because of the union of the mind, the Buddha’s mind is not going in two different directions. It is only going in a good direction. The Buddha has become perfect in goodness. We can use a word like immaculate to describe this. When you understand this, you value the Buddha’s teachings.

#### **6. *Lokavidū***

‘*Loka*’ means the world, ‘*vidū*’ means penetrated. The Buddha has fully understood the world. When we think of understanding the world, we usually think of it incorrectly. To explain this, we have to go to a deeper level. The normal level is the existential way of thinking. This means that we think of existence. We think that I am in the world, so ‘I’ is the subject, and the ‘world’ is the object. That is how everyone understands the world.

*Lokavidū* means the Buddha has penetrated the world and understood that the world is a product of the process of perception. The world is only an appearance and does not exist independent of sense perception. We have to distinguish between appearance and existence. There is a difference between appearance and existence.

The world appears to you, it is an appearance only, but we think of it as existing. One existence is myself, and another is the world, and then we begin to have a relationship between the self and the world. The relationship can be in the form of a desire, hatred, fear, or worry, which leads to unhappiness. The unhappiness results from this reaction, and the reaction is the result of existence. I exist, you exist, and then we have a reaction, and the reaction ends up in suffering. When you have seen that there is only experiencing, that "what you experience (the world) " or " the one who experiences (the self)," are delusions built on top of experience then you have come out of existence.

This is the meaning of *Suññatā* or emptiness, when experience becomes empty of the self and world, which is described in the *Suñña Sutta*<sup>50</sup>. This important idea is also conveyed by the Buddha in the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*. There the Buddha said that thinking in terms of either existence or non-existence is a mistake<sup>51</sup>. It is a mistake because we must think in terms of experience instead. The Buddha says '*bhava nirodho nibbanam*'.<sup>52</sup> What is called *Nibbāna* is freedom from existence. Existence is called *bhava*, and the freedom from existence is called *bhava nirodho*. This is, of course, a long story, which we will explore in chapters to come. When we use the words '*itipi so bhagavā arahā sammāsambuddho...*' though we may be reciting this if you begin to understand it, you will see the entire *Dhamma* in this verse.

## **7. *Anuttaro purisa damma sārathi***

This means unsurpassable (*anuttaro*) trainer (*sārathi*) of personality (*purisa damma*). The Buddha trains a person to be free from personality. To gain freedom from personality is to be free from all suffering, free from all the desires, hatreds, fears, and worries that go along with our personality. When the self disappears, all selfishness comes to an end.

## **8. *Satthā deva manussānam***

'*Satthā*' means the teacher of *devas* and *manussa*, the human beings. He has become their teacher; therefore, he is superior to the deities.

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<sup>50</sup> SN 35.85

<sup>51</sup> SN 12.15

<sup>52</sup> SN 12.68

## 9. *Buddho Bhagavā*

*Buddho* means awake, and *Bhagavā* means holy. We can also use the word transcended. It is like the lotus. The lotus symbolizes transcendence because it is born in muddy water, grows up in muddy water but rises above muddy water, and remains unsoiled by muddy water. In the same way, the Buddha was born in the world, grew up in the world but rises above the world and remains unsoiled by the world. That is absolute transcendence. That holiness of this transcendence is the meaning of *Bhagavā*. So, the word transcended could also be used to translate the word *Bhagavā*. This discussion can be summarized as follows:

TABLE 2: Comparative translation of the qualities of the Buddha

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>Bhagavā</i>	Blessed one	Holy one/Transcended one
<i>Arahām</i>	Accomplished	Spiritually Emancipated/Bond breaker
<i>Sammā sambuddho</i>	Fully enlightened	Harmonious and Self-awakened
<i>Vijjā caraṇa sampanno</i>	Perfect in true knowledge and conducts	Endowed with conscious behavior
<i>Sugato</i>	Sublime	Immaculate
<i>Lokavidū</i>	Knower of worlds	Penetrated the world
<i>Anuttaro purisa dhamma sārathi</i>	Incomparable leader of persons to be tamed	Unsurpassable trainer of personalities
<i>Satthā deva manussānām</i>	Teacher of gods and humans	Educator of Celestial and Terrestrial beings
<b><i>Buddho</i></b>	Enlightened	Awake

This *Sutta* then goes on to discuss the various powers of the Buddha, which you can read for yourself. (For a talk explaining the rest of the *Sutta* by the author visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ69xIfmzF0>). It is essential to understand what a Buddha is. The Buddha is not just a belief or an ordinary person. It is the highest state of consciousness to which humans can evolve. It is not physical evolution. It is psychological evolution. This means that human beings can keep growing mentally. Today there is a lot of scientific research done regarding the theory of evolution. These are all connected with the teachings of the Buddha. We have nothing against modern scientific discoveries.

## **Questions and Answers**

**Q:** I want to know where I can get *Suttas* with the more accurate translations?

**A:** Well, you don't get it anywhere because only a very few people have been translating the *Suttas*. The same people translate all the *Suttas* so they contain the same mistakes.

**Q:** What if we study *Pāli* or *Sanskrit*?

**A:** Even if you do that, you could mistranslate. The problem isn't just mistranslation, it's also misinterpretation. The interpretation of Buddhism in the *Abhidhamma* and commentaries is based on the existential paradigm. This is the basis of the problem. The problem is not that these translators haven't learned *Pāli*. The only way is to do it differently. Understanding the teachings of the Buddha means making the paradigm shift from existential to experiential thinking. This is the point of the teachings. If you make this shift then you will understand that this cannot be the correct translation. You can use a *Pāli* dictionary to help. Gradually you will begin to see that one word can have different meanings. Ask how the term is used in other sentences. By making such an effort, you realize that this word's meaning has to be this and not that. Do you understand what I am saying? That is the kind of thing you have to do. But if you never shift your paradigm, if you continue in the existential paradigm, even if you learn *Pāli*, you will continue to misinterpret and therefore mistranslate the *suttas*.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NATURE OF TRUTH

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

The consecration of a Buddha is realized through the awakening of his wisdom. This wisdom is referred to in *Pāli* as the ‘*Dhamma*’, which is frequently thought of as the universal and absolute truth the Buddha unearthed. Yet, what is the spirit of the Buddha’s wisdom?

In some Buddhist circles there is a view that the ultimate Buddhist end is to see the conventional world into its absolute, indivisible, elemental particles which are the building blocks of the ordinary world. This idea can be traced back to sectarian *Abhidhamma* literature, which many consider as an exposition of this ‘ultimate truth’ (*paramatta sacca*), whilst the *Suttas* are seen as only a description of ‘conventional truth’ (*sammuti sacca*).

The author contends that such models are absent from the primary Buddhist texts. Instead, he describes Buddha’s teaching as a pragmatic philosophy, in the sense of being an explanation of a problem and its solution. This problem is called ‘*dukkha*’ by the Buddha, the problem of human existence. The Buddha’s teachings then, according to the author, is nothing but grasping the nature of this human problem, its causes and its solution, rather than an avowal of absolute truth.

In this chapter, this approach is expounded by the author using the *Kālāma Sutta*, an admired yet often misread discourse. The author contends that this *Sutta* is not a call to rationalism as prevalently thought but the forsaking altogether of the search for truth in favour of a pragmatic methodology.

## **THERE IS NO TRUTH, ONLY PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS**

### **KĀLĀMA SUTTA (AN 3.65)**

The topic of this chapter is a part of philosophy. Philosophy is divided into different branches. The subject that we will explore in this chapter is the branch called epistemology. There are various other branches like ethics and metaphysics, which we will delve into in later chapters. Epistemology is the area that deals with the question 'what is truth?' Different philosophers from the West have been analyzing the nature of truth. The Buddha discusses the same issue in this *Sutta*, popularly known as the *Kālāma Sutta*.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>53</sup>**

On one occasion the Blessed One was wandering on tour among the *Kosalans* together with a large *Saṅgha* of monks when he reached the town of the *Kālāmas* named *Kesaputta*. The *Kālāmas* of *Kesaputta* heard: "It is said that the ascetic *Gotama*, the son of the *Sakyans* who went forth from a *Sakyan* family, has arrived at *Kesaputta*. Now a good report about that Master *Gotama* has circulated thus: 'That Blessed One is an *arahant*, perfectly enlightened ..... and reveals a spiritual life that is perfectly complete and pure.' Now it is good to see such *arahants*."

Then the *Kālāmas* of *Kesaputta* approached the Blessed One. Some paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down to one side ..... some kept silent and sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, the *Kālāmas* said to the Blessed One:

"*Bhante*, there are some ascetics and *brahmins* who come to *Kesaputta*. They explain and elucidate their own doctrines, but disparage, denigrate, deride, and denounce the doctrines of others. But then some other ascetics and *brahmins* come to *Kesaputta*, and they too explain and elucidate their own

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<sup>53</sup> *The Kālāma Sutta: Kesaputtiya* (AN 3.65), translated from the *Pāli* by *Bhikkhu Bodhi*, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Wisdom Publications, 2012). Sutta Central, 4 August 2021, <https://suttacentral.net/an3.65/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

doctrines, but disparage, denigrate, deride, and denounce the doctrines of others. We are perplexed and in doubt, *Bhante*, as to which of these good ascetics speak truth and which speak falsehood."

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

The word *Kālāma* refers to a group of people at the time of the Buddha. These people came and asked the Buddha a question: "There are many speakers who come to our city and talk about their beliefs, what they consider to be true. In talking about the truth, they always point out that what they say is the truth and everything that other people say is not the truth. Their version of the truth they praise and condemn the version of other people's truth". So, these people asked the Buddha how to face this problem because different people come and talk about different things and claim that is the truth. Whom are we going to believe? Whom are we going to accept? They asked the Buddha's advice about what to do. The people asked because they could not decide whose view was correct. All these teachers were expecting blind faith from the *Kālāmas*.

## AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA

"It is fitting for you to be perplexed, *Kālāmas*, fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter. Come, *Kālāmas*, do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think: 'The ascetic is our guru.' But when, *Kālāmas*, you know for yourselves: 'These things are unwholesome; these things are blameworthy; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them".

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

It is vital to understand the teaching of the Buddha based on the *Suttas*. I had an advantage because my mother tongue, *Sinhala*, is very closely related to *Sanskrit* and *Pāli*. So, maybe it's easier for me to understand the words being used because many of them, especially the terms related to the Buddha's teachings, are the same in my language. The grammatical structure of *Sinhala* is also very similar to *Pāli* and *Sanskrit*.

## The role of doubt

The first thing to notice about this *Sutta* is that the Buddha tells the *Kālāmas* it is good to doubt. That they shouldn't believe any teachers' claims about the truth without examining them. The word that is being translated as doubt is the *Pāli* word *vicikicca*. *Vicikicca* is not just doubt or it is a certain type of doubt. There is a profound meaning in this word. It means the division of the mind; the mind being pulled in two different directions about what should be done next. The translation as doubt is coming from the commentaries, but I think the commentators have misunderstood the meaning here. When we analyze the etymology, the prefix 'vi' means separate, 'ci' comes from the same root as *citta*, which refers to the emotional mind, and 'kicca' means something like what should be done. When combined, it conveys the idea of the mind being pulled in separate directions about what should be done next. The technical word in modern psychology for this is cognitive dissonance. That's a much more accurate translation of the *Pāli*. Cognitive dissonance means your mind is going in several different directions. This is usually because the rational mind and the emotional mind are going in two different directions. The mind is not united.

Today, we don't have any people driving bullock carts in this country. But if you go to Sri Lanka, you can still see people doing this. Sometimes, two bulls are tied to a cart, and the two bulls may be pulling in two different directions. One bull pulls in one direction, and the other pulls in the other direction. In the same way, if the rational mind is going in one direction and the emotional mind is going in another direction, we find it difficult to make up our minds about what to do. That is cognitive dissonance. That is what the Buddha called *vicikicca*.

Unlike in some religions, the Buddha says it is natural to have this cognitive dissonance. In other religions, it is not right to question, you must blindly have faith, but it's different in Buddhism. The Buddha encourages people to think for themselves and use their intelligence. To have cognitive dissonance concerning religion is to ask whether it is true or false. That is the meaning of cognitive dissonance in this context. The Buddha says it is natural to have dissonance about such matters. He says he doesn't ask anyone to believe what he says.

Examining the history of philosophy, especially the philosophy of the West, we see that philosophy begins with this sort of dissonance. To doubt is to make use of the human ability to think. Thinking and using our intelligence is called reasoning. We ask, 'what is the reason for this?'. To reason means you are asking for the cause or

origin of something. Reasoning can cause dissonance about traditional myths and religious dogmas. The Buddha is not against this.

### **Approaches to truth**

It is essential to understand the terms the Buddha uses in this *Sutta* to describe the incorrect methods of arriving at truth. To translate these terms into English, it helps to look at the history of Western philosophy. Early on in history, Western cultures were dominated by myths and then by the idea of God and other Christian dogma. These ideas are based on the traditions of those cultures and their scriptures, especially the Bible. At that time, people understood truth by the rules of their culture and what was in their sacred texts. People generally believed what others, especially those with religious authority told them and accepted this as the truth.

#### **1. Hearsay (*anussavena*)**

In the quotation of this *Sutta* above, the term *anussavena* is translated as 'oral tradition.' I translate it as 'hearsay,' which means what other people tell you or what you hear from others. The Buddha is saying not to go by what other people tell you.

#### **2. Traditionalism (*paramparāya*)**

The term *paramparāya* is translated as 'lineage of teaching,' but it means cultural traditions or traditionalism. The Buddha is saying not to accept something just because it's the tradition of your culture, like the idea of God or any other myths.

#### **3. Speculative Philosophy (*itikirāya*)**

*Itikirāya* is translated above as 'hearsay'. I translate it as speculative philosophy. Some people base their ideas about the truth on speculation. The Buddha says not to accept speculation either.

#### **4. Sacred Scriptures (*piṭaka sampadānena*)**

The Buddha then says not to accept what's in your sacred texts. This is what is translated as a 'collection of scriptures' above. This means don't accept something just because it's in the Bible or *Quoran* or *Torah* or even the Buddhist *Tipiṭaka*.

## **5. Rationalism (*takka hetu*)**

The Buddha rejects all these methods people have used to arrive at the truth in the past. These methods are still being used even today. In the history of Western philosophy, we see that these methods were also utilized to find the truth. But then there came a time when Western philosophers began to doubt the traditional myths, God, and the Bible. The belief in God comes from our emotions. Eventually, some people started to use the reasoning part of the mind to question this. People began to ask, 'what is the reason for believing in God?' This type of questioning is called reasoning. To answer these questions, people began to use reason, which philosophers call rationalism. The *Pāli* term *takka hetu* is translated above as 'logical reasoning.' I translate it as rationalism or rational thinking.

Today, many people think that this *Sutta* is about the Buddha asking people to be rational, but that is incorrect. The Buddha is even rejecting rationalism. Why? The problem that arose in Western philosophy with using rational thinking to find the truth is that different people arrive at different opinions. People use their own kind of reasoning and come to different conclusions. People can't agree about how to answer philosophical questions. If we can arrive at truth by reason, everyone should agree about what the truth is. But that's not what happens, and we see this in the history of Western philosophy.

## **6. Logic (*naya hetu*)**

Some Western philosophers realized that they could not arrive at truth by reasoning. This led to some philosophers trying to develop strict rules or methods of reasoning that could deliver truth. These methods or rules are called logic. Logic began with the philosopher Aristotle or Aristotelian logic<sup>54</sup>. The term *naya hetu* is translated as 'inferential reasoning' above, but it should be logic or logical thinking. However, the Buddha is also rejecting logic as a way to arrive at the truth. Because even using these logical rules, people are still arriving at different conclusions. So, logic doesn't give us the truth either.

## **7. Empiricism (*ākāra parivitakkena*)**

Some Western philosophers then said we could not arrive at truth by reasoning or logic. They said the only thing we can call the truth is what we can see with our

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<sup>54</sup> Aristotle. (2023, October 15). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle>

eyes, hear with our ears, smell with our nose, taste with our tongue, or touch with our body<sup>55</sup>. So, whatever we perceive through our senses can be called the truth.

This is how science began. Just by reasoning, if you come to a conclusion, the scientist doesn't accept that. It must be verified using experimental observation, which involves using the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, or the body to touch. This is what is called reasoning based on sensory observation or empiricism. This is the meaning of the term '*ākāra parivitakkena*', translated in the quotation above as reasoned cogitation. This translation does not adequately convey the meaning. *ākāra* means what appears or is observed by the senses, *pari* means around, and *vitakka* is the formation of a concept. When combined, it is the formation of concepts around what is observed. The technical term for this is empiricism.

But we see that the Buddha rejects even this approach to arriving at truth. This is because no scientific truth is absolute, which can never be disproved. It is only a probable truth. For example, Isaac Newton saw that when you throw a ball up, it comes down. Why does it come down? He thought it was due to a force called gravity<sup>56</sup>. He thought there was a force called gravity that attracts things, and that's why when you throw something up, it comes back down. So, other scientists also accepted this idea and tried to understand gravity. That idea was accepted by scientists for some time. Then came a scientist called Einstein, who pointed out there is no such thing as gravity. He brought forward the unified field theory or the theory of relativity<sup>57</sup>. What that means is, that even through experimental observation, you cannot arrive at the absolute truth, only the probable truth.

Also, there are things in this world that can't be observed by our five senses. We know there are colours the human eyes cannot see. There maybe many other things we cannot experience through the senses even with the aid of things like telescopes or microscopes. For example, there are limits to the extent our senses can perceive the workings of *kamma* and other types of causality. Doctors don't understand the causes of some diseases. If it is due to *kamma* or even stress they will not be able to see that with their methods of testing based on empiricism. So, the Buddha also rejects this approach to truth due to its limitations.

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<sup>55</sup> Empiricism. (2023, September 26). In Wikipedia.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empiricism>

<sup>56</sup> Isaac Newton. (2023, October 16). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac\\_Newton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton)

<sup>57</sup> Theory of relativity. (2023, October 4). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory\\_of\\_relativity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_relativity)

## **8. Transcendentalism (*diṭṭhi nijjhānakkhantiyā*)**

Therefore, some philosophers thought that what we experience through the senses is not the truth. They believed that the truth was outside of sensory experience. They said that only special people like mystics could discover this truth using extrasensory perception. These philosophers are called transcendental philosophers. Transcendental philosophers said that what we perceive through the senses is not the truth. The real truth is outside sensory observation. They said we could not see the truth, hear the truth, smell the truth, taste the truth, or touch the truth, but it's there outside the range of our normal senses<sup>58</sup>.

Emmanuel Kant spoke of two things which he called the phenomenon and the noumenon<sup>59</sup>. The noumenon is outside of everyday sense experience and cannot be seen. What we see is the phenomenon. So, he began to say that the absolute truth is the noumenon, and that is a transcendental truth, which is beyond experience. The *Pāli* term *diṭṭhi nijjhānakkhantiyā* is translated in the above quote from this *Sutta* as 'acceptance of view after pondering it.' This translation is incorrect. It should be the formation of views based on mystical or meditative attainments. In other words, it is the transcendental approach to truth. The *Pāli* word *jhāna* is used in this phrase, which is a word meaning deep states of meditation.

But the Buddha is also rejecting views formed through meditative or mystical attainments. Some people have these profound meditative experiences and then develop the belief that they were united or in the presence of God etc. People can still misinterpret these experiences, so we can't rely on them for the truth either. The *Brahmajāla Sutta*<sup>60</sup>, the first in the canon, explains in great detail how incorrect views can be formed through even deep meditative attainments.

## **9. Linguistic Analysis**

Other philosophers, like Bertram Russell, could not accept the idea of transcendental truth<sup>61</sup>. Why? Because the transcendental truth, even if you have seen it, is still an idea in the mind. It is still inside you. What is outside of experience we

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<sup>58</sup> Transcendentalism. (2023, October 15). In Wikipedia.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendentalism>

<sup>59</sup> Immanuel Kant. (2023, September 24). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel\\_Kant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant)

<sup>60</sup> DN 1  
<sup>61</sup> Bertrand Russell. (2023, September 24). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand\\_Russell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_Russell)

cannot know. If you talk about what is outside experience, it's still an idea in your mind. Everything known to us is within our experience. Even extrasensory perception is still a type of sensory perception.

They began to say that whatever we call the truth is an idea. Ideas are formed through language, expressed in statements, and statements come in the form of sentences. Therefore, they said we could only analyze sentences to determine whether the sentence is meaningful or meaningless. It is meaningless if we talk about something we have never seen, heard, smelt, tasted, or touched. If we talk about something we have seen or heard, it's a meaningful statement. According to them, we cannot speak of truth or falsehood. We can only talk about meaningful and meaningless statements. Philosophers who employed this approach to the truth were called linguistic philosophers because they focused on language<sup>62</sup>.

## **10 Views based on probable truth/ probability (*bhabbarūpatāya*)**

This has been translated as “seeming competence of speaker” above but what is meant is that when we think the likelihood or probability of something being true is high we might accept that as the truth. But as discussed previously the Buddha also rejected this approach to truth as there is never 100% certainty in this approach.

## **11 Faith in a teacher (*samāno no garūti*)**

Some people accept whatever a teacher, especially a religious teacher, says as the truth. Here the Buddha is saying this is not a good method for arriving at the truth either.

In summary, in the *Kālāma Sutta*, the *Kālāmas* came and asked the Buddha, what is the truth? How do we get at the truth? Are we to believe what different Gurus say? The Buddha started by saying it is correct to have cognitive dissonance, and then, he says don't go by the following:

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<sup>62</sup> Linguistic philosophy. (2023, July 1). In Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic\\_philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic_philosophy)

**TABLE 3: Comparative translation of the methods in the *Kālāma Sutta***

<b>Pāli</b>	<b>Standard Translation</b>	<b>Author's Translation</b>
<i>anussavena</i>	oral tradition	hearsay what others tell you
<i>paramparāya</i>	lineage of teaching	cultural tradition traditionalism
<i>itikirāya</i>	hearsay	speculative philosophy
<i>piṭaka sampadānena</i>	collection of scriptures	authority of sacred scripture
<i>Takka hetu</i>	logical reasoning	rational thinking rationalism
<i>naya hetu</i>	inferential reasoning	logical thinking/logic
<i>ākāraparivitakkena</i>	reasoned cogitation	reasoning based on sensory observation empiricism
<i>ditṭhinijjhānakkhatiyā</i>	acceptance of a view after pondering it	views conceived through <i>jhānas</i> (meditative or mystic attainments) transcendentalism
<i>bhabbarūpatāya</i>	seeming competence of a speaker	views based on probable truth Probability
<i>samaṇo no garūti</i>	because you think: The ascetic is our guru	out of respect for a developed mind blind faith in a teacher

### **There is no truth, only problems, and their solutions**

In other words, the Buddha is rejecting all these methods of arriving at truth. What is left as truth? There is nothing left ultimately. The authentic teaching of the Buddha is not about truth. There is no truth in the world.

### **Pragmatism**

We can also see the abandoning of the search for truth in Western Philosophy. Eventually, a school of philosophy called pragmatism arose. Pragmatic philosophers thought searching for truth was pointless because there is no such thing as truth. They said the purpose of human thinking is not to discover the truth but to solve

problems<sup>63</sup>. Suppose a person can provide a solution to a problem, and it is possible to verify that the solution works. In that case, it can be accepted as a valid solution, which can be called the truth because it solves the problem. The solution to the problem is also good, so truth and goodness are the same things. These philosophers became popular in the U.S. because they began to say solutions to problems have a cash value and can be used in business.

### The problem of existence

Then another school of philosophy arose called existentialism. They said that other philosophers are just trying to solve useless problems. There is only one problem that needs a solution: the main problem in life. The problem is every human being is aware of one essential thing, that they exist. Everyone thinks I exist. Existence is the basic human experience. At the same time, every human being is aware that they will die. Death is not only for older people. Even young children die. Death is inevitable, and no one likes to die. When a child is born, people are happy, but they begin to cry and lament when a person dies. They don't realize birth and death are the two ends of the same stick we call life. Life begins with birth and ends with death, and in between, there is aging. From the time you are born, you are approaching death. This creates fears, worries, and anxieties, which is the problem of life. According to existential philosophers, this is the fundamental problem that needs to be solved.

These philosophers are called existential philosophers because they are preoccupied with the idea of existence and all the worries, fears, and anxieties that result. One existentialist was Kierkegaard, he was a Christian, and he concluded that the human mind could not solve this problem. The only solution was to take the leap of faith and pray to God<sup>64</sup>. That was his solution. He was expecting God to solve the problem. But there were other existentialists, like Jean-Paul Sartre, who could not believe in God. They said that human beings have to solve this problem<sup>65</sup>. But no one could solve this problem. Ultimately, what is left is we are suffering.

Where are we coming to? We are coming back to the teaching of the Buddha. The suffering (*dukkha*) the Buddha spoke of is this problem of existence. Western

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<sup>63</sup> Pragmatism. (2023, March 17). In Wikipedia.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatism>

<sup>64</sup> Søren Kierkegaard. (2023, September 25). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%B8ren\\_Kierkegaard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard)

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre. (2023, September 29). In Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul\\_Sartre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre)

Philosophy ends where the teachings of the Buddha began. This is what the *Kālāma Sutta* is all about. The Buddha has described the various methods of arriving at truth. Western philosophy has gone through a similar process. Although Western philosophers could not solve the problem of existence, the Buddha solved this problem 2600 years ago. The solution comes in the form of what is usually called the Four Noble Truths, but I don't translate it that way. They are not truths but a description of this problem, its cause, its end, and the method to achieve that end. They are not absolute or dogmatic truths but pragmatic ideas. The *Pāli* word that is being translated as 'truth,' I translate as 'reality.' A truth and a reality are different. So, I call it the Four-fold Supernormal Reality (*cattāri ariya saccāni*). The word *ariya* doesn't mean noble. It indicates something above or superior to the normal.

How did the Buddha solve this problem? Did he find a way of not dying? Because death is the problem. Did the Buddha die, or did he not die? In a nutshell, what the Buddha pointed out was the mistake made by existential philosophers. What is the error? These philosophers think in terms of existence, and the fact is that existence is only a delusion. Only when we have understood this delusion is the problem solved. Existence is only a dream. We have to awaken from this dream. Only when we have awakened from this dream that we exist can we solve the problem of existence. This is the main message of *suttas* such as the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*<sup>66</sup> and the *Cūla-sihanada Sutta*<sup>67</sup>. To go into this further, we have to go into a lengthy discussion, but we have to get back to the *Kālāma Sutta*.

### Truth or Views?

If there is no truth, what is there? According to the Buddha, there are only views. In another *Sutta*, similar to the *Kālāma Sutta*, a different group of people asked the Buddha the same question. It's called the *Cūla Viyuha Sutta*<sup>68</sup>. There the Buddha answers in a similar way but in verse form. The essential sections of these verses have been incorrectly translated, so the meaning has been lost.

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<sup>66</sup> SN 12.15

<sup>67</sup> MN 11

<sup>68</sup> SnP 4.12

**TABLE 4: Comparative translation of an excerpt of the *Cūla Viyuha Sutta***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard translation <sup>69</sup>	Author's translation
<i>Ekam hi saccam na dutiyamatthi</i>	Indeed the truth is one, there's not another,	If truth is one, and no second exists
<i>Yasmim pajā no vivade pajānam,</i> <i>Nāna te saccāni sayam thunanti</i> <i>Tasmā na ekam samanā vadanti</i>	About this the One who Knows does not dispute with another but the <i>Samanas</i> proclaim their varied "truths" and so they speak not in the same way.	Debates will never arise among folk A variety of truths they themselves do form Gurus, therefore, never speak of one truth.
<i>Na heva saccāni bahuni nānā</i> <i>Aññatra saññāya niccāni loke,</i> <i>Takkañca ditthisu kapappayitvā</i> <i>Saccam musāti dvayadhammadmāhu</i>	Indeed, there are not many and varied truths differing from perception of the ever-true in the world; but they work upon their views with logic: "Truth! Falsehood!" So they speak in dualities	<b>Never was there a variety of truths</b> <b>Other than sensations always in the world</b> Creating perspectives using speculative logic They speak of a duality: falsehood and truth

Here, the Buddha is saying that if there is only one truth in the world and there is no second truth, there will be no conflict between people. But different people think in different ways, and they bring out various ideas as truth. This is why there is so much conflict in the world. Then he says there are not many truths in the world. There is only what is called *saññā*. *Saññā* means what you detect through the senses. But people begin to use these sensations to build views using logic, and by doing so, they talk about two things called truth and falsehood. There is no such thing as truth and falsehood. We can only talk about what we perceive through the senses, but that is not the truth. That's what he is saying. This is also the message of

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<sup>69</sup>*Cūla Viyuha Sutta*: Smaller Discourse on Quarrelling (Snp 4.12), translated from the *Pāli* by Laurence Khantipalo Mills. Sutta Central, 8 August 2021, <https://suttacentral.net/snp4.12/en/mills?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, where the Buddha points out how views are built on sense experience. Instead of talking about truth and falsehoods, we can only talk about problems and solutions. That problem is what the Buddha called *dukkha*, and the solution is today called the noble eightfold path.

There is another *Sutta*, called the *Ditṭhi Sutta*<sup>70</sup>. In this *Sutta*, *Anathapindika*, who offered a monastery to the Buddha and his disciples, also talks about these ideas. One day, he visited the Buddha and passed a place where various philosophers gathered and discussed philosophy. These people asked him, "What are the Buddha's views?" *Anathapindika* said, "I don't know what the Buddha's views are" They then said, "ok, what are your views?" *Anathapindika* replied, "my view is that all views are based on conditions and what is based on conditions is unstable. What is unstable is unpleasant. What is unpleasant is not mine, and I give it up." Then these people accused him of holding on to this view. But he said, "no, I fully comprehend how that view comes into existence, I also know how freedom from that view comes into existence." So, ultimately you have to give up all views. Even the Four-fold Supernormal Reality is not a view to hold onto, it should left behind like a raft once you cross the river<sup>71</sup>.

In the *Alagaddupama Sutta*<sup>72</sup> and the *Mahā taṇhā saṅkhaya Sutta*,<sup>73</sup> the Buddha points out that the Four-fold Supernormal Reality is also a view, that anyone can use to solve one's problem but it is not a truth to be held on to. It is included under *Sammā Ditṭhi* in the path, the word *ditṭhi* means a perspective rather than truth. The Buddha takes a pragmatic point of view regarding truth. It is compared to a boat used to cross over the river. It is not to be carried around with you after crossing the river but left behind for others to use. About the Four-fold Supernormal Reality, the Buddha states<sup>74</sup>:

- (1) The first reality (the problem) is not to be believed but **comprehended** (*pariññeyyam*).
- (2) The second reality (the cause) is not to be believed but **eliminated** (*pahattābbam*).

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<sup>70</sup> AN 10.93

<sup>71</sup> MN 22, MN 38

<sup>72</sup> MN 22

<sup>73</sup> MN 38

<sup>74</sup> SN 56.11

- (3) The third reality (the solution) is not to be believed but **realized** (*saccikatābbam*).
- (4) The fourth reality (the method) is not to be believed but **cultivated** (*bhavetābbam*).

### **The solution to the problem of existence – a paradigm shift**

The Buddha gives a solution to the problem, and that solution is what I call a paradigm shift. A paradigm is how we see the world, how we think of the world, and how we think of ourselves. It is our way of thinking that is producing this problem. The Buddha's way of solving the problem is to start thinking differently. There are these two ways of thinking and the first way I call existential thinking. These existential philosophers were thinking of existence, but actually, there is only experience. Seeing is an experience, hearing is an experience, smelling is an experience, tasting is an experience, and touching is an experience. When we experience, the mental process creates two entities called the self and the world.

For example, when I see this cup, the cup is the object that I see, but there is also what is called the seeing. So, there are two parts 'the seeing' and 'what is seen.' The seeing is the subjective experience and what is seen is an objective experience. The subjective experience I personalize and say this is "mine." The object is seen as something outside. That is called alienation. Thus, the subjective experience is personalized, and the objective experience is alienated. Both the cup and myself are thought to be existing. When I exist, and the cup exists, I create a relationship between myself and the cup. The relationship can come in the form of desire, hatred, fear, or worry. That relationship is suffering. The moment existence comes into being, the relationship occurs, and the suffering comes into being.

If I look at it differently and see it simply as an experience, I don't have to personalize the subjective or alienate the objective. I look at it only as seeing. In that case, there is freedom from personality and freedom from existence and, therefore, freedom from suffering. To change from existence to experience is to think differently. That is a paradigm shift. And this paradigm shift solves the problem of existence. This is also the meaning of *suññatā* or emptiness, when experience becomes empty of a self and the world, which is described in the *Suñña Sutta*<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> SN 35.85

Of course, this is not easy to understand fully, but this is the awakening from the dream of existence. That awakening from the dream of existence is what the Buddha achieved. That is why he is called a Buddha. The word Buddha means one who is awakened. Usually, people are sleeping. They are sleeping and dreaming that they exist. Only when we have awakened from that dream, do we realize that existence is a delusion. Existence is called *bhava* and its opposite non-existence is called *vibhava*, both are wrong perspectives.<sup>76</sup> The freedom from both existence and non-existence is called *bhava nirodho*. This is why the Buddha says '*bhava nirodho nibbanam*'.<sup>77</sup> Thus what is called *Nibbāna* is freedom from existence or shifting from the existential paradigm to the experiential paradigm. The experiential paradigm avoids the duality of existence and non-existence. When we have become free from existence, all suffering comes to an end. It is not an easy job to understand that entirely, but at least you may have understood it to some extent.

### Buddhist Ethics

In the *Kālāma Sutta*, The Buddha gives up talking in terms of truth or epistemology and then shifts to talking about what is good or bad. This is what is called ethics. How can we judge what is good and bad? The Buddha gives us three criteria:

1. When you know for yourself that a certain thing is good, this is judging by your conscience.
2. Or a certain thing is the wise or foolish thing to do. This is judging by your rationality or wisdom.
3. Or when a certain thing is done, it leads to your happiness and the happiness of others, then go by that. This is judging by the consequences of actions.

There is something significant in what the Buddha said here. Sigmund Freud pointed out that there are three parts of the mind. He called these the Id, Ego, and Superego. The Id always seeks pleasure and avoids pain. The Ego is guided by logical thinking. The Superego is always trying to be good and avoid the bad<sup>78</sup>.

In the first criterion listed above, the Buddha asks us to use our conscience or what Freud called the Superego. The Superego is always trying to determine if something is good or bad. The Buddha asks us to use our rationality or wisdom or what Freud

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<sup>76</sup> MN 11

<sup>77</sup> SN 12.68

<sup>78</sup> Sigmund Freud. (2023, September 29). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund\\_Freud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud)

called the Ego in the second criterion. The Ego is always using logic, reasoning, and wisdom. Thirdly, the Buddha asks us to consider the consequence of the action or use what Freud referred to as the Id. The Id is trying to determine whether an action brings pleasant or painful consequences. So, the Buddha says to use all three processes of the mind to make ethical judgments. We may be going too much into Freudian psychology, but it's good to know.

Hence, although the initial question posed by the *Kālāmas* was about truth, the Buddha points out that the real problem is not philosophical but psychological. From philosophy, the Buddha brought the people into psychology and connected it with ethics, the idea of good and bad. The *Sutta* goes on to apply this threefold test to lust, hate, and delusion. The Buddha then describes the results of living by this test in this life and the next life. The Buddha doesn't force anyone to believe in the next life because that is not something an ordinary person can see, even though the Buddha has seen these things for himself. The teaching of the Buddha is not based on blindly believing in *kamma* and rebirth.

The ideas in the *Kālāma Sutta* are also discussed further in the *Canki Sutta*<sup>79</sup>. For an explanation of this *Sutta* by the author visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TY0Jk2ExCoM>.

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<sup>79</sup> MN 95

## ***Kālāma Sutta***

### **A new translation by the Author (Excerpt only)**

Once, while on tour among the *Kosalans* with a large community of monks, the Holy One reached the town of the *Kālāmas* named *Kesaputta*. The *Kālāmas* heard that *Gotama*, the son of the *Sakayans* who had renounced from a Royal family, had arrived at *Kesaputta*. A good report had circulated about him thus: "The Holy One is Spiritually Emancipated, Harmonious and Self-Awakened, endowed with conscious Behavior, immaculate, penetrated the World, Unsurpassable trainer of personality, Educator of both Terrestrial and Celestial Beings, Awake and Holy." So, it is beneficial to meet such emancipated *Arahants*. Then the *Kālāmas* approached the Holy One. Some paid homage to the Holy One and sat on one side. Some exchanged greetings with him and sat down. Some reverently saluted him and sat down. Some pronounced their name and clan and sat down. Some sat down in silence. Then the *Kālāmas* addressed the Holy One and said: "Some renunciates and *Brahmins* who come to *Kesaputta*, while they extol and eulogize their doctrines, they run down, belittle, denigrate, and deride the doctrines of others. Other renunciates and *Brahmins* who come to *Kesaputta* do the same thing. We are confused and in dissonance as to whom we should trust".

(The Buddha replies): "It is natural *Kālāmas* for you to have dissonance. It is natural to be confused. Where there is dissonance, there is also confusion. *Kālāmas*:

- (1) do not accept hearsay/what others tell you (*ma anussavena*)
- (2) nor cultural tradition/traditionalism (*ma paramparāya*)
- (3) nor speculative philosophy (*ma itikirāya*)
- (4) nor the authority of sacred scripture (*ma pitaka sampadānena*)
- (5) nor rational thinking/rationalism (*ma takka hetu*)
- (6) nor logical thinking (*ma naya hetu*)
- (7) nor reasoning based on sensory observation/empiricism (*ma ākāra parivitakkena*)
- (8) nor views conceived through *jhānas* (meditative or mystical attainments)/transcendentalism (*ma ditthi nijjhānak khantiyā*)
- (9) nor views based on probability (*ma bhabbarūpatāya*)
- (10) nor out of respect for a developed mind/blind faith in a teacher (*ma samano no gartī*).

When *Kālāmas* you know for yourself:

- (1) These things are harmful (*akusala*). These things are wrong (*savajja*)
- (3) These things are condemned by the perceptive (*vinnu garahitha*)
- (4) These things, when accepted and performed, are found to be unsuitable and stressful

Then you should not follow them.

**PART II**  
**THE PROBLEM**

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BUDDHA'S FIRST DISCOURSE

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

One difficulty we can encounter with the *Suttas* is that they are like puzzle pieces that we must assemble together to form a picture that conveys the Buddha's message. This is no easy task. Mistakes in synthesis or interpretation can distort the ideas we take away, misleading well intentioned and genuine practitioners.

The first sermon of the Buddha following his Awakening, 'the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*' is the seminal discourse of his ministry. It is one of the best discourses to help us understand the theoretical framework of his teaching.

In this *Sutta*, the Buddha introduces what are commonly called the Four Noble Truths. As discussed in the previous chapter, this formulation is seen by the author as the presentation of a problem and its solution.

This *Sutta* is also pivotal to understanding the Buddha's description of the nature of the problem he set out to solve, the calamity he called '*dukkha*'. Only a malignancy laid bare, acknowledged and admitted can be resolved. Thus, one of the first tasks of a Buddhist practitioner is to come to terms with the personal and pervasive nature of *dukkha*. We must fully face the gravity and tragedy of this reality before redemption is possible.

Yet, as the author points out, key terminology remains mistranslated and misunderstood, resulting in the obscuring of meaning in critical areas of this *Sutta*. In this chapter the author presents a lucid, corrective interpretation that lays bare *dukkha* and so makes penetrative and personal understanding of it possible.

## **DHAMMACAKKAPAVATTANA SUTTA (SN 56.11)**

### **The Revolution of the Cycle of Experience**

This *Sutta* is well known as the first sermon of the Buddha. It was delivered to the five ascetics practicing asceticism with Prince *Siddhatha*, the *Bodhisatta*, when he was still seeking awakening. The sermon was delivered shortly after the Buddha had awakened from the dream of existence and become a Buddha. He introduced his message to the world and his attainment in this *Sutta*.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>80</sup>**

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at *Baranasi* in the Deer Park at *Isipatana*. There the Blessed One addressed the *bhikkhus* of the group of five thus:

"*Bhikkhus*, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the *Tathagata* has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*.

"And what, *bhikkhus*, is that middle way awakened to by the *Tathagata*, which gives rise to vision ... which leads to *Nibbāna*? It is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, *bhikkhus*, is that middle way awakened to by the *Tathagata*, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*.

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<sup>80</sup> *The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma* (SN 56.11), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Wisdom Publications, 2000). Sutta Central, 1 October 2023, <https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

"Now this, *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

"Now this, *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.

"Now this, *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.

"Now this, *bhikkhus*, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view ... right concentration.

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

We should notice that the *Sutta* starts with 'thus have I heard.' Why do all these *Suttas* start with thus have I heard? In the last chapter, we explored the nature of truth when we discussed the *Kālāma Sutta*. According to the Buddha, there is no truth, only views. Truth is simply a statement. If you say something is true, the opposite of that statement is taken to be false. If the opposite statement is false and your statement is true, you come into conflict with the other person. The Buddha has said he does not argue with the world, but the world argues with him<sup>81</sup>.

To explain this, the Buddha used the analogy of the elephant and the blind men<sup>82</sup>. Some blind men came and touched an elephant. The person who touched the ear said the elephant is like a fan, the person who touched the leg said the elephant is like a tree, the person who felt the body said the elephant is like a wall, and so on. Those are true statements because each person is describing whatever they touched,

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<sup>81</sup> SN 22.94

<sup>82</sup> Ud 6.4

but the point is that if you try to say that the elephant is like a wall or a tree, that is not a true statement. That is only part of the reality.

In the same way, if any person tries to say their views are the truth, that person can come into conflict with other people. This is why it is better to say, 'this is what I think or what I read in the papers or what I heard.' If you express it like that, it is truthful<sup>83</sup>. This is why every *Sutta* starts with 'this is what I heard' or 'thus have I heard.' It is a significant thing to begin like this.

### **The meaning of the term *Dhammacakkappavattana***

#### **1. *Dhamma***

First, we should note the title of the *Sutta*. It is crucial. What does '*Dhamma Cakka*' mean? And what is '*Dhamma Cakka Pavattana*'? The Buddha is using some critical words here. The word *Dhamma* is usually thought of as the teachings of the Buddha. However, if we dig deeper and research that word, *Dhamma* means supporting or carrying everything. That means the *Dhamma* is the basis or the foundation of everything.

Some modern Existential philosophers are also talking about the most fundamental thing. They say that it is only the human being that is aware of his existence. The Existential philosophers say that becoming aware of our existence is the most fundamental thing. That is why they call themselves existentialists. They speak of existence as the essential thing. They also say that only humans are aware that they will die. This awareness creates a problem because death is the opposite of existence. Buddha means one who has awakened. What has the Buddha awakened from? He has awakened from the dream of existence. The Buddha points out that existence itself is a delusional way of thinking<sup>84</sup>. The Existential philosophers say that the primary thing is existence, but the Buddha says existence is not the primary thing. That there's something even more fundamental than existence.

Usually, people always think that existence is basic. The audience listening to this talk believes that they existed at home and then came here. Now they exist here. After coming here, they saw the Wisdom room, and they accept that the Wisdom room also existed here even before they arrived. That is called existential thinking. Existential philosophers believed that everything exists and that existence is the

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<sup>83</sup> MN 95

<sup>84</sup> SN 12.15, MN 11

most fundamental thing. To become an *arahant*, we must understand that existence is not a fact. It's a delusion. You have to awaken from the dream of existence, and it is to show how to do that that the Buddha spoke the *Dhammacakkapavatna Sutta*.

According to the Buddha, what is most basic or foundational is not existence but experience. Various people try to translate the word *Dhamma* in various ways, usually as truth. The most appropriate English term is experience or cognitive experience. That is a good translation of the word *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* is the foundation of everything, and according to the Buddha, everything is founded on experience. The word *Dhamma* can also be translated as phenomenon, which means what is experienced or cognized by the mental process. According to the Buddha, our cognitive experience is the basis of everything. Existence is a delusion or illusion created on top of this fundamental cognitive experience.

What exactly does experience mean? As humans, we have experience. Every human has a particular experience, and to a certain extent, that experience is common to all human beings. What is common? We all experience a body. Within the body are five senses through which we experience the outside world. This is what experience is, what we experience through our senses. That experience is a problem because experience involves a certain amount of suffering, which is also common to all of us. Thus, we can see that the word *Dhamma* has a profound meaning. This will be further clarified in the next chapter when we discuss the six senses.

## **2. Cakka**

The word *cakka* means a wheel. A wheel is something that revolves or turns. The image of a wheel turning is used here to represent a revolution. In his first sermon, the Buddha is beginning a revolution, a revolution of the nature of human experience. The revolution has to take place by awakening from the dream of existence. The ordinary person is always thinking existentially. We must go through a 'paradigm shift' to awaken. This paradigm shift is the revolution that completes a turnover from existence to experience. The usual way of thinking is existential thinking, and it has to be revolved entirely to produce experiential thinking. This *Sutta* is about how that inner revolution takes place. In summary:

**TABLE 5: Comparative translation of *Dhamma Cakka Pavattana***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations	Author's Translations
<i>Dhamma Cakka Pavattana</i>	Setting in motion the wheel of the <i>Dhamma</i> Setting in motion the wheel of Truth	Revolution of the cycle of experience

### The two extremes to be avoided

Before his awakening, the Buddha experimented with different methods to end suffering. One approach he tried was self-mortification with a group of five other ascetics. However, he soon realized that this did not lead to the end of suffering, and he left that group to pursue another way. After successfully finding a way to end all suffering on his own, he decided to find the five ascetics and teach them what he had discovered. The background to the *Sutta* is that the ascetics had lost faith in the Buddha because he gave up asceticism. He began his discourse by pointing out why he gave up asceticism. The problem the ascetics had attempted to solve was how to end suffering. This is also the problem that modern psychotherapists are trying to solve. This is what is called stress and stress management today.

The Buddha begins by saying, "*dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā*" What this means is that there are two common ways of dealing with suffering or stress, both of which should be avoided. The terms used to denote these may be the technically correct word-for-word translations but they don't bring out the meaning conveyed by the *Pāli* terms. Especially the way the second one is translated makes it seem that it doesn't apply to ordinary people. But we have to realize that both of these ends are methods we use to cope daily. I translate them as follows:

**TABLE 6: Comparative translation of the two extremes to be avoided**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations	Author's Translations
<i>kāma sukhallikānu yoga</i>	Pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasure Devotion to indulgence of pleasure in the objects of sense desire	Engagement in the expression of emotions Engagement in Self-indulgence
<i>atta kilamatānu yoga</i>	Pursuit of self-mortification Devotion to self-infliction Devotion to self-torment	Engagement in the suppression of emotions Engagement in Self-denial

People usually think that *yoga* is a type of exercise, but that is not the meaning. A good translation is engagement. You can be engaged in an activity. We are not talking about the type of engagement that happens before marriage. Sometimes this word is translated as devotion.

### **1. *kāma sukhallikānu yoga***

When a desire arises, you can engage in gratifying that desire. If hatred arises, you can engage in getting rid of what you hate. If fear arises, you can be engaged in running away from what you fear. If it is sexual desire, you can engage in sexual activity. We begin to act according to our emotions; our emotions often carry us away. We often indulge them. This is *kāma sukhallikānu yoga*, engagement in the expression of emotions. Usually, people tend to express their emotions when an emotion is aroused either through speech or actions.

When an emotion is aroused, whether it is a desire, hatred, or fear, tension is built up in the body. The muscles in the body become tense, which is very uncomfortable. To release this tension in action, we begin to obtain what we desire, get rid of what we hate, and run away from what we fear. We release this tension simply because we don't even know we are releasing tension. It is all happening unconsciously to us. It's an unconscious process. The release of tension in action is the first way of dealing with the stress caused by emotions the Buddha spoke about.

### **2. *atta kilamatānu yoga***

The second way the Buddha speaks about is *atta kilamatānu yoga*. The word *atta* means self, and the phrase *kilamatānu* means to exhaust or deny. Sometimes we think it is improper to express some emotions. We usually suppress those emotions that we don't express. From childhood, parents and society teach us what is right and wrong. This can sometimes be connected to a religion. So, a sense of right and wrong begins to be built into our minds. In the adult, this is what is called a conscience. The conscience begins to tell us that certain things are not right, and as a result, we start to feel guilty. When our conscience says no, what do we do? We stop releasing the tension or stop ourselves from expressing our emotions. As a result, the tension remains inside. We suppress it, and we remain unhappy and uncomfortable. This also does not solve the problem. It was suppression that the ascetics practiced. They attempted to suppress the desire for food and even the desire to breathe in the hope this would eliminate emotions and the suffering they cause. This is the second way of dealing with stress and emotions the Buddha

speaks about. When he was practicing with the ascetics the Buddha took this method to its extreme and found it does not lead to the end of suffering.

Our emotions are always seeking an outlet. Freud thought that sublimation was the answer. Sublimation means sending out the energy of emotions in socially acceptable ways. He thought this was civilized. But he recognized that being civilized resulted in discontent, and therefore, it was not a proper solution. That's why he wrote a book called 'Civilization and its Discontents'.<sup>85</sup>

These two roads arise because the normal human being has two mental faculties. One is the rational mind and the other is the emotional mind and this is the problem. In common language, we call them the head and the heart. In psychology, they are called the cognitive and the affective. The rational mind works both consciously and unconsciously. Emotions are unconscious. Often the rational mind is pulling in one direction, and the emotional mind is pulling in another direction. The rational mind gives meaning to what we perceive through our senses, and the emotional mind reacts to circumstances according to the interpretation given by the rational mind. We are born with the emotional mind, but the rational mind begins to develop later and is improved by education. The emotional mind cannot think. It can only feel: feel a desire for pleasure, feel angry, feel fear, or feel an urge to act, or even feel worried, happy, or comfortable. This means, that before the rational faculty develops fully, a child reacts emotionally to circumstance.

The emotional mind cannot think and reason out. Intelligence belongs to the rational mind, which can decide what is right and wrong or what is good or bad. This is why, when emotion and reason conflict, emotion usually wins in the undeveloped mind. This is also why emotions tend to dominate in the undeveloped mind. The rational mind can control the emotional mind, but this ability has to be developed. We need to learn not to emotionally react to circumstances but to rationally respond to events. This is called responsibility, the ability to respond. How we decide to react or respond to our circumstances is what the Buddha called *Kamma*. (These ideas will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

To explain this, we can use an analogy. There was once a man who was blind. But there was also another man, he had eyes to see, but his legs were crippled so he couldn't walk. These two people decided to get together and work as a team. The blind man carried the other man on his shoulders, and he directed the blind man by

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<sup>85</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. (Penguin:2002)

giving him directions. So, they traveled like that for a while. After some time, the blind man became frustrated because he always had to follow the orders from the other man. He decided to stop listening to that man and began to choose where they should go. What happened because he didn't listen to what the other man said? They fell into a big well, and in the end, they couldn't even get out.

Something similar is happening in our minds. The rational mind says one thing, and the emotional mind says something else. I am also having a similar problem because my doctor says I have diabetes and that I should not eat sugar. My rational mind thinks I should not eat sugar. I should be obedient to the doctor. But my emotional mind craves sugar. Today, I went to this mega-mall to get my ears examined. Then the person who took me there bought me a biscuit. But I found that it was full of sugar. So, what can I do? I shouldn't eat that. The problem is that I like to eat sugar, but my mind is going in two different directions. The rational mind says don't eat sugar and the emotional mind craves sugar.

In the same way, many people come to the temple and observe the five precepts. They know that it is bad to speak harsh words, fight and quarrel, steal, commit adultery, lie, or consume alcoholic drinks. But then they go home, and maybe the husband and the wife quarrel. Why is this? It's because the thinking mind is pulling in one direction, and the emotional mind is pulling in the other direction. This is a problem that all human beings have. The mind of the human being can think and understand what is good and what is bad and what is right and what is wrong, but when emotions like anger are aroused, we start to act in a contrary way.



However, the unique thing about human beings is that we can stop and think about whether we should act angrily or calmly. We can try to control our behavior. Animals can't do that. They fight and don't have any ability to control themselves. A dog will begin to bark at a stranger but the human being doesn't do that.

In this *Sutta*, the Buddha points out that the human being deals with emotions in two ways. If you are angry, you can express anger with words and actions. Express means you start to use bad words, and maybe you try to fight and quarrel. That is one way of behaving. The other way is to control that anger. Usually, people control emotions by suppressing them. If you express anger, you may feel better, at least temporarily, but may come to regret your actions later. If you don't express the anger, you're unhappy. So, will you express your anger and feel better temporarily, or will you suppress your anger and be unhappy? Which is a better thing to do?

This is a problem we all face. Buddha is talking about this problem when he says, '*Dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā.*' There are these two ways of behavior. One is *kāma sukhallikānu yoga* and the other is *atta kilamatānu yoga*. This is the problem. Are you going to express emotions, or will you suppress them? If you express them, you can create problems for yourself and others. If you are doing a job and your boss says something or does something, and you're angry, what will you do? Are you going to fight with the boss? If you fight with the boss, you could lose your job. So, that means you have to be calm. To remain calm, you suppress your anger. But when you go home, your anger is still going on, so you fight with your wife or your husband or maybe your neighbors. This is the problem.

The Buddha pointed out a third and medial way of dealing with this problem. What is this method? That is what is usually translated as the Noble Eight-Fold Path. Instead of expressing or suppressing, there is a third way of responding. The third way involves applying the teachings of the Buddha, controlling your behavior according to the precepts, becoming conscious of the tension in the body and consciously learning to relax the tension and calm the mind through meditation. Once the mind is calm you must then learn to change the interpretation of the circumstances that have triggered the emotion. Once you have done that inner work you can then rationally think about whether any action is required to deal with the situation and then respond rationally rather than emotionally. Applying the Noble Eight-Fold Path is the medial way. To relax the body, calm the mind, and change the negative thinking then proceed to action. But before we can relax the body and calm the mind, we have to understand what has happened. If you don't know what has happened, you won't be able to do that.

You must realize that emotions are aroused by how the mind interprets the circumstances, not the circumstances themselves. We have to learn to change how we interpret events. This is the kind of meditation we have to learn. This is what the Buddha refers to as the *majjhima patipada*, which I translate as the medial way, not the middle path. I translate it as the Super Normal Eight-Fold Way. It is supernormal because it is not the usual thing that people do. It has eight steps. We won't detail this path here because that will be the topic of Chapter 8, 9, and 10.

The main message of this *Sutta* is to show this way of transforming the mind. This means the human being is transformed from a normal (*puthujana*) state into a supernormal (*ariya*) state. The normal human being is partly animal and partly human. The Buddha aimed to eliminate the animal part and turn the human being into a fully human state. This fully human state, however, is not normal. It is supernormal. Just as modern psychology attempts to turn an abnormal person into a normal person, the Buddha aimed to turn a normal person into a supernormal state.

The Buddha introduced this transformation in the Fourfold Supernormal Reality:

1. Problem (*dukkha*)
2. Cause (*samudaya*)
3. Solution (*nirodha*)
4. Method (*maggā*)

The first step is to understand the problem and how to solve it. By understanding the problem, we begin to turn in a different direction. The normal approach is suppression or expression of emotions. Instead, we need to become conscious of the unconscious process. The *Bodhisatta* gave up both hedonism and asceticism because both expression and suppression of emotion ultimately create suffering. In this *Sutta*, having revealed the medial way between expression and suppression of emotions, the Buddha begins to deal with the more fundamental problem of existence, which he called *dukkha*.

### **The First Reality – *dukkha*, which is to be comprehended**

In this *Sutta*, the Buddha introduces his formula for *dukkha* as follows:

- Birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), disease (*vyādhi*), and death (*maraṇam*) are *dukkha*
- Association with the unpleasant (*appiyehi sampayogo*) is *dukkha*

- Dissociation with the pleasant (*piyehi vippayogo*) is *dukkha*
- Frustration or failure to gratify desires (*yampiccham na labhati*) is *dukkha*
- In summary, the five personalized cumulatives (*saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā*) are *dukkha*

What is described here is the never-ending futile struggle to maintain existence, which inevitably ends in death. It is a problem because we struggle to exist in a world that does not allow existence. From the moment we are born, we struggle to survive. The newly born baby cries because it is struggling to survive by breathing. As we grow up, we forget that we are struggling to breathe all the time. Breathing is the basic struggle to exist. Feeding is also a struggle to exist. Avoiding discomfort is a struggle to exist. Seeking comfort is a struggle to exist. Without this struggle, we cannot exist. Why we go to work is this struggle to exist. Earning money is struggling to exist. Some see this struggle as a problem, but some do not see it as a problem. Existence is definitely a struggle. We are struggling to be permanent in an impermanent world.

From birth, a baby is suffering. This is why the first thing the infant does after birth is cry. Inside the womb, it was warm and comfortable. Outside it is cold. No one touched the baby while inside the womb. Now everyone touches the baby. Inside the womb, there was no need to breathe. Now the baby has to breathe. Then the baby is bombarded with lights and noises. The infant begins to gradually grow and get used to these new experiences and becomes a baby that smiles. Soon the baby grows further and becomes a child who can think. This thinking child soon realizes its weakness and insecurity and hopes to be secure and robust when growing up. After growing up, one realizes that the insecurity has become even worse. One has to study, learn many things, find a job, get into competitions, deal with difficult people, struggle hard to succeed, and meet many failures and disappointments. As an adult, one struggles to make ends meet all one's life till aging and sickness set in. Things get even worse—the struggle to survive continues until death. The Buddha further describes this struggle in the *Mahā Dukkhakkhanda Sutta*<sup>86</sup>.

The first reality that the Buddha pointed to was this insecurity of life. Life is insecure because of the impending, unpredictable death that can come to any individual young or old, at any age, and at any time. This insecurity is seen very clearly when we look at the animal world. Every animal has to go in search of food to keep on living. While searching for food, it can become food for another animal.

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<sup>86</sup> MN13

Even herbivorous animals eat plants, which are also trying to live. Human beings also attempt to keep living through competition and exploitation. Each person attempts to live at the expense of others.

The idea of eternal life and eternal happiness in heaven after death is an attempt by other religions to solve this problem of existence. Pursuing heaven, which can only be verified after death, assumes that death is the opposite of life and not a part of life. Some have pointed out, however, that birth and death are merely the two ends of the same stick called life. This means death is a part of life and not the opposite of life. From the beginning of history, humankind has tried to remain alive without dying, despite the apparent fact of death. This struggle to exist is impossible. It is futile and painful and based on the delusion of eternal existence.

A typical attempt to escape from this insecurity of life is to forget about death and devote one's life to pleasure. We even think that it is pessimistic to think of death. We try to hide from the fact of death in many ways and attempt to carry on living, enjoying the pleasures of the senses. Some people do not like to keep a dead body in their homes. They keep it in a special place hidden from the public. They even try to prevent children from looking at a dead body. They also try to stop children from speaking about death. People have only recently begun to talk about death or even write books about death. It was quite recently that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote her book '*On Death and Dying*', where she describes the five stages of grief<sup>87</sup>:

## **1. Denial**

The first reaction is denial because of the difficulty in facing a loss. The person tries to shut out the reality or magnitude of the situation and develops a false, preferable reality.

## **2. Anger**

"Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "Who is to blame?" In the second stage, the individual recognizes that denial cannot continue and becomes angry. Misplaced feelings of rage appear. Anger can manifest itself in different ways, such as anger with themselves, others, and especially with close ones.

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<sup>87</sup> Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*, (Scribner: 1997)

### **3. Bargaining**

"I'll do anything for a few more years..." or "I will give my life savings if...." In the third stage, hope arises that the individual can somehow undo or avoid the cause of grief. Psychologically, the individual is saying, "I understand I will die, but if I could just do something to buy more time...." People facing a less severe trauma can bargain. For example: "Can we still be friends?" when facing a break-up. Bargaining rarely provides a sustainable solution.

### **4. Depression**

During the fourth stage, the grieving person begins to understand the certainty of death. "I'm so sad. Why bother with anything?"; "I'm going to die soon, so what's the point?" Because of this, the individual may become silent, refuse visitors, and spend much of the time crying and being sullen and gloomy. This process allows the grieving person to disconnect from love and affection, possibly to avoid further trauma. It is a kind of acceptance with emotional detachment. It is natural to feel sadness, regret, fear, and uncertainty when going through this stage. Feeling those emotions shows that the person has begun to accept the situation.

### **5. Acceptance**

In this last stage, individuals begin to deal with their inevitable future. "It's going to be okay." "I can't fight it. I may as well prepare for it." This stage varies according to the person's situation. This typically comes with a clear, retrospective view of the individual and a stable mindset.

Kübler-Ross originally developed this model based on her observations of people suffering from terminal illnesses. She later expanded her theory to apply to any form of catastrophic personal loss, such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or income, significant rejection, the end of a relationship or divorce, drug addiction, incarceration, the onset of a disease or chronic illness, an infertility diagnosis, as well as many tragedies and disasters (and even minor losses). Supporting her theory, many (both sufferers and therapists) have reported the usefulness of the Kübler-Ross model in a wide variety of situations where people were experiencing a significant loss. The application of the theory is intended to help the sufferer fully resolve each stage, and then help them transit to the next – at the appropriate time – rather than getting stuck in a particular phase or continually bouncing around from one unresolved phase to another.

Hans Selye also wrote about stress and stress management. He presented the stress of life as the General Adaptation Syndrome, which consisted of three stages<sup>88</sup>:

**(1) Alarm reaction**

= Grief (*sōka*), Lamentation (*paridēva*)

**(2) Stage of resistance**

= Pain (*dukkha*), Distress (*domanassa*)

**(3) Stage of exhaustion**

= exhaustion (*upāyāsa*).

It is interesting to note that the Buddha described the same stages in the General Adaptation Syndrome in the form of grief (*sōka*), lamentation (*paridēva*), pain (*dukkha*), distress (*domanassa*), and exhaustion (*upāyāsa*)<sup>89</sup>. Stress is understood today as a complete disturbance of the body and mind where the body begins to change behavior from normal to an abnormal state. If continued too long it makes the body sick, ultimately leading even to death. This disturbance goes through the three stages as indicated above.

This problem has also been brought to our attention by existentialism. Søren Kierkegaard started speaking about the meaninglessness of life, which fills one with anxiety, despair, a sense of hopelessness, and deep depression. He is supposed to have said: " I stick my finger in existence — it smells of nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How did I come to be here? What is this thing called the world? How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted? And If I am compelled to take part in it, where is the director? I want to see him."<sup>90</sup> The greatness of the existentialists was in becoming aware of the problem, even though they were unable to solve it.

*Dukkha* is not external. Suffering is something inside. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Hegel also rejected the idea that the problem was social or collective. It is a problem concerning the individual. In other words, the problem is not political but psychological. This is also understood by scientists who are researching stress. In the modern world, people talk about stress. They point out that stress is not something that is happening outside in the world. Stress occurs when the emotions

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<sup>88</sup> Hans Selye. (2023, June 30). In Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Selye](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Selye)

<sup>89</sup> AN 6.63

<sup>90</sup> Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, (Oxford University Press: 2009)

are agitated. The whole body becomes disturbed, and when the body becomes disturbed, we become unhappy. To understand *dukkha*, we have to look not outside but inside. Looking inside is not mindfulness. It is introspection. By looking inside, we can understand what is going on, and how the unhappiness comes about.

The cause of this unhappiness is emotional arousal which the Buddha called *tanhā*. This word is translated as craving. *Tanhā* it's not just craving. *Tanhā* is emotional reactions. It is imperative to understand that. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The *Bodhisatta*, who became the Buddha renounced his princely life and became a monk to solve this problem of existence, which he came to recognize when he saw an old man, a sick man, and a corpse<sup>91</sup>. The *Bodhisatta* set out to solve the problem, not by seeking help from supernatural powers hoping to extend life to eternity or even fixing all the injustices of society. His method was to solve the problem using natural human intelligence to change himself. He wanted to understand the problem and its cause and solve it by removing the cause. He also realized that he had to find a method to remove the cause of the problem. The Buddha finally solved the problem by stopping this futile and painful emotional struggle to exist by realizing that existence is a delusion that ordinary people are suffering from. He saw that the human being needs to awaken from this dream of existence. He discovered how to awaken from this dream and showed the world the way.

For a question and answer forum with the author about this *Sutta*, visit:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxMg2Mp3zLc>

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<sup>91</sup> MN 26

## **Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta**

### **The Revolution of the Cycle of Experience**

**A new translation by the Author**

As I heard:

The Holy One was living in *Banares Isipatana* at *Migadaye*. While there, the Holy One addressed the Renunciates:

The progressor should avoid these two extremes:

1. Engagement in self-indulgence which is inferior, secular, common, normal, and futile.
2. Engagement in self-denial, which is stressful, normal, and futile.

Without entering these two extremes, the Realized One is super-awakened to the medial path that bestows vision, bestows understanding, and evolves into inner tranquility, super-understanding, awakening, and serenity (*Nibbāna*).

What, Renunciates, is this medial path to which the Realized One has super-awakened? Which bestows vision, bestows understanding...?

It is this Super Normal Eightfold Way, namely:

1. Harmonious perspective
2. Harmonious goal orientation
3. Harmonious speech
4. Harmonious action
5. Harmonious lifestyle
6. Harmonious exercise
7. Harmonious attention
8. Harmonious mental equilibrium

This Renunciates is the medial path which the Realized One has super-awakened to, which bestows vision...

This Renunciates is the supernormal reality of *dukkha*

1. Birth is *dukkha*
2. Decay is *dukkha*
3. Disease is *dukkha*
4. Death is *dukkha*
5. Association with the unpleasant is *dukkha*
6. Disassociation from the pleasant is *dukkha*
7. Non-fulfillment of desire is *dukkha*
8. In essence, the five personalized cumulatives are *dukkha*.

This Renunciates is the supernormal reality of the arising of *dukkha*: That which is the recurring emotional reaction accompanied by pleasure and passion, finding pleasure everywhere. Namely:

1. The emotional reaction of sense desire
2. The emotional reaction of existence
3. The emotional reaction of non-existence

This, Renunciates, is the supernormal reality of stopping *dukkha*: Whatever is the non-residual, dispassionate, stopping of that reaction; its sacrifice, its complete renunciation, and the freedom and disattachment from it.

This, Renunciates, is the supernormal reality of the way leading to the stopping of *dukkha*.

It is the Supernormal Eightfold Way, namely: Harmonious perspective; Harmonious goal orientation; Harmonious speech; Harmonious action; Harmonious lifestyle; Harmonious exercise; Harmonious attention; Harmonious mental equilibrium."

## **The Revolution of the Cycle of Experience**

With the realization, 'This is the extraordinary reality of *dukkha*,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of *dukkha* is to be completely understood,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of *dukkha* has been completely understood,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'this is the extraordinary reality of the arising of *dukkha*,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of the arising of *dukkha* is to be given up,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'this extraordinary reality of the arising of *dukkha* has been given up,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This is the extraordinary reality of the stopping of *dukkha*,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of the stopping of *dukkha* is to be realized (in action),' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of the stopping of *dukkha* has been realized (in action),' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime

understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This is the extraordinary reality of the path leading to the stopping of *dukkha*,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of the path leading to the stopping of *dukkha* is to be developed,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

With the realization, 'This extraordinary reality of the Path leading to Arising of *dukkha* has been developed,' Renunciates, vision arose in me, understanding arose, prime understanding arose, consciousness arose, light arose, concerning experience, unheard of before.

So long, Renunciates, as these four extraordinary realities did not become clear to me through this twelve-fold triple revolutionary understanding and vision of how things have come to exist, I did not know that in the world consisting of deities, devils, saints, priests, and the common people, of celestial and human beings, I am one, super-awakened to that unsurpassable harmonious awareness.

When, Renunciates, these four extraordinary realities became clear to me through this twelve-fold triple revolutionary understanding and vision of how things have come to exist, then I knew that in the world consisting of deities, devils, saints, priests, and the common people, celestial and human beings, I am one super-awakened to that unsurpassable harmonious awakening.

Understanding and vision have arisen in me; imperturbable is my emotional freedom; this is my last birth; no more are there recurrences of existence.

Thus, spoke the Holy One. Approving, the group of five Renunciates was extremely delighted with what the Holy One said.

While being spoken to, in this way of expression, the undefiled, unstained vision of experience arose for the Venerable *Kondanna*: 'Whatever is experienced as arisen, all that is experienced (also) as stopped.'

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

We are venturing deeper into the Buddha's teachings. In the last chapter we explored the Buddha's first sermon, where he introduced his seminal doctrine, the Supernormal Four-Fold Reality. In particular, we began to explore the first reality, the problem called *dukkha*. The Buddha's formulation of *dukkha* always ends with the same formula "*sarikhitteṇa pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha*." This is usually translated as "in short, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering".

While the grosser levels of *dukkha* that were discussed in the last chapter are generally well translated and understood, this most subtle and harrowing facet remains, according to the author, riddled with mistranslation and misunderstanding. Normally, the five aggregates are translated as form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. The author argues that not only are these terms mistranslated but the entire concept has been misconstrued. This error can be traced back to the *Abhidhamma* and commentarial literature. As a result of commentarial interpretations, today the five aggregates are thought to be the five components of the psycho-physical being. Form is said to be the body, while the remaining four are said to be the components of the mind. Thus, they are thought of as the makeup of the mind-body complex. In the author's view this is to fall into existential thinking, with the body and the mind both seen as existing entities rather than mere experiences.

In this chapter, the author argues for a radical review of this view, based on the experiential paradigm. In the author's interpretation, the five aggregates are not seen as the five components of the mind/body but the five cumulatives of the process of perception, as experience through the process of perception is all there really is.

## THE PAIN OF EXPERIENCE, THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN

In the last chapter, we began to explore the Buddha's formula for describing the problem of the human condition, the pain he called *dukkha*. In the *Suttas*, this formula always ends with the statement "*saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*".<sup>92</sup> This is a statement that carries profound meaning. To understand the depths of *dukkha*, it is essential to understand what *pañcupādānakkhandhā* means. Today this is translated as the five aggregates of clinging. The five aggregates are thought of as the five parts of a person. The first aggregate is considered to refer to the physical body/form. The remaining four are regarded as parts of the mind.

This interpretation of the *pañcupādānakkhandhā* originates from later sectarian literature<sup>93</sup>. I think that this is a misinterpretation of this vital concept. To understand why this is a misinterpretation, we must first understand the Buddha's position on the issue of the mind/body duality and the debate between materialism and idealism. These issues have been of particular significance to both Eastern and Western philosophers throughout history, and it is still a topic of contention for modern philosophers and scientists. A brief survey of what Western philosophers have said about this matter will help us focus on the nature of the issues involved.

## MATERIALISM, IDEALISM, AND PHENOMENOLOGY

### Materialism

Some Western Philosophers like John Locke<sup>94</sup> and most modern scientists argue that what we call the mind is simply the activity of the body or the brain. For example, if we have a car, the car will only move if the engine is active. It is the activity of the machine that makes the car function. Similarly, the body is like a machine, and the activity of the body, in particular the brain, spinal cord, nervous system, and the senses, is what we call the mind. There is only the body and its activity. In other words, there is only matter. Matter is solids, liquids, and gases. This view is known as materialism in philosophy and science. It is the physical way of thinking.

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<sup>92</sup> SN 56.11

<sup>93</sup> See *The Path of Purification (Visudhimagga)*

<sup>94</sup> John Locke. (2023, September 26). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Locke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke)

## **Idealism**

However, other philosophers, like George Berkeley, challenge the idea of materialism. Berkeley was a Bishop, and as a Christian, he believed in a soul. He didn't like the idea of materialism because it denied the existence of a soul<sup>95</sup>. These philosophers ask what is matter? How do you know there is matter? Because you have seen it, smelled it, tasted it, touched it, and heard it. What we call matter is what is perceived through the senses. If you perceive something through the senses, its existence is dependent on the mind. What is dependent on the mind for existence is a mental phenomenon. Therefore, it's mental, not material. It's mind not matter.

They pointed out that when we open our eyes and see, whatever we see is only an image in our minds. That image is like taking a photograph. The picture is only something inside the camera. Similarly, when we open our eyes and see something, it is simply an image inside our minds. In other words, they say that although we believe matter exists in a world outside, it is all just an image in the mind. They say there is only the mind. There is no such thing as matter. This view is known as idealism in philosophy. That argument also seems correct. But one position excludes the other. If you take a materialistic position, there is no such thing as a mind. There is only matter. If you take an idealistic position, there is no such thing as matter. There is only the mind.

## **Phenomenology**

Other philosophers, like David Hume, also entered this debate<sup>96</sup>. They say that materialism and idealism are both wrong to a certain extent, but also right to a certain extent. They say one proves that there is no such thing as matter and the other proves that there is no such thing as mind. That is right. There is neither mind nor matter. The only reality is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. In other words, there is only sense experience. They say that matter and mind are both just constructs built on top of sense experience. Today in philosophy, the study of reality based on this view is known as phenomenology.

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<sup>95</sup> George Berkeley. (2023, September 21). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Berkeley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Berkeley)

<sup>96</sup> David Hume. (2023, September 20). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Hume](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume)

## The Buddha's Position

Sometimes it is said that the Buddha did not speak about these issues but that is not correct. There is a very short but very profound *Sutta* where the Buddha also speaks about the issue of materialism, idealism, and phenomenology, although not using those terms. Modern Buddhists have not comprehended the meaning of this *Sutta* very well. The *Pāli* word *sabba* means all or everything. It also means the whole or totality. In the *Sabba Sutta*,<sup>97</sup> the Buddha says:

**TABLE 7: Comparative translation of the *Sabba Sutta***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation <sup>98</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Kiñca, bhikkhave, sabbam? Cakkhuñceva rūpā ca, sotañca saddā ca, ghānañca gandhā ca, jivhā ca rasā ca, kāyo ca phoṭṭhabbā ca, mano ca dhammā ca— idam vuccati, bhikkhave, sabbam.</i>	<p>And what is the all? It's just the eye and sights, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touches, and the mind and thoughts. This is called the all.</p>	<p>What, Renunciates, is everything? Only seeing and images, hearing and sounds, smelling and smells, tasting and tastes, touching and touches, thinking and thoughts. This is called everything.</p>
<i>Yo, bhikkhave, evam vadeyya: 'ahametam sabbam paccakkhāya añnam sabbam paññāpessāmī'ti, tassa vācāvatthukamevassa; puṭṭho ca na sampāyeyya, uttariñca vijhātam āpajjeyya. Tam kissa hetu? Yathā tam, bhikkhave, avisayasmin ti.</i>	<p>Mendicants, suppose someone was to say: 'I'll reject this all and describe another all.' They'd have no grounds for that, they'd be stumped by questions, and, in addition, they'd get frustrated. Why is that? Because they're out of their element.</p>	<p>If someone were to say, 'I can speak of something other than these,' he could be questioned and cross-questioned, and at the end of it, he would not be able to make good his boast. Why is this so? Because he cannot get beyond his sense experience.</p>

It is important to note that in this *Sutta*, the Buddha is saying that all there is to talk about is our sense experience. In other words, he takes a phenomenological view.

<sup>97</sup> SN 35.23

<sup>98</sup> *Sabba Sutta: The All* (SN 35.23), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Sujato. *Sutta Central*, 12 August 2021, <https://suttacentral.net/>

That's why I have translated it differently. To convey that the Buddha avoids both the materialistic and idealistic view and instead takes a phenomenological position.

This issue is also raised in the *Jata Sutta*<sup>99</sup> where the Buddha is asked about how to solve a subjective or inner tangle and an objective or outer tangle. People can interpret this question in different ways and even Ven. *Buddhagosa* has his interpretation<sup>100</sup>. But what I see is that the Buddha was referring to the same problem raised by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. The subjective tangle is: what is the nature of the mind? Does it exist or not? The objective tangle is: what is the nature of matter or the body and the world? Does matter exist or not? So, there is this subjective tangle and objective tangle to be resolved. The Buddha gives a very interesting answer in three verses. Ven. *Buddhagosa* only refers to the first two verses but the key is in the third verse. There the Buddha takes a phenomenological position by stating that one who understands *nāma/rūpa* will untangle this tangle. Today, *nāma/rūpa* is sometimes translated as mind/body or mentality/materiality. Or even if it is more accurately translated as name/form it is still interpreted as the mind and the body. I think that is a mistake. These translations fall into the errors of existential ways of thinking. When we examine the *Suttas* it is very clear that the Buddha is not talking about the mind and the body.

In the *Māha Nidana Sutta*,<sup>101</sup> the Buddha defines these terms in a very important way. These *Pāli* definitions can always be translated in different ways. What I would say is that the explanation of *rūpa* given there refers to the image that has been perceived through the senses. Each image we perceive through our senses is named or identified using a noun. The definition of *nāma* given in this *Sutta* means the effort to express in words the images perceived through the sense. Thus, *nāma* refers to the naming or identification of the *rūpa*. Those who identify *nāma* as the mind or mentality also say the four “mental” aggregates are classified as *nāma*. But if we look at the *Sammā Ditthi Sutta*<sup>102</sup> this view is also incorrect as the Buddha does not define *nāma* this way there. The Buddha does not talk about the existence of the mind or matter but only talks about the experience of images and their names. *Nāma/rūpa* refers to the process of perception itself. When the process of perception is understood the tangle is finally solved. The Buddha's analysis of both *nāma* and *rūpa* will be further discussed below.

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<sup>99</sup> SN 7.6

<sup>100</sup> See *The Path of Purification* (*Visudhimagga*)

<sup>101</sup> DN 15

<sup>102</sup> MN 9

This phenomenological position is also taken by the Buddha in the *Bahiya Sutta*<sup>103</sup> where he gives meditation instructions to an advanced yogi very succinctly. There he says that “in the seeing, there is only the seeing.” That means that there is no such thing as what is seen. Or the world/object/matter is absent. There is also no person seeing. That is, the self/subject/mind is absent. When you say there is only seeing, that means the process of perception is all we have. Everything else is a construct built on top of perception. This is also the meaning of *Suññatā* or emptiness which is described in the *Suñña Sutta*<sup>104</sup>. There the Buddha is describing experience becoming empty of the existence of a self and the world.

In *Mulapariyaya Sutta*<sup>105</sup> the Buddha describes this in further detail. There again he distinguishes between how the ordinary person sees things and how the Awakened person sees things. He says the ordinary person will perceive a solid, then form the concept solid and conclude that the solid exists. He also becomes attached and says the solid is mine and delights in this. Why? Because he has not fully understood. The Awakened person, however, apperceives the solid and does not conclude that the solid exists. He does not think the solid is mine or take delight in it. Why? Because he has fully understood. Apperception means to see the process of perception. The Awakened person is not just looking at a solid but seeing the process by which the solid is seen. There is no conclusion that a solid exists because the Awakened person is aware that it is only the perception of a solid. It is more accurate to say that a solid is perceived rather than to say that the solid exists. These ideas are also discussed in the *Loka Sutta*<sup>106</sup>.

According to the Buddha, speaking in terms of mind and body or materialism and idealism is incorrect. Both materialism and idealism are existential ways of thinking. Materialism asserts the existence of matter and the body. Idealism asserts the existence of the mind. Therefore, the view that the *pañcupādānakkhandhā* is the five components of the mind and body is based on a mistaken idea about the teachings of the Buddha. This view asserts the existence of both the body and the mind. This is existential thinking.

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<sup>103</sup> Ud 1.10

<sup>104</sup> SN 35.85

<sup>105</sup> MN 1

<sup>106</sup> SN 35.82

In the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* and the *Cūla-Sihanada Sutta*<sup>107</sup>, the Buddha said that thinking in terms of either existence or non-existence is a mistake<sup>108</sup>. Existence is called *bhava* and its opposite non-existence is called *vibhava*.<sup>109</sup> It is a mistake because we must avoid both these extremes and think in terms of experience instead. The freedom from both existence and non-existence is called *bhava nirodho*. This is why the Buddha says '*bhava nirodho nibbanam*'.<sup>110</sup> *Nibbāna* is freedom from existence or the paradigm shift from existence to experience. We can't understand the teachings of the Buddha without understanding the difference between existence and experience. We have to move from the paradigm of existence to the paradigm of experience. We have to move away from both materialism and idealism and take a metaphysical approach. Again, Western philosophical ideas may help us understand these distinctions.

## EXISTENCE, ESSENCE, AND EXPERIENCE

John-Paul Sartre, the Existential philosopher, said that "existence precedes essence."<sup>111</sup> Sometimes when we read words like that, we don't know what they mean. It is essential to understand these terms. Philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle began to speak about existence and essence. Today, if you look in a dictionary of philosophy, existence is defined as the mere fact that a thing is. Essence means the nature of the thing that exists. For example, if we take a white ceramic cup, its existence is that it occupies space and time. Its essence is that it is ceramic, its color is white, it is used for drinking, and any other such characteristic that make up its nature. Existence is that it is. Essence is what it is.

Existence means that when we perceive something through our senses, we believe it exists in the outside world, independent of us. But idealistic philosophers pointed out that when we see an object, what we see is only an image in the mind. Therefore, it doesn't have an independent existence. He questioned the typical assumptions we have about the separate existence of things.

This is why Emmanuel Kant started to say that there are two things. One he called the phenomenon, and the other he called the noumenon. When we open our eyes, what we see are mental images. He called this the phenomenon, that which we

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<sup>107</sup> MN 11

<sup>108</sup> SN 12.15

<sup>109</sup> MN 11

<sup>110</sup> SN 12.68

<sup>111</sup> Sartre, John-Paul, "*Existentialism is a Humanism*", (Yale University Press, 2007)

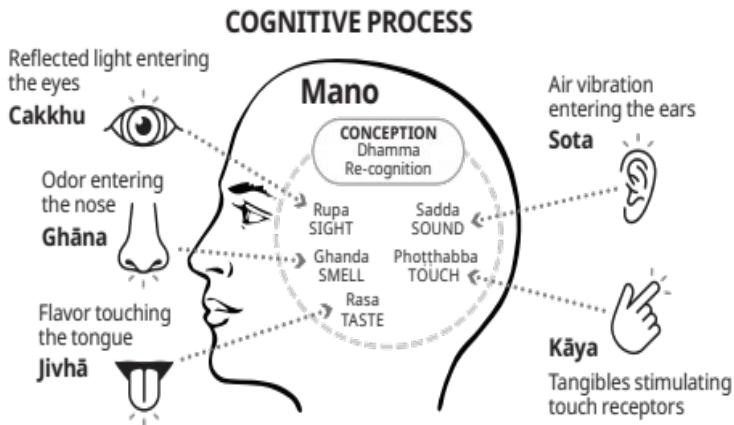
experience through our senses. But he thought there must also be something existing that we don't experience, that doesn't appear to our senses. He called that the noumenon. So, he spoke of two things called the phenomenon and noumenon. Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates also talked about these ideas. What Kant called the phenomenon is what they called existence. Other philosophers pointed out that it is only the phenomenon or our sense experience that we can directly know. In other words, the only reality is the phenomenon. They said that the noumenon is only a theoretical concept; it is not a reality. This branch of philosophy is called phenomenology. The teachings of the Buddha is all about phenomenon experienced through our senses.

## THE SIX SENSES

The Buddha went much further than any Western philosopher because he deeply analyzed how the process of experience through our senses occurs. He also explained how this process leads to *dukkha*. His analysis was not merely philosophical speculation but based on penetrative observation of the process of perception gained through deep states of meditation.

When we speak about the senses in *Pāli*, we use the words *cakkhu* and *rūpa*. *Cakkhu* refers to seeing, and *rūpa* are the images that are seen. *Sota* refers to hearing, and *saddha* are the sounds that are heard. *Ghāna* is smelling, and *gandha* is smells. *Jivhā* is tasting, and *rasa* is tastes. *Kāya* is the sense of bodily touch, and *potthaba* is the touch experienced. From modern science, we know that the raw data of the five senses are collected together and interpreted or given meaning by the cognitive process. The product of the cognitive process is what we call experience. Experience is the collection of the data of the five senses plus the meaning we give it. In the same way, the Buddha used two words to speak about a sixth sense: *Mano* and *Dhamma*. *Mano* is the cognitive process, and *Dhamma* is the final experience or phenomenon produced by cognition. Because perception is related to the five senses and the cognitive process, the Buddha spoke of six senses instead of five senses. We can illustrate this in a diagram:

## DIAGRAM 5: The six senses in Pāli



## THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION

We perceive and experience through these six senses. The *pañcupādānakkhandhā* is a description by the Buddha of the process of perception through these senses. If we take vision as an example, we know that when we open our eyes during the daytime, we see things. That is called visual perception. Most of the time, we only think about what we see. It is only very rarely that we consider how we see what we see. We only know that we see through the visual process. We do not understand how this process works. The Buddha explained how we perceive through the senses, and scientists have confirmed it through experimental research.

As described by the Buddha, the process of perception is a series of antecedents that can be visualized using an analogy of a row of marbles. When we tap the marble at one end, the marble next to it begins to knock the adjacent marble, thus starting a movement of marbles ending in the last marble being moved. This can also be called a chain reaction. That is a series of antecedents moving one after the other. All modern electromagnetic energy transmissions, such as radio, TV, and telephone, occur similarly. According to the teachings of the Buddha, even the process of perception occurs similarly. The Buddha analyzed the chain reaction of the process of sense perception using five terms. These are what are collectively called the *pañcupādānakkhandhā*. Due to translation errors, the real meaning of these terms has been lost. This phrase is usually translated as the five aggregates of clinging.

The word *pañca* means five. The term *khanda* is generally translated as aggregate, which does not carry the necessary meaning, which is cumulative. The word means something that piles up and accumulates over time and becomes like a mountain. The term *upādāna* (*upa* = inside, *ādāna* = taking) is to regard something as mine or to personalize it. This term is usually translated as clinging, which also doesn't convey the appropriate meaning.

### **The five cumulatives of the process of perception**

To understand the Buddha's analysis, we must first understand that the environment stimulates each sense. Each sense is stimulated differently as described below:

**TABLE 8: Stimulation of the senses by the environment**

Sense	Stimulation
<b>Seeing (cakkhu)</b>	Light waves stimulate the cone and rod cells in the retina
<b>Hearing (sota)</b>	Air vibrations stimulate the eardrum
<b>Smelling (ghāna)</b>	Odor molecules bind to receptor cells in the olfactory bulb in the nose
<b>Tasting (jīvhā)</b>	Flavor molecules react chemically with gustatory sense receptors in the taste buds on the tongue
<b>Touching (kāya)</b>	Tangible contacts such as pressure, heat, and vibrations stimulate the tactile receptors under the skin

It is the chain reaction to this stimulation we call perception. This chain reaction has been analyzed into five phases by the Buddha as follows:

**TABLE 9: Comparative translation of the *pañcupādānakkhandhā***

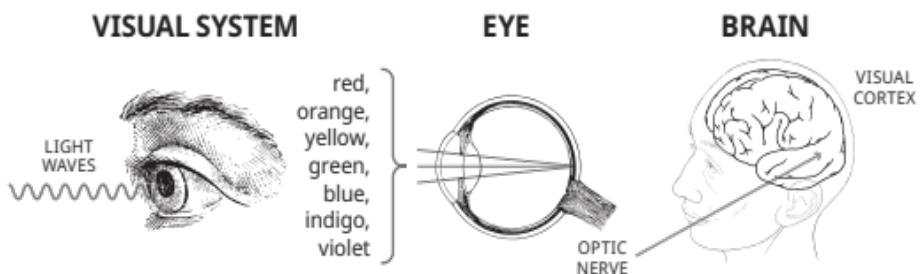
Pāli	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>pañcupādānakkhandhā</i>	five aggregates of clinging	five personalized cumulatives
<b>1. Rūpa</b>	form/materiarity	mental image
<b>2. Vedanā</b>	feeling	feeling
<b>3. Saññā</b>	perception	sensation
<b>4. Sankhāra</b>	Formations, fabrications, volition	mental construction
<b>5. Viññāṇa</b>	consciousness	perception

## 1. *Saññā*

If we take vision as an example, our eyes work like a movie camera continuously taking a series of pictures. Just as light comes into a camera and touches the light-sensitive screen at the back of the camera, light comes and touches the retina at the back of the eyeball. It is important to remember that light comes in the form of waves of different frequencies, and there are nerve endings at the retina that can detect only one frequency of light, which produces only one color out of seven colors, namely: violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. This means what we see at the beginning is only color. It is this first phase in the chain reaction or constituent in the process of perception that the Buddha called *saññā*. For visual perception, the *saññā* is the colors and their brightness detected by the retina, but it is different for the other senses. For hearing, the *saññā* would be frequency or pitch and amplitude or loudness. The most rudimentary constituent of the chain reaction triggered by stimulation of the senses is *saññā*.

I translate *saññā* as sensation, which is the technical word used by psychologists. Sensation is the most fundamental building block of sense experience. It is the first thing to arise when the environment stimulates a sense organ. *Saññā* is not perception as usually thought; perception occurs much later in the process.

### DIAGRAM 6: The Process of Seeing



## 2. *Vedanā*

Each *saññā* also carries a feeling tone that is either felt as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This feeling tone is what the Buddha called *vedanā*, so I translate that as feeling. But it is not feeling as in emotions. The Buddha has spoken about three types of *vedanā*: *sukha vedanā* (pleasant feeling), *dukkha vedanā* (unpleasant feeling), and *adukkhamasukkha vedanā* (neutral feeling). *Saññā* and *vedanā* are

always going together; you cannot separate them, where there is one there is the other. These are like the building blocks of our sense experience.

### 3. *Sankhāra*

The images we see are constructed out of these two building blocks, the colors from the visual process and the sensation from the other senses, and their feeling tones. Although we experience them as objects in the outside world, they are merely mental images. It is this process of mental construction that the Buddha called *sankhāra*. The prefix *san* means bringing together, and *khāra* means creating or constructing. So, mental construction is a good translation of that word. The sensations from the five senses are brought together and using these sensations images are constructed. The constructed images are not merely visual or made of color but include sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile sensations.

### 4. *Rūpa*

Every image that is constructed using the raw data of the five senses is identified by giving it a name. Therefore, what we see are mental images identified with names. The images that are constructed are called *rūpa* by the Buddha, and the names that they are identified with he called *nāma*. *Nāma/rūpa* are also going together. Translating *rūpa* as form doesn't convey the more profound meaning; *rūpa* is the mental image created by the process of perception. Today, *nāma/rūpa* is also translated as mentality/materiality. They are thought of as the mind (mentality) and the body (materiality). The mind being *nāma* and the body being *rūpa*. This idea comes from the commentaries, but it has no basis in the *Suttas*. This view is existential. We previously discussed that the Buddha avoids materialistic and idealistic views, which are based on the idea of existence, and instead takes a phenomenological position. *Nāma/rūpa* is the images we perceive and the names we identify these images with. This is experiential thinking.

The materialistic and existential view of *rūpa* is also caused by the idea that *rūpa* is made of earth, water, fire, and wind. These are mistranslations of the *Pāli* words *pathvī*, *āpo*, *tejo* and *vāyo*. They should be translated as solidity, liquidity, heat, and motion. These are referred to as *dhātu* by the Buddha. *Dhatu* is translated as elements, but it should be data or datum. The word element falls into the error of existential thinking, these should not be seen as the building block of *rūpa* but as how the image appears to us. The building blocks of *rūpa* are sensation and feeling as discussed above. Images on TV may appear as solid, liquid, heat, or motion, but

those images are not made of these things. They are appearances of data that is transmitted to the TV. It is the same with our process of perception.

**TABLE 10: Comparative translation of the four *dhātu***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>dhātu</i>	element	data
<b>1. <i>pathvī</i></b>	earth	solidity
<b>2. <i>āpo</i></b>	water	liquidity
<b>3. <i>tejo</i></b>	fire	heat
<b>4. <i>vāyo</i></b>	wind	motion

## 5. *Viññāṇa*

Finally, the Buddha spoke of the completion of the five stages in the process as *viññāṇa*. Here, each image is distinguished, and their relationship to each other is determined. The prefix *vi* means to separate or distinguish, and the word *ñāṇa* means to know. So, to know separately. Today *viññāṇa* is translated as consciousness. However, the technical term for the final stage in the process of our senses is perception. We perceive through our senses. Consciousness can mean different things in different contexts and is a much more advanced stage in the experiencing process. Consciousness means being conscious of a self and a world, which happens much later in the chain reaction we are discussing. The Buddha has spoken about six types of *viññāṇa* (seeing/cakkhu *viññāṇa*, hearing/sota *viññāṇa*, smelling/ghāna *viññāṇa*, tasting/jivhā *viññāṇa* and touching/kāya *viññāṇa*) which corresponds to the five senses and cognition as the sixth (*mano viññāṇa*). The single word we can use to describe these six processes is perception.

Therefore, hopefully, you can see that these five cumulatives are better understood as the stages in the process of perception and not the five aggregates of a person or the mind and the body as is commonly thought. We can illustrate the five cumulatives in the process of perception with the following diagram, although we must not think of it in terms of materialism:

## DIAGRAM 7:

### Pancupādānakkhandhā (Commonly "The Five Aggregates of Clinging")

#### The five personalised cumulatives

1. Rūpa – Mental Image
2. Vedanā – Feeling
3. Saññā – Sensation
4. Saṅkhāra – Mental Construction
5. Viññāna – Perception



## THE DELUSION OF SENSE PERCEPTION

Today modern psychologists are also talking about the theory of perception. They are talking about what is perceived being a creation of the process of perception. In the *Rohitassa Sutta*,<sup>112</sup> a deity comes to the Buddha and asks a question. The question was, "If you travel in space will you be able to come to the end of the world?" The Buddha said, "No, you can never come to the end of the world by traveling in space." It is a fascinating question and answer because modern scientists like Einstein pointed out that you come back to the same point if you travel in space. Once they experimented to see if that was true and found it was true. They sent out a ray of light, and somehow it came back to the same point.

But the Buddha went on and said that "without reaching the end of the world, you cannot bring all suffering to an end." But to reach the end of the world, you cannot do it by traveling in space. Then he said that "the world, the beginning of the world, the end of the world and the way leading to the end of the world is within this fathom long body itself, with its sensation and conception." This means that this cognitive process is creating the world. This is the meaning of phenomenology.

There was a monk that I knew who was going to talk to prisoners, and once I went with him. At the end of the talk, I said, "If there are any questions, you can ask me." There was a young man, and he asked me, "Who created the world?" I said, "You

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<sup>112</sup> AN 4.45

created the world." The other monk thought I gave a wrong answer, and he would not allow me to speak. So, I just kept quiet.

We can compare perception to a movie, where the people and scenes you see look like they are real. To convey the delusional or illusional nature of these five cumulatives of the process of perception, in the *Phenapiṇḍūpama Sutta*,<sup>113</sup> the Buddha used some penetrative metaphors. This *Sutta* also describes these five cumulatives as empty (*suñña*), which means they are empty of a self and a world. The metaphors the Buddha used are as follows:

**TABLE 11: Metaphors from *Phenapiṇḍūpama Sutta***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation <sup>114</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Phenapiṇḍūpamā rūpam</i>	Form is like a glob of foam	Image is like a foam or froth
<i>vedanā bubbulupamā</i>	feeling, a bubble	Feeling is like bubbles
<i>Maricikupamā saññā</i>	perception, a mirage	Sensation is a mirage
<i>samkhārā kadalūpamā</i>	fabrications, a banana tree	Construction is like the banana tree
<i>Māyūpamañca viññāṇam</i>	consciousness, a magic trick	perception is a magic show

I don't call the awakening of the Buddha enlightenment. There is a difference between awakening and enlightenment. It is an awakening from a dream because we are all dreaming. We are all dreaming of existence. The Buddha says '*bhava nirodho nibbanam*'.<sup>115</sup> *Nibbāna* is freedom from existence. Existence is called *bhava*, and the freedom from existence is called *bhava nirodho*. We realize that everything is only a sensory experience created by the mental process when we awaken from this dream. To become aware or conscious of how this process works is the meaning of *Nibbāna*. It is the shift from the paradigm of existence to experience.

<sup>113</sup> SN 22.95

<sup>114</sup> *Phēṇa Sutta*: Foam (SN 22.95), translated from the *Pāli* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013,

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.095.than.html>

<sup>115</sup> SN 12.68

Modern psychologists are intellectually aware of this concept but it doesn't enter their everyday life. Why? The reason is that emotions, not reason, always influence us. We might reason out sometimes, but our life is based on emotions. Emotions become an obstacle to awakening.

## HOW THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION CREATES DUKKHA

The Buddha also described the five cumulatives as being characterized by instability (*aniccā*), stress (*dukkha*), and impersonality (*anattā*)<sup>116</sup>. These terms are usually translated differently:

**TABLE 12: Comparative translation of the three characteristics**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>aniccā</i>	Impermanent	Unstable
<i>dukkha</i>	Suffering	Stressful
<i>anattā</i>	Not-self/ No Self	Impersonal

### 1. Unstable (*aniccā*)

Everything perceived is a mental construct (*sankhāra*) or phenomenon. Every perceptual experience arises and is maintained by the presence of several necessary conditions. If one of those conditions is absent, it ceases to continue. For example, a candle flame will continue as long as the heat, wax, and oxygen are present, and the wind is not blowing too hard. If one of those conditions is absent, the flame goes out. So is our life based on food, water, air, shelter, temperature, etc. So are all our relationships with others, and so is our perceptual experience of everything in the world. That is the meaning of instability or *aniccā*. What depends on conditions is unstable; therefore, all constructs are unstable (*sabbe sankhāra aniccā*).

### 2. Stressful (*Dukkha*)

As a consequence of instability, we experience stress. Normally, we think the stress arises from the instability. However, stress is due to the frustration of our desire for our sense experience to be as we wish. If there is no desire for our experience to be as we want, the ever-changing and unstable reality can't make us unhappy. It is the blind emotional impulse that desires our experience to be a certain way. Therefore,

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<sup>116</sup> SN 22.59

the only way to be free of stress is to give up the blind, unrealistic, emotional reaction for experience to be as we want. Here we find that our emotions are responsible for our unhappiness, not the experience or reality itself. That is why it is necessary to learn to gain control of our emotions and to calm the mind. Then we can maintain a peaceful and happy mind no matter what our experience is. Experience is unstable and insecure and therefore never as we wish. Even a pleasant experience does not last so it is also not as we wish. What is not as we wish is stressful (*dukkha*). Therefore, all constructs are stressful (*sabbe sankhāra dukkhā*).

### 3. Impersonal (*anattā*)

Experience is of two kinds: subjective and objective. Every subjective experience is personalized as mine and becomes the self. Every objective experience is alienated as things in the external world. The self and the world build an emotional relationship. This emotional relationship creates stress. However, if what is personalized is unstable and painful, it is not as I want. What is not as I want is not under my power. What is not under my power is not mine. What is not mine should not be personalized as it is impersonal. What is impersonal is not mine, me, or myself. Therefore, all experience is impersonal (*sabbe dhammā anattā*). All that is impersonal should be let go. To let go is to become dispassionate. If what should not be personalized is personalized, grief, lamentation, pain, distress, and depression follow. To solve this problem, one should depersonalize. Personalization is an unconscious process. Depersonalization is a conscious process. Experience, when depersonalized, ceases to be stressful.

When these cumulatives of the process of perception are personalized (*upādāna*), the feeling of self comes into being. To personalize is to say, "This is mine." All that is personalized, as mine becomes the self. Personality, therefore, is the product of the personalization of the cumulatives of perception. This personality, however, is not a rational concept but an emotional feeling.

Take the sense of sight. If we see something, we say "I see," but where is the I that sees? Is it the process of perception that we refer to as I? The I is a feeling rather than an actual object. If we look for an object, the only object to be seen is the body that occupies space and time. The process of perception takes the form of the body. The body is personalized as this is mine or I perceive. Yet, the body is not something we objectively see, other than just the visible hands, legs, abdomen, or image in a mirror. The body we think of is only a mental image constructed by perception. The body we see as myself is only a mental image, very different from

what other people see as me. This is why when we see a picture of ourselves taken by someone, it looks different from what we imagine we look like. By personalizing the body in the form of a mental image, the notion of a self comes into being.

It is imperative to realize that the Buddha says the five cumulatives of perception are *dukkha* if personalized or made into a self. In other words, this sense of subjective self or existence is *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is not just happening to people in poor countries or caught up in wars or terrible circumstances. According to the Buddha, it is happening to us all of the time because the mental process creates this sense of self, which we feel exists, out of our sense experience. How this happens will be fully discussed in Chapter 6.

We discussed how suffering is expressed as grief, lamentation, pain, distress, and exhaustion in the last chapter. We described the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death. What then is the cause of this suffering? Is it because we have a self that grows old, falls sick, and dies? Is it the body that is the self that grows, old, falls sick, and dies? How did this body become the self that grows, old, falls sick, and dies? Because I personalized the body, thinking "This body is mine," it is my "self." If I did not personalize the body, the body would not be me. Then the aging, sickness, and death of the body would not be my suffering. The body is only a collection of feelings, mental constructs, perceptions, and images.

It is essential to understand that the five cumulatives of perception if personalized are the foundation of the stress of life. This is the meaning of *sankittena pancupādānakkhanda dukkhā*. In other words, it is the feeling of self that is *dukkha*. Aging, sickness, and death become suffering only because it is connected to the self and not otherwise. Suffering also occurs when the self is in an emotional relationship with the world in the form of lust, hate, fear, and worry. Suffering also arises from an insatiable desire for material gains, variety, sensual pleasure, fame, power, conflict with others, comparison with others, etc. We will discuss these ideas further by looking at two crucial *Suttas*, the *Cūla Vedalla Sutta* and the *Mahā Vedalla Sutta*.

## **Question and Answer**

**Q:** An *arahant* does not personalize the five aggregates. Does an *arahant* still possess *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa*?

**A:** What is the meaning of possessing? What is the meaning of personalize? To personalize is to say that this is mine. Then what is possess? Suppose there is a glass of something here, and I have bought this by giving money, and so it is mine, it is my possession. To personalize is to say that this is mine. If I have not personalized this, do I still possess this? Well, the possession part is very unimportant. The important thing is to stop personalizing it. Once you have stopped personalizing, even if you are supposed to own this, you can give it away if someone wants it. This is because you are not attached to it. An *arahant* does not personalize anything. For example, an *arahant* may be wearing a robe, and if someone wants the robe, they will willingly give it. They are not attached to that even though it may be their possession.

## **Cūla Vedalla Sutta (MN 44)**

### **The Minor Discourse on Knowledge**

The *Cūla Vedalla Sutta* may be called "The Minor Discourse on Knowledge." The *Pāli* word *Cūla* means minor or shorter. The word *Veda* means knowledge; that is why the ancient Hindu scriptures are called the *Vedas*. This *Sutta* talks about the higher teachings of the Buddha. According to the background provided for this *Sutta* in the commentaries, which aren't as reliable as the *Suttas*, during the time of the Buddha, a husband and wife were studying his teachings. The wife ordained and became an *Arahant*, but the husband was still a layman. She had reached the highest level. The husband comes to meet the *Arahant*, who is his former wife. Then with great respect, he asks her some questions. The *Arahant Bhikkhunī* answers the questions. Later *Visākha* consulted the Buddha and told him about the *Arahant's* answer. The Buddha said the questions were very well answered, and he would have given the same answers.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>117</sup>**

"SO I HAVE HEARD. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha, in the Bamboo Grove, the squirrels' feeding ground. Then the layman Visākha went to see the nun Dhammadinnā, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to her: "Ma'am, they speak of this thing called 'substantial reality'. What is this substantial reality that the Buddha spoke of?"

#### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

The husband's name is *Visākha*. This name can be used for males and females. When it is a male name, you pronounce it as *Visākha*. When it is a female name, you pronounce it as *Visākah*. When the wife became a *Bhikkhunī* (nun), her name was *Dhammadinnā*. Again, that name is sometimes used for males as well as females. When it is male, it is pronounced as *Dhammadina*, but when it is a female, it is pronounced as *Dhammadinnah*. Here the translator used "Ma'am," a polite form of addressing a *Bhikkhunī*. A *Bhikkhunī* is usually addressed as "sister."

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<sup>117</sup> *Cūlavedalla Sutta*: The Shorter Elaboration (MN 44), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Sujato. Sutta Central, 12 February 2024, <https://suttacentral.net/editions/mn/en/sujato?lang=en>

The important word here is "*sakkāya*" which has been translated as "substantial reality". This translation is not clear in my view. What is substantial reality? The *pāli* the prefix *sa* means one's own and *kaya* means a body or collection. The important thing is the idea behind the term: it is the feeling we have that our self is somewhere inside "my" body and in what are normally called the five aggregates. We have personalized the body and the five aggregates and this results in thinking in terms of a personality. We can use the word personality to translate this word.

**TABLE 12: Comparative translation of *sakkāya***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations	Author's Translation
<i>sakkāya</i>	identity, embodiment, self-identification, own body, substantial reality	personality

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

"Visākha, the Buddha said that these five grasping aggregates are substantial reality. That is, the grasping aggregates of form, feeling, perception, choices, and consciousness. The Buddha said that these five grasping aggregates are substantial reality."

#### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

The translator uses the words five grasping aggregates; aggregate means totality. As discussed previously, I translate this as the five cumulatives of the process of perception. It is the five activities that create the process of perception that is being personalized. First of all, I want to ask: have you ever seen your body? No one has seen their whole body. You have seen another person's body but not all of your own body. You may have seen your arm or your legs. Have you seen the backside of yourself? Have you seen your face? You have looked at the mirror and seen the image of your face. Whenever you see your photograph, you may think this is not me. I am a little better than this. There is something wrong with this picture. You only have an image of what you think you look like in your mind. What you consider your body is a combination of what you see in the mirror and what you think you are. The image in your mind is very different from what other people see because you have never really properly seen your whole body.

What you call yourself is a collection of various photographs your eyes are "taking." Your eyes are like a camera, and you have taken a group of those photographs and put them together. You see with your eyes and combine it with what you hear with your ears. When you hear your voice, it is how you hear your voice. Other people may hear your voice differently. Similarly, with the smell you get from your nose, the taste you get from your tongue, and the touch you feel in the body. All that is a collection of images, sounds, tastes, smells, and touches. All the information or experience is collected and put together, and that is what you think you are. The whole thing is all made up in the mind. It is only an image in the mind.

The image also begins to change in different situations. When you are at home, you have one image. When you go to work in the office, you have another image. If you walk on the streets, you have another image. All these images are different. It is simply a collection of impressions that you call yourself, and all this is your personality. Your personality is what you think you are in your mind, but what other people think you are, is another personality. So, you have many characters because different people see you and talk to you. There is no real fixed personality.

When we experience the self, we combine and personalize all these experiences that depend on the process of perception. That is why the process of perception has been analyzed into five cumulatives that are personalized. The self we feel is nothing other than experiences dependent on perception that accumulate over our lives, which are personalized and called "mine". But this self is a delusion, in the sense that it is a creation of the imagination rather than an existing entity. It is created due to the personalization of what is impersonal. The personality perspective is your imagination that you have a self as a result of this personalization.

This is why I speak of the five cumulatives of the process of perception: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. What is *rūpa*? Some people think *rūpa* is the body. *Rūpa* is not the body. *Rūpa* means the mental image. Even in the Sinhala and Malay languages, *rūpa* means image. *Vedanā* refers to the feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. *Saññā* refers to the sensations experienced in each of the senses. For example, for the eye, the sensation is the colors that you see. Light comes in the form of wavelength or frequency. The color you see depends on that frequency or wavelength. Different colors have different frequencies. The image is created using colors. When a person draws a picture, they put colors on the paper. You put the different colors together to create images. I call it sensation, but it is usually translated as perception.

The making of images is the construction. When we talk about *sankhāra*, we are talking about this construction. You are constructing the image. The image is built by using colors. You are not only creating one image. You construct many images. For example, even in the human face, there are different things: eyes, chin, nose, and beard. To be able to distinguish them is what is called *viññāṇa*. *Viññāṇa* is perception. *Viññāṇa* is usually translated as consciousness.

The word *rūpa* refers to the image that you see. Every time you see an image, you give it a name. In *Pāli* the name is called *nāma*. That is how you identify the image. Even if you look at a flower, you identify the petal, the stem, and the stigma. You use all kinds of words to describe the different parts of the flower. In the same way, when you see a face, you are not only seeing the face. You see the eyes, eyebrows, or the ear. You see all kinds of things according to the number of names you know. So, every image has a name. If it does not have a name, it is not a separate object. The moment you separate the image, you have a name for it. What is perceived comes in the form of a name and an image: *nāma* is the name and *rūpa* is the image.

When we speak of a person, we are speaking of the experiences through the process of perception that have accumulated over time and is personalized as “mine”. This is an experiential way of interpreting this concept, which avoids the existential way.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

“How many processes are there?” “There are these three processes. Physical, verbal, and mental processes.” “But ma’am, what is the physical process? What’s the verbal process? What’s the mental process?” “Breathing is a physical process. Placing the mind and keeping it connected are verbal processes. Perception and feeling are mental processes.” “But ma’am, why is breathing a physical process? Why are placing the mind and keeping it connected verbal processes? Why are perception and feeling mental processes?” “Breathing is physical. It’s tied up with the body, that’s why breathing is a physical process. First you place the mind and keep it connected, then you break into speech. That’s why placing the mind and keeping it connected are verbal processes. Perception and feeling are mental. They’re tied up with the mind, that’s why perception and feeling are mental processes.”

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

Here the question asked is about *sankhāra*, which has been translated as processes. In the context of the five cumulatives, the same word was translated as choices by this translator. If you didn't look up the *pāli*, you would not even realize that, and maybe you would just accept this translation. Can the same word have two such different meanings? I think this translation difficulty has come about because the meaning of the keyword *sankhāra* has not been understood. I translate it as mental construction. There are three kinds of *sankhāra*. They are *kāya sankhāra* (bodily construction), *vacī sankhāra* (verbal construction), and *citta sankhāra* (affective construction). The first type of construction is physical, the second is verbal, and the third is affective. *Kāya sankhāra* refers to the in-breathing and out-breathing. It is related to the physical body. The energy needed for the construction process comes from breathing. Without it, the process of construction of images can't go on.

*Vacī sankhāra* refers to *vitakka vicārā*, which are the two components of conceptual thinking. It is translated differently here. *Vitakka vicārā* is the verbal construction. *Vicārā* means asking a question, and *vitakka* means answering the question. There is a difference between perception and conception. Perception is what you perceive through your senses. What you perceive you form concepts about. Seeing the bottle is perception. Asking and answering the question about the bottle is to form a concept. "What is this?" "This is a bottle" That conceptual thinking is what the Buddha called *vacī sankhāra*. It is called a verbal construction because you have formed the word "bottle." Every time you speak, you have to create a concept before talking. The verbal construction is also a part of the construction of images.

*Citta sankhāra* refers to *saññā* and *vedanā*, which are the sensations and feelings derived from seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. These are the basic building blocks, like bricks, for constructing images. It is called *citta sankhāra* because the *vedanā* is also the building block for the *Citta* or the affective/emotional process. Sometimes it is called *mano sankhāra* because *saññā* is also the building block for the *Mano* or the cognitive process. *Citta* and *Mano* will be fully explained in the next chapter. It is crucial to note these definitions, especially when discussing what is usually called dependent origination (chapter six). Today, due to commentarial interpretations, when explaining dependent origination these three *sankhāras* are said to be physical, verbal, and mental *kamma*. *Kamma* means action. However, we see by the definitions given in this *Sutta* that they have nothing to do with *kamma* or action. The rest of this *Sutta* will be discussed in Chapter 9.

## ***Mahā Vedalla Sutta (MN 43)***

### **The Major Discourse on Knowledge**

The *Mahā Vedalla Sutta* is significant as it explores the higher levels of the Buddha's teachings. As we have discussed previously, the word *Dhamma* means experience. We have five senses; the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the body. What we experience through these five senses is what we call an experience. That sense experience is the thing that we are talking about.

In what is commonly called the Four Noble Truths, the first two are *dukkha* and *samudaya*. *Dukkha* is today translated as suffering, and *samudaya* is the cause of suffering. Suffering, and the cause of suffering, are experiences that ordinary people have. That is the ordinary *dhamma*, the everyday experience. But when we talk about the ending of suffering and the way leading to the end of suffering, that is not the ordinary person's experience. That is the higher level of experience. This *Sutta* is talking about that higher level.

This *Sutta* is called the *Mahā Vedalla Sutta*. The word *Mahā* means great. *Veda* is the same word used for the Hindu scriptures, and it has the same meaning here. *Veda* is related to the word *vijjā*. *Vijjā* means to know or become conscious of something. *Veda* is about knowledge. It is a great discourse on the higher levels of knowledge. It is usually translated as "the great series of questions and answers" because it is in the format of questions and answers.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>118</sup>**

"SO I HAVE HEARD. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapindika's monastery. Then in the late afternoon, Venerable Mahākoṭṭhita came out of retreat, went to Venerable Sāriputta, and exchanged greetings with him." "Reverend, they speak of 'a witless person'. How is a witless person defined?" "Reverend, they're called witless because they don't understand. And what don't they understand? They don't understand: 'This is suffering' ... 'This is the origin of suffering' ... 'This is

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<sup>118</sup> *Mahā Vedalla Sutta: The Great Elaboration (MN 43)*, translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Sujato. Sutta Central, 12 February 2024, <https://suttacentral.net/editions/mn/en/sujato?lang=en>

the cessation of suffering' ... 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.' They're called witless because they don't understand." Saying "Good, reverend," Mahākotṭhita approved and agreed with what Sāriputta said.

Then he asked another question: "They speak of 'a wise person'. How is a wise person defined?" "They're called wise because they understand. And what do they understand? They understand: 'This is suffering' ... 'This is the origin of suffering' ... 'This is the cessation of suffering' ... 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.' They're called wise because they understand." "They speak of 'consciousness'. How is consciousness defined? "It's called consciousness because it cognizes. And what does it cognize? It cognizes 'pleasure' and 'pain' and 'neutral'. It's called consciousness because it cognizes."

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

*Anāthapiṇḍika* was the chief lay follower of the Buddha. The word *Anāthapiṇḍika* means the feeder of the helpless. He was a great philanthropist. *Anāthapiṇḍika* built the *Jetavane ārāme* – a monastery he offered to the Buddha. It was a place where the Buddha and his followers resided. Ven. *Sāriputta* was the chief disciple of the Buddha. He was the disciple with the foremost wisdom. *Mahā Koṭṭhika* was also a great disciple of the Buddha. These two great disciples are going to have a conversation. *Mahā Koṭṭhika* asks some questions and Ven. *Sāriputta* will answer them. These are high-level questions with high-level answers.

The question is about a "witless person". The word being translated as witless is *dupañña*. It is better to use the words like lacking in conception, comprehension, understanding, or knowledge. Here the question is about who is without comprehension or knowledge. There are two words in the *Pāli* language: *pañña* and *dappañña*. *Dappañña* is not understanding, and *pañña* is understanding, which is usually translated as wisdom. The second question is about *pañña*. He wants to understand something more about this.

As previously discussed, I translate *viññāna* as perception, not consciousness. It is not consciousness, which is a much more advanced phase in the experience process. I also disagree with the use of the word cognize, it's more like discriminative knowing. Mostly these are the words used by Rhys Davids, Horner, and Woodward, who translated the *Suttas* for the *Pāli* Text Society, London. These early English

translators did pioneering work but understandably also made mistakes. As we go along, you will begin to see their mistakes.

### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

“Wisdom and consciousness—are these things mixed or separate? And can we completely disentangle them so as to describe the difference between them?”

“Wisdom and consciousness—these things are mixed, not separate. And you can never completely disentangle them so as to describe the difference between them. For you understand what you cognize, and you cognize what you understand. That’s why these things are mixed, not separate. And you can never completely disentangle them so as to describe the difference between them.” “Wisdom and consciousness—what is the difference between these things that are mixed, not separate?” “The difference between these things is that wisdom should be developed, while consciousness should be completely understood.”

### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

Now another question is put. Wisdom and consciousness – the two words being used are *pañña* and *viññāṇa*. It is crucial to learn these *Pāli* words. The person who uses English will think there is confusion between wisdom and consciousness. This is not the actual confusion. The confusion is here between *pañña* and *viññāṇa*. What is *pañña* and *viññāṇa*? It is not clear. I will try to explain what this means.

We are organisms in an environment, which is how we have to look at it. An organism is like a machine, although not a man-made machine. It's a naturally formed machine but is working like a machine. In this machine we call the organism, there are five senses; seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The environment stimulates the senses. Light falling on the eye stimulates the eye. Sounds coming to the ear stimulate the ear. Once stimulated, the senses react to the stimulus. When light falls on the eye, the eye reacts. It is incorrect to use the word response. There is a difference between a reaction and a response. A response is a rational action. A reaction is an automatic, impulsive action. If I ask you a question, you will give me an answer. If it's a rational answer, that is called a response, a logical response. But when I ask you a question, if you become angry, that is not a rational response. That is an emotional reaction. Do you see the difference between a reaction and a response? This eye, when stimulated, is reacting to the stimulus, not

responding. And that reaction makes you see something. That reaction of seeing is called perception in modern psychology. Seeing something is called perception, not consciousness. Consciousness is more complicated than perception.

What happens is, that although you see something, you may not know what you see. If you know what you see, that means the thinking mind has been active. The thinking mind gives meaning to what you see. Now that is not a perception. That is a conception. You think and give meaning. That is the difference between perception and conception, which is *viññāna* and *pañña*. *Pañña* is the conception part which is the result of thinking. You think and understand what you have seen. The seeing is perception, and giving meaning to what you see is conception, which is *pañña*. These two words *viññāna* and *pañña* are differentiated like that.

What you have seen becomes a perception and then becomes a meaningful concept. That process is called cognition. In that process of cognition, we recognize what we see. That recognition is a re-cognition. If a dog comes here, you see it and say this is a dog. How do you know there is a dog? Because you have seen dogs before. What you see now is put in a category. What you see has been placed in the category "dog," and you then recognize what you have seen as a dog. That is re-cognition. The first time you saw the dog, it was cognition. The second time you see a dog that is a re-cognition. You are putting that same picture into the category. That is how we recognize everything. When you look at the chair, this is a chair because you have seen chairs before. That way of recognizing things is forming a concept. First, you see a picture, and then you understand what it is. These are the two words we are using: *viññāna* and *pañña*. *Viññāna* is perception and *pañña* is conception.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

"They speak of this thing called 'feeling'. How is feeling defined?" "It's called feeling because it feels. And what does it feel? It feels pleasure, pain, and neutral. It's called feeling because it feels." "They speak of this thing called 'perception'. How is perception defined?" "It's called perception because it perceives. And what does it perceive? It perceives blue, yellow, red, and white. It's called perception because it perceives." "Feeling, perception, and consciousness—are these things mixed or separate? And can we completely disentangle them so as to describe the difference between them?" "Feeling, perception, and consciousness—these things are mixed, not separate. And you can never completely disentangle them so as to describe the difference between them. For you perceive what you feel, and you

cognize what you perceive. That's why these things are mixed, not separate. And you can never completely disentangle them so as to describe the difference between them.”

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

Now we are coming across two more words, *saññā* and *vedanā*. It is important to know these *Pāli* words because then we understand what the Buddha said. *Vedanā* is feeling. *Saññā* is translated as perception, but I disagree. *Saññā* in modern psychology is sensation. We have to distinguish between these two things: *saññā* and *vedanā*. When you see, the first thing you see is not objects. What you see is only color. When you open your eyes, light in the form of electromagnetic waves stimulates the eyes. When that light falls on the eye, what the eye sees is nothing but color, either, blue, red or white, etc. Here the *Sutta* is referring to the sensing of color. *Saññā* for visual perception is color. It is the colours that are used to construct an image. When a painter paints the picture, they are only putting colors on the paper and you are the one who produces the picture out of the colors that you see. When you sense the color, you might feel it as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. That tone is *vedanā*. The Buddha has been explaining this properly, only if you translate it differently then you are not able to understand it. This is the problem.

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** This picture that you are talking about, is it a picture inside or a picture outside?

**A:** It is inside. When you use a camera, the picture is inside the camera. It is essential to understand that a picture is a creation of the process of perception. You are also creating the image and giving meaning to that image. Giving meaning is a result of your thinking. And that thinking is done by *Mano*. *Mano* refers to thinking.

Later on, the *Sutta* reads:

“Reverend, these five faculties have different scopes and different ranges, and don't experience each others' scope and range. That is, the faculties of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. What do these five faculties, with their different scopes and ranges, have recourse to? What experiences their scopes and ranges?” “These five faculties, with their different scopes and ranges, have recourse to the mind. And the mind experiences their scopes and ranges.”

The faculties mean the five senses. The five senses when they are stimulated by the environment react by creating sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. The sight is very different from the sound and the sound is different from the smell, and so on. The five senses each have a separate field, and separate domain, not experiencing each other's fields and domains.

After that, I think the translation does not convey the idea properly. The question is 'Where do these things ultimately lead to? In the answer, the word mind is used. The word the Buddha used was *mano*. *Mano* refers to the thinking or cognitive process. According to modern scientific findings, this occurs in the cerebrum or cerebral cortex<sup>119</sup>. Today scientists are aware nerves are going from the eye to the brain, nose to the brain, and so on. These nerves carry messages like telephone wires and send all the information derived from the five senses to the brain. The brain takes all that, puts it together, relates it to the past, present, and future, and gives meaning to what was seen, heard, or tasted. This cognitive process is what the Buddha called *mano*. He speaks of it as a process rather than occurring in a certain part of the brain like scientists, which is a materialistic or existential view.

**Q:** If an unwise person is without *pañña*, he may also give a wrong idea to a perception?

**A:** You are using *pañña* to mean intelligence. You are talking about the intelligent person and the person without intelligence. *Pañña* is a result of intelligence.

**Q:** Can I say that *pañña* is free from conceptual ideas?

**A:** What is it that you call conception? Conception is the process of forming a concept using intelligence. You are using thinking to form a concept.

**Q:** What is the *Pāli* word for consciousness?

**A:** *Viññāṇa* is perception. We have two kinds of *viññāṇa* – seeing is a *viññāṇa*, hearing is a *viññāṇa*, etc. That is the activity of the five senses, that is one kind of *viññāṇa*. This type of *viññāṇa* refers to perception. There is another kind of *viññāṇa* – *mano viññāṇa*. The *viññāṇa* that results from thinking is the *mano viññāṇa*. That *mano viññāṇa* is different from the other five *viññāṇa*. It is through the *mano viññāṇa* that consciousness comes. The consciousness is a part of *mano viññāṇa*. This is why the word *viññāṇa* cannot be called just consciousness.

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<sup>119</sup> Cerebral cortex. (2023, October 13). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerebral\\_cortex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerebral_cortex)

There is another word, *phassa*, which is poorly translated as contact. It is what creates consciousness. There are two kinds of consciousness. One is objective consciousness, which is the consciousness of the world that we are aware of. The world of objects is always seen as something outside. When we look at a chair, we see it as something outside.

There is also a subjective consciousness. You see an object. But where is the seeing? The seeing is inside you. What is inside you personalize and say this is mine. The seeing is mine. What I see is something outside. The object is seen as outside. The seeing is a subjective process, and the subjective process is personalized, and you say this is mine and this is me. I see the object. There is an I that you create. The I is something inside you. You are conscious not only of an object outside, but you are also conscious of a subject inside. That awareness of a subject inside is called self-consciousness. There are two kinds of consciousness – world consciousness and self-consciousness. Consciousness is not as simple as perception. It's a more complicated thing.

**Q:** *Phassa*, according to the scriptures, is made up of three parts *cakkhu*, *cakkhu viññāṇa*, and *rūpa*. They say when these three come together that is *viññāṇa*. The seer (represented by the *cakkhu*), the seeing (*cakkhu viññāṇa*), and the seen (*rūpa*).

**A:** No, no. There is an activity called seeing. When that activity is there, then a picture appears. That picture is not something outside. It is something inside. When these two are present, there is *cakkhu viññāṇa*, i.e., visual perception. This is not objective. When the seeing occurs, you begin to think of the subjective and objective. The self and the world are the product of the process.

**Q:** Can I say that subjective and objective are conceptual ideas?

**A:** First, there is the seeing. The seeing produced the subject/self and object/world. Typically, people think there is the self; then there is the world, then they come together, and then seeing occurs. The Buddha pointed out that seeing comes first and that seeing creates the self and the world. This is the difference. Seeing is all there is, and it is the seeing process that creates the subject/self and object/world.

For an explanation of the rest of this *Sutta* by the author, please visit:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7hDImGZEME>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq9784VpzvM>

**PART III**  
**THE CAUSE**

## CHAPTER 5

### CAUSALITY

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

We have diagnosed the illness of the human condition, which the Buddha called *dukkha*; it's now time to examine its cause. We saw in Chapter 3 when we discussed the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* that the Buddha used the *Pāli* word *tanhā* to describe the cause of *dukkha*. *Tanhā* is usually translated as craving or desire. In this chapter, the author argues that this is an error which has resulted in the failure of seekers of the Buddha's wisdom to understand this vital concept.

This error is in fact, according to the author, flowing on from a symbiotic misunderstanding of the Buddha's functional description of the mind. The cause of *dukkha* cannot be understood without understanding the Buddha's analysis of the mind. Thus, the failure to understand one has resulted in the reciprocal misunderstanding of the other. In one of his defining arguments, in this chapter the author points out that the Buddha used three *Pāli* words to describe the mental process:

1. *Viññāna*
2. *Mano*
3. *Citta*

Today these are considered synonyms for the mind, which distorts the meaning of these terms. Using two key verses, the author points out this pivotal mistake and seeks to clarify the meaning of these key terms, providing fresh translations that help us grasp the Buddha's functional description of the mind and therefore how the mind functions to create *dukkha*.

## A TALE OF TWO MINDS

### THE CAUSE OF DUKKHA IS INSIDE NOT OUTSIDE

The subject of the next two chapters is the second supernormal reality, the cause of *dukkha*. When we are experiencing stress and distress, the malady the Buddha sought to heal, it is quite natural for us to feel that the cause of our problem is our circumstances or events in the outside world. The first thing we must understand to grasp the Buddha's analysis of the cause of *dukkha*, which he called *tanhā*, is that all the unhappiness that we experience in life is not due to our unfavorable circumstances. Rather, it's due to our unconscious reactions to our circumstances. This means that our unhappiness, its cause, its cure, and the way to its cure are within ourselves. We must stop worrying about and attempting to control our circumstances and start being conscious of our reactions to our circumstances, and begin correcting them. According to the Buddha, our unconscious emotional reaction to events in the outside world is causing our unhappiness, not the events themselves, which are often out of our control. Thus, it is futile to struggle to change our circumstances constantly. Instead, we must attempt to change ourselves.

For example, when a loved one dies or a romantic relationship ends, we naturally feel that the death or the breakup is the cause of our grief. When someone yells at us, we think that person's behavior is the cause of our distress. Or, if we lose our job, we believe that loss is causing us stress. But thinking this way makes it impossible to be free from suffering because it is impossible to control or stop such adverse events. At the very least, death, illness, and loss are inevitable and unstoppable parts of life. Therefore, the Buddha points to the fact that it is not these unfavorable events themselves that cause us unhappiness but our emotional reactions to them. If we begin to think this way, we can learn to be free from stress. According to the Buddha, it is possible to gain control over emotional reactions to what is happening in the world around us, even though we can't control the world itself. This crucial message is conveyed in the often chanted *Maṅgala Sutta*<sup>120</sup> (The Formula on the Greatest Blessings):

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<sup>120</sup> Sn 2.4

**TABLE 13: Comparative translation of a quote from the *Mangala Sutta***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations <sup>121</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi cittam yassa na kampati, Asokam virajam khemam etam marigalamuttamaṇ</i>	Though touched by worldly circumstances, Never his <b>mind</b> is wavering, Sorrowless, stainless and secure: This, the Highest Blessing	When faced with the changing vicissitudes of life If one's <b>emotions</b> remain imperturbable Free from grief, lust, or fear This is the greatest blessing

### REACTION vs RESPONSE

Put another way, we must stop reacting to our circumstances and start responding to them. A reaction is emotional and unconscious, while a response is calm, rational, and conscious. As already mentioned, the difference between an animal and a human being is that animals passively react emotionally to circumstances. In contrast, human beings can stop reacting emotionally and respond rationally to events. The human being can consciously delay the reaction to get sufficient time to decide the appropriate response to a given situation. Yet, the average human being is not always able to respond rationally. They often react emotionally like animals. This means that the normal human being is carrying the animal nature within them until, of course, one has evolved to the fully human level where one does not react emotionally to circumstances anymore but instead responds rationally to them.

Self-centered emotional reactions to our circumstances are what the Buddha used the word *tanhā* to describe. Today it is translated as craving, which does not convey the proper meaning. Emotional reactions or *tanhā* are the cause of our pain, sorrow, discomfort, unhappiness, stress, and distress. The Buddha has stated the following:

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<sup>121</sup> *Mangala Sutta: Blessings* (Khp 5), translated from the *Pāli* by Dr. R.L. Soni. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 23 July 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.5.soni.html>

**TABLE 14: Comparative translation of AN 1.51**

Pāli	Standard Translation <sup>122</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Pabassaramidañ bhikkave cittan.</i> <i>Tanca ko āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkilitthañ. Tan assutavā putujjano yatābhutan</i> <i>nappajanāti. Tasma assutavato putujjanassa cittabhāvana nattiti vadāmiti</i>	Luminous, monks, is <b>the mind</b> . And it is defiled by incoming defilements. The uninstructed run-of-the-mill person doesn't discern that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that—for the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person—there is no development of <b>the mind</b> .	<b>The mood</b> is essentially pure but is polluted by foreign pollutants that enter it. This fact is not understood by those who have not heard the <i>dhamma</i> . Therefore, I declare that there is no purification of the mood for the multitude of common folk.

To help us understand this *Sutta*, it helps to compare the mind to water. Water is a pure substance, which gets polluted due to foreign matter falling into it. Water is never naturally found in a pure form. However, it can be purified when polluted by filtration or distillation. In the same way, the mind can also be purified because it is essentially pure, provided we know the proper technique. The mind, too, can never be normally found in its pure form. What pollutes the mind are our unconscious emotional reactions to what is happening in the world around us, which the Buddha called *tanhā*. Thus, *tanhā* is said to be the cause of our problem.

### WHAT IS THE MIND?

To help us understand the deep meaning of the word *tanhā*, it is necessary to understand the Buddha's functional description of the mind. Only when we have correctly understood what the mind is can we know what *tanhā* is. As discussed in previous chapters, according to the Buddha, the mind and the body are not seen as existing entities. Both the body and the mind are mere experiences. The body is an objective experience, while the mind is a subjective experience. The mind is not an entity separate from the body. The mind is experienced as an activity of the body. Just as the activity of an engine differs from the engine, the mind as an activity differs from the body. We experience many activities as a part of the experience of

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<sup>122</sup> *Pabhassara Sutta*: Luminous (AN 1.49-52), translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an01/an01.049.than.html>

the body. The body is working as a living machine. In this machine, there are many activities like breathing, digestion, etc. What we call the mind is the activity of the nervous system. There are three kinds of activities, which the Buddha used to refer to the functioning of the mental process: *viññāṇa*, *mano*, and *citta*.

**TABLE 15: Comparative translation of a quote from SN 12.61**

Pāli	Standard Translation <sup>123</sup>	Editor's Translation
<p><i>Yañca kho etam bhikkhave vuccati cittam itipi mano itipi viññānam itipi. Tañ ratti�ā ca divasassa ca aññadeva uppajjati aññam nirujjhati.</i></p> <p><i>Seyyathāpi bhikkhave, makkhaṭo araññe pavane caramāno sākham gañhāti. Tañ muñcivtā aññam gañhāti: tañ muñcivtā aññam gañhāti:</i></p> <p><i>evameva kho bhikkhave yadidam vuccati cittam itipi mano itipi viññānam itipi. Tañ ratti�ā ca divasassa ca aññadeva uppajjati, aññam nirujjhati.</i></p>	<p>But what's called 'mind,' 'intellect,' or 'consciousness' by day and by night arises as one thing and ceases as another. Just as a monkey, swinging through a forest wilderness, grabs a branch. Letting go of it, it grabs another branch. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. In the same way, what's called 'mind,' 'intellect,' or 'consciousness' by day and by night arises as one thing and ceases as another.</p>	<p>However, Renunciates, what's called 'emotions,' 'cognition,' or 'perception' day and night appear as one thing and disappear as another. Renunciates, just as when a monkey moves through a forest, it clings to a branch, then lets it go, and then clings to another branch. Letting go of that, it clings to another one. In the same way, what's called 'emotions,' 'cognition,' or 'perception' day and night appear as one thing and disappear as another.</p>

To grasp the meaning of these terms, we must understand that the Buddha has described the pollution of the mind, which results in *dukkha* as a chain reaction. We mentioned this chain reaction when discussing *āsavās* in the second chapter and we explored the first part of the reaction in the last chapter. This chain reaction can be seen as the organism's reaction to the environment which has a sequence of seven stages, which the Buddha used the following Pāli words to describe:

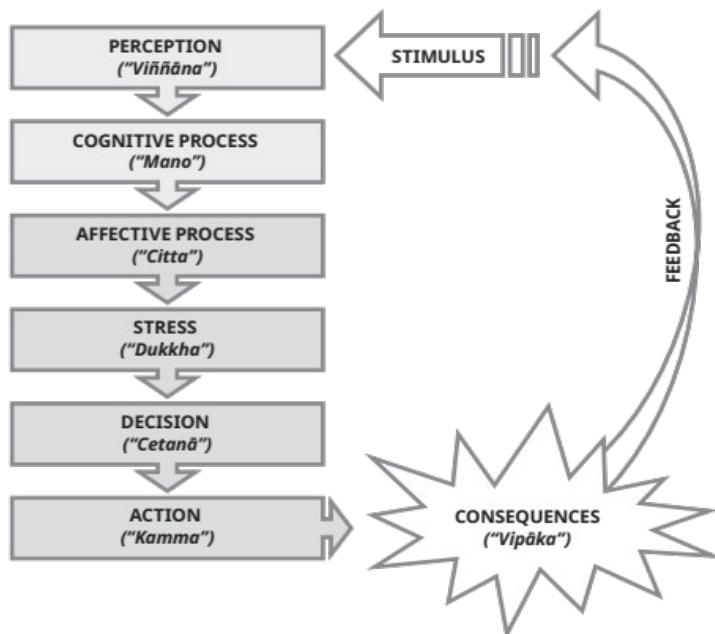
<sup>123</sup> *Assutavā Sutta*: Uninstructed (1) (SN 12.61), translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.061.than.html>

**TABLE 16: Comparative translation of terms relating to the mental process**

Pāli	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<b>1. viññāṇa</b>	Consciousness	Perception
<b>2. mano</b>	Mind	Cognition/conception
<b>3. citta</b>	Mind	Affection/mood/emotion
<b>4. dukkha</b>	Suffering	Stress
<b>5. cetanā</b>	Volition	Decision
<b>6. kamma</b>	Action	Action/Behaviour
<b>7. Vipāka</b>	Result	Consequence

The *Sammā ditṭhi Sutta* describes this same chain reaction, although there the reaction is broken down into even more stages than above. The full break down provided there will be discussed in the next chapter. Understanding these terms and how these processes form a chain reaction leading to *dukkha* will be assisted by the diagram below. What is called *āhāra* in the *suttas* is what is called stimulus in the diagram. It means a sustenance that comes from outside in.

**DIAGRAM 8: Chain reaction of the organism to stimulation**



## 1. *Viññāṇa*

From a functional standpoint, the mind can be seen as a chain reaction within the organism to sensory stimulation. In the last chapter, we discussed the first part of this chain reaction, which is perception through the senses or *viññāṇa*. We described how perception occurs when the environment stimulates the senses. We saw that the Buddha analyzed this process into five cumulatives which describe step by step how perception arises. We also explained why although today *viññāṇa* is translated as consciousness, it is more appropriate to translate it as perception.

## 2. *Mano*

In the second stage of the chain reaction, what is perceived through the five senses is collected and given meaning. In this way, a concept/interpretation/thought is formed. This process of collating the data of the five senses and interpreting it by giving it meaning using thoughts and concepts is what the Buddha called *mano*. *Mano* is usually translated as mind but is better translated as cognition, which is the technical word scientists use to describe this process.

In the well-known Buddhist book of verses called the *Dhammapada*, the first verse points out the nature and function of the cognitive process and how it precedes and creates our experience. Due to translation errors, however, the meaning of this verse is not clear:

**TABLE 17: Comparative translation of *Dhammapada* Verse 1 & 2**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation <sup>124</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Mano pubbangamā dhammā, Manosetthā manomayā Manasāce padutthēna bhāsativā karotivā Tato nam dukkhamanvēti Cakkhanva vahato padam</i>	<b>Mind</b> precedes all mental states. <b>Mind</b> is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure <b>mind</b> a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox	<b>Cognition</b> precedes all experience It predominates and even creates them With destructive <b>cognition</b> , if one speaks or acts stress will follow, as the carriage follows the drawing animal

<sup>124</sup> "Yamakavagga: Pairs" (Dhp 1&2), translated from the *Pāli* by Acharya Buddharakkhita. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.01.budd.html>

<i>Mano pubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā; Manasā ce pasannena, bhāsatī vā karoti vā; Tato nam sukhamanveti, chāyāva anapāyinī</i>	<b>Mind</b> precedes all mental states. <b>Mind</b> is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure <b>mind</b> a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow	<b>Cognition</b> precedes all experience It predominates and even creates them With constructive <b>cognition</b> , if one speaks or acts pleasure follows as the shadow follows the runner
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As discussed in Chapter 1, although Sigmund Freud thought that the emotions are inside trying to go out, the Buddha says that the mind is pure and the emotions/*tanhā* is polluting it. There was a time I was trying to understand this: how can that be? But gradually, I began to understand this because a new kind of psychology began called cognitive psychology. These psychologists started to point out that although we have all the organs necessary for emotions to arise in the body, they won't occur until cognition triggers them.

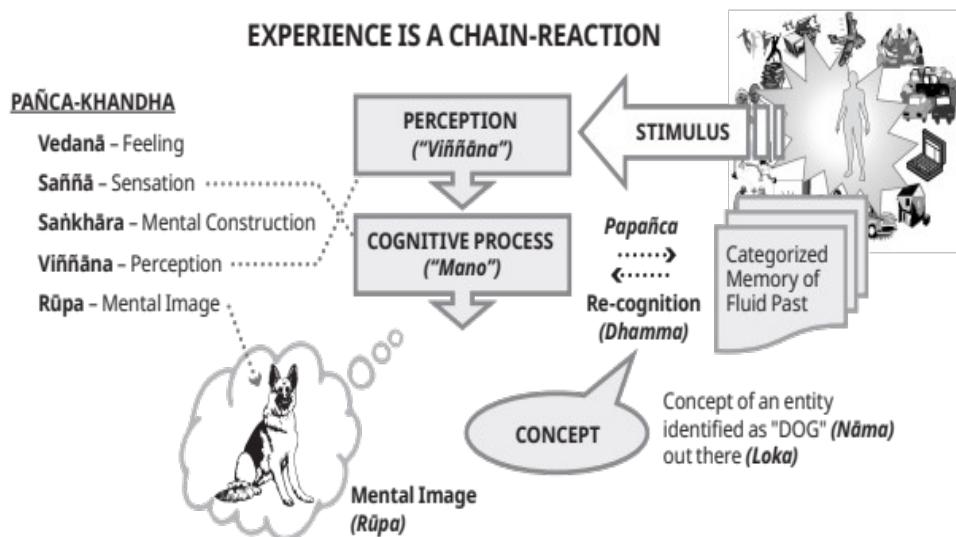
It's like dynamite. You can have the dynamite for a hundred years, but nothing will happen unless a spark or flame ignites it. Once ignited, then the dynamite will explode. In the same way, although we have the organs necessary for emotions to be aroused, there must be something to trigger them. Typically, we think it is the circumstances of the outside world that trigger our emotions. However, in this verse, the Buddha points out that the cognitive process or *mano* activates an emotion. Cognitive psychologists also believe that how the cognitive process interprets our circumstances leads to emotions, not events themselves.

We are just organisms like a machine. There are some machines called vending machines. You put money inside, press a button, and the product comes out. Similarly, in our body, when perception occurs, the reaction is not finished. Once you see or hear something, a message goes from that sense organ to the brain. The brain receives messages from the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the whole body. Then the brain puts all this information together and forms a concept. When forming the concept, the brain is not only using the data from the immediate present. It also gets data from memories about the past. The brain uses all this data to form a concept. Certain concepts formed in this way will trigger emotions.

If the interpretation of circumstances is at the base of all emotional upheavals, it is essential to realize that most of our interpretations are conditioned by our past experiences, particularly in childhood. The culture we are born into also influences some interpretations, while others are conditioned by the influences we grow up with. Whatever circumstances we face today are interpreted through past conditioning. Therefore, our present worries, feelings of inadequacy, frustrations, fears, and fantasies about the future are only the result of concepts based on past experiences. To take these concepts seriously is to create further emotional upsets.

Thus, it is according to the concept you form that emotion is aroused. If the cognitive process forms constructive concepts about what has been perceived through the senses, the rest of the chain reaction will proceed constructively. Emotion will not be aroused, and the mood will remain calm. But if the cognitive process gives a destructive meaning, emotion will be produced, and the rest of the chain reaction proceeds in the destructive direction. Therefore, the cognitive process or *mano* is the key to our experience, dominating our experience and creating our experience. This is the meaning of these two verses. We can illustrate the chain reaction process thus far with the following diagram:

#### DIAGRAM 9: Perception & Cognition



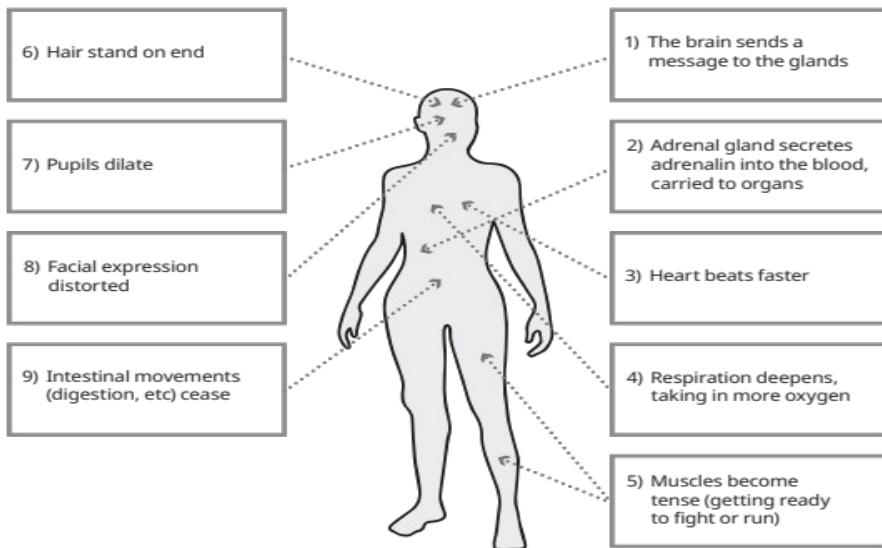
### **3. *Citta***

In this third stage of the chain reaction, depending on the interpretation given by the cognitive process, emotion may be aroused. In the last chapter, we described the three feelings experienced through the senses: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. These feeling tones also combine with the interpretations given by the cognitive process to create emotions. Thus, the emotional reaction also comes in three forms: desiring what has been cognized or interpreted as pleasant, hatred of what has been cognized as unpleasant, and experiencing a sense of existence of what has been cognized as neutral. This is the emotional or affective phase of the reaction.

The emotional reaction is not only mental. It is also physical. Hormones are secreted into the blood, and in response, the function of various organs of the body changes. Tensions in the muscles accompany these changes in the body. Take, for instance, the arousal of anger. When anger is aroused, a message from the brain goes through the sympathetic pathway to the adrenal gland, adrenalin (a hormone) is secreted into the blood, and the blood carries it to the whole body. Organs in the body begin to react in unusual ways depending on the hormone, preparing the body for action. In the case of anger, the heart beats faster, the breathing becomes heavier, muscles become tense, pupils dilate, the hair stands on end, blood rushes to the capillaries in the face, and muscles in the face contract to distort facial expression and digestion ceases.

This particular way the body reacts is commonly termed "the fight, flight, or freeze reaction." It is controlled by the amygdala, a part of the brain. The body is preparing to react to the events of the outside world. The behavior of the body during emotional arousal is not normal or healthy. It is an emergency reaction, which is not very healthy, but could be sometimes helpful in an emergency. However, if this arousal continues too long, it can be highly detrimental to the body.

**Diagram 10: The Fight, Flight, or Freeze Reaction**



The Buddha called this emotional part of the reaction *citta*, which is generally translated as the mind. *Citta* refers to the mood or temperament. In psychology, it is referred to as the affective process. Translating both *mano* and *citta* as mind distorts the meaning of these words which refer to different aspects of the mind. We discussed these two aspects in detail in Chapter 3.

The *citta* may be in a calm state or an aroused state. It is the arousal of the *citta* that the Buddha called *tanhā*. There are some problems with the translations, so it is essential to know the *Pāli* words. The word *tanhā* is usually translated as craving, but I say that craving is not the meaning of the word *tanhā*. I think *tanhā* means the emotional reaction or arousal. The Buddha didn't speak in English. I hope you know that. When I say that the English word is wrong and use a different word to translate, others try to quarrel with me. They say I am using the wrong words.

The Buddha described three types of *tanhā*, corresponding to the three types of emotional reactions described above<sup>125</sup>. *Kāma tanhā* is the emotional reaction that accompanies states experienced as pleasant. The Buddha also called this desire for a pleasant sense experience *lobha*. *Vibhava tanhā* is the emotional reaction that accompanies cognitive experiences that feel unpleasant. This dislike/hatred of unpleasant experiences is also called *dosa* by the Buddha. Normally, *vibhava tanhā*

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<sup>125</sup> MN 44

is interpreted as the craving to end rebirth or *samsāra*. In my view, this is a big mistake stemming misunderstanding of the word *bhava*, which is normally thought of as rebirth. Therefore, *vibhava* is said to be the craving to end rebirth. But the word *bhava* means existence. We have to understand that *tanhā* is the reaction to feelings experienced through the senses. That's why it's said *vedenā paccayā tanhā*<sup>126</sup>. We can see support for this view in the *Sammā ditṭhi Sutta* and the *Mahā Nidāna Sutta* where *tanhā* is defined slightly differently. There we see that *tanhā* is not related to rebirth but to our six senses. We see in the *Cūla vedalla Sutta* that *dosa* is the reaction to the unpleasant feeling. *Dosa* or *vibhava tanhā* is not just the craving to end rebirth, it is an emotional reaction against a sense experience. The emotional reaction is that you want the unpleasant thing to not exist. It is very important to understand this.

*Kāma tanhā* and *vibhava tanhā* are the two primary emotions, desire for the pleasant experience and hatred of the unpleasant experience. *Bhava tanhā* is the emotional reaction created by perceptions felt as neutral. We neither desire nor hate neutral experience but only feel that what is creating that sense experience exists. We also feel that a self exists in contrast to the object creating a neutral feeling. It is that neutral feeling that makes us feel that we exist. When we say 'I am existing,' we refer to the neutral feeling. We want to exist by experiencing the neutral sensation. We emotionally desire this sense of existence. This feeling of existence is a delusion, according to the Buddha. This delusional sense of existence created by the emotional reaction to a neutral sense experience is also called *moha* by the Buddha. This type of *tanhā* is also normally interpreted as the craving for rebirth or *samsāra*. This is also coming from the misunderstanding of the word *bhava*, which means existence, not rebirth. This word will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

We are attracted to the pleasant feeling. We want a pleasant feeling all the time. But can we have it? We can never have a pleasant feeling all the time. It comes and goes. Thus, our whole life is an effort to experience the pleasant feeling and keep it. But we cannot control it because it goes away and the unpleasant feeling comes, which we don't like and try to avoid. Our whole life is an effort to have more and more pleasant feelings and avoid unpleasant feelings altogether. But it can never be achieved, so we become unhappy. We don't get the pleasant feeling all the time, and we cannot avoid the unpleasant feeling.

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<sup>126</sup> DN 15

We want the neutral feeling to continue. That is, we want to exist, which is also not possible because we will die eventually. We don't like to die. This means we exist unhappily. Why? Because we are reacting to these feelings, we react to the pleasant feeling, we react to the unpleasant feeling, and we react to the neutral feeling. This reaction is an emotional reaction that the Buddha called *tanhā*. It's not just a craving. That reaction itself is suffering. Thus, we saw in the *Dhamma Cakka Pavattana Sutta* that the Buddha says:

**TABLE 18: Comparative translation of the cause of *Dukkha***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation <sup>127</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Idam kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayam ariyasaccam— yāyām tanhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratastrābhinandin ī, seyyathidam</i>	Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: It is this <b>craving</b> which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is:	This Renunciates is the supernormal reality of the arising of <i>Dukkha</i> : It is the recurring <b>emotional reaction</b> accompanied by pleasure and passion, finding pleasure everywhere. Namely:
<b>1. <i>kāma tanhā</i></b>	1. craving for sensual pleasures	1. The emotional reaction of sense pleasure
<b>2. <i>bhava tanhā</i></b>	2. craving for existence	2. The emotional reaction of existence
<b>3. <i>vibhava tanhā</i></b>	3. craving for extermination	3. The emotional reaction of non-existence

This is a critical statement. In this formulaic description of the cause of *dukkha*, *tanhā* is described as *ponobbhavikā*. Today the word *ponobbhavikā* is thought to mean leading to rebirth. This has resulted in the idea that *tanhā* leads to *dukkha* because it is the cause of rebirth and being born again and again means suffering. But I think this is a mistake. The prefix *pono* means again. *Bhavikā* means existence; it doesn't mean rebirth. *Tanhā* is described as *ponobbhavikā* because our emotional urges come into existence, again and again. There is no end to them. Reoccurring is a good translation of the word *ponobbhavikā*. Our emotions reoccur.

<sup>127</sup> *Dhammadakkapavattana Sutta*: Setting in motion the wheel of Dhamma (SN 56.11), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Sutta Central, 24 August 2022, <https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

For example, if we have a glass of water, it will not shake if appropriately placed. If you begin to shake it, it shakes. If you leave it alone, the shaking will stop. If you shake it, it will start to shake again. That shaking is not there all the time. The shaking is a thing that comes again and again. Similarly, *tanhā*, which is an emotional disturbance, is not present all the time. Our emotions calm down and then get disturbed again and again. It does not stop forever and is not disturbed all the time. Sigmund Freud used the word repetitive in his psychology to describe emotions. *Tanhā* is repetitive. It comes again and again. *Tanhā* is the emotional arousal or disturbance of the *citta*. The *citta* or affective part of the mind may be calm, or it may be disturbed again and again by the arousal of emotions.

*Tanhā* is also described as *nandirāgasahagatā* which means it is always accompanied by delight and passion. *Nandi* means delight or pleasure. *Rāga* means passion, and *sahagatā* means accompanied or endowed with. These two parts are present. For example, if you see something nice, the first thing that you do is to appreciate it. If I give you chocolate or ice cream, you will delight in it. When you take delight in it, the next thing is you are aroused with passion. You want more. These two parts are there in every emotional excitement. You start with delight or appreciation, followed by passion.

Finally, *tanhā* is also described as *tatratastrābhinandinī* which means you are not only emotionally aroused by one thing. When you see another thing, you begin to appreciate that also. *Tatratastrā* means everywhere, and *nandinī* means to delight in. For example, when a young man walks on the road and sees an attractive girl, he begins to be emotionally aroused by that. The boy starts to talk to the girl and becomes friendly with her. Then, the next day, he sees another girl and gets attracted to her. A person is emotionally aroused not only by one thing but by many things. When that happens, conflict arises. The first girl thinks, "Oh, this man is not only interested in me but interested in other girls also." Ultimately, they lose their friendship. All these problems come up because our emotions are not satisfied by or centered on one thing. We become interested in whatever we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch through our senses. *Tanhā* is a thing like that.

*Tanhā* is not only craving or desire. Hatred is also *tanhā*. All other emotions such as jealousy, fear, anxiety, worry, and regret are also *tanhā*. The desire for pleasant things is *kāma tanhā*. The desire for neutral things is *bhava tanhā*. *Bhava tanhā* means you are not attracted to or desiring things. You are just aware of its existence. You feel it is there, and you want it to be there. For example, with a white wall, you are not thinking in terms of its beauty, but you want it to be there or exist. *Vibhava*

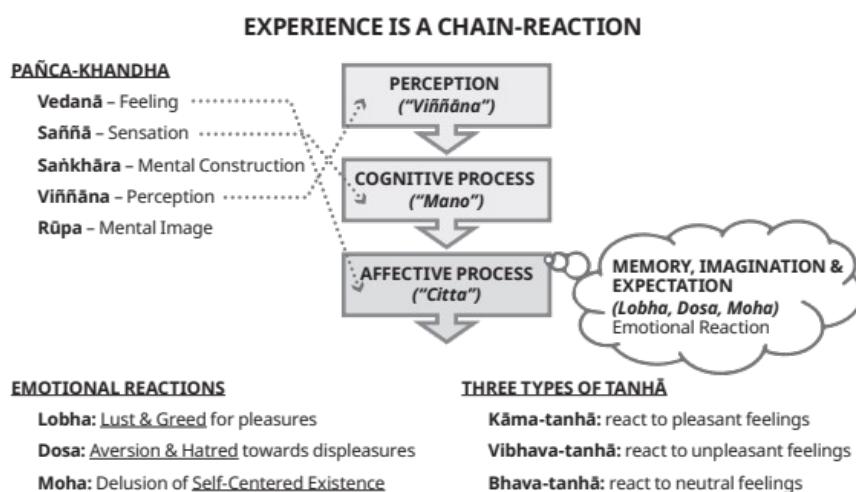
*tanhā* means you do not want it to be there. You want to get rid of the unpleasant things. That is hatred. *Tanhā* comes in these three forms. It is essential to know this and understand that *tanhā* is like the shaking of the water. The shaking is there, but it comes and goes. The dominant and destructive role the *citta* plays in our lives has been expressed in verse form by the Buddha. Here we also see the standard error of translating *citta* as mind, which distorts the meaning:

**TABLE 19: Comparative translation of *Citta Sutta* (SN 1.62)**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation <sup>128</sup>	Author's Translation
<i>Cittena nīyati loko</i>	The world is led around by <b>mind</b>	<b>Emotions</b> dominate the world
<i>Cittena parikassati</i>	By <b>mind</b> it's dragged here and there	<b>Emotions</b> entice us all
<i>Cittassa ekadhammassa</i>	<b>Mind</b> is the one thing that has	<b>Emotion</b> is that one thing
<i>Sabbeva vasamanvagūti</i>	All under its control	To which all are spellbound

We can summarize the above information as follows:

**DIAGRAM 11: Perception, Cognition & Affection**



<sup>128</sup> *Citta Sutta*: Mind (SN 1.62), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Sutta Central, 24 August 2022,

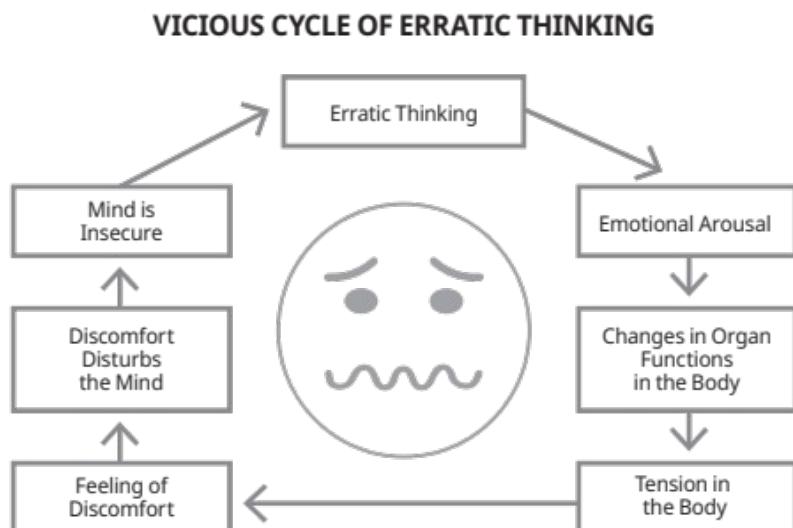
<https://suttacentral.net/sn1.62/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

#### 4. *Dukkha*

The fourth stage in the organism's reaction to the stimulation of the environment is the experience of *dukkha*. In chapter three, we discussed how emotional arousal is accompanied by muscle tension and discomfort in the body. The Buddha described this as *dukkha*, which is usually translated as suffering. But a better translation of *dukkha* is stress, which is a state where the mind is disturbed, and the body is tense and uncomfortable. It's a whole body, mental, and physical unpleasant condition. This state is often referred to as stress today.

Negative thoughts in our minds can produce emotional disturbances and physical tension. This makes us unhappy mentally and uncomfortable physically. This starts what I call the "vicious cycle of erratic thinking." The mind affects the body, and the body affects the mind. Negative thoughts cause emotional arousal, which brings about bodily reactions and tension caused by the hormones secreted. This tension causes discomfort, which disturbs the mind and tends to project negative images onto the mental screen, producing more negative thoughts. This, in turn, causes further emotional arousal, and we become victims of a vicious cycle.

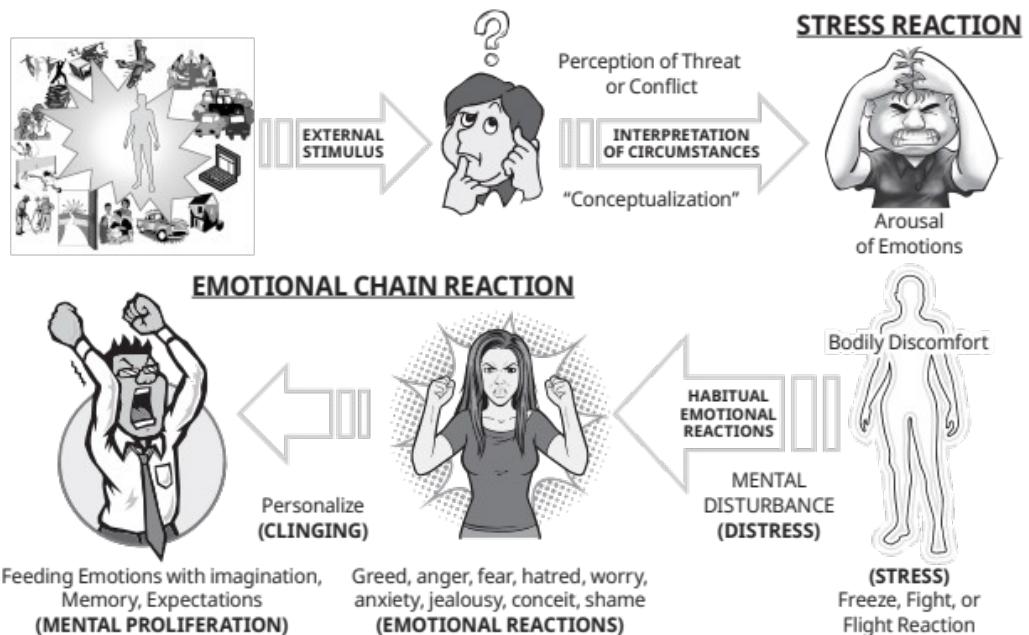
**Diagram 12:**



Some people think *dukkha* happens only in third-world countries with poverty, starvation, and other problems. That is not the only type of *dukkha* we are

considering here. *Dukkha* is what we experience every day, all the time, because of tensions caused by our emotions. That is why emotional urges are said to be the cause of *dukkha* because they are causing this tension and discomfort in the body. We can illustrate the chain reaction up to this point as follows:

**DIAGRAM 13: *Dukkha***



## 5. *Cetanā*

In the fifth stage of the reaction, human beings have a choice. We saw in chapter three that we usually fall into two extremes when dealing with emotions and the tension and discomfort that accompanies them. We often react unconsciously by repressing the emotion or react unconsciously by expressing the emotion. But there is also a third option: to consciously respond to our circumstances instead of unconsciously reacting to them. The decision can be to suppress the tension or allow the emotional action by releasing the tension unconsciously or take an alternate conscious, calm, and rational action. This decision about how to express emotions in action is called *cetanā*, which determines our actions or *kamma*. In the Buddha's words, "*cetanāham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi*,"<sup>129</sup> means, "Renunciates,

<sup>129</sup> AN 6.63

I declare, *kamma* is the decision to act." The word *cetanā* is usually translated as volition, but a better word would be decision. The words *citta* and *cetanā* are related. *Cetanā* means how we decide to deal with the emotional arousal of the *citta*. Decisions dealing with our emotional impulses are *cetanā*.

## **6. Kamma & 7. Vipāka**

The sixth stage in the reaction is the active part of the reaction where the action decided upon is performed. The word *kamma* means action, and *vipāka* means the consequence or result of the action. Depending on the decision made, the action may release the tension produced by the emotions. This is usually done by obtaining what is desired, getting rid of what is hated, or running away from what is feared. When the tension is released in action, a feeling of comfort and happiness results.

The human being can delay the action (*kamma*), unlike animals, to get sufficient time to decide what to do in a given situation. If the decision is to act emotionally, it becomes a destructive action (*akusala kamma*) with negative consequences. Since we are partly animals, we are often carried away by emotions, and when we are carried away by emotions, we begin to create conflict with other people. That is why we hurt others, steal or rob, have improper sexual behavior, tell lies, use foul language, and even take intoxicants that make us mad in certain ways. We have to find a way of controlling this behavior. All religions are talking about this. However, if the decision is to respond rationally, it becomes a constructive action (*kusalā kamma*) with positive consequences. The decision to act rationally is due to the interference of the emotional process (*citta*) by the rational or cognitive function (*mano*). The Buddha has described ten types of *kusalā kamma* and ten types of *akusala kamma* in the *Sammā ditthi Sutta*.

Although the biological mechanism of releasing tension in action is helpful to animals and our primitive ancestors, today, we cannot release our tensions in the same way. This is partly due to civilization and the standards of acceptable behavior expected of us by society. For example, when we become angry with someone, we can't kill, fight or abuse them. If it's your boss, you can't do anything! So, the tension remains and is not released. You may release the tension by quarreling with your husband, wife, or children when you go home. Sometimes the tension cannot be adequately released, and even if you release it with someone else, you still haven't released it with your boss. The tension therefore remains. These tensions get built up one upon the other. New tensions come up and are never released properly. The tension also remains if we control our behavior through the five precepts. This

is the problem referred to as stress today. Even if we react by releasing our tensions temporarily, new tensions arise because we react all the time to the ever-changing difficulties and challenges in life. So, the problem is our reaction.

This emotional chain reaction has been helpful to animals and primitive human beings during evolution. Emotions have been beneficial for animals in finding food or shelter, defending against threats, reproduction, and safety and security. However, human beings have a better tool for that purpose: intelligence or the *mano* part of the mind. The faculty of reasoning and thinking developed later in evolution with the coming of the fully developed forebrain or the cerebrum in the human being. We don't need emotions (*tanhā*) when the cognitive process (*mano*) functions correctly. The emotions are primitive. Human beings can use reason.

Yet, human beings are dominated by emotions most of the time. As a result, we are not free from crime, violence, arrogance, war, insanity, and all the other evils that threaten humankind. All these evils occur despite the modern advancements in science and technology, which are rooted in the intellect. This means modern man's intelligence has become the slave of emotions.

Blind emotions are dominating our lives. As children, we are mainly dominated by emotions. As we grow up into adulthood, we begin to think more intelligently, but this intelligence is primarily used to gratify our emotions rather than guide our emotions. As adults, even though our intelligence decides what is right and wrong, we tend to be carried away by our emotions rather than by our intelligent thoughts when our emotions are intense. This dominance of emotions prevents us from acting all the time rationally. This is how we often break the five precepts, which we value very much when emotions dominate us. We even repent later for what we have done inadvertently and blame ourselves for our negligence.

This is why Buddhist meditation practice makes the intellect dominate the mind rather than the emotions. Intelligence should guide one's life rather than emotions. Emotions should be subordinate to intellect. Some psychologists like Daniel Goleman have begun to speak of "emotional intelligence,"<sup>130</sup> which does not mean that emotions have the intelligence or can think at all. Emotions are blind. Only the intellect can think. Emotional intelligence merely implies that emotions are being guided by the intellect, putting emotions under its control.

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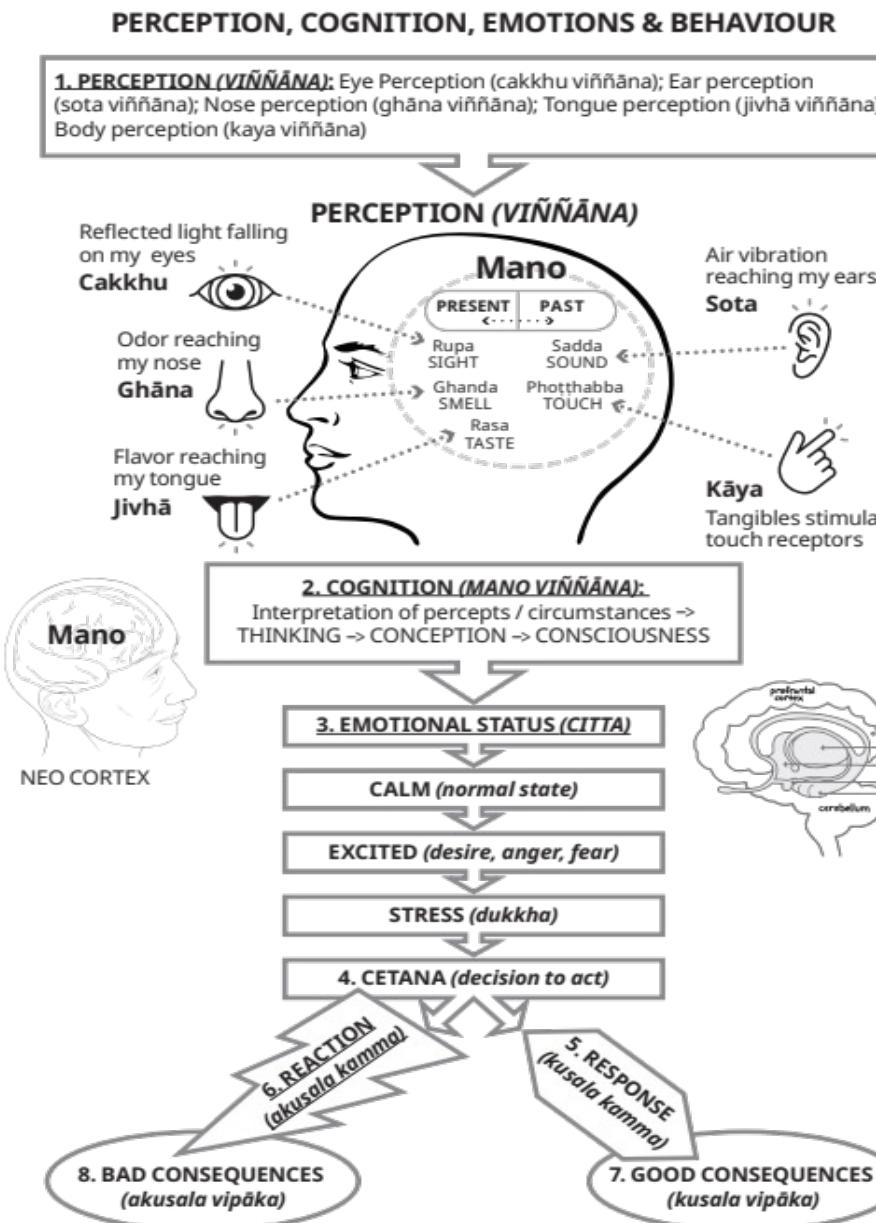
<sup>130</sup> Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ.* (Bantam Book:1995)

The chain reaction described in this chapter leading to *dukkha* has been further broken down and analyzed by the Buddha into twelve processes. These twelve processes are described in the famous formula called *paticca samuppāda*. It is vital to understand *paticca samuppāda* to understand *tanhā* and the cause of *dukkha*. It is to this task we turn to in the next chapter.

## SUMMARY

The chain reaction of the organism to the environment we have been describing above can be summarized and illustrated in diagram form as follows:

**Diagram 14: Reaction of the organism to the environment**



## **POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS**

Some may object to this by saying that we need love or other positive emotions. But there are no positive emotions because all emotions are self-centered, unstable, temporary, and triggered by external circumstances. Real love becomes possible only when the mind is free of self-centered emotions. It is not subject to change when circumstances change. In his book, *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm distinguishes between the three kinds of love—*eros*, *philia*, and *agape*<sup>131</sup>. *Eros* is sexual love. *Philia* is family love between parents and children or siblings. *Agape* is selfless love. As Jesus says, "Love thy neighbor as thy self."<sup>132</sup> So did the Buddha speak of *mettā*, the universal benevolence, which is not an emotion because all emotions are self-centered. True love is an interest in the welfare of others without making any distinction between oneself and others. *Mettā* is called a divine mental state (*Brahma vihāra*). *Brahma* is a term for divinity. *Vihāra* means dwelling. Therefore, *mettā* is a divine dwelling. In other words, this is the love, which is called God. This is selfless love. When human beings can cultivate this kind of love, they become divine, according to Buddhist thinking.

### **Questions and Answers**

**Q:** *Cetanā* or decision or choice, is it emotion or without emotion?

**A:** Here, our choice is between emotional action and rational action. We have to choose between emotion and reason. The thinking faculty has to come in and interfere with the emotional action. If you are angry and want to fight, the thinking part should go in and say no, don't fight. Because if you fight with your boss, the boss can chase you out. So, you stop fighting. That is the rational action. It's a choice like that.

**Q:** You said *cetanā* has to be conscious. If *cetanā* is conscious, that means *cetanā* is good *kamma* or wholesome actions? So *cetanā* is wholesome, can I say that?

**A:** No, *cetanā* is a decision. You see, *cetanā* is a decision either to act angrily or rationally. *Cetanā* is not always rational. You might decide I will kill that man. That is the wrong *cetanā*, but it can be done consciously and unconsciously. Bad *cetanā* leads to bad action, not good action.

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<sup>131</sup> Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. (Harper and Brothers: 1956)

<sup>132</sup> Matthew 22:39

**Q:** Is *cetanā* coming from your thinking part?

**A:** Yes, the *cetanā* is coming from the thinking part. The thinking part can be both conscious and unconscious. Although you consciously decide, you give in to the anger if the anger is very great. There is an interesting story that happened in Sri Lanka when I was young. There was a man who was a carpenter. He was a poor. His main job was cutting trees.

In this village, there was another man who wanted to dominate everyone. He drank and did all kinds of nasty things. The villagers were frightened of him. On the other hand, the carpenter was a very well-behaved, kind man. He had planted some vegetables in his garden, and the other man came and stole some of these vegetables. The owner of the garden, even though he was a very good man, became very angry. He took a knife and went straight to the thief's house and cut the thief's neck. And then he began saying: "I don't care about my own life. At least my children can live in peace now." He thought he was sacrificing himself for his children or other innocent people because this thief created problems for the whole village.

The carpenter went straight to the police station and made a full confession. He was condemned to imprisonment for life. But actually, he was not a criminal most of the time. The other man was the real criminal. So, things like that happen. That means even if you use your thinking or reasoning part, you can still make wrong decisions. It depends on what other people think. One person might think that is the right decision. Others may disagree.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *PĀTICCA SAMUPPĀDA*

#### **PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED**

To completely fathom the cause of *dukkha*, it is necessary to comprehend the twelve-step formula called *pātīcca samuppāda*, which is typically translated as dependent origination. This is the dazzling opus of the Buddha's dispensation.

Thus, however, the degree of difficulty of fully understanding this doctrine is high. The depth of wisdom contained in this formula reflects the degree of misunderstanding and mistranslation. The difficulty of explaining *pātīcca samuppāda* is one of two reasons the Buddha was reluctant to commence his ministry.

Today, there are numerous interpretations of this doctrine among the various schools of Buddhism. The traditional interpretation in the *Theravāda* school, based on the commentaries is sometimes known as the “three lives interpretation”. This is because the twelve links of the formula are said to described how rebirth takes places over the past, present and future lives. Thus, the process of rebirth is seen as the cause of *dukkha* because to be born again and again leads to suffering.

However, over the last 60 years there have been several notable people who have questioned this view, including the author. These teachers began to doubt the temporal approach to understanding this formula and instead argued for a psychological interpretation. They saw the formula as the analysis of how the mental process creates suffering each moment of our lives. It was seen as description of the functioning of our present experience, rather than the process of rebirth. If discovering *pātīcca samuppāda* is the Buddha's greatest achievement, the penetrative interpretation presented by the author in this chapter also represents his supreme contribution towards discovering the Buddha's teachings before sectarian divisions led to the distortion of his message.

## THE BUDDHA'S THEORY OF GENESIS

As I heard:

Once, the Holy One was sojourning among the *Kurus* at *Kammassa dhamma*, a village of the *Kurus*. Then the Venerable *Ananda* visited the Holy One, and paying obeisance, sat on aside. Having done so, he addressed the Holy One:

'Wonderful Holy One, Marvelous Holy One, this sequence of antecedents (*paṭicca samuppāda*) although it appears so profound, it is very clear to me.'

'Say not so *Ānanda*, say not so *Ānanda*. The sequence of antecedents not only appears to be profound, it is also extremely profound. Because of not knowing, not comprehending this profound teaching, common people remain confined like in a bird's nest and fettered like a ball of string, unable to escape falling into painful purgatory.'

Quote from *Maha Nidana Sutta* (DN 15) – The Great Discourse on Genesis

## COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS

It is unfortunate that since the first century after the Buddha, the pure teachings of the Buddha were distorted due to pollution by foreign concepts. Since then, his followers began to emphasize *kamma* and rebirth rather than the Fourfold Supernormal Reality. The Buddha himself foretold this degeneration of the teachings when he said: "In the future, my followers will speak about my lower level teachings rather than my higher teachings like emptiness (*suññatā*)."<sup>133</sup> The *Mahāyānists* took over this idea of emptiness, but they could not fully comprehend the meaning of emptiness. Two well-known thinkers attempted to explain *suññatā*, but they differed. They were *Nāgārjuna*, the analyst, and *Asaṅga*, the idealist.

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<sup>133</sup> SN 20.7

What appears today in the modern world as Buddhism: whether *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, *Vajirayāna*, Pure-land, or *Zen* are adulterated forms of the original teaching of the Buddha. Fortunately, some of these schools preserved the authentic teaching in the *Sutta Piṭaka/ Āgamas* and the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. First in memory and later in writing. Therefore, the original teaching of the Buddha is not entirely lost. It is available at least in written form in the *Suttas/Āgamas* preserved by the modern Buddhist schools, even though their meaning may not be fully comprehended. A person who studies the *Suttas* carefully both in theory and practice, may sometimes understand, at least to a workable degree, the profound teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha has said: "One who sees me sees the *Dhamma*, and one who sees the *Dhamma* sees me."<sup>134</sup> He has also said: "One who sees the *Dhamma* sees *paticca samuppāda*," and one who sees the *paticca samuppāda* sees the *Dhamma*.<sup>135</sup> We may conclude that one who sees the Buddha sees *paticca samuppāda* and vice versa. This could be far better than looking at a golden image of the Buddha. What is great about the Buddha is not his body but his mind. *Paticca samuppāda* represents his mind. This means that the entire teaching of the Buddha and the Buddha himself is founded in the *paticca samuppāda*.

We are equipped today with the *paticca samuppāda* in the words of the Buddha. Today many versions are attempting to explain this doctrine. There are traditional explanations of the *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and the *Vajirayāna* schools of Buddhism. There are also two popular versions: one given by a Western scholar-monk called Venerable *Ñānavīra*<sup>136</sup> and an interesting version of a famous monk in Thailand, Venerable *Buddhadāsa*<sup>137</sup>. There are also other interpretations of scholars well known and unknown. Anyone interested could go into a comparative study of these different explanations of the words of the Buddha.

## THE PROTO-BUDDHIST APPROACH

However, what we offer in this book is only the explanation we use in our Proto-Buddhist system. This is not something to be blindly believed in, but something the meditator will discover as one continues on the meditative path given in this book. It is important to note that *paticca samuppāda*, or the concurrence of logical

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<sup>134</sup> SN 22.87

<sup>135</sup> MN 28

<sup>136</sup> See: *Ñānavīra Thera. Notes on Dhamma 1960-65.* (Path Press Publications: 2009)

<sup>137</sup> See: *Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Paticca samuppāda: Practical Dependant Origination.* (Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives, 2020).

antecedents, is a description of the experience of the Buddha after his awakening from the dream of existence. It also describes how the mental process creates the world, the self, and the problem of existence that results. It is not a description of how rebirth occurs, as the traditional commentators make us believe. The tradition holds that our problem is rebirth, but the *Suttas* point out that the real problem is the concept and feeling of existence, which is a delusion. The Buddha has described *Nibbāna* not as the ending of rebirth but as the ending of the delusion of existence<sup>138</sup>. This will be further explained in the next chapter.

In the *Sabbāsava Sutta*<sup>139</sup> (Appendix 1), the Buddha says that if a person begins to think in terms of *kamma* and rebirth, they will never be able to attain *Nibbāna*. The genuine follower of the Buddha thinks only of suffering, its cause, its end, and the way to its end, without thinking of a self that suffers. This directs them to *Nibbāna*.

Further, the teaching of the Buddha is called *akālika*<sup>140</sup>, which means "not-temporal" because it is independent of time and space. *Paṭicca samuppāda* is an explanation of how time and space come into being. Time and space are dependent on the *paṭicca samuppāda*, not vice versa. As we have discussed in previous chapters, *dhamma* means experience, or even better, it is the process of experiencing. Experience is the perceptual and conceptual process of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, and feeling. The concept of existence is a product of experience, and therefore experience precedes existence. To exist is to occupy space and time. Thus, space and time are products of experience.

Critics imagine that the Buddha was ignorant of how the world, including time and space, has come into being. In *paṭicca samuppāda*, he reveals how each individual creates the world by oneself and for oneself. In short, we are living in a world of our creation. Each one's world is separate from others, although we may think we live in an external world common to all, created by an external agent. All human beings are the creators of their world. Each one makes one's world. The world they create is similar because of their mental processes' similar structure and functioning. They can communicate with others through language and share their experience with others. The result of this unconscious process of creating a world and a self through cognition and affection is that it creates the problem of existence, which is the miserable insecurity of life, due to the endless ways the self clashes with the world. The world is never the way the self wants it to be, and stress is the result.

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<sup>138</sup> SN 12.68

<sup>139</sup> MN 2

<sup>140</sup> DN 16

## **THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT, DETERMINISM & BUDDHISM**

The human enterprise called modern science took root in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with famous scientists such as Charles Darwin, Marie Curie, Galileo Galilee, Isaac Newton, later Albert Einstein, and many others. With the arrival of scientific thinking, a fundamental new law came to be known. It is called determinism<sup>141</sup>. This law states that the necessary conditions determine every natural event. When this fact came to be known to the educated intelligentsia of Western civilization, they began to lose faith in their religious dogmas. They thought that if every event occurred due to the necessary conditions, it could not happen due to the whims and fancies of a supernatural creator. Some said: "God is dead."<sup>142</sup> They also realized that determinism meant that humankind had the power to manipulate nature according to its whims by studying the laws of nature. This period from 1650 to 1770 came to be known as the Age of Enlightenment<sup>143</sup>.

As a result of this optimistic and revolutionary change of thought, many political revolutions took place, such as the French, British, and Marxist revolutions. This means human thinking changed radically. Theistic thinking changed to humanistic thinking. When people became sick, they did not run to the priest or church anymore. Instead, they sought help from doctors and hospitals. They trusted natural human intelligence more than the supernatural power of God. In ancient times, religion did have tremendous power to control humanity. People obeyed the commandments of God out of fear or favor. Religion lost the great power it had over the lives of people. This power was taken over by science.

Some erudite observers who recognized this state of affairs began to express their grief about it. Some even began to establish voluntary organizations to revert this trend. A few people started to seek help from Eastern religions, which they supposed were founded on more meaningful premises acceptable to scientific thinking. In so doing, some discovered Buddhism. They found in Buddhism what they thought was reasonable. Recently many scientists have even begun to communicate with the *Dalai Lama* and start experimenting on meditating Buddhist

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<sup>141</sup> Determinism. (2023, October 12). In Wikipedia.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinism>

<sup>142</sup> God is dead. (2023, October 10). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_is\\_dead](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_is_dead)

<sup>143</sup> Age of Enlightenment. (2023, October 20). In Wikipedia.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age\\_of\\_Enlightenment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment)

monks. Some have even started to compare Buddhist philosophy with Western psychology, and they have seen a kind of introspective psychology in Buddhism.

Some have even surmised that this humanistic revolution had occurred in Asia twenty-five centuries earlier. They saw that a special Prince was born into a rich royal family during the fifth century BC in India. Astrologers predicted that he would either become a global ruler or renounce the world to solve the problem of existence. Although his father made significant attempts to prevent him from renouncing the royal future as predicted, he renounced all worldly life. This account is the well-known story of Prince *Siddhartha Gotama*, who became the Buddha. Buddhists believe that he did wonderfully solve the problem of existence.

It is imperative to understand that when we say I take refuge in the Buddha, that doesn't mean that we are taking refuge in the supernatural power of a God. The Buddha is not a God like that. Buddha is talking about taking refuge in human intelligence. The Buddha is a human being who has risen to the ultimate level. When we take refuge, we say:

*Buddhañ saranañ gacchāmi* - I go for refuge in the Buddha

*Dhammañ saranañ gacchāmi* - I go for refuge in the teaching

*Saṅghañ saranañ gacchāmi* - I go for refuge in those who carry the message

Therefore, taking refuge in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and the *Saṅgha* is to take shelter in human intelligence. It is like taking refuge in science. To take refuge in science is to take refuge in human intelligence. Taking refuge in human intelligence is to take refuge in this fundamental fact called determinism.

Buddhists also believe that the Buddha brought the message of determinism to the world long before it came to the West. It came under the name *paticca samuppāda*. When this principle of determinism was understood in India, many intelligent people lost faith in theistic religious dogmas and absorbed the humanistic teachings of the Buddha. Those who have heard about *Upatissa* and *Kolitha*, who became the chief disciples of the Buddha, will remember this fact. They heard from Ven. Assaji, an emancipated disciple of the Buddha, the statement: "How everything arises dependent on conditions, the Realized One revealed. How they end, when the conditions are absent, that too the Great Sage declared" (*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā*

*tesaṇ hetuṇ Tathāgato āha, tesaṇ ca yo nirodho evan vādi Mahā Samano)*<sup>144</sup>. The moment they heard this, they understood and were converted.

Modern science has won the day, today, in conquering nature. It has even created nuclear bombs that can destroy the entire planet. Are we happy now? People are in fear of nuclear war and environmental catastrophe. In attempting to kill their enemies, in anger or fear, people will be killing themselves as well. Most inventions of science today are made to gratify human emotional needs. Everyone today talks about peace and happiness, but the world is full of crime, war, terrorism, and environmental degradation. They all question why, but do they find a sensible answer? A person asked this question from the Buddha. The Buddha answered: "It was the human emotions (*tanhā*) that were responsible for this problem."<sup>145</sup>

The Buddha did not use this law to conquer nature. He used this law to transform the subjective mental nature and solve the problem of existence. This concurrence of antecedents described by the Buddha is more than mere determinism, which points to the fact that things happen due to the necessary conditions.

## **THE PROTO-BUDDHIST INTERPRETATION OF PATICCA SAMUPPĀDA**

The term *paticca samuppāda* has the same meaning as determinism, though it is commonly translated as "dependent origination." However, when translated more precisely, it means the concurrence of antecedents (*paticca* = antecedent; *samuppāda* = concurrence). The prefix *sam* in the word *samuppāda* means together, *uppāda* means arising. This means that the twelve factors in the formula arise together, not over three lives as commonly thought. These terms are carefully chosen by the Buddha and we should pay attention to them.

### **Types of Antecedents**

The term antecedent means an event that occurs before another event, on which the latter event depends. The concurrence means it is simultaneous. The Buddha defines it as: "When the conditions precede it comes into being; when the conditions are absent it ceases to be" (*iti imasmīm sati idam hoti, imassuppādā idam uppajjati; imasmīm asati idam na hoti, imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*)."<sup>146</sup> This is an interesting statement because if one event occurs before another event, how can it happen simultaneously? Fortunately, this is comprehensible in the modern age of

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<sup>144</sup> Vin, Mv 1.23.1-10

<sup>145</sup> SN 1.62

<sup>146</sup> SN 12.61

science. Let's think of when I hear someone speak, nothing passes from that person to me, even though I feel it does. Even if it is a telephone call from a distant land, this is so. Radio communication and television work similarly. It is a series of movements, one coming after another. All occur simultaneously.

Although it is a series of functions linear in time and space, it co-occurs. Therefore, it needs to be presented in a structural form. The word antecedent means happening one after another, while the word concurrence means happening simultaneously. There are three types of antecedents:

1. **Temporal antecedent:** This is where the antecedents come one after another in time. For example, a series of sounds from repeated tapping on a table. Each sound comes one after the other in time.
2. **Spatial antecedent:** This is where the antecedents come one after the other in space. For example, a row of books on a shelf. Each book comes one after the other, in space.
3. **Logical antecedent:** This is where the antecedents come one after, not in time or space but logically. For example, a numeral series like 1,2,3,4. Each number comes logically after the other but is not related to time or space.

The antecedent in the formula of *paticca samuppāda* is logical and therefore independent of space and time. Concurrence of antecedents describes how things come to be (*yatā bhutan pajānāti*<sup>147</sup>), including how the world and the self come to be based on a series of antecedents which are subjective mental processes. This process brings about an awareness of the world and the self. This means the world we are aware of is the product of a subjective mental process rather than the independent existence of objective reality. In existential terminology, it is an essence without an existence, where existence denotes that it is, and essence denotes what it is. In Kantian terminology, the world and self are phenomena without noumena. In still another way of speaking, the world and self are appearances.

Therefore, *paticca samuppāda* is a natural mental process by which the world and the self come into being, along with *dukkha* or the miserable insecurity of life. This is a series of logical antecedents that take place simultaneously, all at the same time. This is why I have translated it as the concurrence of antecedents. Today, modern scientists know that all kinds of transmission, telephonic, telegraphic, radio, television, etc., is a concurrence of antecedence. It is a series of movements, one

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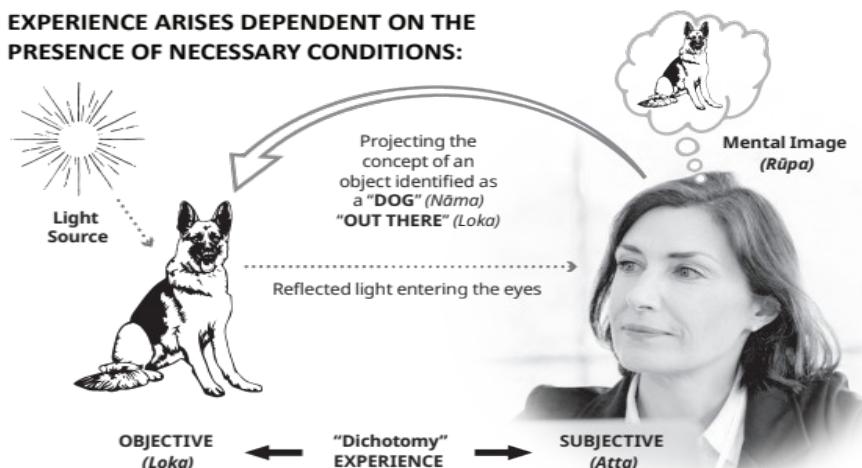
<sup>147</sup> SN 22.5

coming after another simultaneously. This is why we can hear by telephone or see on TV what is happening elsewhere at the same time.

### Structure of Experience

To understand the interpretation of *paticca samuppāda* presented in this chapter, it is essential first to know that we feel the subject (self), object (world), and experience, as illustrated below:

**DIAGRAM 15: Structure of Experience**



Experience is dichotomous. It is divided into two parts: subjective and objective. The subjective part we tend to personalize as mine and the objective component is alienated as other. Personalization creates a personal self or personality separate from the alienated external world. This dichotomy becomes the foundation for an emotional relationship between the subjective self and the objective world.

What we call matter is an objective experience. Matter is perceived as solids and liquids. Energy is perceived as heat and motion. What we call the mind is a subjective experience. What I call "I," "me," "mine," or "self" are subjective, personal experiences. What I call the world, matter, energy, people, animals, plants, or inanimate objects are objective experiences.

We usually think that the subject/self and the object/world exist first, and the subject meets the object, resulting in the subject experiencing the object through the senses. But this is not what happens. The subject and the object are products of the

sensory experience. First, the sense experience comes into being due to the presence of the necessary conditions; the subject and the object lie within this sense experience. We are conscious of a world of space and time. We think we exist in this world. But "we" and the "world" are products of sense experience.

Even when we think there is something outside our experience, that something outside is also an inference or concept. If something outside corresponds with the mental image we perceive, we can only say that the object is changing all the time. If it is changing, it has no constant identity. The unchanging entity we think of is only a concept in our mind. The mind creates all such static entities by combining the past, present, future, and spatial dimensions. Behind what we experience as static entities are only dynamic processes that cannot be identified as entities.

This is not an idealistic position. It is incorrect to state that the world is a concept in our mind, and therefore the mind is the only reality. Even the mind is a product of experience. This does not mean that experience is the truth either. It is also incorrect to say that what experience gives us is the truth. We can only state that experience is all that we can talk about. What experience gives is only an appearance, not truth. What appears is what people call reality. To be truthful, we must call an experience an experience and not the truth. In other words, we can be truthful, but we cannot speak of an absolute truth. Therefore, appearance and the process of appearing, which we call experience, is all we have. It is neither true nor false.

What we call the concurrence of logical antecedents is, therefore, nothing but an account of the process by which we experience the objective world and the subjective self. It is how the Buddha saw the genesis of the common reality perceived by humankind. It is the process of experiencing the world and the self and the resulting suffering (*Eva metassa kevalassa dukkhakkandassa samudayo hoti*)<sup>148</sup>. It also points the way out of suffering (*Eva metassa kevalassa dukkhakkandassa nirodo hoti*)<sup>149</sup>. Suffering is the relationship between the self and the world. It also points out that the world we are aware of and the self we are aware of is only a dream. We can awaken from this dream, and thereby both self and the world can disappear. What we experience then will only be the experience – *DHAMMA*.

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<sup>148</sup> DN 15

<sup>149</sup> DN 15

## The 12 Antecedents of *Paticca Samuppāda*

This functional description of experience is a unique formulation of the Buddha. It lays down topographically a series of logical antecedents independent of time or space. The purpose of this description is to show how the experience of the existence of the self and the world becomes manifest through the perceptual, cognitive, and affective mental processes. Space and time are products of this mental process. The experience of self in the world depends on the presence of necessary conditions, and it ceases with the absence of those conditions.

The *paticca samuppāda* formula found in the *Suttas* is: “*Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇam, viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpam, nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṁ, saḷāyatanaṇapaccayā phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā, taṇhāpaccayā upādānam, upādāṇapaccayā bhavo, bhavapaccayā jāti, jātipaccayā jarāmarañam sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti*”<sup>150</sup>

**TABLE 20: Comparative translation of the *paticca samuppāda* formula**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<b>1. <i>avijjā</i></b>	Ignorance	Unconsciousness
<b>2. <i>sankhāra</i></b>	Formations/Choices/ <i>Kamma</i>	Mental construction
<b>3. <i>viññāna</i></b>	Rebirth linking consciousness	Perception
<b>4. <i>nāma/rūpa</i></b>	Mentality/Materiality	Name/Image
<b>5. <i>saḷāyatana</i></b>	Six sense bases	Six sense fields
<b>6. <i>phassa</i></b>	Contact	Objective consciousness
<b>7. <i>vedanā</i></b>	Feeling	Feeling
<b>8. <i>taṇhā</i></b>	Craving	Emotional reaction
<b>9. <i>upādāna</i></b>	Clinging	Personalization
<b>10. <i>bhava</i></b>	Becoming	Existence
<b>11. <i>jāti</i></b>	Birth/ Rebirth	Birth
<b>12. <i>jarā marañā</i></b>	Ageing & Death	Ageing & Death

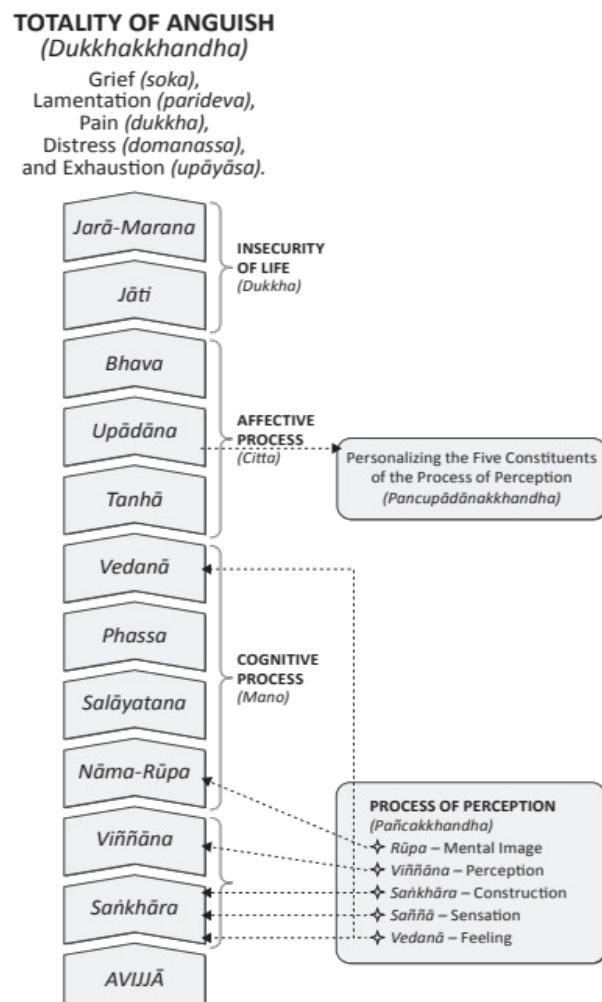
To fully comprehend the interpretation of this formula presented in this chapter, we have to recall that in the last chapter, we described how the organism reacts to stimulation by the environment and how by stages this unconscious reaction leads to discomfort or *dukkha*. In particular, we described the three stages of this reaction

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<sup>150</sup> MN 38

that precede *dukkha* as *viññana* (perception), *mano* (cognition), and *citta* (affection). We explained how the arousal of the *citta* or *tanhā* was creating our stress and distress, which was the fourth stage in the reaction. In our view, it is nothing but these same four stages of the organism's reaction to stimulation by the environment that are being further broken down and analyzed into twelve steps in this *paticca samuppāda* formula. It may be helpful to illustrate this in diagram form as follows:

**Diagram 16: The reaction that leads to *dukkha***



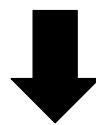
Concurrence of antecedents, therefore, consists of three sequential processes: the perceptual, the cognitive, and the affective. The outcome of this chain reaction is

*dukkha*. It starts with the perceptual process that begins unconsciously (*avijjā*) with mental construction (*sankhāra*), which leads to perception (*viññāna*). This is followed by the cognitive process, which starts with name/image (*nāma/rūpa*) and ends with the consciousness of the objective world (*phassa*). This is followed by the affective process that begins with feeling (*vedanā*) and ends with the consciousness of a self who suffers birth, aging, and death (*jati, jarā, marana*) or *dukkha*. We have been discussing these key terms and concepts in the previous chapters. This sequence of three mental chain reactions resulting in *dukkha* is further explained below:

### The process of perception (*viññāna*):

1

**UNCONSCIOUSNESS (*avijjā*)** - Antecedental concurrence, the process that creates an existence of a self and the world, begins from a state of unconsciousness. That is, it is not something we do consciously and with awareness. It merely happens to us quite unconsciously due to the presence of the necessary conditions. Traditionally, *avijjā* is translated as ignorance and defined as ignorance in our past life which generates rebirth. In Proto-Buddhism, we understand it as unconsciousness of how the mental process creates *dukkha* and unconsciousness of how to overcome this problem.



2

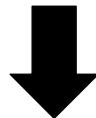
**MENTAL CONSTRUCTION (*sankhāra*)** – Beginning from a state of unconsciousness, the mental process begins construction (*sankhāra*). The first process to arise when sense organs are stimulated by the environment is sensations and their feeling tone. The building materials used by the construction process are these feelings (*vedanā*) and sensations (*saññā*). Sensations (*saññā*) in the form of colors, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches become the building material for the world. The images that we call the world are constructed out of these sensations. Feelings (*vedanā*) become the building material for the self. The Buddha pointed out that construction is of three kinds<sup>151</sup>:

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<sup>151</sup> MN 44

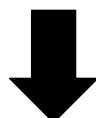
- (1) Affective construction (*citta saṅkhāra*): feeling and sensation (*vedanā-saññā*)
- (2) Verbal construction (*vacī saṅkhāra*): inquiry and inference (*vitakka-vicāra*)
- (3) Physical construction (*kāya saṅkhāra*): breathing in and out (*assāsa-passāsa*)

These three processes construct images. The feelings and sensations are like the bricks that build a wall (*citta saṅkhāra*). Objects are created using questions and answers such as: What is this? This is a tree, or this is a dog, or this is a man. This type of concept formation is called *vacī saṅkhāra* (verbal construction). The physical energy for this construction activity is obtained from breathing (*kāya saṅkhāra*). Traditionally, *saṅkhāra* is translated as formations and defined as physical, verbal, and mental *kamma*. However, in the discussion of the *Cula Vedalla Sutta* in chapter four we argued this was incorrect.



**3**

**PERCEPTION (*viññāna*)** - Perception is the recognition of the images constructed to form the world and their relationships. This completes the process of perception. When perception is completed, the five cumulatives of perception come into being: mental image (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), sensation (*saññā*), construction (*sankhāra*), and perception (*viññāna*). Traditionally, *viññāna* is translated as rebirth linking consciousness and thought of as the entity that travels from the previous life to the present life but according to the *Mahā Taṇhā Saṅkhaya Sutta*<sup>152</sup>, which will be discussed later in this chapter, this view is incorrect.



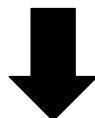

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<sup>152</sup> MN 38

**Perception develops into cognition (*mano*):**

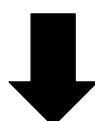
**4**

**NAME AND IMAGE (*nāma/rūpa*)** – What is perceived through the five senses is given meaning by rational thought and memory (*mano*). This way, a percept (*viññāna*) is transformed into a concept (*dhamma*). Through this process of conception, an entity with an image (*rūpa*) and name (*nāma*) is created. *Nāma* refers to the name given to identify each image produced by the process of mental construction. *Rūpa* is the image that is constructed. Thus, these two go together and cannot be separated. Usually, *nāma/rūpa* is translated as mentality/materiality and thought of as the mind and body generated by the rebirth linking consciousness in the mother's womb. We discussed in chapter 4 why this view is not supported by the *Suttas*.



**5**

**SIX SENSE FIELDS (*saṭṭayatana*)** – By combining all the names and images that the process of construction has created, a world made of six sense realms (*saṭṭayatana*): of vision, sound, smell, taste, touch, and concepts comes into being. The world that we perceive is a product of combining these six sense fields. Therefore, the external world is the six-fold sense field (*saṭṭayatana*).

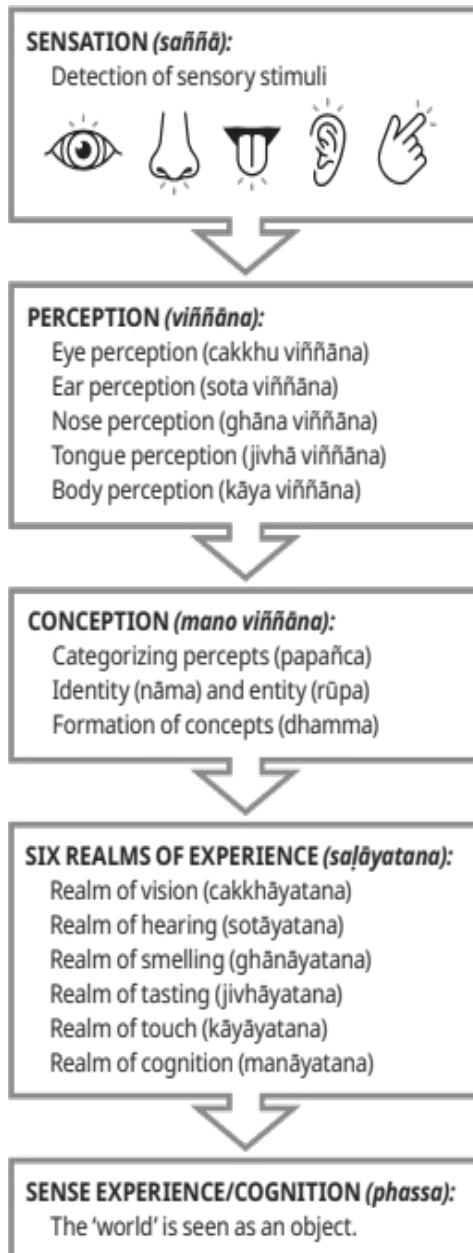


**6**

**OBJECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS (*phassa*)** - With the coming of the world of six sense realms, the process of cognition (*mano*) is completed, and consciousness of the world arises. Being conscious of an external world which is *phassa*. This is usually translated as contact, which is incorrect. The idea conveyed by the word contact falls into an existentialist and materialistic view, as the self and the world are seen as existing independent entities that contact each other.

The process thus far is summarized in the following diagram:

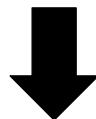
## DIAGRAM 17: Perception & Cognition



## Cognition develops into affection (*citta*)

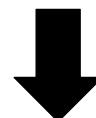
7

**FEELINGS (vedanā)** – Out of the two initial building blocks, sensations are used to create images that make up the world. Having made the world, the construction process now utilizes the feeling tone of the sensation called *vedanā* to create the self. The feeling tone comes in pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral forms.



8

**EMOTIONAL REACTION (tanhā)** - With the activation of feelings arises the emotional reactions to these feelings. The reactions are the attraction to pleasant feelings (*kāma tanhā*), the experience of existence derived from neutral feelings (*bhava tanhā*), and the urge to get rid of the unpleasant feelings (*vibhava tanhā*). It is this *tanhā* that is seen as the cause of *dukkha* because this emotional reaction brings about a dichotomy of experience. As a result of emotional reactions, a subject who reacts and an object to which the reaction occurs comes into being. Up to this point, there was only the consciousness of the world, but the emotional reaction to the world is the beginning of the creation of the duality of the self and the world, which is the basis of all *dukkha*. As previously discussed in chapter five, *tanhā* is usually translated as craving, and two types of *tanhā* are also interpreted in relation to rebirth. This is incorrect.



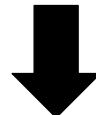
9

**PERSONALIZATION (upādāna)** - The emotional reaction leads to the possessiveness and personalization of this urge. The subjective emotional experience is personalized as mine, and the objective experience (world) is alienated as not mine or other. This personalization (*upādāna*) of the subjective process results in the notion of "I" and the notion of a self. Once the self has come into being through personalization (*upādāna*), that self is only a feeling

and not a visible object. Then the question arises: what is the entity that can be referred to as the self? The answer naturally obtained is the body because only the body is seen to occupy space and time. The body then becomes the self (*sakkāya ditthi*). Even others begin to refer to the body as me. The image I am aware of as the body or self is constructed using feelings and sensations. In other words, what we call the body is only a mental construct created by the process of perception. The Buddha has spoken of four kinds of personalization (*upādāna*):

- (1) personalization of reactions to sense experience (*kāma upādāna*)
- (2) personalization of thinking/reasoning/ideas (*ditthi upādāna*)
- (3) personalization of actions/behavior (*sīlabbata upādāna*)
- (4) personalization of the notion of self (*attavāda upādāna*)

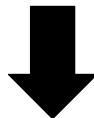
As discussed in chapter four *upādāna* is usually translated as clinging but personalization is a better translation.



10

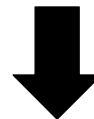
**EXISTENCE (*bhava*)** - This is the experience of the existence of a self in the world that arises from personalizing the subjective experience and alienating the objective experience. The self is the figure in the background of the world. Both are felt to be existing entities. This static concept of self (I exist) is composed of time (the past, present, and future) and the dimension of space. The conventional reality of time and space is a product of this concept of being in the world. Generally, *bhava* is translated as becoming and thought of as the process that leads to rebirth in the next life. In the discussion of the *Mahā Taṇhā Saikhaya Sutta*, we will discuss why this view does not follow the *Suttas*.

**The affective process leads to *dukkha***



**11**

**BIRTH (*jāti*)** - If the body that exists in space and time is me, then this body, that occupies time, has a past, present, and future, which means I have a past, present, and future. That means the body's past becomes my past, which is birth (*jāti*). The identification with the body leads to the concept of birth.



**12**

**AGEING (*jarā*) & DEATH (*marana*) & TOTALITY OF STRESS (*dukkhakkhanda*)** - With this concept of birth (in the past) arises the idea of death (in the future) and the idea of aging that leads a person from birth to death. This means, that by making the body myself, I have become subject to birth, aging, and death. This impermanence results in fears, worries, and anxiety. This is the arising of the whole mass of anguish. The idea of birth, aging, and death arose from the concept of existence, which emerged from personalization based on the emotional reaction that arose from feelings. If the body were not myself, there would be no birth, aging, and death for me; no grief, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair. Myself, therefore, is the result of personalizing the subjective experience of perception. In short, suffering is not the suffering of a true self but the suffering of the five cumulatives of perception (*saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha*), which we discussed in Chapter 4.

In the traditional explanation, birth, aging, and death are seen as suffering occurring in the next life due to the process of rebirth. However, antecedental concurrence is not subject to time. Rather, it is vital to understand that antecedental concurrence is an explanation of how time comes to be.

Here ends the concurrence of antecedents. When one begins to become conscious of this process that starts unconsciously (*avijjā*), one begins to see how things come to be. This way of observing is called thinking causally or deterministically (*yoniso manasikāra*)<sup>153</sup>. Such observation begins to transform the unconsciousness (*avijjā*) into consciousness which brings about the paradigm shift from personal existence to impersonal experience. This is awakening from the dream of existence, ending in the imperturbable serenity – *Nibbāna*.

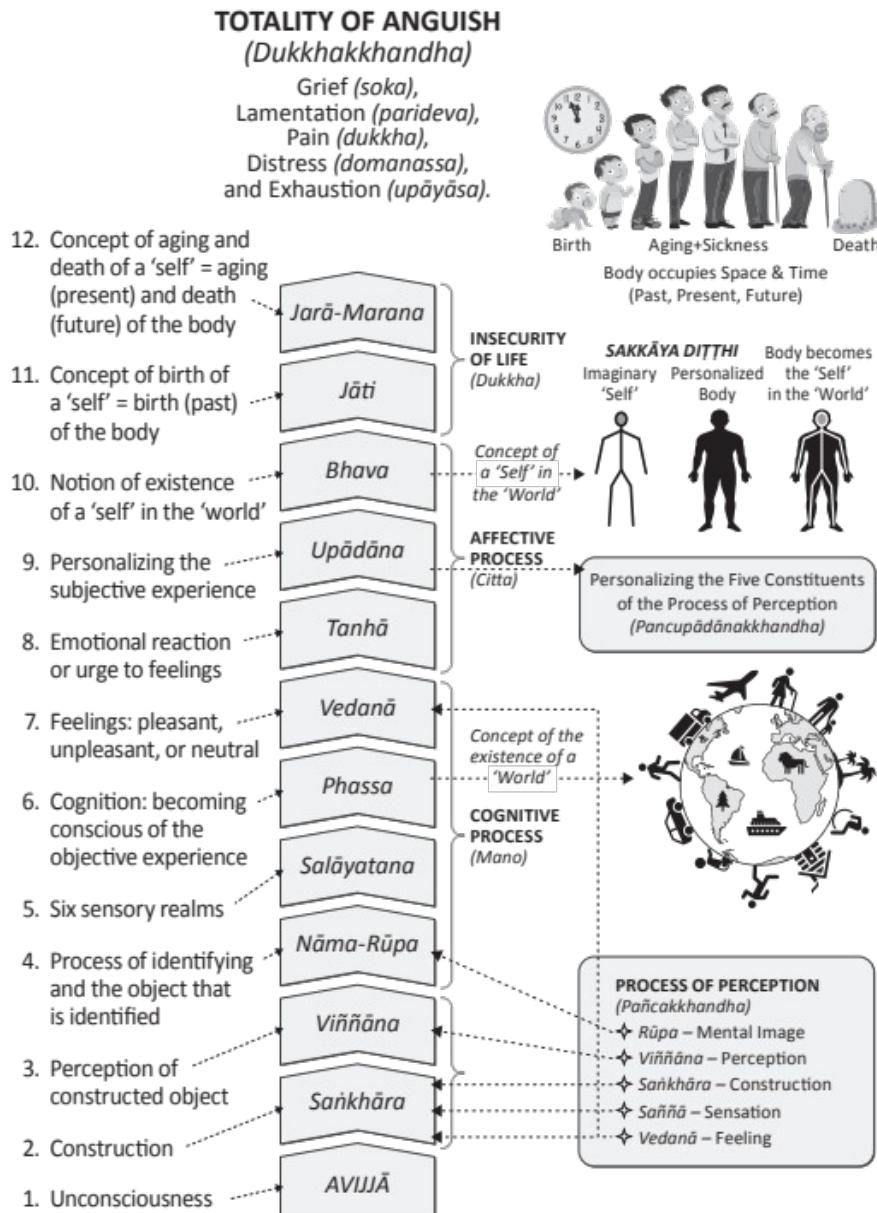
The Buddha teaches the way to freedom from existence because existence is painful and filled with anxiety. The Buddha speaks of experiencing experience (*dhamma*) only, without an experiencer (self/subject) and the experienced (world/object). To experience a subject and an object is to speak of the existence of a self in the world. The practice of the Buddha's teaching is to gain freedom from the existence of a self in the world. The course of the Buddha's method helps one attain this state, which is called *Nibbāna*.

The above discussion can be summarized in diagram form as follows:

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<sup>153</sup> MN 2

## DIAGRAM 18: Paticca Samuppāda



We will further explore these ideas by discussing the *Mahā Tanhāsaṅkhaya Sutta*.

## ***Mahā Taṇhā Saṅkhaya Sutta (MN 38)***

### **The Great Deliverance from Emotional Reactions**

Sometimes people ask me how rebirth takes place. Some people think that a self exists inside the body, which is sometimes called the soul, and it is the soul that goes from life to life when you're reborn. Even though this may be how some people think, by exploring the *Mahā Taṇhā Saṅkhaya Sutta*, we can see this is a mistaken view, according to the Buddha.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>154</sup>**

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at *Sāvatthī* in *Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park*. Now on that occasion a pernicious view had arisen in a *bhikkhu* named *Sāti*, son of a fisherman, thus: "As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another. Several *bhikkhus*, having heard about this, went to the *bhikkhu Sāti* and asked him: "Friend *Sāti*, is it true that such a pernicious view has arisen in you?" Exactly so, friends. As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another."

Then those *bhikkhus*, desiring to detach him from that pernicious view, pressed and questioned and cross-questioned him thus: "Friend *Sāti*, do not say so. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One; it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus. For in many ways the Blessed One has stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness." Yet although pressed and questioned and cross-questioned by those *bhikkhus* in this way, the *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, still obstinately adhered to that pernicious view and continued to insist upon it.

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<sup>154</sup> *Mahā Taṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta*: The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving (MN 38), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Sutta Central, 3 September 2022, <https://suttacentral.net/mn38/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

A monk named *Sāti* had formed the idea that consciousness passes from one life to another in the round of rebirths called *Samsāra*. We find that some translators use the term reincarnation or transmigration when they translate instead of the word rebirth. Today when people think of transmigration or reincarnation, they tend to think in terms of a soul. Some people believe that God puts a soul into the body when a person is born. This is called an incarnation. That means when a person dies, the soul comes out of the body. Although the body dies, the soul will remain without the body. That is called discarnation. When people talk about reincarnation, they think the discarnate soul re-enters another body. So, reincarnation means that the soul comes out of the body and goes into another body. This particular *bhikkhu* called *Sāti* thought similarly, but he called it consciousness instead of calling it a soul. He thought that consciousness travels from one life to another. A lot of modern Buddhists also think like that.

In this *Sutta*, the Buddha is not talking about reincarnation or transmigration. Rebirth is not the same as reincarnation or transmigration. The word rebirth means another birth. We have to understand that what we call life is not the existence of an entity. An entity is an object that exists. It is the continuation of activity. We have to distinguish between an entity and an activity. If we take the example of a flame, a flame is not an entity; it's an activity. My hand is an entity, but if I shake my hand, that is an activity. An entity is something that occupies space and time. This is why it is wrong to call rebirth transmigration or reincarnation. Life is not an existence because existence is a static concept. Life is a dynamic process of activities that continues from birth to death and even beyond, like a flame.

Scientists use two words; matter and energy. When we speak of matter, we talk about an entity because it occupies space and time. But when we talk about energy, we are not talking about an entity. It is an activity. Therefore, scientists also have these two concepts of entity and activity. In quantum physics, they are now confused because they are trying to see whether light is an activity or an entity. At this point, they cannot even find out what it is. This is the problem. Anyway, when we speak of our lives, we talk about an activity. We are not talking about an entity.

In this *Sutta*, some monks who had heard about *Sāti*'s view attempted to dissuade him from that view, but *Sāti* continued to hold onto his view. These monks tried to explain to *Sāti* that the Buddha has been talking about determinism, which means that everything happens in the world due to the necessary conditions. The fact that

everything happens due to the presence of the necessary conditions is what the Buddha called *paticca samuppāda*. The general principle of *paticca samuppāda* is '*iti imasmīm sati idam hoti, imassuppādā idam uppajjati; imasmīm asati idam na hoti, imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*'<sup>155</sup>. This means when the conditions are there, something happens, and it does not happen when the conditions are absent.

This is what the other monks were trying to explain. The monk *Sāti* thought that consciousness is doing the thinking and the reasoning, and it is consciousness that is going from life to life. The Buddha has pointed out that consciousness is simply dependent on conditions and, therefore, it is an activity. Consciousness is not an entity. When the necessary conditions for consciousness are absent, it will stop, like any other activity. It has no independent existence, so it cannot travel all by itself from life to life. It is not a separate independent entity like that.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

Since the *bhikkhus* were unable to detach him from that pernicious view, they went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, they sat down at one side and told him all that had occurred, adding: "Venerable sir, since we could not detach the *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, from this pernicious view, we have reported this matter to the Blessed One." Then the Blessed One addressed a certain *bhikkhu* thus: "Come, *bhikkhu*, tell the *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, in my name that the Teacher calls him."—"Yes, venerable sir," he replied, and he went to the *bhikkhu Sāti* and told him: "The Teacher calls you, friend *Sāti*."

"Yes, friend," he replied, and he went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, sat down at one side. The Blessed One then asked him: "*Sāti*, is it true that the following pernicious view has arisen in you: 'As I understand the *Dhamma* taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another'?" "Exactly so, venerable sir. As I understand the *Dhamma* taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another." "What is that consciousness, *Sāti*?" "Venerable sir, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions."

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<sup>155</sup> SN 12.61

"Misguided man, to whom have you ever known me to teach the *Dhamma* in that way? Misguided man, have I not stated in many ways consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness? But you, misguided man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp and injured yourself and stored up much demerit; for this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time."

Then the Blessed One addressed the *bhikkhus* thus: "Bhikkhus, what do you think? Has this *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, kindled even a spark of wisdom in this *Dhamma* and Discipline?" "How could he, venerable sir? No, venerable sir." When this was said, the *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, sat silent, dismayed, with shoulders drooping and head down, glum, and without response. Then, knowing this, the Blessed One told him: "Misguided man, you will be recognised by your own pernicious view. I shall question the *bhikkhus* on this matter."

Then the Blessed One addressed the *bhikkhus* thus: "Bhikkhus, do you understand the Dhamma taught by me as this *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, does when he misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit?" "No, venerable sir. For in many discourses the Blessed One has stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness."

"Good, *bhikkhus*. It is good that you understand the Dhamma taught by me thus. For in many ways I have stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness. But this *bhikkhu Sāti*, son of a fisherman, misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit; for this will lead to the harm and suffering of this misguided man for a long time.

"*Bhikkhus*, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the nose and odors, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and flavours, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness; when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is

reckoned as mind-consciousness. Just as fire is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it burns—when fire burns dependent on logs, it is reckoned as a log fire; when fire burns dependent on faggots, it is reckoned as a faggot fire; when fire burns dependent on grass, it is reckoned as a grass fire; when fire burns dependent on cow dung, it is reckoned as a cow dung fire; when fire burns dependent on chaff, it is reckoned as a chaff fire; when fire burns dependent on rubbish, it is reckoned as a rubbish fire—so too, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent on which it arises. When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness...when consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness."

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

We need to note here that the word being translated as consciousness is *viññāna*. In previous chapters, we have already discussed why I don't translate that word as consciousness. I translate it as perception. When translated as perception, this *Sutta* becomes easier to understand. We can understand that perception is not something that can travel from life to life. It is an activity that depends on conditions, and when those conditions cease to exist, perception will stop. Even in sleep, we can experience the stopping of perception because certain conditions are absent. The *viññāna* does not come out of one body and then creep into another body.

Today, if you ask most Buddhists how rebirth takes place, they will tell you that the *patisandhi viññāna* arises at the moment of death and travels from this life to the next. This view has arisen because of the mistaken "three lives" interpretation of *paṭicca samuppāda*, which is based on later commentaries rather than the early *Suttas*. In that view, when the third factor in the formula, *viññāna*, is explained, they say at the moment of death a thing called a *patisandhi viññāna* arises, and that is what is going from the present life to the next life. This is translated into English as rebirth linking consciousness. But we can see from this *Sutta* that the Buddha did not teach such a view. Nowhere in the *Suttas* has the Buddha spoken about a *patisandhi viññāna*. That is wholly an invention of later texts. It was probably invented to try to explain *paṭicca samuppāda* in terms of the process of rebirth, but that is not correct in my view. In the *Suttas*, the Buddha only ever spoke about six types of *viññāna*, which we have discussed previously as perception through the senses. Hearing is the perception with the ear, smelling is the perception with the nose, tasting is the perception with the tongue, and touching is the perception with the body. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha also states this, although it is translated as six

types of consciousness, not perception. The monk *Sāti* was thinking differently. His type of thinking is existential thinking, and the thinking of the Buddha is experiential thinking. We have been discussing these two paradigms previously.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

"*Bhikkhus*, there are these four kinds of nutriment for the maintenance of beings that already have come to be and for the support of those about to come to be. What four? They are: physical food as nutriment, gross or subtle; contact as the second; mental volition as the third; and consciousness as the fourth.

"Now, *bhikkhus*, these four kinds of nutriment have what as their source, what as their origin, from what are they born and produced? These four kinds of nutriment have craving as their source, craving as their origin; they are born and produced from craving. And this craving has what as its source...? Craving has feeling as its source...And this feeling has what as its source...? Feeling has contact as its source...And this contact has what as its source...? Contact has the six-fold base as its source...And this six-fold base has what as its source...? The six-fold base has mentality-materiality as its source... And this mentality-materiality has what as its source...? Mentality-materiality has consciousness as its source...And this consciousness has what as its source...? Consciousness has formations as its source...And these formations have what as their source, what as their origin, from what are they born and produced? Formations have ignorance as their source, ignorance as their origin; they are born and produced from ignorance.

So, *bhikkhus*, with ignorance as condition, formations come to be; with formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition, the six fold base; with the six fold base as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, being; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

### Four types of sustenance for life

#### 1. *Kabalinkara Āhara*

The Buddha says there are four kinds of sustenance for preserving life. The first one is *Kabalinkara Āhara*. I translate it as palpable sustenance. It means physical nutrients that have to be taken from the outside world into the body through the senses. In the above translation, it has been translated as physical food. Although this is the primary nutrient, this term perhaps includes such things as oxygen, heat, vitamins from the sun, medicines, etc

#### 2. *Phassa Āhara*

The second sustenance is in the form of objective consciousness (*phassa āhara*). The word *phassa* is usually translated as contact, but *phassa* is not contact. *Phassa* is the final part of the cognitive process where we become conscious of an objective world. For example, if you say this is a cup, that is cognition. That is how you have understood that it is a cup. This means you have seen cups before, and then you have put this into that category of cup. That is how people become conscious of the objects in the world outside. This is also a kind of sustenance for life because we can't live without being conscious of the outside world.

#### 3. *Manosancetanā Āhara*

The third sustenance is in the form of cognition and decision-making related to how emotions will be expressed in action (*manosancetanā āhara*). *Mano* refers to cognitive thinking or reasoning, *san* means together and *cetanā* is decision-making related to emotions and actions. So, in other words, cognitive activity is also a type of sustenance because people need it to live. This is a kind of necessary nutriment for living.

#### 4. *Viññāna Āhara*

The fourth form of sustenance is sense perception (*viññāna āhara*). We also need to distinguish between all the data that is perceived through the senses. It is a kind of sustenance needed for our lives. These four types of sustenance sustain our life.

**TABLE 21: Comparative translation of the Four types of Āhara**

Pāli	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<b>Kabalinkara Āhara</b>	Physical food	Palpable sustenance
<b>Phassa Āhara</b>	Contact	Objective consciousness
<b>Manosancetanā Āhara</b>	Mental volition	Cognition and decisions
<b>Viññāna Āhara</b>	Consciousness	Perception

Here the Buddha is talking about coming into existence. Coming into existence is the result of this sustenance. Then he points out that conditions being present, these four kinds of sustenance come into being. What is the condition necessary for that kind of sustenance? He says it is *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* is usually translated as craving, but I don't call it craving. *Taṇhā* is the emotional reaction to feelings. There are three kinds of feelings that we experience; pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. The pleasant experience leads to an emotional reaction in the form of a desire for pleasant things. The unpleasant things we hate or dislike. That is also an emotional reaction, but that is not a craving. The reaction to the neutral feelings is to experience a sense of existence. That word craving also doesn't convey that meaning. It's these three emotional reactions called *taṇhā* that are the condition for this sustenance. We go after these for survival because of our emotions, which keep us living.

Then he asks what the condition for these emotional reactions is. The condition is feeling (*vedanā*). When the feeling is present, an emotional reaction occurs. Then, what is the condition for the feeling? It is objective consciousness (*phassa*). *Phassa* means we have to recognize an object, and it is only when we have identified the object that we begin to desire or hate it. It is according to our recognition. The condition necessary for recognition is sense experience, which means we have to see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. When the senses are active, we react to what we have seen or heard. Then we become attracted or repulsed by what we see or hear.

Here the Buddha is talking about *paticca samuppāda*. It is imperative to understand that the Buddha is talking about our experience, and all these experiences are rooted in certain conditions. Some people think that *paticca samuppāda* is an explanation of how rebirth takes place but here the Buddha is pointing out that *paticca samuppāda* is not an explanation of rebirth. It is an explanation of how experience takes place. He goes through the steps in *paticca samuppāda*. It explains how we become conscious of a world and a self and the pain that results.

## **PERSONALIZATION, BIRTH, AGING, AND DEATH**

We have two kinds of consciousness. One is objective consciousness, which means becoming conscious of an object/world outside of yourself. The other is subjective consciousness, which is to become conscious of a subject inside. The subject that we become aware of is the self. We feel that I am here or my mind is here. Thus, we are thinking and feeling the existence of a self.

But here, the Buddha is pointing out that even the self is a product of this process of perception. What we see as an object, is seen as something outside. What is subjectively experienced inside we personalize. Personalize means to say this is mine. So, if I desire something, that desire is experienced as inside and not outside, and that desire becomes mine. If I hate something, that hatred is also mine. So, we begin to personalize the subjective experience, and we alienate the objective experience. To alienate means to say that it is something outside. When we say something is mine, a self has to come into being. How can there be mine without me? The moment there is personalization, we are creating a self. Once the self has been created in this way, what can you call the self? You have only thought of a thing called self, but what is it that you call yourself? You have to point to something. The only thing to point to is the body. You claim the body as me. So, the body becomes the vessel for the self. We have to point to an object as being the self. An object is something that occupies space. And the only thing that occupies space that you can point to is the body.

Once you have taken the body as yourself, a big problem arises. What is that problem? The body is not only something that occupies space. It is also something that occupies time. What does it mean to occupy time? It means it has a past, a present, and a future. If you have made the body yourself, the body has a past, present, and future. What is the past of the body? The past of the body is the birth. Because the body has become yourself, the birth of the body becomes your birth. What is the future of the body? The future of the body is death. Because the body has become yourself, the body's death also becomes your death. What is in between birth and death? In between, there is aging. Hence there is birth, there is aging, and there is death. Why? Because you have made the body yourself. Before that, you didn't have a self, but now the self has been created. You are pointing to the body as yourself. As a result, you are subject to birth, aging, and death. Not only that but all the other suffering of life that the body is subject to.

So, the suffering is created by personalizing the body and identifying the body as yourself. If you don't identify your body as yourself, that problem does not arise. Now, this is the problem. In other words, the problem is created. The beginning of the creation is the emotional reaction to the feelings. Where do the feelings come from? The feelings came from the sensory experience. The sensory experience is called perception. This is what the Buddha pointed out. And this is the meaning of *paṭicca samuppāda*.

### **BHAVA – BEING OR BECOMING?**

In the *paṭicca samuppāda* formula, the Buddha states that personalization leads to *bhava*. *Bhava* means existence or being. Today the word *bhava* is often translated as becoming. That is not correct. They used the word becoming because they didn't understand what the Buddha said. Western philosophers use two crucial words, which are being and becoming. For example, you plant a seed that begins to grow and become a tree. This process of change from seed to plant to a tree is becoming. Therefore, to become is to change. Being is the opposite of becoming. 'To be' is not to change. Being means not changing at all.

The Buddha pointed out that we feel a core unchanging self exists or is being. But actually, we are becoming. What does this mean? When a child is born, what happens to the child? Is that child going to be there in that same way all the time? They are gradually growing and becoming an adult, and even as adults, that child won't be the same all the time. Slowly they begin to grow old and ultimately fall sick and die. That is becoming and not being. When the Buddha used the word *bhava*, it refers to the false sense of being or existing that is created due to personalization. The term *bhava* doesn't refer to the actual process of becoming but the mistaken feeling of existence we have.

Why is the word *bhava* used here? This is because people feel they are existing or being, that there is an unchanging self somewhere inside. Although the self is changing, they think of the self as unchanging. This is a mistake. We are thinking in terms of being, although the fact is becoming. This is what the Buddha is trying to say. The Buddha points out that we have to get out of this sense of individual being or existence and understand becoming. This is why the Buddha says '*bhava nirodho nibbāna*'<sup>156</sup>. *Nirodho* means to come out of that false sense of being or existence. What is called *Nibbāna* is to awaken from the dream of existence. Being means existence. This is why I say that existence is a static concept in a dynamic reality.

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<sup>156</sup> SN 12.68

Dynamic means changing all the time. Static means not changing. When we use the word existence, we are talking about a static concept. But the reality is changing all the time. There is no being in this world. There is only the becoming.

When we are born, we are born unconscious, and it is from the state of unconsciousness that we begin to open our eyes and see things. When that happens, we also start to react to what we see. That seeing and the reaction is what the Buddha is talking about. We are becoming aware of the world. Ultimately, we begin to react to the world emotionally, and it is the reaction that brings all the unhappiness. By fully understanding this, we begin to stop the reaction. It is by stopping the reaction that all suffering ends. In other words, it is the state of calmness and tranquility of mind that is called *Nirvana*. 'nir' and 'vāna': vāna means disturbance 'nir' means non. The absence of any mental disturbance is *Nirvāna*.

I hope you understand what I have said. The rest of the *Sutta* you can read for yourself. When you read *Sutta* for yourself, you'll begin to understand more. It is essential to know that this *Sutta* clearly explains the true nature of *paṭicca samuppāda*. It is not the explanation of *kamma* and rebirth. It is about the arising and ceasing of an impersonal experience. This experience creates the delusion of existence due to the personalization of the impersonal subjective experience, resulting in suffering. It also shows how suffering comes to an end when both the subjective and the objective experiences are depersonalized.

### **Questions and Answers**

**Q:** According to Chan Buddhism, when you die, we don't call it soul, but spiritual consciousness takes time to pick a form in another life. So, there's time in between. Rebirth can take many forms. We can be born in an animal world. If you do good things, you can be reborn as a human. The spiritual consciousness carries these qualities, like the precepts you have observed. People may ask, why am I born poor? Why am I born without eyes? Buddhism explains the link to the past life and the cause-and-effect relationship. Is this the correct understanding of Buddhism?

**A:** Well, it's a good question. The only thing is that you are thinking the same way that *Sāti* was thinking. I call it called existential thinking. If you keep on doing existential thinking, you'll not understand what the Buddha is talking about. You have to start experiential thinking. Because existence is a delusion created by our experience. The self is a part of this delusion. It is only an experience, and we have to think in those terms. You have to read this *Sutta* and gradually begin to understand. It's challenging to understand the teachings of the Buddha because we

are all thinking existentially. We have to get out of that wrong way of thinking. It's only when we do that we begin to understand this correctly. Later on, in this *Sutta*, the Buddha says:

"*Bhikkhus*, knowing and seeing in this way, would you run back to the past thus: 'Were we in the past? Were we not in the past? What were we in the past? How were we in the past? Having been what, what did we become in the past?'?"—"No, venerable sir."—"Knowing and seeing in this way, would you run forward to the future thus: 'Shall we be in the future? Shall we not be in the future? What shall we be in the future? How shall we be in the future? Having been what, what shall we become in the future?'?"—"No, venerable sir."—"Knowing and seeing in this way, would you now be inwardly perplexed about the present thus: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?'?"—"No, venerable sir."

Here the Buddha is rejecting the existential way of thinking. The Buddha makes the disciples drop out of time. The concept of time in the form of past, present, and future makes one feel one exists. Existence is the feeling of being in the past, present, and future. Therefore, existence is a feeling of being in time. However, the past does not exist. It has finished. The future does not exist. It has not come. The present is becoming the past every fraction of a second. If the past, present, and future are absent, what is existence? Existence is a delusion. Existence is only a feeling. If existence is only a delusion, can I die? Is death something to worry about?

**Q:** Isn't Buddhism all about the law of cause and effect?

**A:** Well, not really. Even to talk about cause and effect is not correct. There was a Western philosopher called David Hume who began to talk about this<sup>157</sup>. That there is no such thing as cause and effect.

**Q:** Does one have to have a direct experience to change their thinking from existential thinking to experiential thinking through mediation? Is it only then you can shift?

**A:** Yes, you have to develop meditation to do this properly. The practice of the Supernormal Eight-Fold Way is the only method.

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<sup>157</sup> David Hume. (2023, October 16). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Hume](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume)

## ***Mahā Taṇhā Saṅkhaya Sutta***

### **The Great Deliverance from Emotional Reactions**

**A new translation by the Author (condensed)**

As I heard:

Once when the Holy One was in *Savatthi* at *Anathapindika*'s Park, of *Jeta*'s grove, a pernicious view had arisen in a Renunciate named *Sāti*, who was the son of a fisherman. His view was that: "It is perception that passes from one life to another in the round of rebirths called *samsāra*."

Some Renunciates had heard about his pernicious view and attempted to detach him from it: "Friend *Sāti*, in many ways the Holy One has stated, perception arises dependent on conditions. Perception cannot arise without the conditions for its arising." Although pressed by those Renunciates, *Sāti* continued to remain in that pernicious view.

So, the Renunciates went to the Holy One, and the Holy One called for the Renunciate *Sāti*. Then the Renunciate *Sāti* came to the Holy One, and the Holy One asked him whether he harbored this view, and Renunciate *Sāti* admitted, yes. Then the Holy One asked him to explain the nature of that perception. He replied that it was the perception that speaks, feels, and experiences the result of helpful and harmful actions.

Then the Holy One said: "Misguided man, have you ever heard me teach the *Dhamma* that way? Have I not stated in many ways that perception arises depending on conditions? Perception cannot arise without the presence of the necessary conditions.

(....)

"Renunciates, does cognitive dissonance arise when one is uncertain? Yes, Holy One, it is so. Is cognitive dissonance abandoned in one who comprehends? Yes, Holy One, it is so. Having comprehended it, do you hold on to it dogmatically? No, Holy One. You then understand that the *Dhamma* is similar to a raft for the purpose of crossing over and not for clinging to it dogmatically. Yes, Holy One.

There are these four kinds of sustenance to preserve life for those already living and those seeking a living. What four?:

1. Palpable sustenance, coarse or fine
2. Sustenance in the form of objective consciousness
3. Sustenance in the form of cognition and decisions
4. Sustenance in the form of perception

What condition being present do these four kinds of sustenance come into being? **Emotional reactions to feelings** are the conditions when present these four kinds of sustenance come into being.

What condition being present does the **emotional reaction to feelings** come into being? **Feeling** being present, the **emotional reactions** come into being.

What being present does **feelings** arise? **Objective consciousness** being present **feelings** arises.

What being present does **objective consciousness** arise? The **six sense experiences** being present **objective consciousness** arises.

What being present does the **six sense experiences** come into being? **Name and mental images** being present the **six sense experiences** come into being.

What being present does **name and mental images** come into being? **Perception** being present the **name and mental images** come into being.

What being present does **perception** come into being? **Mental construction** being present **perception** comes into being.

What being present does **mental construction** come into being? **Unconsciousness** being present **mental construction** comes into being.

(....)

"Having understood this, Renunciates, would you run back to the past and question about the past?" "No, Holy One." "Then would you run to the future and question about the future?" "No, Holy One." "Then would you question the present thus: Am I existing now? Where did I come from? Where will I go from here?" "No, Holy One."

"Having comprehended this would you state: I believe this out of respect for my teacher?" "No, Holy One." "Having comprehended this, would you seek another teacher?" "No, Holy One." "Having comprehended this, would you dogmatically get into arguments and debates with others?" "No, Holy One." "Will you be speaking only about what you have seen and understood for yourselves?" "Yes, Holy One."

"Good, Renunciates, you have been guided by this *Dhamma*, which is well enunciated, experiential, independent of time, verifiable, introspective, and to be personally experienced by the perceptive."

"Renunciates, conception takes place dependent on three conditions":

1. Union of parents
2. Mother being fertile
3. Agent seeking birth

After conception, the mother carries the embryo for nine months, then the child is born. When the child grows up, the child begins to play games. When they grow up and their faculties mature, the youth enjoys the five sensual pleasures. On seeing forms with the eye and hearing sounds with the ears, they lust after them, personalize them, and come into existence, resulting in birth, aging, and death, and all the consequent suffering.

Then a Realised One arises in the world. The Realised One describes the nature of the world and speaks about the *Dhamma* pleasant, in the beginning, middle, and end, and reveals the holy life. Having heard the *Dhamma*, the youth abandons the sensual life and begins to discipline themselves according to the training rules. They guard their senses. They begin to act with introspective attention and full comprehension in all activities. Then they abandon the five obscurants and enter and abide in the first, second, third, and fourth *jhāna*. They learn to remain unaffected by feelings pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral felt through the five senses. They stop personalizing subjective experiences. Thus they gain freedom from existence, birth, aging, and death, and the entire mass of suffering.

Remember this as the **Great Deliverance from the Emotional Reactions**, the root of all discomfort. Remember also how Renunciate *Sāti* had misunderstood the *Dhamma*. The Renunciates were pleased to hear what the Buddha said.

**PART IV**  
**THE SOLUTION**

## CHAPTER 7

### **NIBBĀNA**

#### **PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED**

We have diagnosed the illness of the human condition, we have explored its cause, now it's time to seek the solution. Although some consider Buddhism to be pessimistic by nature, the Buddha does not merely teach that there is *dukkha* and leave us without hope of salvation. In the third super normal reality the Buddha explains that the cure to the problem of human existence is the cessation of *tanhā*. *Tanhā* is the cause of the problem we explored in the last two chapters. The experience of this state of cessation is called *Nibbāna* in the *Pāli* and *Nirvāna* in *Sanskrit*. It is the *summum bonum* of the Buddhist.

However, the second reason the Buddha is said to have been reluctant to commence his ministry is the difficulty surrounding explaining the experience of *Nibbāna* to those who have no experience of it. It is therefore not surprising that there are many misconceptions regarding *Nibbāna*. Some see it as a destination to travel to after death, equivalent to a theistic heaven.

Others see it as a state where there is no mind. The tendency seems to be water down the state of *Nibbāna* to make it seem more attainable or to be defeatist by seeing it as a supernatural state beyond our attainment, at least in this life time. This has even led some to give up hope of attaining *Nibbāna* altogether and instead wait for the appearance of the next Buddha for salvation.

Yet, for all the difficulty the Buddha foresaw in explaining the state of *Nibbāna* he had achieved, he did explain it in various ways in the *Suttas*. In this chapter, the author provides a penetrative exploration of *Nibbāna*, the third supernormal reality, based on the *Suttas*. Certainly, a super normal, though not a supernatural state, but one that we can work towards.

## **THE HUMANISTIC SALVATION OF NIBBĀNA**

Soteriology is a word used by Christians to refer to salvation. Christians believe in a soul and a Creator God, which Buddhists do not accept. Buddhists do not speak of salvation in the sense of saving a soul. The Buddha is not the savior of the soul but the teacher of a way out of suffering. Soteriology in Buddhism is about ending suffering. The state free from suffering is called *Nibbāna*.

The Buddha comes along as a teacher showing the way out of lust, hate, and the delusion of self, which are the causes of all suffering. This freedom is an inner transformation achieved through awakening. This way, one is freed from evil, unhappiness, death, and ignorance, here and now. This achievement of freedom through the inner transformation based on awakening is *Nibbāna*. There are many ways of looking at *Nibbāna*. It can be looked at from an evolutionary or biological point of view. It can also be looked at from a religious, psychological, and even philosophical point of view. This chapter will explore these various ways of looking at *Nibbāna*. Sometimes meditators are unsure about the purpose or final goal of meditation. Today, meditators have a common misconception that the final objective is to gain insight. The ultimate purpose of Buddhist practice is the unconditional, absolute serenity of *Nibbāna*, which has to be attained gradually by going through a series of successive stages in the purification of conduct, mood, and intellect, like traveling in a relay of vehicles.

### **NIBBĀNA FROM A BIOLOGICAL AND EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE**

In 1987, I had the honor of delivering a lecture at a university in Sri Lanka. The topic of my talk was the evolution of human beings through religion. I spoke under the title "Man, Superhumans, and Beyond." Superhumans is not mere fiction, as it is understood today. Real superhumans did walk on earth more than twenty-five centuries ago. Superhumans are the result of a process of evolution that took place a long time ago. Superhumans as a species are virtually extinct today, though not entirely. People can evolve to solve the problem of existence. To understand this process of evolution, it is helpful to examine the biological theory of evolution.

#### **The struggle for existence**

According to the biological perspective, life came about due to a substance formed out of inanimate matter when the right conditions happened to coincide at a moment

in the planet's history. This substance had the unique characteristic of being able to reproduce itself. Although this substance, like any other, had to break up and be destroyed someday, it had the capacity for apparent continuation through continuous replacement. In other words, it attempted to become permanent in an impermanent world, even though this was a failure in reality.

This was the original "sin". There was no actual being; there was only an attempt to be. There was no existence; there was only a struggle for existence. There was no survival either for the fit or the unfit; there was only an apparent survival. Charles Darwin saw this process as an unconscious struggle for existence. This was why he spoke of the survival of the fittest. These facts boil down to the single fact that this unconscious struggle was a mission impossible. Life is a dynamic activity rather than a static existence. Existence is a static concept in a dynamic reality. In other words, existence is a conceptual fallacy or delusion. It was a futile struggle because actual existence was not a possibility. This unconscious struggle to survive is a failure. It is only suffering that continues during this struggle to survive.

### **The evolution of the brain**

The environment was not always favorable for this impossible struggle to exist. When the environmental conditions changed, many organisms died, but a few survived by adapting to the changes. Because the adaptation was some change in the organism, the organisms began to change in structure and function. As a result of these changes, many different species evolved, with various forms and functions befitting various environmental conditions. They also began to develop systems where several organs combined to deal with an environmental problem. As conditions in the environment became more and more challenging, the systems became correspondingly more complex. Cardiovascular systems that circulated blood and even nervous systems that carried messages like telephone wires developed. As the nervous systems began to develop more complex structures and functions, it led to the development of the brain. The brain started to evolve from a primitive structure called the brain stem, which regulates essential life functions such as respiration, digestion, blood circulation, and metabolism – these are the autonomous functions that keep the organism alive and healthy.

The brain gradually began to evolve further and aid the survival of the species. This resulted in the development of another part of the brain called the limbic system that helped start an emotional reaction to stimulation by the environment. It is this reaction that we now call emotional arousal. The limbic system is the emotional

command center of the organism, which is responsible for regulating differences in mood or temper, such as calmness and excitement. Within the limbic system is a structure known as the amygdala, which is responsible for scanning the environment to detect signs of potential threats and danger to the organism. When aroused, the amygdala triggers the fight, flight, or freeze reaction to protect the organism from harm. This reaction is called stress today, which, if prolonged, can develop into the general adaptation syndrome, which turns stress into distress.

As the brain evolved further, higher forms of organisms such as mammals evolved, forming the cerebrum, which contained the cerebral cortex or neo-cortex responsible for thinking. As evolution progressed further, the cerebrum developed into left and right hemispheres. Within these two hemispheres of the cerebral cortex came four major lobes: frontal lobes, temporal lobes, occipital lobes, and parietal lobes. In this way, the human brain developed with a pre-frontal cortex in the frontal lobes, which equipped the human being with highly advanced and sophisticated cognitive functions such as planning, goal setting, decision making, judgment, reasoning, rationalization, and language.

With the development of these particular brain parts came the activity called consciousness. Thus, came into being the human being, the most sophisticated species with the most advanced cognitive capacity. This species became aware of an environment called the world and became aware of a self that exists in the world. In other words, this impersonal electrochemical activity called consciousness has given rise to an awareness of an objective world and a subjective self. The world that we are aware of is an objective experience. The self that we are aware of is a subjective experience. The self is the result of the personalization of the subjective experience. This means the self is a product of the subjective process called consciousness and does not exist apart from consciousness. Therefore, it is an appearance rather than a reality. The world that we are aware of is also a product of the process of consciousness. It, too, is a mere appearance. In other words, both the world and the self are subjective experiences rather than objective existences that stand apart from the subjective experience. Though they are supposed to exist, the self and the world do not exist independently. If this is so, the self and the world are mere delusions. If this process called life began as an unconscious electrochemical activity of a self-replicating molecule, this unconscious electrochemical activity produced the consciousness and this delusion.

## **The insecurity of life**

Although our thinking faculty (*mano*) may be aware of this fallacy, our emotions (*citta*) are unaware. It is our blind emotions that desire existence, but our reason is aware that this blind desire clashes with the reality of impermanence. This clash leads to frustration. It is this frustration that we call suffering.

This insecurity of life was more apparent in primitive, pre-civilized times. The uncivilized human was closer to the apes in that they, like the apes, were mostly passively reacting to the environment, unable to control their impulses. Their life was full of anxiety. They had to find food or die of starvation. When finding food, they were in danger of being eaten by other animals. Amid this danger, they also began to seek pleasure, and in doing so, often risked their life in competition with others. An uncivilized person did not have adequate shelter, clothing, medicine, or much security and comfort. As a result, uncivilized people experienced a relatively greater amount of anxiety than civilized humans. Because they were not in full control of their natural impulses, an uncivilized person was self-centered and could not properly care for others. They were also competitive and alienated and had to satisfy and defend themselves, alone, as an individual, even by hurting others. Therefore, they could not make much progress in controlling the environment until they learned to join others, share, care and help one another in society.

## **Civilization and its discontents**

When the mind is broadened in the process of civilization, humans become less individualistic and more cooperative. They become more capable of teamwork. Through collaboration in production and exchange and the discovery of better ways of governing and organizing society, people can reduce the anxiety of life. This anxiety reduction became people's primary goal, and it was achieved through self-discipline. Self-discipline is both positive and negative. It is to perform what is socially constructive and avoid what is socially destructive. This social attitude is the characteristic of civilized people. Civilized society is their product.

Although a civilized person can reduce anxiety and make life more comfortable, they cannot eliminate anxiety. In the process of becoming socialized and disciplined, a person learns to suppress their natural self-centered urges. These suppressed impulses begin to accumulate tension, which seeks release in actions. Because this tension is not allowed to be released in anti-social acts, they tend to find an outlet in a perverted form, or this tension remains in the condition of anxiety.

## **The search for inner peace through the evolution of consciousness**

This is why civilized society is plagued with neurosis, anxiety, problematic stress and other psychological problems, and psychosomatic disease. A modern person though they may be comfortable materially, is still uncomfortable within. Therefore, they need to seek inner peace and tranquility. They turn to therapy, stress management, the use of drugs, entertainment, relaxation, the search for love, and other methods of finding inner peace. They also turn to ancient religious techniques of meditation and mysticism. The important thing about this new turn is the focus on inner peace and tranquility. This new turn of modern people is in the direction of the next stage in the evolution of humans. It is the evolution of civilized people to the superhuman level. This psychological evolution is achieved through the practice of religion. By religion, I do not mean mere belief and ceremonial rituals. That is what organized religion usually is. I am speaking of natural religion, which is the gradual evolution of consciousness. This evolution is not an unconscious biological evolution but a consciously executed evolution of consciousness itself.

Religion seen in this way is concerned with individuals rather than organizations, temples, or churches. When an individual evolves from one stage to another, views and lifestyles change. Organized religions tend to prevent such change and therefore obstruct the evolutionary process. The religion that I refer to, and which I call natural religion, is not mere obedience to rules but a conscious process of growth and evolution. It could also be called a growth technique, through which an individual consciously evolves from a lower to a higher level of consciousness. What is unique about the superhuman evolutionary stage is the superhuman understanding. This is getting in touch with the ground of being. This ground of being is experience, which can be normal or supernormal. The everyday experience is stress and its cause. The supernormal experience is the absence of stress and the way to its absence. The Buddha has described this supernormal understanding as the four-fold supernormal reality. This is because this understanding results in the solution of the problem of existence and the ending of the evolutionary process. It is, therefore, the ultimate point in the evolution of humans.

The evolution of Superman from man is not so much a biological process as it is a psychological one. It is the evolution of the human consciousness through introspection. The consciousness becomes gradually conscious of itself and thereby loses the delusion of existence. It is experiencing experience instead of existence. This freedom from delusion paves the way to vistas of super knowledge that equips humans to become superhumans. Humankind must solve its problems through

evolution. Just as a child solves their problems by growing up and animals solve their problems by evolving, human beings too have to solve their problems through maturity, growth, and evolution. Modern society is plagued with crime, drug abuse, poverty, mental sickness, psychosomatic disease, insanity, suicide, war, and environmental destruction. All these problems seem to be the result of mental dysfunction. Therefore, growth or evolution appears to be the only solution. If evolution is the solution to our problems, it is worth learning how to evolve. If you have recognized the importance of evolution and the fact that it is possible for a human being to evolve and if you have understood the method of conscious evolution, then what is left to be done is nothing but to try to keep evolving.

### **Keep evolving!**

Once I was traveling by train from Washington DC to New York City. I saw a large poster put up at one station. It contained a picture of a large chimpanzee. Below the picture was a line that read: keep evolving. This should be everyone's motto. This is my message to you, too: keep evolving. If you follow this advice, there would be no doubt about the possibility that you will develop to the superhuman level called *Nibbāna*. Therefore, let me repeat: keep evolving by practicing religion in a non-dogmatic universal way. Keep evolving to solve your problems. Keep evolving to the superhuman level. The Buddha is the ultimate point in the evolution of the human being.

Biological evolution takes place through adaptation to the environment. Not by changing the environment. Human evolution, too, can take place only by the same method. We must change ourselves to fit into the environment. We need a revolution, not a political or social revolution, but a personal inner revolution of the mind. Only when we have changed can we begin to change the world in our favor. The advances made by science turn into nothing when we consider the advances made by those who transform themselves. This was what the Buddha achieved and what he taught his disciples. The evolution of man is not through the conquest of nature but the mastery of one's mind. This was why the Buddha did not use physical determinism to transform the world but used mental determinism to transform the human being.

For further discussion of these ideas, see the author's talk on the *Aggañña Sutta* (DN 27) at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG\\_jYXzJaJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG_jYXzJaJw)

## **NIBBĀNA FROM A RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE**

Buddhism is often misunderstood as an atheistic philosophy because it does not worship supernatural gods or an all-powerful Creator. However, Buddhism is a humanistic religion with, a pragmatic philosophy, and an evolutionary psychology. In Buddhism, religion is the human effort to solve the problem of existence. The problem of existence is the insecurity of life due to the impending, unpredictable certainty of death. Are not all religions attempting to solve this same problem? Isn't it the main effort of every religion whether they recognize it or not? Some attempt to solve it through a well-believed hope of eternal life in heaven after death. This belief helps the faithful endure suffering until death.

Though I am a Buddhist by birth, I never blindly believed in the religion I was born into by accident, while there were so many other religions in the world. Therefore, I began a comparative study of religions. I have spent many years trying to understand theistic beliefs from the theistic point of view. Since I was a student of science, I applied the scientific method in my study. What I discovered was that all religions had similarities in practice. The differences lay in the theoretical framework within which the practice stood. I saw unity in the diversity of religion.

The term religion comes from the Latin word *re-ligare* meaning, "to bind." Etymologically, religion should then mean the binding or commitment to a set of beliefs and practices. There is, however, something more to religion than mere commitment. It is the idea of holiness, which, to the Buddhist, is the devotion to the ideal of perfection or *Nibbāna*. Conceived theistically, the perfect, holy being is God in heaven. Conceived humanistically, holy beings are humans themselves in perfect form. A perfect being is called a Buddha in Buddhism. Religion could be defined as the commitment to the ideal of perfection, which is the perfection of goodness and wisdom for Buddhists. However, this perfect being is also conceived to be almighty in theistic religions.

I also saw religion as a nearly universal phenomenon that takes various forms in different cultures. The clothes people wear vary amongst cultures. Music and painting also reflect cultural differences. So do the outward forms and beliefs on which the practice of religion is based differ in cultures. Each culture has a different story to explain why it practices religion.

There are four primary levels of individual religious evolution. They are:

1. **The *Saddhā* level (Devotion)** – worship of goodness, prayer, and performance of rituals.
2. **The *Sīla* level (Discipline)** – control of behavior through precepts or obeying commandments.
3. **The *Samādhi* level (Tranquility)** – purification of mind through meditation and contemplation.
4. **The *Paññā* level (Awakening)** – some associate this with the soul uniting with God, sometimes called mysticism. In Proto-Buddhism, we call it awakening from the dream of existence.

These practices are found in most religions to a greater or lesser degree. The rationale behind the practice is where the differences lie. Some are theistic and others humanistic. On examination of the common practice, we can see the unity in the diversity. People of different cultures began to talk about religion in different ways. For example, although all human beings eat food, the way the same food is cooked in different cultures is different. Another difference is the way they dress, sing, and dance. These differences are what we call culture. Different cultures have different ways of practicing religion, but they have something in common. We can see this in the different levels of religious practice:

### 1. **The *Saddhā* level (Devotion)**

Devotion can be understood theistically as the devotion to a God who is perfect in goodness. With devotional practices, people are taking refuge in and worshipping higher powers. Why are they worshipping powers? They feel powerless and helpless. Out of all the infants, the human infant is the weakest. In most animals, the infancy period is very short. They become independent quickly. The human infant and the child feel weak for much longer. They have to run to their father and mother whenever they are frightened. As they grow up and become adults, they realize that their parents are as helpless as themselves. Where do they run to now?

The only place is to run to a higher power they have never seen. They begin to believe that some supernatural beings control this world. They try to worship these supernatural beings to utilize their power to satisfy their desires. "Please give me a little of your power to change my circumstances." That is a prayer, and sometimes they begin to believe that if you pray or chant certain things, their prayers will be

answered. They believe in performing some rituals, and then the higher power comes to their aid. The worship of power is to satisfy our endless desires.

From a humanistic perspective, it could be understood as the devotion to the ideal of human perfection, represented by the Buddha, the human being who attained perfection in goodness through human effort. However, today we can see the worshipping of power to satisfy desire even amongst cultural Buddhists, where the Buddha is treated like a god able to grant wishes.

## **2. The *Sīla* level (Discipline)**

Discipline may be understood theistically as following the commandments of the All-Mighty Creator of the universe, who justly rewards the good people and punishes the evil-doers. Human beings realized that praying to higher powers is not enough. God becomes like a human being who rewards the good people and punishes the bad people. God becomes a judge. Therefore, people begin to be good to get God's favor. It means God will favor the good people only. That was the beginning of religion, where they started to value and worship goodness and see God as a good person. The idea of God changes at that point, and the practice also changes. Discipline and controlling the behavior become essential.

Discipline can also be understood in a humanistic way, as following the principles of good living, based on the consideration for the wellbeing of others and society. Such good behavior naturally leads to happiness, and bad behavior leads to unhappiness. This law of *kamma* is misunderstood as a punishing and rewarding prescriptive law, while it is a descriptive law like gravity.

## **3. The *Samādhi* level (Tranquillity)**

Tranquility or the purification of the mind through meditation and contemplation can be understood theistically as the soul's mystical union with God. From here onwards, people begin to practice meditation and purify the mind. When they start to do that, the concept of God changes again. The purpose of purifying the mind is to unite with God. Then God must be everywhere. God is seen as the universal soul that pervades the universe. It is a substance that fills the universe, and your soul can begin to unite with this God, and you begin to experience a superior kind of happiness. That experience is sometimes called mysticism.

Tranquility can be understood humanistically as the psychological transformation of the emotional part of the mind through practices like meditation that calm and purify the mind.

#### 4. The *Paññā* level (Awakening)

The realization of ultimate reality may be understood theistically as a direct experience of God. It may be understood humanistically as the experience of a transformed consciousness, affectively and cognitively, as in the experience of the Buddhist *Nibbāna*.

In Buddhism, it is only when someone awakens from the dream of existence that the self disappears. That is the highest perfection. Religion is ultimately an effort to unite with this state of perfection. Once you have become perfect, you are called a Buddha. Buddha is called "*Brahma bhuto*,"<sup>158</sup> one who has become God. Now God is not another person outside. God is a human concept of perfection, and this concept of perfection becomes an ideal to be realized. The practice of religion is an effort to realize the ideal of perfection. When we speak of the Buddha, we speak of the highest level of spiritual perfection. Becoming like a Buddha itself is *Nibbāna*.

Usually, our mind is disturbed all the time. The disturbances are lust, hate, and delusion. *Nibbāna* is to stop these disturbances. This stillness of mind that can never be disturbed is called *ākappa ceto vimutti*<sup>159</sup>. *Ākappa* means the imperturbable. The word 'perturb' means to shake. There is also 'turb' when we say disturb, which means to shake. It is also similar to the term turbulence. When we speak of turbulence, it means shaking—imperturbable means non-shaking. *Ceto vimutti* means absolute freedom from emotions. The word *ceto* is related to the word *citta*, which is the emotional part of the mind. So, it means the imperturbable serenity or the absolute freedom from emotional turbulence. Serenity means calmness and tranquility of the mind. So, I am using some beautiful-sounding words to refer to *Nibbāna*. There is no happiness more extraordinary than that. This is what *Ajhān Brahm*, *Ajhān Chāh*, and many other meditation teachers are talking about.

This experience of *Nibbāna* has been explained by the Buddha in the *Suttas*. The Buddha was the only spiritual teacher who elaborated in great detail on the last stage of religious practice. Here, Buddhism stands alone, denying the concept that is most essential to other religions, namely the idea of an eternal soul or self, either

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<sup>158</sup> MN 28

<sup>159</sup> AN 9.41

individual or universal. Buddhism also stands in agreement with modern scientific thinking, while all other religions conflict. It is here that Buddhism displays its uniqueness. However, in this part of the teaching, there has been much misunderstanding among both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

In Buddhism, *samsara* means a tour where there is a continuous process of rebirth. This tour is seen as unpleasant because rebirth can happen in celestial worlds or hells and not just in the human world. Every time you are reborn, you will die, and every time you die, you are reborn. Most of the time we are dominated by emotions, and that emotional state will determine where rebirth occurs. If we are constantly getting angry, that will affect the place of rebirth. If we kill, rebirth may be in hell. If you live with reason rather than emotion, rebirth will be in good realms. That is the way with *kamma* and rebirth. *Kamma* is the kind of emotional life that we live. The Buddha pointed out that it is easier to be carried away by emotions than to act rationally. If we are carried away by emotions, we are cultivating harmful *kamma* and we suffer as a result. *Samsara* is a situation where we can go up or down, but most of the time, we will go down because we are carried away by emotions.

Most people think *Nibbana* is the stopping of rebirth. If Buddhists say this, Christians will say it is annihilation, destroying a person by not allowing them to continue living. The Christians see rebirth as a continuation of life. If you stop rebirth, that means the continuation is stopped. In his book "*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*," a Pope said that the Buddhists do not have any hope<sup>160</sup>.

There are two extreme ways of thinking that the Buddha rejected<sup>161</sup>. Eternalism is to believe that you can live forever. The Christians believe that you will live forever if you go to heaven. The other is annihilation which means you stop living forever. The Buddha pointed out that these two extreme ways of thinking have to be avoided. The Buddha was talking about freedom from the delusion of existence. You have to exist before you can live or die. If existence is a delusion, how can you live or die forever? That is the real freedom from death, which is also not eternal life. It is the freedom from the delusion of existence. When you realize existence is a delusion, there is no one to live or die. That is the meaning of *Nibbana*.

When someone asked the Buddha, "What is the meaning of *Nibbana*?" the Buddha gave a very simple answer. Some people are confused about *Nibbana*. They think it is a mystical state or there is a mystery about *Nibbana*. The Buddha said, "It is the

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<sup>160</sup> His Holiness John Paul II. *Crossing the threshold of hope*. (Alfred A. Knopf: 1994)

<sup>161</sup> DN 1

complete elimination of lust, hate, and delusion.<sup>162</sup> The first two are emotions. Delusion is a conceptual fallacy. An illusion is a perceptual fallacy. A mirage is an illusion. But a delusion, e.g., a person may say, "I am God," that is a conceptual fallacy. Every human being is suffering from a delusion. That delusion is "I am" or "I exist." "You are" is also a delusion. You think you exist and other people exist. You form relationships, friendly or unfriendly. All activities of human beings are based on these relationships.

I once met a writer who compared world religions. He talked about *Nibbāna*, but he was confused about it. There are places in the *Suttas* where the Buddha describes *Nibbāna*, but he misunderstood it because he comes from a background dealing with God. There are different definitions of God depending on your understanding. All human beings are at different levels.

For Buddhists, religion is not something that comes down from heaven to earth to solve our problems. According to the Buddha, religion is a creation of human beings. It grows up on earth to satisfy a human need. The human need is to find a way out of suffering. Some people try to solve the problem after death by believing they go to heaven. Buddhists are not trying to solve the problem after death. We are trying to solve the problem here and now without waiting for the next life. According to the Buddha, even if we go to a celestial world after death, we live a much longer life but we will still have to die. Freedom from death can only be achieved before you die, here and now, by awakening from the dream of existence.

## **NIBBĀNA FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The Buddhist approach to *Nibbāna*, as explained in the *Suttas*, is psychological rather than theological or mystical. In previous chapters, we explored the different concepts used by the Buddha to describe the mind. In particular, we discussed the three key terms of perception (*viññana*), cognition (*mano*), and affection (*citta*). We also discussed the behavioral part of psychology as described by the Buddha using the word *kamma*. When talking about *Nibbāna* from a psychological point of view, we can look at the transformation of these four activities. Perceptually, it is the experience of apperception. Cognitively, it is the experience free from the delusion of existence. Affectively, it is the experience of mental purity, selfless love, and inner peace. Conatively it is the experience of the freedom of will for discretion in behavior. This free will allows for concern for the happiness and welfare of all beings, including animals, plants, and even the inanimate environment.

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<sup>162</sup> SN 38.1

Previously, we discussed how suffering arises due to the unconscious chain reaction of the organism to the environment. If suffering begins unconsciously, it can end only by becoming conscious of this process. That is, by becoming conscious of antecedental concurrence (*paticca samuppāda*). The concurrence of perception, cognition, and affection creates the world and the self. This world and the self are unstable. What is unstable is insecure. What is insecure is not as I want. What is not as I want is not under my power. What is not under my power is not mine. What is not mine cannot be me. What cannot be me cannot be myself. What is not mine is not me, not myself (*netam mama, neso'hamasmi, neso me attāti*)<sup>163</sup>. What is not mine should be discarded. This realization brings about the paradigm shift from existence to experience, which results in dispassion. When the perceptual, cognitive, and affective processes are fully comprehended and the paradigm shift has occurred both intellectually and emotionally, the delusion of self is eradicated. This is emancipation or freedom from suffering (*vimutti*). This results in the imperturbable serenity of the mind (*Nibbāna*).

### **Transformation of Perception (*viññāna*)**

As we previously discussed, to focus on the object perceived is to become aware of the object perceived as existing, while the subject that perceives the object is also seen to exist. The subject is personalized as mine, thus creating a sense of I or self (*etan mama, eso hamasmi, eso me attati*)<sup>164</sup>. This way of thinking is what we call existential thinking. Instead of thinking this way, if one focuses attention on the process of perception and not on the object perceived, then one sees that it is the process of perception that creates the object and the subject. Then the existence of the subject and the object is seen as an appearance only. It is then an illusion or a delusion. This kind of thinking focuses on the experience of perception rather than the subject or object. It is what we call experiential thinking.

The Buddha points out in the *Mulapariyaya Sutta*<sup>165</sup> that the normal person (*putujjana*) perceives a solid as a solid and concludes that the solid exists. The emancipated *Arahant* super-perceives (*abhijānati*) a solid and does not conclude that a solid exists. This is the difference between perception and super-perception, based on apperception. This change from existential thinking to experiential thinking is the relieving paradigm shift (*nirodha samāpatti*). It means one is

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<sup>163</sup> SN 22.59

<sup>164</sup> MN 148

<sup>165</sup> MN 1

relieved from the sense of existence (*bhava*). When existence is no more, birth, aging, and death are no more. This is the end of all grief, lamentation, pain, distress, and exhaustion. In this way, the great mass of suffering comes to an end (*eva metassa kevalassa dukkhakkandassa nirodho hoti*)<sup>166</sup>.

This was why the Buddha said: "When the mind enters equilibrium, one understands how things come to exist" (*samahito Bhikkhave, Bhikkhu yatabhutan pajanathi*)<sup>167</sup>. To clarify this point further, it is helpful to use an analogy. Suppose a bird is in front of a mirror, the bird begins to peck at the image in the mirror, backed by the assumption that the image is another bird. On the other hand, if a human is in front of the mirror, the human being knows that the mirror reflects one's image. The human is aware of how the image in the mirror appears and therefore knows that there is no human behind the mirror. In the same way, when one is aware of the process of perception, one knows that what is seen is only a mental image produced by the process of perception and not a real existing thing out there. The emancipated *Arahant* is aware of the process by which the object is seen, and therefore does not conclude that the object exists. This is what we call super-perception (*abhiññā*), as distinct from the ordinary perception of the human.

When we become aware of perception, we realize that suffering is involved with this paradigm, and we start to think differently. When we focus our attention on perception, we know that what we see is not a real object but a mental image. In other words, both subject and object are not seen as existing in existential thinking. Whatever is seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched, is only sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch, and the objects are understood to be only a product constructed by the process of perception. This means the object perceived is not a reality but an illusion. The object perceived is a mental image (*rūpa*), like a picture taken by a camera. The process of construction forms the mental image (*sankhāra*), the colors seen are the sensations (*saññā*), which are felt as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (*vedanā*). The images are identified (*viññāna*) by giving them names (*nāma*).

There is an important verse in the *Kevatṭa Sutta*<sup>168</sup> where the Buddha describes this transformation of the perceptual process of one who has attained *Nibbāna*. The fully awakened person no longer has a normal *viññāna* but what the Buddha refers to as *anidassana viññāna*:

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<sup>166</sup> MN 38

<sup>167</sup> SN 22.5

<sup>168</sup> DN 11

**TABLE 22: Comparative translation of a verse from *Kevaṭṭa sutta***

Pāli	Standard Translations <sup>169</sup>	Author's Translations
<u><i>Viññānam</i></u> <u><i>anidassanari,</i></u> <u><i>anantam</i></u> <u><i>sabbatopabham;</i></u> <u><i>Ettha dīghañca</i></u> <u><i>rassañca,</i></u> <u><i>añum thūlam</i></u> <u><i>subhāsubham;</i></u> <u><i>Ettha nāmañca</i></u> <u><i>rūpañca,</i></u> <u><i>asesam uparujjhati;</i></u> <u><i>Viññānassa nirodhena,</i></u> <u><i>etthetam uparujjhati</i></u>	<b>Consciousness that is signless</b> , limitless, all-illuminating, Then water, earth, fire, & wind find no footing, Then long & short, small & large, pleasant & unpleasant - Then "name-&-form" are all brought to an end. With the cessation of <i>viññāṇa</i> [divided-knowing] all this is brought to an end	<b>Non-manifest perception</b> , limitless, and all-clear No solid, liquid, heat, or motion is cognized No long and short, small and large, pleasant and unpleasant Not even a trace of an image or name met When perception is stopped, all objects disappear

### Transformation of Cognition (*mano*)

With cognition or *mano*, we make meaning out of what we perceive. We have discussed previously how the emotional reaction was the cause of suffering. The way to remove the emotional reaction was to change how we interpret our circumstances. How do we do this? It is to switch from existential thinking to experiential thinking. Existential thought carries a subjective I and an objective world, resulting in an emotional relationship between the two, ending in suffering. In experiential thinking there is no self or world but only impersonal experience.

It is only the cognitive faculty that is sensible. The cognitive faculty should dominate our mind, not the emotions, but very often, it is the emotions that dominate. This is what makes a human being an animal. What is unique about the human being is the cognitive faculty. The glorious aim of the Buddha was to make the average half-human being a supernormal full human being.

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<sup>169</sup> *Kevaṭṭa sutta*: To *Kevaṭṭa* (DN 11), translated from the *Pāli* by T.W Rhys-Davids, Leigh Brasington. Sutta Central, 2 September 2022, <https://suttacentral.net/dn11/en/rhysdavids-brasington?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

"Feeding, sleeping, fear and sex<sup>170</sup>  
 Is common to both man and beast  
 Cognitive experience does make man very special  
 When low in cognitive experience man is a beast."

*āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunam ca  
 sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām  
 dharmo hi teṣām adhiko viśeṣo  
 dharmeṇa hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*

This ancient Sanskrit sloka illustrates the grave need of man to practice meditation. What meditation does is make the cognitive faculty of man dominate his mind rather than the affective. This involves changing the way we think to stop emotions from dominating. The importance of changing our thinking to stop unconscious and irrational emotional behavior has been recognized only recently in Western psychology. The Buddha fully understood and used this fact to transform personality by radically eliminating all self-centered emotions. This was the meaning of becoming a spiritually awakened Buddha or an emancipated *Arahant*.

In the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta*, the Buddha explains the difference between the thinking of the emancipated individual and the normal person. In other words, this explains the meaning of the paradigm shift from existence to experience (*nirodha samāpatti*). The Buddha says in his Formula on the Root of All Phenomena (*Mūlapariyāya Sutta*):

- (1) The ordinary human being **perceives** a solid as a solid (*patavim patavito sañjānāti*).
- (2) The Emancipated One (*Arahant*) **super-perceives** a solid as a solid (*patavim patavito abhijānāti*).
- (3) The ordinary human being, having perceived the solid, **concludes the solid exists** (*patavim patavito saññatva patavi maññati*).

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<sup>170</sup> *Mahabharat, Shantiparva*, 294.29

- (4) The *Arahant* having super-perceived the solid **does not conclude the solid exists** (*patavim patavito abhiññatva patavi namaññati*).

This difference between the ordinary person and the *Arahant* is similar to the difference between the bird and the human in front of a mirror described earlier.

The *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* goes on:

- (5) The ordinary person **concludes** that the solid exists and also of what it is made (*patavito maññati pataviyā maññati*).
- (6) The *Arahant* **does not conclude** that it exists or of what it is made (*patavito namaññati pataviyā namaññati*).

It is helpful to compare this statement with existential philosophers who distinguish between existence and essence. Existence is expressed by the statement "that it is," and the essence is expressed by the statement, "what it is." For example, if there is a cup made of clay, its existence is described by the statement, "there is a cup." Its essence is expressed by the statement, "it is made of clay." This is how Jean-Paul Sartre made the statement, "existence precedes essence,"<sup>171</sup> for something must exist before we can talk of what it is made. Sartre considered this to be the essential premise on which existential philosophy stands. The ordinary person, according to this *Sutta* is also thinking in this same existential way.

Existential philosophers drew attention to the problem of existence: every human being is aware of his existence and aware of his death. This brings about anguish, anxiety, worry, fear, and trembling. However, existential philosophers could not solve the problem other than taking the leap of faith in God or waiting until human intelligence evolves to a capable level.

The Buddha solved this problem by showing that it was created by existential thinking. From the Buddhist perspective experience precedes existence. This is because existence is a concept that arose from experience, which is the mental process of perception. Therefore, it can be solved only through a paradigm shift from existential thought to experiential thinking. This is why existence (*bhava*), according to the Buddha, is a delusion, or a dream, from which humankind must awaken. Entering into the experiential paradigm is what is called *nirodha samāpatti*.

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<sup>171</sup> Existence precedes essence. (2023, September 4). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence\\_precedes\\_essence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence_precedes_essence)

The *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* goes further:

- (7) The ordinary person **personalizes** the solid as mine (*patavi meti maññati*).
- (8) The *Arahant* **does not personalize** the solid as mine (*patavi meti namaññati*).
- (9) The ordinary person **takes delight** in the solid (*patavi abhinandati*).
- (10) The *Arahant* **does not take delight** in the solid (*patavi na abhinandati*).
- (11) Referring to the ordinary person, the Buddha asks, "Why do they do so?" (*tankissa hetu*). And answers "because they do not **comprehend**" (*apariññattassati*).
- (12) Referring to the *Arahant*, the Buddha asks, "Why do they do so?" (*tankissa hetu*). And answers "because they **comprehend**" (*pariññattassati*).

This is the essence of the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta*, which discusses the differences between the ordinary person and the Awakened One concerning everything experienced. Due to translation problems, comprehension of these ideas has been difficult. We can see this in the following table:

**TABLE 23: Comparative translation excerpt from the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations <sup>172</sup>	Author's Translations
<i>Idha, bhikkhave.... —pathavim pathavito sañjānāti; pathavim pathavito saññatvā pathavim maññati, pathaviyā maññati, pathavito maññati, pathaviṁ meti maññati, pathavim abhinandati. Tam kissa hetu? 'Apariññātam tassā'ti</i>	Here, <i>bhikkhus</i> , an untaught ordinary person.....perceives earth as earth. Having perceived earth as earth, he conceives himself as earth, he conceives himself in earth, he conceives himself apart from earth, he conceives earth to be 'mine,' he delights in earth. Why is	The ordinary human being perceives a solid as a solid, having perceived the solid, concludes the solid exists The ordinary person concludes that the solid exists and also of what it is made The ordinary person personalizes the solid as mine

<sup>172</sup> *Mūlapariyāya Sutta*: The Root of All Things (MN 1), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Sutta Central, 14 September 2022, <https://suttacentral.net/mn1/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

<i>vadāmi</i>	that? Because he has not fully understood it, I say	The ordinary person takes delight in the solid Why do they do so? because they do not comprehend
<i>Yopi so, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araham .... sopi pathavim pathavito abhijānāti; pathavim pathavito abhiññāya pathavim na maññati, pathaviyā na maññati, pathavito na maññati, pathavim meti na maññati, pathavim nābhinandati. Tam kissa hetu? 'Pariññātarāt tassā'ti vadāmi</i>	<i>Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who is an arahant .....he too directly knows earth as earth. Having directly known earth as earth, he does not conceive himself as earth, he does not conceive himself in earth, he does not conceive himself apart from earth, he does not conceive earth to be 'mine,' he does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has fully understood it, I say</i>	The Emancipated One ( <i>Arahant</i> ) super perceives a solid as a solid The <i>Arahant</i> having super-perceived the solid does not conclude the solid exists The <i>Arahant</i> does not conclude that it exists or of what it is made The <i>Arahant</i> does not personalize the solid as mine The <i>Arahant</i> does not take delight in the solid Why do they do so? because they comprehend

The Buddha has also described this aspect in the *Nibbāna Sutta*<sup>173</sup> as follows:

Renunciates, there is that experience wherein is neither solid, nor liquid, nor heat, nor motion; wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space, nor infinite perception, nor nothingness, nor neither sensation nor non-sensation; where there is neither this world, nor a world beyond, nor both together, no moon and sun. There, Renunciates, I declare is no coming, nor going, nor duration; therein is no falling, nor arising; it is not something fixed, nor is it moving; it is not based on anything. That indeed is the end of *dukkha*.

This transformed consciousness is only a temporary turning of consciousness inward to look at itself. It is a rest from toil. The person who has attained *Nibbāna* is not always turned within in this way. Therefore, the cognitive experience of *Nibbāna* is twofold as the Buddha said<sup>174</sup>:

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<sup>173</sup> UD 8.1

<sup>174</sup> *Itivuttaka* 44

Renunciates, there are these two essential components of the experience of *Nibbāna*. What are they? The component with attributes and the component without attributes. And what, Renunciates, is the component of *Nibbānic* experience with attributes? Herein a Renunciate is a Bond breaker (*Arahant*), one who has ended all influences, who has fulfilled the divine life, accomplished the task, laid down the burden, achieved the purpose, shattered the shackles of existence, and freed by penetrative understanding. In them, the five senses are active and intact, they experience pleasant and unpleasant sensations, and they are subject to pleasure and pain. But their experience is free of lust, hate, and the delusion of self. This Renunciates is called the component of *Nibbānic* experience with attributes (*sopādisesa nibbāna dhātu*).

And what, Renunciates, is the component of *Nibbānic* experience without attributes? Herein a Renunciate is a Bond breaker... (as before) ...who is freed by penetrative understanding. But in this very life, they experience the absence of pleasure or pain through the senses. They become quiescent and cool. This Renunciates is called the component of *Nibbānic* experience without attributes (*anupādisesa nibbāna dhātu*).

Although the attention is withdrawn from the existential paradigm during the paradigm shift (*nirodha samāpatti*), it does not mean that the paradigm of existence is given up forever. When it becomes necessary to communicate with ordinary people, the Awakened Ones return to the existential paradigm for that purpose and return to the experiential paradigm. These two modes can be changed from time to time and are seen as two kinds of *Nibbāna* as described above:

- (1) *Saupadisesa Nibbāna* – experienced when the *Arahant* is in the existential mode.
- (2) *Anupadisesa Nibbāna* – experienced when the *Arahant* is in the experiential mode.

Although this is so, today, the *Theravāda* tradition explains these two kinds of *Nibbāna* differently. They describe it as follows:

- (1) *Saupadisesa nibbāna* – experienced when the *Arahant* is alive.
- (2) *Anupadisesa nibbāna* – experienced after the death of the *Arahant*.

The person who has attained the state called *Nibbāna* is not one who constantly lives in a different reality, like a lunatic, claiming it to be the only true reality. In contrast, the ordinary person's reality is considered false. The Bond-breaker is a person who can see both realities and who is, therefore, able to experience and empathize with the ordinary person's reality but see the disadvantages of being in the everyday, mundane reality and the advantages of the super-mundane reality. He could switch from one mode of reality to the other at will, like changing channels on TV. The emancipator can occasionally toggle between these two paradigms, but they remain in the experiential mode most of the time. Sometimes, they enter the existential mode for a purpose like going on alms round (*pindapāta*) or discussing the *Dhamma* (*dhammiva katā*). The well-known statement of the Buddha, "speak on the *Dhamma* or maintain the Ariya silence (*dhammiva katā ariyo vā tunhibhāvo*)<sup>175</sup>" refers to the same toggle. The Ariya silence (*ariyo vā tunhibhāvo*)<sup>176</sup> is the experiential mode, and discussing the *Dhamma* is the existential mode.

### **Transformation of the Affective (*citta*)**

This twofold aspect of *Nibbāna* is only the description of the cognitive experience of *Nibbāna*. The affective aspect is the purity and tranquility of the heart, the freedom from lust, hate, and the notion of I and mine, and the selfless concern for the welfare of all beings without exception, called selfless love (*mettā*). The cognitive transformation leads to the affective transformation.

In previous chapters, we discussed that emotions are causing all our difficulties and therefore need to be given up. Some might argue that love, joy, or the four divine dwellings are positive emotions. However, emotion is, by definition, self-centered and needs to be triggered by external circumstances. What is called the four divine dwellings by the Buddha can only be experienced in the absence of all such self-centered, dependent emotions. The complete loss of all selfish emotions and the experience of these four divine dwellings of *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* is the affective experience of the awakened individual.

*Mettā* is usually translated as loving-kindness, but I call it universal benevolence. Universal benevolence is a selfless longing for the welfare of all beings. It is not a love for one individual or even love for members of one's family. It is not even love for all humanity. It is a longing for the welfare of all beings without exception, including plants and animals and even unknown beings in other worlds. Universal

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<sup>175</sup> MN 26

<sup>176</sup> MN 26

benevolence is losing one's self-interest in the interest of all beings. It is like a drop of water or river entering the ocean and losing its identity by merging with the ocean. In the same way, self-interest is lost in the interest of all beings. Interest in others is not opposed to self-interest. One's interest, which was originally narrow, by being concerned only with oneself, is now expanded to include all beings without exception. Universal benevolence is a broadminded state that has no limits. For a translation of the *Mettā Sutta*<sup>177</sup> see Appendix 2.

When fully developed, *mettā* turns into *Karunā*. *Karunā* is when you do not make a distinction between yourself and others. Just as a mother thinks of her children, we spread goodwill towards all beings without exception. This loss of self brings about freedom from all grief and suffering. *Karunā* results in the happiness of selflessness (*muditā*). This happiness of selflessness is not an emotion. It is the perfect tranquility of mind. This perfect tranquility is turned inwards. It does not seek happiness outside. The mind at this stage is not disturbed by the vicissitudes of life: gain and loss, fame and ill-fame, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

The mind thus centered within begins to be focused on the experience within or apperception (*upekkhā*). When the mind is focused within, the attention becomes focused on the process of perception rather than the object perceived. When this occurs, one becomes aware of the process of perception in detail. This way, one becomes able to analyze the cumulatives of the process of perception (*pañca upādānakkhandha*).

**TABLE 24: Comparative translation of the four divine dwellings**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations	Author's Translations
<i>Mettā</i>	Loving-Kindness	Universal Benevolence
<i>Karunā</i>	Compassion	Empathy/Compassion
<i>Muditā</i>	Sympathetic Joy	Selfless Joy
<i>Upekkhā</i>	Equanimity	Apperception

The *citta* and *taṇhā*, the affective part of the mind and the emotional reactions it produces are also described in the following way by the Buddha in verse form:

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<sup>177</sup> Snp 1.08

**TABLE 24: Comparative translation of *Dhammapada* verses 153 &154**

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translations <sup>178</sup>	Author's Translations
<p><i>Anekajātisamsāram, sandhāvissam anibbisam; Gahakāram gavesanto, dukkhā jāti punappunam.</i></p> <p><i>Gahakāraka ditṭhosī, puna geham na kāhasī; Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā, gahakūṭam visāṅkhataṁ; Visāṅkhāragatam cittam, tanhānam khayamajjhagā</i></p>	<p>Through many a birth in Samsara have I wandered in vain, seeking the builder of this house (of life). Repeated birth is indeed suffering! O house-builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again. For your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered. <b>My mind</b> has reached the Unconditioned; I have attained the destruction of <b>craving</b></p>	<p>Numerous lives in <i>samsāra</i> I ran in pursuit of the Creator But never did I ever meet him So painful is repeated birth</p> <p>Now I see you, Oh Creator No more will you create again Destroyed is your foundation Dismantled the entire structure <b>The emotions</b> have stopped creating <b>The emotional reactions</b> have ceased.</p>

These two verses represent the paradigm shift from existential thinking to experiential thinking. The first verse depicts the existential paradigm, and the second verse describes the experiential paradigm. In the existential paradigm, the world as an object and the self as a subject exists. In the experiential paradigm, they do not exist. The first verse describes the Buddha's thoughts before his awakening. The second verse describes his thoughts after his awakening. Before his awakening, he thought there was an external creator who created the world, and he searched for him but did not find him. After his awakening, he realized that the creator was his mind. The actual creator is said to be the emotions. This was his awakening from the dream of existence, and this was how he stopped creating the world.

### Transformation of behavior (*Kamma*)

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<sup>178</sup> *Jaravagga: Old Age* (Dhp XI), translated from the *Pāli* by Acharya Buddharakkhita. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.11.budd.html>

There is also a behavioural aspect of *Nibbāna*. It is to act selflessly without being a slave to selfish emotions. It is the overcoming of harmful actions and the perfection of human nature. It is the transcendence of human weakness. According to Buddhism, one is not born with free will. It must be acquired through human effort.

## SUMMARY

In summary, from the above discussion, we can see that the experience of *Nibbāna* is not a withdrawal from society, to enjoy a state of eternal bliss selfishly, or an escape from the real world, to enjoy a mystic union with God. The question of eternal life or annihilation does not arise when the self is a delusion. *Nibbāna* is a psychological transformation of personality where a self-centered person is transformed into a completely selfless one. It is the perfection of man, which is the aim of both Christianity and Buddhism and all other religions worthy of the name. It also means that the practice of religion is not merely doing social service either, but the building of a person's character in preparation for selfless service. It is becoming a good person rather than just doing good deeds. It is the solution to a psychological problem, taking precedence over solving social, political, or economic problems.

## Question and Answer

**Q:** What is the distinction between desire and emotion?

**A:** Desire is not necessarily an emotion. It can be a rational desire. That is, desire can come from both cognition/*mano* or affection/*citta*. For example, you have decided to do something like helping a person, not because of emotions. The desire to attain *Nibbāna* is not an emotion. A person once asked the Buddha, "You said that you have to give up desires, but still you have the desire to attain *Nibbāna*."<sup>179</sup> The Buddha said I will use an analogy to explain this to you. If you desire to go to the city of *Rajagahā*, you have a desire. You go to the city of *Rajagahā*. When you are in the city of *Rajagahā*, do you still have the desire to go to the city? He said no. So, this is a desire that brings an end to desire. You do not have that desire anymore. The desire is eliminated when you are at the point. Once you have attained *Nibbāna*, the desire also comes to an end. But still, you may have the desire to help another person attain *Nibbāna*. That desire may be natural and rational. It is not an emotional desire.

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<sup>179</sup> MN 107

**PART V**  
**THE METHOD**

## CHAPTER 8

### THE BUDDHA'S METHOD

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

Thus far we have been looking at Buddhism as a theory; it's now time to examine Buddhism as a practice. It's in the fourth super normal reality that the Buddha sets out the method of attaining *Nibbāna*.

In the modern world meditation is increasingly becoming mainstream, especially the mindfulness and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation movements.

The modern mindfulness movement is even seen as a cure all by some proponents.

In the rush to practice such myopic methods and experience the benefits they promise to deliver, the author pointed out that the method the Buddha taught, usually known as the noble eight-fold path, has been cast aside and forgotten. According to the author, an examination of the early texts reveals that the Buddha did not teach many methods but only one method and this is what he translates as the supernormal eightfold way.

Whilst practicing selective portions of this method in a piece meal way, such as mindfulness, may bring limited benefits, if we are interested in the practice taught by the Buddha and the attainment of *Nibbāna*, the super normal eightfold way must be practiced in a holistic manner.

In this chapter, the author clarifies this path, pointing out common mistakes in translation and interpretation. In this task the author employs a series of *Suttas* known as the gradual training, where the Buddha describes how the model of the super normal eight-fold way unfolds practically in our lives.

## THE BUDDHA'S EIGHT STEP PROGRAM

An amazing conglomeration of meditation techniques has begun to appear in the spiritual supermarket of today. They are all directly or indirectly imported from the East. All claim to gratify the various needs of seekers in one way or another. Yet, they do not seem to help solve the fundamental problem of existence. They sometimes alleviate the symptoms of the disease but do not deal with the cause and eliminate the sickness. Of course, several meditation techniques claim to be Buddhist among the various meditation brands available today. These techniques vary depending on the teacher and which school of Buddhism they follow. However, the Buddha taught only one method. It is the supernormal eightfold way (*ariya aṭṭhāṅgika magga*). Unfortunately, the methods available today are widely divergent from what was taught by the Buddha. Consequently, meditators go from teacher to teacher, searching for the technique that makes sense to them. This chapter aims to help meditators who have lost their way in this wilderness of views.

Anxiety, stress, and aversive life circumstances have led many people to seek relief through meditation. While it is true that meditation can bring relief from stress or the entire scope of human unhappiness, it can also bring about difficulties unless understood and practiced correctly. This is very pertinent to the practice of meditation, both in monastic and lay life.

There are many meditation methods available to people in various retreat settings. The seeker is free to choose whatever seems to be appealing. Some of these are non-Buddhist. Others, such as tranquillity and insight meditation, claim to be Buddhist. Unfortunately, many of these practices skip the preliminaries and start with the newcomer sitting on a cushion and concentrating on in-and-out breathing. Such instructions have led many astray. The desire to learn the *Dhamma* has driven some to study books or engage in *Dhamma* discussions. Such a desire, although wholesome, has led to attempts at more advanced meditation techniques such as *samatha* and *vipassanā* without the necessary preliminary foundation. These advanced meditation techniques require a sound understanding of the teachings, high levels of ethical behavior, and renouncing many things such as sensual pleasure.

Lay people, in particular, find such renunciation difficult to endure without jeopardizing the family life. Those who have attempted to do so have found it a precarious balancing act between living the meditative life and meeting family, job,

or other responsibilities. In some cases, marital discord has been the result. Therefore, a proper understanding and application of meditation within the scope of lay life is essential for a lay meditator. A layperson must ask, "what should my goal be, and how should I practice meditation as a layperson?"

This overview aims to provide a map for meditators, both lay and monastic, to show where one should start and where one can go. The kind of meditation we present here differs from other types. It is a special type of meditation based on the Buddha's original teachings. We call it Proto-Buddhist awakening meditation. The prefix "proto" used by us means the prototype from which all modern schools of Buddhism have originated. The authentic source of information and guidance in developing this technique has been the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which the *Theravāda* school of Buddhism has preserved. All scholars unanimously regard it as the earliest source of the teachings of the Buddha. Parallels of these *Suttas* have been preserved in Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan by other schools. Thus, they represent the teachings held in common by all schools of Buddhism.

It is a system of meditation that transforms a normal human being (*puthujana*) into a supernormal individual (*ariya puggala*). In other words, this system of meditation aims to change the individual's character from a self-centered one to a selfless one, from an unhealthy one to a healthy one; and from an unhappy one to a happy one.

## BECOMING A BUDDHIST

The purpose of Proto-Buddhist meditation is the solution to the problem of existence. More than twenty-five centuries ago, *Gotama* the Buddha discovered the problem of existence and its solution and revealed it to the world. Only a few learned from him and benefited from his method. Later, his approach was worshiped as a religion, and thereby, it became a palliative to soothe the sufferer rather than a cure for a disease. Only a few know of his discovery today.

Practicing Buddhism and being a Buddhist are two different things. You may not be a Buddhist, but you can still practice Buddhism. On the other hand, you may be a Buddhist but not practice Buddhism. Quite different from both practicing or being is becoming a Buddhist. On one extreme are some Westerners who experiment with Buddhist practice but do not become Buddhist. They miss the full benefit of the practice. On the other extreme are some Easterners, born in Buddhist countries and brought up in Buddhist cultures, who call themselves Buddhists but do not practice Buddhism. They get the minimal benefit, if any at all, from Buddhism.

There is a third intermediate group of people that avoids both extremes. That is, those who become Buddhists. They are the ones who benefit from the teachings of the Buddha. Those who call themselves Buddhists just because they have been born into a Buddhist family or practice some rituals are mistaken. One does not become a Buddhist by birth, practice, or even initiation. One becomes a Buddhist by what one is. Buddhists by birth and non-Buddhists, practitioners of Buddhism or otherwise, can become Buddhists if they want to and know how. To do so, one has to understand what one is. What one is, is one's character structure, which consists of one's philosophy of life, one's aim in life, what one speaks habitually, what one does habitually, and how one lives habitually. Habits are tendencies of behavior that are perpetuated by practice. Practice means repetition. What one repeats habitually, one becomes. One repeats, however, only what one wants to be. One is what one wants to be. What one wants to be depends on one's sense of values, which in turn depends on one's philosophy of life.

An individual's character is a functional whole that is organized to reach a set goal. Every habit of thought, speech, and action is an integral part of this functional whole, which is necessary to achieve this goal. The goal, however, is always a personality. It is some self that one wants to be. To be more accurate, the goal is a visualized image of the person one wants to become. This person one wants to become is always a person one considers superior in some form. One always wants to move from a state of inferiority to superiority. One's goal tends to be what one perceives to be lacking in oneself. What is perceived to be superior depends on one's sense of values. These values, again, depend on one's philosophy of life. If we want to change our habits, we can do so only by becoming a different person, which means we have to change our philosophy of life.

We have to change our goal in life, followed by a complete reorganizing of our thoughts, speech, actions, and life to reach the new goal. Then old habits will drop, and new patterns will be formed. Isolated habits cannot be eliminated because they are essential parts of one's character structure organized to reach the desired goal. Only by a character transformation can one change habits. This is the reason for the failed attempts to overcome habits like eating, drinking, and smoking. Many of these concepts are accepted by modern psychologists. But more than 25 centuries ago, the Unsurpassable Trainer of Personality (*Anuttaro purisadamma sārati*), the Buddha, formulated a system of transforming character based on these principles. When we examine this system carefully, we realize that Buddhism is a personal growth and inner transformation system.

The supernormal eightfold way is not a set of commandments or rules for living. It is a description of the character structure of the true Buddhist. One has to acquire this character structure to become a Buddhist. A change in character is rarely a sudden change, though sometimes it could appear to be so. After a long period of struggling to understand, the harmonious perspective may dawn upon one when the jigsaw puzzle pieces suddenly click into place. When the harmonious perspective appears, the rest of the structure falls into place. The individual's life becomes reoriented to reach the extraordinary goal of inner calm called *Nibbāna*.

In other words, it is a transformation of the personality. When it occurs fully, the self-centered personality changes to a selfless state. There is freedom from the burdensome sense of self. Thus, the transformation is not a normal state, but it is not an abnormal state either. Therefore, the only word we can use is super normal. We can even call it transcendence. You are transcending all the self-centered weaknesses of the personality when you come to the supernormal state. This transcendence is a change in the way a person thinks, their emotional state, and how they behave. It is not a transformation from the outside but a transformation inside.

## THE SUPERNORMAL EIGHTFOLD WAY

The framework the Buddha taught for this character transformation is the supernormal eight-fold. This method of meditation involves a change in our way of thinking, feeling, and living. In the *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*,<sup>180</sup> which deals with the last days of the Buddha, we learn of a person called *Subhadda* who came to the Buddha and asked, "Are there spiritually emancipated people in other religious sects in the world?" The Buddha replied, "I do not wish to talk about other religious sects. I will speak only about the views of my religious sect. As long as the supernormal eightfold way is practiced, the world would not be devoid of spiritually emancipated people." This indicates that if we want to solve the problem of existence and be freed from the suffering of life, the path to follow is the supernormal eightfold way. This is why the method of meditation discussed in this book is based on the supernormal eightfold way as taught by the Buddha in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. It is not based on the *Visuddhimagga*, the famous commentary on meditation, written by Ven. *Buddhaghosa*. This especial way comprises eight steps as follows:

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<sup>180</sup> DN 16

**TABLE 25: Comparative translation of *ariya aṭṭhāṅgika magga***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<b><i>ariya aṭṭhāṅgika magga</i></b>	Noble eightfold path	Supernormal eightfold way
<b>1. sammā ditthi</b>	Right View	Harmonious Perspective
<b>2. sammā sankappa</b>	Right Intention/Thought	Harmonious Goal Reorientation
<b>3. sammā vācā</b>	Right Speech	Harmonious Speech
<b>4. sammā kammantha</b>	Right Action	Harmonious Action
<b>5. sammā ājīva</b>	Right Livelihood	Harmonious Lifestyle
<b>6. sammā vāyāma</b>	Right Effort	Harmonious Exercise
<b>7. sammā sati</b>	Right Mindfulness	Harmonious Attention
<b>8. sammā samādhi</b>	Right Concentration	Harmonious Mental Equilibrium

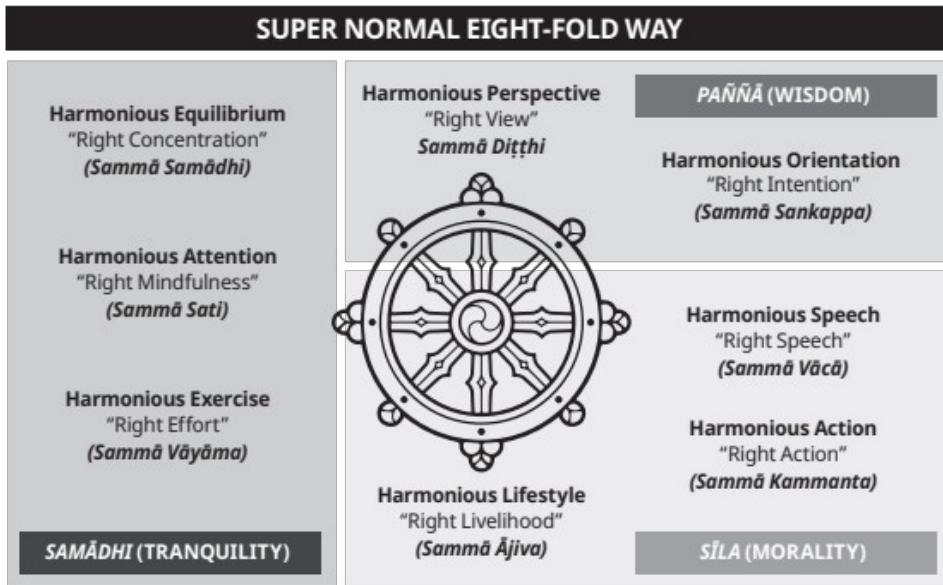
### **Meaning of Ariya**

I have translated the word *ariya* as supernormal, not noble. The Buddha's teaching aims to bring normal people to a supernormal state. In modern psychology, they aim to change people with abnormal levels of suffering into the level of normal suffering. But the Buddha aimed to bring normal suffering to a level of supernormal happiness. This is done by changing the normal person into a supernormal person.

### **The threefold division of the path**

This transformation is a gradual process that begins with the harmonious perspective. Once the harmonious perspective has been acquired, the other steps are automatically destined to follow in sequence. This unfolding can be described as "letting go." This means that the sense of self has to be gradually given up. Once the harmonious perspective has been acquired, the rest of the process unfolds with control of behavior (*sīla*) which is letting go of behaviors rooted in self-centered emotional impulses (steps 3,4 & 5). Followed by letting go of emotional disturbances (*saṃādhi*) (steps 6,7 & 8), the outcome of which is letting go of the concept of self and existence through a paradigm shift from existence to impersonal experience. This is to gain perfect understanding (*paññā*), resulting in freedom (*vimutti*) from all discomfort and the attainment of the imperturbable serenity of mind (*Nibbāna*).

## DIAGRAM 19: Division of the path into *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, *Paññā*



### Meaning of *Sammā*

In describing these eight steps, again, I have changed the translations. We usually see it translated as right view etc. I don't use the word right because the *Pāli* word *sammā* is unrelated to right or wrong. It is a word that means harmony. Why do we use the word harmony? Because it is the opposite of conflict. That means our thinking conflicts with reality, which is why we have to change our way of thinking. And our emotions are also in conflict with reality. Our speech is also in conflict with reality. Our actions conflict with reality. Our life is also in conflict with reality. It is because we conflict with reality that we are suffering. We become unhappy because of this conflict. We need to move from conflict to harmony.

#### 1. *Sammā dīṭṭhi* (Harmonious Perspective)

The process begins with the harmonious perspective. I don't translate the word *dīṭṭhi* as view. I call it a perspective. Perspective means a different way of looking at the same thing. For example, when taking a photograph, someone can stand behind us and take a picture, or they can stand in front of us and take a picture. These two photographs will be different. That difference is the difference in perspective. In the same way, we can look at the world from different perspectives. Different people

can look at the world in different ways. The insane person may be thinking, I am the lord of the world, which is that person's perspective. Another person may think I am the most unimportant person in the world, which is that person's perspective.

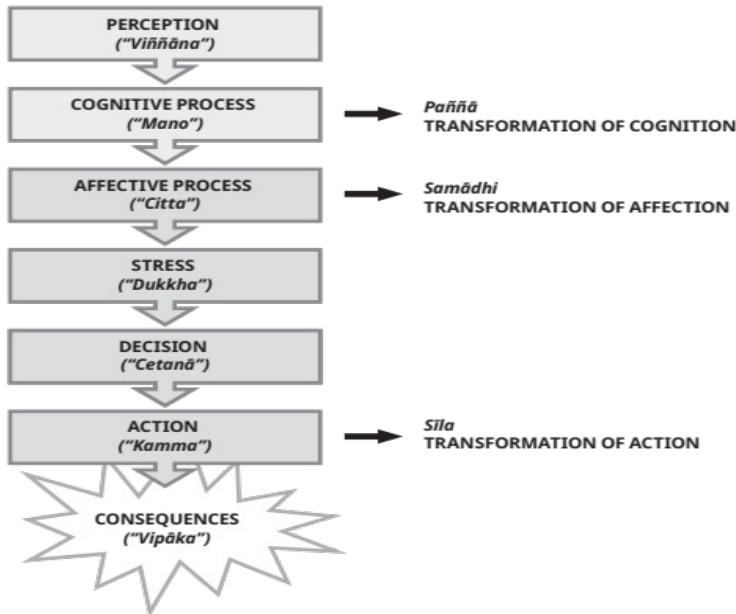
Similarly, we are talking about a unique perspective that does not conflict with reality. That is why we call it the harmonious perspective. When we begin to cultivate this perspective, our thinking becomes harmonious, our goals become harmonious, our speech becomes harmonious, and our actions become harmonious. Our whole lifestyle becomes harmonious. In the *Suttas*, the Buddha defines this harmonious perspective as the supernormal fourfold reality.<sup>181</sup> This is the subject of this entire book, which may be summarised as shifting from the perspective of existence to the perspective of experience. We must begin transforming our suffering by shifting our perspective from what we usually start with to the perspective taught by the Buddha. We begin this paradigm shift in its theoretical phase by cultivating the harmonious perspective. We may still feel the sense of existence, but we understand intellectually that it is a delusion.

In summary form, in the previous chapters, we have been describing how *dukkha* results from the organism's unconscious chain reaction to the environment. Here we must understand that through the practice of the supernormal eightfold way, which the Buddha summarised as *sīla*, *saṃādhi*, and *paññā*, we are gaining freedom from this unconscious reaction in stages. Thus, we are gaining freedom from all *dukkha*. We can illustrate this in diagram form:

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<sup>181</sup> SN 45.8

## DIAGRAM 20: The transformation of the unconscious chain reaction



The Buddha has spoken of four factors that lead to the harmonious perspective. This sequence is called "the path to stream-entry" (*Sāriputta Sutta*)<sup>182</sup>:

- 1. Association with those mature in the *Dhamma* (*sappurisa sevana*)** – These are people who are aware of the fourfold reality and value *Nibbāna* as the highest good.
- 2. Hearing the *Dhamma* (*saddhamma savana*)** – This is hearing about the fourfold supernormal reality from such people.
- 3. Deterministic thinking (*yoniso manasikāra*)** – thinking based on antecedental concurrence rather than thinking based on the paradigm of existence.
- 4. Reorganization of one's life to solve the problem of existence (*dhammānudhamma patipatti*)** This reorganization is to start following the supernormal eightfold way.

For further discussion of the harmonious perspective see the author's explanation of the *Sammā Diṭṭhi Sutta* (MN 9) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSMNVEZxheo>).

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<sup>182</sup> SN 55.5

## **2. *Sammā sankappa* (Harmonious Goal Reorientation)**

I call the second step the harmonious goal reorientation. I don't call it right thought or intention. There is a book called Psycho-Cybernetics by Maxwell Maltz<sup>183</sup> which explains that the human mind is also a goal-seeking machine like a computer. Every time we get up in the morning, what do we do? If you go to the bathroom, what are you doing? You are seeking a goal. You have a different goal when you leave the bathroom, so you come out. If you turn to the left, you do so because that is another goal. Everything that we do involves seeking a goal.

What is the meaning of reorientation? Reorientation is turning in a new direction. The Buddha also looks at your goal in life and then tries to change the goal. Changing the goal is like changing direction when you drive a car. You change the direction per the goal you are seeking. The steering wheel turns in the direction of the goal. In the same way, once we have got the harmonious perspective, we begin to change our goals. This is the harmonious goal reorientation.

Although we think we are conscious, we are unconscious most of the time. This is what Sigmund Freud discovered. If you become angry, is it something that you do consciously? Do you think: I must become angry and then become angry? No, anger comes up without your consent. It is happening unconsciously. If you are frightened, do you start thinking: Oh, this is an excellent time to be afraid, and then you become terrified? No, that also happens unconsciously. If you are worried about something, is it because now you think: Ah, this is a good time to worry, and then you begin to worry? No, it just happens to you, and you can't even stop it. We are carried away by our emotions all the time without our knowledge.

We must understand the problem. Although we think we are acting consciously, we are often behaving unconsciously. This is why we have to become conscious. The supernormal eightfold way starts with the harmonious perspective, which leads to the harmonious goal reorientation. Having understood our problem, we have to turn in the opposite direction. If you are driving a vehicle, there is a word for turning in the opposite direction. It's called a U-turn. If we want to be free from *dukkha*, we have to make a U-turn in the direction of our life.

Why? When you become angry, what do you want to do? You want to express your anger at the person who made you angry. That means you want to use bad words or fight and quarrel with that person. If anger arises when you have the harmonious

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<sup>183</sup> Maxwell Maltz. *Psycho-cybernetics*. (Prentice Hall: 2000)

perspective, your effort is not to express the anger but to calm down the anger. That is the U-turn. When a desire for something arises, you want to let go of the desire. When fear arises, you want to let go of the fear. When a worry comes up, you want to calm down the worry. You are now always trying to calm down the emotion that has been aroused. That is the goal reorientation.

The Buddha has described three types of *sankappa* or goals.<sup>184</sup> When we discussed the cause of *dukkha*, we discussed the three types of emotional reactions or *tanhā*: *kāma tanhā*, *bhava tanhā*, and *vibhava tanhā*, which lead to *dukkha*. The three types of *sankappa* are nothing but the goal of removing these three types of emotional urges. In other words, what becomes your goal? It is calmness and tranquillity of mind. How can one be free from emotions? Is it by fighting with emotions? We don't fight with emotions, but we learn to relax the body and calm the mind. That tranquillity of mind called *Nibbāna* becomes the new goal.

When *Nibbāna* becomes the goal, your speech will become calm and tranquil. Your actions will be calm and tranquil, and your lifestyle will be calm and tranquil. This is because this is necessary to achieve your new goal. The harmonious perspective leads to the harmonious goal reorientation, which results in harmonious speech, action, and lifestyle.

### **3. *Sammā vācā* (Harmonious Speech)**

Harmonious speech does not create conflict between oneself and others but creates happiness. The Buddha has spoken about refraining from four types of speech:<sup>185</sup>

**TABLE 25: Harmonious Speech**

Disharmonious Speech	Harmonious Speech
1. False speech	1. Truthful speech
2. Slanderous speech	2. Respectful speech
3. Harsh speech	3. Courteous speech
4. Harmful speech & gossip	4. Harmless, helpful speech

<sup>184</sup> SN 45.8

<sup>185</sup> SN 45.8

#### **4. *Sammā kammanta* (Harmonious Action)**

This is behavior that is always pleasant to ourselves and others. The Buddha has spoken about refraining from three types of actions:<sup>186</sup>

**TABLE 26: Harmonious Action**

Disharmonious Action	Harmonious Action
1. Harming living- beings	1. Reverence for living- beings
2. Stealing other's property	2. Not stealing other's property
3. Harmful sexual behavior	3. Harmless sexual behavior

The above speech and action are referred to as the five precepts.

#### **5. *Sammā ajīva* (Harmonious Lifestyle)**

Here, we refer to our whole lifestyle. Usually, it is translated as livelihood and defined as the type of occupation. The harmonious lifestyle is an unselfish, friendly, honest, compassionate, and tolerant way of living that is helpful but not harmful to anyone. Someone can speak good words or do good actions occasionally but still have a bad lifestyle, where one gets angry and greedy often and even is hated by others for one's behavior. If one has a good lifestyle, one will always be good, honest, helpful, and loved by everyone. It is the avoidance of bad speech and bad actions and the cultivation of a good disposition and character. It is not how you appear to others or society as a personality. It is what you are inside as a character.

The above three forms of behavior (*sīla*) are based on the harmonious perspective and the harmonious goal reorientation. This results in autonomous rather than heteronomous morality (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*). Autonomous means not due to external pressures but due to one's inner desire. Morality means how one behaves towards others. It is also an expression of the extent to which one is civilized.

Progress in Proto-Buddhist awakening meditation, which commences with the next step of the supernormal eightfold way, cannot be achieved without the proper foundation in the first five steps of the path described above.

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<sup>186</sup> SN 45.8

## **6. *Sammā vāyāma* (Harmonious Exercise)**

From there on, your whole life becomes the harmonious exercise. People do all kinds of weight lifting or yoga exercises for the body. But the harmonious exercise is the exercise you perform to purify the mind systematically. At this stage, meditation should be seen as an effort to calm the mind and relax the body. We call our practice "cultivating tranquillity of mind" (*samatha bhāvanā*). Cultivation of tranquillity is achieved correctly only through the harmonious exercise.

The thoughts we think often produce emotional agitation and physical tension. This makes us unhappy mentally and uncomfortable physically. This starts the vicious circle we discussed in chapter five. The cycle can be stopped by breaking it at two points: the mind and the body. We break the cycle in the mind by learning to calm the mind. We break the cycle in the body by learning to relax the body. The harmonious exercise does both. Therefore, the practice achieves two things: mental calmness and physical relaxation.

The working principle is that emotions are triggered by a mental image and to remove emotions, one must remove the mental image. Therefore, this exercise aims to stop thinking and quieten the mind. To purify the mind is to quieten it by freeing it of emotional disturbances such as the desire for sensual pleasures, anger, hatred, boredom, anxiety, and agitation. The pure and quiet mind is a happy mind that also brings happiness to others.

The harmonious exercise is fourfold (*sammappadhāna*):

- **Prevention (*saṃvara*)**
- **Elimination (*pahāna*)**
- **Cultivation (*bhāvanā*)**
- **Maintenance (*anurakkhana*)**

To understand these four exercises, let us compare the mind to a room. If we want to clean the room, the first step is to shut the doors and windows through which dirt enters the room. The second step is to remove the dirt by sweeping or using a vacuum cleaner. The third step is to put clean furniture and decorate the room. The fourth step is to keep watch and maintain cleanliness constantly. Similarly, we can clear the mind of emotional disturbances.

## **Prevention (sanvara)**

Impurities enter the mind through the senses. They enter when we focus our attention on sensory objects. To prevent this, we withdraw our attention from sensory things, which is to stop reflecting on the object's pleasantness or unpleasantness. This is called guarding the senses. This way, we begin to be free of emotional disturbances due to environmental influences. In other words, we are preventing the mind from being polluted by forces coming from outside. This way, we also stop reacting to the stimulation of the senses by the environment. This step can be described as the withdrawal of attention from perceptual images.

## **Elimination (pahāna)**

Elimination is the removal of harmful thoughts that have already arisen in the mind. If, after the practice of prevention, any emotional disturbances remain, it is due to carrying a memory of something that happened in the past or imagining something that will happen in the future. The emotion can be removed by withdrawing attention from memories and imagination. We can focus our minds on a different image. For example, if the original image was the image of a difficult person, we can focus our attention on the image of the Buddha. This is analogous to watching a television program, and upon seeing unwanted content, one turns to another channel with more agreeable content. This step can be summed up as the withdrawal of attention from memory images and future imagination.

## **Cultivation (bhāvanā)**

This is the systematic cultivation of calm introspection unhindered by emotional arousal. This is achieved by first withdrawing attention from external objects and memories, as done in the first two exercises above, and then focusing attention on the experience within, which is the emotional reaction to external objects and memories. This means focusing attention on the emotional reaction to an object rather than on an object to which one reacts. This step can be summed up as focusing attention within (*bhāvanā*). Focusing attention within begins the meditation called *satipaṭṭhāna*. In this way, the harmonious exercise transitions to harmonious attention (*sammā sati*), the next step in the supernormal eightfold way.

## **Maintenance (anurakkhana)**

This is the effort to keep attention within the body and the mind instead of focusing on external objects. This inward focus must be maintained throughout the day.

When we focus on external things, we react to them. When we take our attention away from them, the reaction stops, and we calm down. When we become conscious of the reaction, the reaction stops because it cannot go on consciously. This practice has to be done every moment in our lives. While we are in the four postures of walking, sitting, standing, and lying down. In other words, it is to be done every moment during the waking life, from the time one wakes up till one falls asleep. The mind calms down as one practices this way, and the body relaxes. The practice turns into a habit. This results in mental happiness and physical comfort.

## 7. *Sammā sati* (Harmonious Attention)

All our emotions and all our emotional behavior are happening unconsciously. Today the practice of mindfulness has become popular. When people practice mindfulness, what are they doing? They are trying to become conscious. Be conscious of the thoughts that arise and be conscious of whatever you say and do. Mindfulness is a translation of the *Pāli* word *satipaṭṭhāna*. *Sati* means attention. When you become conscious, you have to pay attention. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is a combination of *sati* + *uppatthāna*. '*Uppa*' means inside as opposed to '*appa*', which means outside. *Thāna* is to place. If I place an object here, that placing is called *thāna*. In combination, these words mean placing the attention inside, that is the meaning of *satipaṭṭhāna*. What are the English words for that? The English word is introversion of attention. The real meaning of the word *satipaṭṭhāna* is not mindfulness but introversion of attention. Introspection is also a good translation.

Why do we need introspection? Sigmund Freud studied the mind through introspection. That is called introspective psychology. There was another psychologist who started investigating the mind, but he could not explore the mind. Why? He said to study the mind, you must see it. But he couldn't see the mind. Can you open your eyes and look at the mind? No. Can you use your ears and look at the mind? No. You cannot look at the mind using the five senses. This is because what we call the mind is not an object. What we look at is called an object. The mind is something that we experience subjectively and not objectively. Whatever we experience subjectively, we have to look at not through observing outside but by observing what is inside. That means through introspection.

This particular psychologist couldn't study the mind because he thought to be scientific, you have to observe it through your senses. He thought practicing introspection was unscientific. Therefore, he said that the only way to study the

mind is not to look at the mind but to look at human behavior. That kind of psychology is called Behaviourism. Behaviorists went against Freud because Freud used introspection to study the mind. Later some of the Behaviourists said that the mind must also be studied. Otherwise, how can we call it psychology? Psychology is the study of the mind. And they started introspection again. This new type of psychology using introspection is called Cognitive psychology. We cannot study the mind without introspection. This is why the Buddha's method was introspection.

Harmonious attention keeps the attention introverted so that we become aware of the reaction that is going on within us. As discussed in previous chapters, this reaction consists of various phases:

1) perception, 2) cognition/interpretation, 3) affection/ emotional arousal, 4) stress, and 5) action to release tension.

In observing the reaction, however, we go in reverse by first observing the action phase or the physical manifestation of the reaction in the body followed by awareness of feelings in the body, then awareness of emotions, and ending in awareness of the cognitive experience as follows:

#### **Awareness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*)**

This is awareness of what is going on in the body, such as movements, heartbeat, muscle tension, changes in breathing, perspiration, etc.

#### **Awareness of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*)**

This is awareness of how one feels in the body, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Tension is felt as a painful sensation. Relaxation is felt as a pleasant sensation. Movement of the body can be felt as a neutral sensation.

#### **Awareness of emotions (*cittānupassanā*)**

This is awareness of the emotions or the mood. We observe the manifestation of the reaction as anger, fear, worry, lust, etc, or a calm and tranquil mood.

#### **Awareness of cognitive experience (*dhammānupassanā*)**

This is awareness of the thoughts that interpreted one's circumstances perceived through the senses, to which one reacted or not. It is the thought that interprets and gives meaning to what occurred in a particular event as perceived through the five

senses. That meaning is what started the emotion. The sense experience and the interpretation through thoughts is the *dhamma* or cognitive experience. That is what needs to be investigated.

*Satipaṭṭhāna* will be fully discussed in Chapter 10.

## **8. *Sammā samādhi* (Harmonious Mental Equilibrium)**

This is the eighth and final step in the supernormal eightfold way. *Samādhi* is usually practiced as an exercise in concentration, but as the Buddha taught it, it is an exercise in relaxation. By learning to purify the mind, one can relax the entire body. When the body is relaxed, the mind calms down. When the mind is calmed, the mind and body are free from emotional agitation. As emotional disturbance disappears, the mind attains a state of equilibrium (*samādhi*). *Samādhi* is not concentration as commonly translated. It is the equilibrium of the mind and body (*samā* = equal and *dhi* = the state). It is a state of mental and physical balance or stillness of mind and body. Concentration implies tension and effort, whereas equilibrium is a state of rest.

The purpose of *samādhi* is to rest the mind. The mind is not experienced as an entity different from the body. It is merely experienced as an activity of the body. The entire body is involved in this activity called the mind, just as the whole engine is engaged in driving a car. *Samādhi* is a gradual stopping of this activity called mind until it comes to a complete stop. This stopping of the mind happens in stages that the Buddha calls *jhāna*, which I translate as ecstasy. There are four ecstasies. The state of tranquillity or ecstasy is where the body is fully relaxed, and the mind is fully awake and alert. With full awareness, one experiences a state of mental bliss and bodily ease, free of emotional excitements and tensions. Ecstasy means standing out. It is standing out from the emotional world. The usual experience of the human being is sensual and emotional. One stands out of this sensual and emotional experience when one enters the first ecstasy.

In the ecstasy, the mind is focussed within and free from all emotional disturbances. Entering the different levels of tranquillity is a gradual withdrawal from the emotional level that experiences a world outside. It is a gradual reduction of the experience of the sensual world. The experience in this ecstasy is sometimes seen as the spiritual world. Some even see it as entering heaven. Others call it a union with

God. However, we call it simple ecstasy, which is a gradual emptying of the mind, reduction of experience, or a gradual stopping of the activity called mind.

This was what the Buddha achieved. Having stopped the mind, he restarted it again. When he restarted it, he was able to observe how the mental process creates both the self and world and the stress that results. This led him to awaken from the dream of existence and thus become a Buddha. This will be discussed fully in Chapter 10.

### **Gradual Progress**

The supernormal eightfold way is an inner transformation. This transformation is a gradual process of growth and evolution. It is a gradual transformation from an emotional, irrational, and unhappy character to a calm, sane, rational, and happy character. This change occurs in four stages, where the ten emotional engagements (*dasa saṃyojanā*) are progressively abandoned. These stages of growth are:

- 1) **Stream Entrant (*sotāpanna*):** Abandoned the personality perspective (*sakkāya ditṭhi*), cognitive dissonance (*vicikicca*), and heteronomous morality (*sīlabbata parāmāsa*)
- 2) **Once returner (*sakadāgāmi*):** Minimised lust and hate (*kāma rāga and patigha*)
- 3) **Non-returner (*Anāgāmi*):** Abandoned lust and hate (*kāma rāga and patigha*)
- 4) **Bond Breaker (*Arahant*):** Free from five more bonds that cause the feeling of self. Has abandoned lust for images (*rūpa rāga*), abandoned lust for image-free states (*arūpa rāga*), abandoned the sense of the existence of a self (*māna*), abandoned agitation (*uddacca*), and abandoned unconsciousness (*avijjā*).

**TABLE 26: Comparative translation of *dasa saṃyojanā***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<b>1. sakkāya diṭṭhi</b>	Identity view	Personality perspective
<b>2. vicikicca</b>	Doubt	Cognitive dissonance
<b>3. sīlabbata parāmāsa</b>	attachment to rites and rituals	Heteronomous morality
<b>4. kāma rāga</b>	Sensual desire	Desire for pleasant feelings
<b>5. patigha</b>	Ill will	Hatred of painful feelings
<b>6. rūpa rāga</b>	Lust for material realms	Desire for mental images
<b>7. arūpa rāga</b>	Lust for immaterial realms	Desire for imageless states
<b>8. māna</b>	Conceit	Feeling of the existence of a self
<b>9. uddacca</b>	Restlessness	Agitation/excitement
<b>10. avijjā</b>	Ignorance	Unconsciousness

The first level of growth can be reached while living a household secular life. However, the last three stages can be won only through a renounced, religious life. How the supernormal eightfold process and these four stages of growth unfold in our lives has been described in a series of *Suttas* known as the gradual training. To one of these, the *Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta*, we turn to next.

## ***Ganaka Moggallāna Sutta (MN 107)***

A series of *Suttas* describes what is commonly known as the gradual training. One such *Sutta* is the *Cūla Hatthipadopama Sutta*<sup>187</sup> (visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCQ45yKhfXo>). It explores the complete practice of the Buddhist path. The *Kitagiri Sutta* (see Appendix 3) also describes the gradual training slightly differently. The *Sabbāsava Sutta* (see Appendix 1) is another *Sutta* in this series. That *Sutta* explores the influence of the environment that we live in. The influence is the reaction to stimulation of the senses that leads to suffering. The entire teaching of the Buddha is an effort to stop that reaction. Instead of reacting, we want to respond. There is a difference between a reaction and a response. A reaction is emotional. It happens unconsciously. We are not doing it. It is happening to us. But a response is a thought-out, deliberate action. It is something that we do. Instead of emotionally reacting to situations, we should learn to calmly and rationally respond.

To achieve this, the Buddha has shown a path. It is a gradual process. In this particular *Sutta*, a person comes and asks the Buddha: what is the gradual path? Then the Buddha explains. Here, the Buddha talks about practicing meditation, which is a gradual process. You don't start by sitting like a statue and concentrating. That is not the starting point. When we read this *Sutta*, we begin to understand that.

### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>188</sup>**

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near *Sāvatthī* in the Eastern Monastery, the stilt longhouse of *Migāra*'s mother. Then the *brahmin Moggallāna* the Accountant went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side and said to the Buddha:

Master *Gotama*, in this stilt longhouse we can see gradual progress down to the last step of the staircase. Among the *brahmins* we can see gradual progress in learning the chants. Among archers we can see gradual progress

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<sup>187</sup> MN 27

<sup>188</sup> *Ganaka Moggallāna Sutta*: With Moggallāna the Accountant (MN 107), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Sujato. Sutta Central, 3 September 2021,

[https://suttacentral.net/mn107/en/sujato?  
lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin](https://suttacentral.net/mn107/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin)

in archery. Among us accountants, who earn a living by accounting, we can see gradual progress in mathematics. For when we get an apprentice we first make them count: 'One one, two twos, three threes, four fours, five fives, six sixes, seven sevens, eight eights, nine nines, ten tens.' We even make them count up to a hundred. Is it possible to similarly describe a gradual training, gradual progress, and gradual practice in this teaching and training?"

It is possible, *brahmin*. Suppose a deft horse trainer were to obtain a fine thoroughbred. First of all he'd make it get used to wearing the bit. In the same way, when the Realized One gets a person for training they first guide them like this: 'Come, mendicant, be ethical and restrained in the monastic code, conducting yourself well and seeking alms in suitable places. Seeing danger in the slightest fault, keep the rules you've undertaken.'

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

Even though the first step here seems to be controlling your behavior or *sīla*, before a person comes to the Buddha for training, they will have heard of his message and decided to turn their lives in a different direction, usually by ordaining. They will have acquired the first two steps of the supernormal eightfold way, the harmonious perspective, and the harmonious goal reorientation. In other *Suttas* describing the gradual training we see this, but here it is absent.

After this, the next step is to go through a disciplining of behavior based on the harmonious perspective and harmonious goal reorientation. Not to be sitting like a statue. When a person learns to meditate, they also need to take the precepts and then observe the precepts properly. In meditation retreats, when we ask people to stop talking to one another and to be silent, they find it very difficult. If you begin to speak, you won't be able to meditate properly. Disciplining your body in terms of behavior has to precede the practice of meditation. Even if you become emotional, like angry or worried or lustful, you don't express it in behavior. Either in the form of speech or action. That discipline is necessary to start meditating. This is why the Buddha first asks the person who comes to meditate to practice self-discipline. This is the practice of the third, fourth, and fifth steps or harmonious speech, harmonious action, and harmonious lifestyle in the supernormal eightfold process.

In my approach to teaching meditation, I speak of three levels. The first level mainly focuses on developing the first five steps of the path. We are primarily trying to cultivate the harmonious perspective, the harmonious orientation, and the disciplining of behavior. Our meditation is mainly connected with this.

## **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

When they have ethical conduct, the Realized One guides them further: 'Come, mendicant, guard your sense doors. When you see a sight with your eyes, don't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of sight were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of desire and aversion would become overwhelming. For this reason, practice restraint, protect the faculty of sight, and achieve restraint over it. When you hear a sound with your ears ... When you smell an odor with your nose ... When you taste a flavor with your tongue ... When you feel a touch with your body ... When you know a thought with your mind, don't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of mind were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of desire and aversion would become overwhelming. For this reason, practice restraint, protect the faculty of mind, and achieve its restraint.'

## **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

The second level of meditation I teach is the harmonious exercise, the sixth step in the supernormal eightfold way. The harmonious exercise has four parts. The first exercise is to prevent unwholesome states arising in the mind. The second exercise is to eliminate unwholesome states of mind once they have appeared. Here the Buddha is talking about preventing unwholesome states arising in the mind by guarding the senses. Guarding the senses begins purifying the mind, removing all harmful thoughts. This exercise is practiced while standing, sitting, walking, or even lying down. You don't have to sit like a statue to do this. It has to be done twenty-four hours a day, not twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening. This is why this kind of meditation is a different way of living. This is a way of life. Here you begin to change the way you think. Then the Buddha goes on:

## **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

When they guard their sense doors, the Realized One guides them further: 'Come, mendicant, eat in moderation. Reflect properly on the food that you eat: 'Not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support spiritual practice. In this way, I shall put an end to old discomfort and not give rise to new discomfort, and I will live blamelessly and at ease.'

When they eat in moderation, the Realized One guides them further: 'Come, mendicant, be committed to wakefulness. Practice walking and sitting

meditation by day, purifying your mind from obstacles. In the evening, continue to practice walking and sitting meditation. In the middle of the night, lie down in the lion's posture—on the right side, placing one foot on top of the other—mindful and aware, and focused on the time of getting up. In the last part of the night, get up and continue to practice walking and sitting meditation, purifying your mind from obstacles.

### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

The next step is to control your eating habits. This is also part of guarding the senses. To progress in meditation, we must control our food intake. One reason we limit eating is that meditation should be carried into the night. Here, meditation is not concentrating but watching the thoughts coming into your mind. You remove the harmful thoughts and cultivate the good thoughts. You divide the night into three parts: the first watch, the middle watch, and the last watch. In the first watch, you have to be meditating. In the middle watch, you can lie down. It may be hard for you to be up the whole night. But you lie down only for four hours at the most. After which, in the last watch, you wake up and start meditating again. Therefore, meditation is a continuous process. Here you are not stopping the meditation to sleep. You lie down and continue to meditate so that even if you fall asleep, you wake up and start meditating again. When you wake up, you don't remain in that lying position. You have to get up and start walking. This is how the meditation is done. But you should not force yourself to sleep for four hours as an act of will. It will naturally happen as you progress in the meditation. If you force yourself, you will just end up being sleepy during the daytime. Then the next step is:

### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

When they are committed to wakefulness, the Realized One guides them further: 'Come, mendicant, have mindfulness and situational awareness. Act with situational awareness when going out and coming back; when looking ahead and aside; when bending and extending the limbs; when bearing the outer robe, bowl and robes; when eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting; when urinating and defecating; when walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking, and keeping silent.'

### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

This is the point where a meditator begins to practice the *satipaṭṭhāna*. It is usually translated as mindfulness, but I don't call it mindfulness. There are two things: the

introversion of attention, where the attention is focused within, and the other is introspection. This means you are looking at what is going on inside you. You are looking at how you are reacting to what you hear, see, smell, taste, and touch. You are observing the reaction. Whatever happens in the external world, the reaction to it is going on inside of you.

You can observe the reaction in four aspects. The first thing you observe is what happens to your body when you see something, hear a sound, smell something, taste something, and touch something. There are changes in the body as a result of these stimulations. One change is that you feel tension in the body. Whatever your reaction, there will be a certain amount of tension in the body, which you can observe. This is called *kāyānupassanā*.

The next step is to become aware of how the body feels. Are you comfortable, or are you feeling uncomfortable? You have to be aware of the feeling when you hear, smell, taste, and touch something. This is becoming aware of the feeling. This is called *vedanānupassanā*. Then you become aware of any emotional disturbance that arises when you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch something. What kind of emotion is aroused? This is called *cittānupassanā*.

Then you can also become aware of the thoughts that arise when you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch something. You become aware of how you interpret the sense experience. The reaction starts thinking. This is *dhammānupassanā*. Here, *Dhamma* means the idea or interpretation that arises in the mind. This is the practice of introverted attention and introspection.

It is essential to understand the purpose of doing this. Your reaction is happening unconsciously, so what you are trying to do is become conscious of the unconscious reaction. When you become conscious, the unconscious reaction stops. The *satipaṭṭhāna* is the method for becoming aware of the unconscious chain reaction we have discussed throughout this book. Then the next stage is:

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

When they have mindfulness and situational awareness, the Realized One guides them further: 'Come, mendicant, frequent a secluded lodging—a wilderness, the root of a tree, a hill, a ravine, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a forest, the open air, a heap of straw.' And they do so.

After the meal, they return from alms-round, sit down cross-legged with their body straight, and establish mindfulness right there. Giving up desire for the world, they meditate with a heart rid of desire, cleansing the mind of desire. Giving up ill will and malevolence, they meditate with a mind rid of ill will, full of compassion for all living beings, cleansing the mind of ill will. Giving up dullness and drowsiness, they meditate with a mind rid of dullness and drowsiness, perceiving light, mindful and aware, cleansing the mind of dullness and drowsiness. Giving up restlessness and remorse, they meditate without restlessness, their mind peaceful inside, cleansing the mind of restlessness and remorse. Giving up doubt, they meditate having gone beyond doubt, not undecided about skillful qualities, cleansing the mind of doubt.

### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

For this stage of the practice, you need to find a place to be quiet and not be disturbed by anyone. Finding a secluded spot is very important. Having found a remote area, a monk or nun starts meditation on returning from the alms round in the morning. The habit of monks and nuns walking in a village and collecting food is called *pindapātha*. After their meal, they sit down, folding their legs crosswise, setting the body erect, and start meditating. This is very important to understand. It is only after many preliminary practices that you begin to sit like a statue and meditate. It is not the first step. Most people practice it as the first step. This is a mistake. Only now does the Buddha ask a meditator to sit and practice meditation. They are sitting with a mind that has been adequately trained.

The five things to be abandoned are usually called the five hindrances. In that seated position, that person is trying to free the mind of these hindrances. They are called hindrances because they interfere with the purification of the mind. These hindrances are emotional thoughts. All the previous practices have aimed at trying to remove emotional thoughts. At this point, when you are seated, because you have already trained your mind to do that, it becomes easy for you to do it. It's not a difficult thing. This is when you will successfully purify the mind by abandoning all these various impurities. The *Sutta* continues:

### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, they enter and remain in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it

connected. As the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, they enter and remain in the second absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of immersion, with internal clarity and confidence, and unified mind, without placing the mind and keeping it connected. And with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, personally experiencing the bliss of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.' Giving up pleasure and pain, and ending former happiness and sadness, they enter and remain in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness.

That's how I instruct the mendicants who are trainees—who haven't achieved their heart's desire, but live aspiring to the supreme sanctuary. But for those mendicants who are perfected—who have ended the defilements, completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their own goal, utterly ended the fetters of rebirth, and are rightly freed through enlightenment—these things lead to blissful meditation in the present life, and to mindfulness and awareness."

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

When the five hindrances are completely abandoned, a meditator enters the first *jhāna*. There are five characteristics of the first *jhāna*. These are what is translated here as placing the mind, keeping it connected, rapture, bliss, and unified mind. These translations are not good, but we will discuss them in the next chapter.

From the first *jhāna*, you progress into the second *jhāna*. This means you begin to calm your mind further. In the third *jhāna*, even happiness is seen as a disturbance of the mind. So, you calm the mind further. This does not mean you become unhappy. It is simply a peacefulness of the mind. And you become calmer in the next *jhāna*, where even that feeling of comfort disappears. The feeling of comfort is seen as a disturbance, and your mind becomes completely still. In that stillness of mind, your mind is entirely directed inwards and not outwards. This is the fourth *jhāna*. You are no longer focusing on what you see. You are focusing on how you see. There is a difference. Instead of thinking of the object that you see, you are looking at the process of perception. This is what is called apperception.

The main thing we should understand is that there is a gradual path, and it is by taking this gradual path, we can ultimately succeed. If you think that meditation is simply sitting like a statue and concentrating on something, you will likely enter the

hypnotic state, but that is not actual meditation. Actual meditation is a discipline. It is like learning to type. If you don't practice, you won't be able to type. Or if you want to play a musical instrument there too, you need to practice. You have to discipline yourself; otherwise, you can't practice. The teaching of the Buddha is a matter of discipline, and you have to discipline yourself.

For a translation by the author of this *Sutta* and the *Dantabhūmi Sutta*, which also describes the gradual training visit:

<https://buddhaoriginalteachings.blogspot.com/p/level-ii-sublime-eightfold-way.html>

### Questions and Answers

**Q:** In the first *jhāna*, we experience five factors. Are we trying to cultivate these, or are they just the results of our cultivation?

**A:** They are the results of the cultivation. What you are cultivating is a different thing. What we just described are the things we have to cultivate. If you are learning to play the piano, the exercises that you do are one thing. Once you have practiced and become proficient in your practice, you will be playing beautiful songs. That is only a result of the training. It's not the practice.

**Q:** You mentioned in the fourth *jhāna* that there is apprehension.

**A:** No, it's not apprehension, it's apperception. Apperception maybe difficult to understand. I only used that word to point out that instead of looking at the object, you are looking at the process of perception. That means how you see the object. That is a difficult thing. You cannot understand it till you get close to that. (This will be discussed further in chapter ten).

**Q:** Can we call the training before sitting as preparation for meditation?

**A:** Are you asking whether you want to call the earlier part the preparation for the latter part? And you are using the word meditation to refer to attaining the *jhāna*. That is not correct. Starting from the beginning is meditation, not only the last point.

Entering *jhāna* is not easy. Guarding the senses can't be done in the household life. You can go on a meditation retreat, and try guarding the senses. Without guarding the senses, you can't do this meditation properly. In laylife, you want to see beautiful things, listen to beautiful music, smell pleasant perfumes, taste pleasant food, and you want pleasant touches. If that is what you want, then that is not practicing meditation. This is why you have to give up that kind of life if you want

to practice this meditation. But at least if you can learn what has to be done and whenever you get an opportunity like going on retreat, you can try it for some time. A person can do it in the lay life but they have to give up all the normal things that people do and live like a renounced monk or nun. It's not just a matter of just shaving the head and putting on the robes. The important thing is what kind of life you are living. That amount of discipline is necessary. If you want to practice it, you have to start with the proper *sīla* or discipline.

## CHAPTER 9

### SAMATHA

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

It is within the context of the supernormal eightfold way, not apart from it then, that we must approach the practice of meditation. Meditation is one tool to help us develop the eight steps of this path. Within the holistic framework of the supernormal eightfold way, the author taught the practice of meditation in three levels:

**Level 1-** Beginner: *Anussati* (Selective thinking meditation)

**Level 2-** Intermediate: *Samatha* (Tranquility meditation)

**Level 3 -** Advanced: *Vipassanā* (Awakening meditation)

The author saw this approach based on the *Suttas* as being different from many of the other modern meditation systems, be they Sri Lankan, Thai, Western or from Myanmar. He often pointed out that much of what is considered Buddhist meditation today is actually originating from later sectarian exegetical texts rather than the early Proto-Buddhist sources.

In this chapter, we will explore the first two levels of meditation in the author's approach. The aim of these two levels of meditation is the attainment of deep states of mental equilibrium the Buddha called *Samādhi*, by calming the mind and eliminating what are usually called the five hindrances.

The word *Samādhi* is normally translated as concentration. The major mistake the author saw with other approaches to this type of mediation was the effort to concentrate on various objects of meditation rather than purifying and calming the mind. In this chapter, the author argues that this mistaken effort to concentrate in meditation has led many to fall into the hypnotic state and mistake this state with what the Buddha called *samādhi*, when in fact the two states are completely different. According to the author, what many meditation systems today consider as progress in meditation is actually based on this mistaking of hypnotism for mysticism.

## **LEVEL ONE—ANUSSATI: SELECTIVE THINKING MEDITATION**

There are two ways of helping a blind man cross the road. One way is to hold his hand and guide him. The blind man does not know where we are taking him in such a case. He must have blind faith in us. The other method is a surgeon who operates on the blind man's eye to make him see for himself—this way, blind faith is eliminated. The Buddha's method of teaching meditation is similar to the technique of the surgeon. It is not based on blind faith but on clear comprehension. The profound teachings of the Buddha are not easy to decipher and put into practice. Today, the *Dhamma* is mainly practiced at the *saddhā* (devotion) and *sīla* (moral discipline) levels. The more advanced teachings encompassing *saṃādhi* (tranquility) and *paññā* (comprehension) are not well understood or practiced. The primary reason for this is the difficulty in deciphering the Buddha's extraordinarily intelligent description of the realities of life and salvation through awakening.

As taught in level one, Proto-Buddhist meditation is not a mystical practice. This meditation technique is for people living as householders, who work, have responsibilities, and are involved in various social relationships. Such people need freedom from stress and the anxieties of life. They need peace of mind, healthy relationships, self-confidence, success in life, and efficiency at work. This means learning to control emotional disturbances such as anger, lust, worries, fears, and anxieties. The form of meditation taught in level one helps one free the mind from these emotional disturbances and to think clearly and act rationally.

It involves a systematic technique of consciously purifying the mind. All impurities arise from self-centered emotional states. The pure mind is the tranquil mind. When the mind is purified, one experiences inner happiness, physical comfort, kindness, and compassion that one has never experienced before. The happiness referred to here is not a state of emotional excitement but a tranquil, undisturbed mind. The kindness and compassion taught here are not based on attachment. It is a state of unselfishness. Emotional excitement is not true happiness and attachment is not true love. Happiness and kindness are attributes of the pure and tranquil mind.

We are all used to taking a physical bath to clean the body. After the bath, we feel fresh and comfortable. However, it is very rare for us to clean our minds in the same way. We carry the dirt we have been accumulating since our infancy, and probably from our former lives. Emotions not only pollute our minds, but they also interfere

with our physical health. They are a disturbance of the mind and body. This problem is what is today called stress. Emotions have been helpful for some lower animals to preserve life and the propagation of the species. But human beings have a better tool for that purpose: intelligence. Intelligence is the distinctive feature that sets the human being apart from all other animals.

This meditation method aims to purify the mind and relax the body, resulting in happiness, kindness, and a maturity that translates into calm, rational, selfless actions and lifestyle. The individual creates society, and society creates the world. Therefore, we begin with the individual, and that is YOU. However, the mind can only be purified by first restraining the behavior in the form of *sīla* grounded in the harmonious perspective and the vision of a new goal – the tranquility of the mind – through the harmonious goal reorientation. This means that novice lay meditators must observe *sīla* – at least the five precepts daily – before beginning level one practices. Their *sīla* will refine and deepen through progress in level one meditation.

## THE FIVE OBSCURANTS

The emotional disturbances of the mind we are attempting to calm with the level one mediation practice are called the *pañca nīvaraṇa* by the Buddha,<sup>189</sup> which is generally translated as the five hindrances. I translate it as the five obscurants because they obscure the naturally calm state of mind. In chapter five, we discussed that when describing the mind, the Buddha has stated<sup>190</sup>:

The mood is essentially pure but is polluted by foreign pollutants that enter it. This fact is not understood by those who have not heard the *Dhamma*. Therefore, I declare that there is no purification of the mood for the multitude.

The mind can be compared to water. Water is a pure substance, which gets polluted due to foreign matter falling into it. These five obscurants or emotional disturbances pollute the mind:

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<sup>189</sup> MN 107

<sup>190</sup> AN 1.49-52

**TABLE 27: Comparative translation of *pañca nīvaraṇa***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>kāmacchanda</i>	Desire for sensual pleasure	Urge for sensual pleasures
<i>vyapāda</i>	Ill will	Anger/hatred
<i>thina middha</i>	Dullness and drowsiness	Boredom/laziness/sleepiness
<i>uddhacca</i> <i>kukkucca</i>	Restlessness and Remorse	Worry about the past or future
<i>vicikicca</i>	Doubt	Cognitive dissonance

In level one Proto-Buddhist meditation, the primary purpose is to achieve temporary freedom from these five obscurants, thus calming the mind. There are different levels of calm to be reached. First, it is crucial to find out what calmness is and the obstacles to it. In level one, we have to start to overcome these five obscurants.

### **1. *Kāmacchanda***

*Kāmacchanda* is the lust for sensual pleasure. People often ask what's wrong with enjoying sensual pleasures. It is very temporary and eventually leads to unhappiness. If you enjoy a pleasure once, you want more. Then you want the pleasure to last. There is no end to this, and you become unhappy when you do not have pleasure. The enjoyment leads to desire, and desire creates unhappiness. When the urge arises, tension also arises. The tension has to be released in action to obtain what is desired. When you do not get what is desired, the uncomfortable tension remains and has to be released somehow. This condition can lead to addiction. This also leads to the constant pursuit of sensual pleasure, which leads to competition, jealousy, crime, violence, war, and a whole host of suffering. This can also manifest in the form of neurosis, psychosis, and psychosomatic illnesses. Although sensual pleasure itself is nice, the desire for sensual pleasure leads to many problems. The *Mahā Dukkhakkhanda Sutta*<sup>191</sup> explains this well.

### **2. *Vyapāda***

*Vyapāda* is anger. It arises partly from the desire for sensual pleasure. When you can't get what is desired, you can become angry. Or if someone takes what you desire away, you can also become angry. Anger can be destructive. Anger prevents

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<sup>191</sup> MN 13

us from experiencing true love. True love cannot exist in the presence of the desire for sensual pleasure and anger.

### **3. *Thina middha***

*Thina middha* is boredom, lethargy, and sleepiness. We feel bored when we don't have pleasure or aren't occupied with anger. People experience this in mediation. When one cannot obtain what is desired, one can feel like not doing anything. Sometimes it's felt as depression or apathy. *Thina middha* is an accumulation of tension, which is not released. An alternative to releasing the tension is going to sleep or becoming lazy. Here, the emotions and tensions are kept inside.

### **4. *Uddhacca kukkucca***

*Uddhacca kukkucca* is anxiety and worry. When we are not actively involved in anything, our default position is to start to worry about the past or be anxious about the future. This is very often experienced when we sit down to meditate.

### **5. *Vicikicca***

*Vicikicca* is a confused state of mind where you cannot decide on what to do. Your mind begins to pull in two different directions – what you like to do and what you think you should. This is called cognitive dissonance by psychologists.

When you learn to control your emotions and relax your tensions, these obscurants begin to disappear. That is one advantage of meditation. Meditation at this level is learning to relax the body and calm the mind.

## **THE PRACTICE OF SELECTIVE THINKING MEDITATION**

Proto-Buddhist meditation is understood during level one as selective thinking, which is consciously choosing our thoughts instead of unconsciously thinking whatever thought that enters the mind. This means we must constantly watch our thoughts very carefully and decide to keep only the good thoughts and not the bad thoughts. Usually, thoughts come into our minds quite unconsciously, and most of them are emotional. Very often, we are even carried away by these emotional thoughts. The moment we become conscious of them, however, they start to stop. This is because emotional thoughts can only run unconsciously and cannot continue consciously. Therefore, the moment we become conscious of them, they will naturally stop. This is the fact on which even psychoanalysis is based. Psychoanalysis aims to make the unconscious thoughts conscious. This making of

the unconscious emotions conscious seems to be what Daniel Goleman calls emotional intelligence<sup>192</sup>. It is also the fact on which the technique of the Buddha was originally based. If our emotional thoughts unconsciously carry us away, we remain not only unconscious but also unhappy.

As discussed in previous chapters, we have two minds, an unconscious emotional mind, and a rational conscious mind. During evolution, the emotional mind developed first and the rational mind later. In our meditation, we learn to overcome old habits of unconscious emotional thinking and cultivate new calm, rational thought habits. However, developing a new habit means practice and practice means repetition, which must be maintained throughout. It is like learning to type or play a musical instrument. Only practice makes one perfect. This means the kind of meditation that we practice is not an exercise in concentration but wakefulness and selective thinking. It must be noted that meditation is not sitting like a statue for twenty minutes or even one hour in the morning and the evening. Selective thinking has to be done every moment in our waking lives, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. This meditation has to be practiced all the time during retreats or in daily life, even at night, no matter what posture you are in. We have to make a serious decision to change our way of thinking and cultivate a new way of thinking through repeated practice. This idea can be stated in verse form:

Sow a thought and reap a habit

Sow a habit and reap a character

Sow a character and reap a destiny

If we maintain conscious awareness of our thoughts and practice selective thinking, we overcome the habit of worrying and being unconscious. We cultivate the habit of being conscious and happy all the time. It is by the constant practice of selective thinking that a fundamental transformation and growth can occur in our lives. This leads to the gradual development of consciousness until we awaken from the dream of existence, as the Buddha did, whereby all suffering is ended.

There is nothing strenuous about this system of meditation unless one begins to concentrate. Concentration needs a strenuous effort. We aim to stop concentration and keep our mind calm, and the body relaxed. Being relaxed and calm is not an

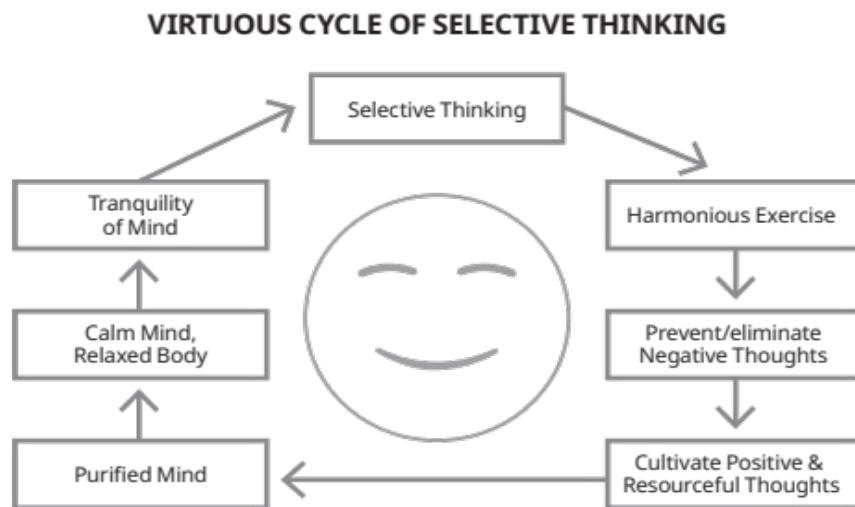
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<sup>192</sup> Emotional Intelligence. (2022, June 15). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional\\_Intelligence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_Intelligence)

easy job either because the mind has a natural tendency to unconsciously concentrate on the past or the future and become emotionally agitated. It is this habit that we are trying to overcome.

#### **DIAGRAM 21:**



In controlling thoughts, we have to look at the reaction to environmental stimulation again in terms of the cognitive, affective, and active. The cognitive is a mental picture. The affective is emotional arousal. The active is the release of tension in action. Emotional arousal occurs when we hold a mental image associated with an emotion, resulting in tension. For example, when we are angry, we have a mental picture of some disagreement. As long as we hold that mental picture in our minds, anger will be aroused, and we will become tenser and tenser. The Buddha compared this to a person being shot with two arrows<sup>193</sup>. The first arrow is someone abusing or harming a person. The second arrow is the anger that arises in the person.

As we learn to change mental pictures through meditation, we learn to take our minds away from such images, which arouse emotional states and focus on something that produces mental calm. We think of the Buddha (the Awakened One), *Dhamma* (the teachings or reality of the Awakened One), or the *Sangha* (the community of followers). The mental picture determines what kind of emotional state you have. We can learn to change the mental picture like changing channels on

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<sup>193</sup> SN 36.6

TV. We have to learn to switch off bad mental images and switch on mental pictures that calm our minds. This way, we can reach deep levels of tranquility.

If one were to peruse the *Suttas* carefully, one can see that the first type of meditation the Buddha teaches is what he called *anussati*, which I have translated as selective thinking. This type of meditation is nearly ignored today in a rush to practice advanced techniques such as *vipassanā* and mindfulness. In the *Suttas*, the Buddha usually teaches six *anussati* meditations as follows<sup>194</sup>:

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Buddhānussati</i> | (Reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha)     |
| 2. <i>Dhammānussati</i> | (Reflecting on the qualities of the teachings)  |
| 3. <i>Sangānussati</i>  | (Reflecting on the qualities of the community)  |
| 4. <i>Sīlānussati</i>   | (Reflecting on one's behavior)                  |
| 5. <i>Cagānussati</i>   | (Reflecting on one's generosity/self-sacrifice) |
| 6. <i>Devatānussati</i> | (Reflecting on rebirth in higher realms)        |

It is not possible to go into a detailed description of these techniques here. Please see the level one meditation guide by the author at:

<https://buddhaoriginalteachings.blogspot.com/p/level-i-sublime-eightfold-way-selective.html> for further information.

'A meditator's tool: A study guide on the Ten Reflections' by *Thanissaro Bhikkhu* is also a good *Sutta*-based resource:

[file:///D:/ENGLISH%20TIPITAKA/ati\\_website/html/lib/study/recollections.html](file:///D:/ENGLISH%20TIPITAKA/ati_website/html/lib/study/recollections.html)

The ideas of the level one practice or selective thinking can be further explored by examining two key *Suttas* called the *Dvedhā Vitakka Sutta* and *Vitakka Santhāna Sutta*.

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<sup>194</sup> AN 11.12

## **Dvedhā Vitakka Sutta (MN 19)**

### **Two kinds of thoughts**

As I heard:

Once, the Holy One was sojourning in *Savatthi*, at the *Jetavanārāma*, *Anāthapindika's* Monastery. While there, the Holy One addressed the Renunciates thus:

"Renunciates"! "Yes, Holy One," they replied.

Then the Holy One said: "Before my awakening, Renunciates, while I was still an unawakened *Bodhisatta*, it occurred to me: "Suppose I distinguish between good thoughts and bad thoughts." So, I separated sensual, angry, and harmful thoughts from dispassionate, kind, and peaceful thoughts.

When I dwelt thus watchful, alert, and vigilant, a sensual thought arose in me. Then I recognized: "A sensual thought has arisen in me, this can lead to my harm, to other's harm, and the harm of both. It obstructs intelligence, favors destructiveness, and leads me away from *Nibbāna*. When I considered "this leads to my harm," it subsided in me. When I considered "this leads to others harm," it subsided in me. When I considered "this leads to the harm of both," it subsided in me. When I considered "this obstructs intelligence, favors destructiveness, and leads me away from *Nibbāna*," it subsided in me. Every sensual thought that arose in me, I did not accept it, I rejected it, and I eliminated it.

Similarly, when an angry thought arose in me, I did not accept it, I rejected it, and I eliminated it. When a harmful thought arose in me, I did not accept it, I rejected it, and I eliminated it.

Renunciates, whatever a Renunciates frequently thinks and ponders over, the mind will be inclined towards it. If one frequently thinks and ponders over sensual thoughts, one has abandoned dispassion, and the mind is inclined more towards sensual thoughts. Similarly, if one frequently thinks and ponders over angry thoughts, one has abandoned kindness, and the mind is inclined more towards anger. Or, if one frequently thinks and ponders over harmful thoughts, one has abandoned peacefulness, and one's mind becomes inclined more towards thoughts

of harm. This way, I saw the danger, futility, and confusion in unwholesome mental states, and I saw the advantage of cultivating wholesome mental states.

As I dwelt thus: watchful, alert, and vigilant, a thought of renunciation arose in me. Then I recognized that a thought of renunciation had arisen in me. This does not lead me to my harm, others' harm, or the harm of both. It promotes intelligence, supports constructiveness, and leads me to *Nibbāna*. If I think and ponder this thought for one night or one day or even for a night and a day, I see no danger. However, excessive thinking and pondering might tire my body, and when my body is tired, the mind becomes tired. When the mind is tired, it is far from tranquility. So, I steadied my mind internally, quietened it, and brought it to a state of tranquility and stillness. Why is that? To prevent the mind from being disturbed.

Similarly, with thoughts of kindness and peacefulness.

Renunciates, whatever a Renunciates frequently thinks and ponders over, the mind will become inclined towards it. If one frequently thinks and ponders over thoughts of renunciation, one has abandoned sensuality, and one's mind is inclined towards thoughts of renunciation. If one frequently thinks and ponders over thoughts of kindness or peacefulness, one has abandoned anger and harm, and one's mind inclines towards kind and peaceful thoughts.

Having gone thus far, I had only to be aware that those good thoughts were going on in my mind. I realized my vigilant practice had progressed, my unremitting introspective attention was established in me, my body was relaxed and comfortable, and my mind was happy, tranquil, and unified.

In this way, withdrawn from sensual thoughts, withdrawn from harmful thoughts, I entered upon the first *jhāna* with inference and inquiry, experiencing joy and comfort based on mental equilibrium..... ultimately, I came to realize that: birth is ended, lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done and no more is the continuity of existence.

So Renunciates, the safe and good path to be traveled joyfully, has been reopened by me. The wrong path has been closed off. What a teacher who seeks your welfare and has compassion for you can do, I have done for you, Renunciates. There are these roots of trees and these empty huts. Renunciates meditate, do not delay, or else you will regret it later. This is my advice to you. Thus, was the Holy One's utterance. The Renunciates were delighted and inspired by what the Holy One said.

## **Vitakka Santhāna Sutta (MN 20)**

### **The technique of calming thoughts**

The disciple engaged in developing the superior disposition should cultivate five mental strategies at the appropriate times.

- 1). Suppose an image arises in a disciple's mind, which as one reflects on it, arouses harmful and unworthy thoughts associated with sensuality, anger, and confusion. In that case, an image contrary to this image, which is worthy, must be reflected upon. When this is done, those harmful, unworthy thoughts wane and cease. Just as a skillful carpenter or their assistant removes an old wooden peg by placing a new wooden peg and hammering, the disciple removes a bad mental image by substituting a good mental image.
- 2). When this is done, if the harmful and unworthy thoughts continue to arise, then one should consider the negative consequences of these harmful thoughts thus: "These thoughts are unworthy, these thoughts are incorrect, these thoughts lead to painful consequences." When this is done, those harmful unworthy thoughts wane and cease. Just as a woman, man, or child who is clean and cleanly dressed would be horrified, humiliated, or disgusted when the carcass of a snake, dog, or human is hung on their neck, even so, when one considers the harmful consequences of harmful images they wane and cease.
- 3). When this is done, if the harmful and unworthy thoughts continue to arise, one should stop paying attention to these thoughts and stop reflecting on them. When this is done, those harmful and unworthy thoughts wane and cease. Just as a person with eyes who does not want to see something that comes within the range of their vision would shut their eyes or look aside, even so, one should shut one's mind to these harmful thoughts by not paying attention to them and ignoring them.
- 4). When this is done, if the harmful and unworthy thought still arises, one should focus on calmness, and calming down thought activity. When this is done, those harmful, unworthy thoughts wane and cease. Just as a person who is running begins to walk slowly or a person who is walking slowly begins to stop and stand or a person who is standing sits down or a person who is sitting lies down, thus changing from a more tiresome position to a less tiresome and more restful and relaxed position, even so, one focuses on calmness and rests the mind.

5). When this is done, if the harmful, unworthy thoughts still arise, one should relax the clenched teeth, relax the tongue pressed on the palate, and remove the thought associated with it easily, without exertion by relaxing and calming the mind. Just as a strong person holding a weak person by the head or the body throws them out easily without exerting themselves, being fully relaxed and calm, even so, the disciple relaxes the jaws and tongue and throws out the thought without exerting themselves by relaxing the body and calming the mind. Those harmful, unworthy thoughts associated with sensuality, anger, and confusion wane and cease when this is done. When they disappear, the mind stays within, rests within, becomes uniform, and enters equilibrium.

The disciple who achieves this is called the "master of the mind." They think what they want to think. They do not think about what is unwanted. They have stopped the emotional reactions, broken the fetters, removed the existence of self, and ended *Dukkha*.

**Summary of *Vitakka Santhāna Sutta*:** Elimination of harmful thoughts involves the following:

- 1). Replace a harmful mental image with a good mental image, 2). Think of the disadvantages of harmful thoughts 3). Stop entertaining harmful thoughts and take your attention away from them 4). Gradually transition from an agitated to a calm mind by slowing down the thinking process 5). Relax the tensed facial muscles, jaw, and tongue, and calm the mind.

## **Questions and Answers**

**Q:** You mentioned that thinking involves mental pictures and words. In other words, there is both a visual and verbal component to thinking. You also mentioned that when anger arises, we can change the mental picture to control the emotion of anger because the image we carry has a powerful influence on the emotion. My question is, do you have any other techniques to diminish arisen anger in addition to changing the mental image.

**A:** Yes. Five methods are given in the *Vitakkasanthāna Sutta*. First, we can calm down by replacing the emotion-laden mental image with a calming image. At this step, both visual and verbal parts of the thinking are changed. Changing the picture is a useful technique because we react to the picture. The verbal component of thinking is where you interpret or give meaning to the image seen. Second, we focus on the emotion of anger and think of the disadvantages of this emotional state. Third, remove the thoughts of anger by taking your attention away from those thoughts. Fourth, slow down the thinking and silence the mind. Your body has relaxed at this stage, but some tension remains in the jaws and tongue. Fifth, relax your clenched teeth and jaw and tightness of the tongue, which are rudiments of the remaining tension. It should be noted that in the standard translation of the *Sutta*, the fifth technique is mistranslated. It is usually translated as clenching your jaw and tongue and using force to repress the thought. It should be the opposite, we don't want to create tension in the body, we want to relax. Meditation does mean being forceful in this way. The *Vitakkasanthāna Sutta* has five methods, of which the second method is in the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*.

## LEVEL TWO

### **SAMATHA BHĀVANĀ: TRANQUILITY MEDITATION**

#### **THE HARMONIOUS EXERCISE**

The intermediate level in meditation is step six (*sammā vāyāma*) in the supernormal eightfold way. This practice is also called the four harmonious exercises (*cattāri sammappadhāni*) by the Buddha.<sup>195</sup> The four exercises are:

1. **Prevention (*Saṇvara*)**
2. **Elimination (*Pahāna*)**
3. **Cultivation (*Bhāvanā*)**
4. **Maintenance (*Anurakkhana*)**

This is the systematic effort to purify the mind. At this stage, meditation should be seen as a continuation of the effort to calm the mind and relax the body started in level one. In level one we cultivate good thinking habits but in level two we want to practice silence of the mind. We call the practice at this level cultivating tranquility of mind (*samatha bhāvana*). Cultivation of deep tranquility is achieved correctly and fully only through the harmonious exercise.

#### **1. Prevention (*Saṇvara*)**

Guarding the senses is called *indriya saṇvara*. It is not shutting off the senses but guarding them. What does this mean? If we put a person at the door to prevent the wrong kind of people from getting in, that person is called a guard. In the same way, we have to guard our senses: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body. We can't stop sense experiences but we have to stop thinking about what we are seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. We have to take our attention away from the outside world. This is the first meditation at this level. If you do that properly every day, it becomes a habit.

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<sup>195</sup> AN 4.13

## **2. Elimination (*Pahāna*)**

But there is another problem. Although we guard the senses, there is still a way that the mind can get polluted. Guarding the senses only deals with the present moment, but thoughts about the past can come, polluting the mind. The past has gone but memories can bring the past into our lives. We might also think of the future. The future has not even come but imagination can bring the future into our life. This is how the mind becomes polluted. Removing these mental images is the second kind of practice. In addition to guarding the senses, we are also guarding the memories and imaginations. If you do this well, then the mind becomes silent and purified.

## **3. Cultivation (*Bhāvanā*)**

If you take your attention away from what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and even your memories and imaginations, where will you focus your attention? The attention has to be focused within and not outside. This is what is called cultivation or *bhāvanā*. The word *bhāvanā* is usually translated as meditation. Actual meditation is focusing our attention within. When you do this, where are you focusing? On what is happening to your body. Is your body seated, or is your body standing, or is your body walking, or is your body dancing or whatever it is doing. You become aware of the body. This is called *kāyānupassanā*.

Then you focus your attention on how the body feels. Are you feeling comfortable or uncomfortable? Or is it just a neutral feeling? There are only three kinds of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. You observe the feeling in the body. This is called *vedanānupassanā*. What are you observing? You observe your emotional reactions to what you have seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched. The physical manifestation of the emotional reaction is what you watch when observing the body. The reaction manifests physically in the form of a feeling in the body. When the body becomes tense, you feel uncomfortable. When the body is relaxed, you feel comfortable. You see that the feeling in the body depends on the reaction.

The third thing you can become aware of is the emotional state created by the reaction. What kind of emotion is it? Is it anger, fear, worry, or sexual desire? You have to become aware of the emotion in the mind. This is called *cittānupassanā*. We have discussed many times that *citta* means the affective or emotional part of the mind. The other part of the mind is cognition. You have to become aware of the cognitive experience. How do you interpret your sense experience or circumstances? The idea in the mind is what you are observing. This is called

*dhammānupassanā*. We have also discussed previously that *dhamma* means the experience created by the cognitive part of the mind called *mano*.

So, there are four things you are observing inside. This is usually translated as the four foundations of mindfulness. But I call it the four focuses of attention. We focus our attention on four things: the body, the feeling, the emotional state, and the cognitive experience.

#### 4. Maintenance (*Anurakkhana*)

The focus of our attention has to continue, which means you have to do it all the time. Not just for a short period, and then you start thinking about other things. That won't work. You have to maintain the attention within. This is what is called maintenance or *anurakkhana*.

In summary, we have four exercises: *sañvara*, *pahāna*, *bhāvanā*, and *anurakkhana*. *Sañvara* means guarding the senses, *pahāna* means avoiding memories and imaginations, *bhāvanā* refers to focusing the attention within, and *anurakkhana* means to maintain this awareness. Therefore, the aim of these four exercises and the intermediate level is to learn to stop thinking and quieten the mind. To quieten the mind is to purify it by freeing it of emotional disturbances such as the desire for sensual pleasures, anger, hatred, boredom, anxiety, and agitation. The pure and quiet mind is a happy mind that also brings joy to the world.

This meditation technique differs significantly from other forms of meditation. Primarily, this technique is not an effort to concentrate the mind but to calm the mind and relax the body. This is the opposite of concentration. It is not an attempt to focus attention on anything such as a black spot on a white background, a candle flame or the breath touching the nostril, or the abdomen rising and falling. Nor is it an attempt to focus on the spot on the forehead between one's eyebrows or a shining light within. Such practices only help one enter the hypnotic state.

### **JHĀNA**

The result of the diligent practice of the fourfold exercise is the entering the four levels of deep tranquility of mind called *jhāna*. *Jhāna* is usually translated as absorption, but I translate it as ecstasy. We use the term ecstasy in a unique sense here. It means to stand out (ec = out, stasy = stand). When the first two of these steps are practiced proficiently, the mind is withdrawn from the external surroundings, memories, and imaginations (i.e., standing out). It is ready to be

focused on continuous observation of what is going on quite unconsciously within. In level one, we eliminate the five obscurants to some extent. When level two is adequately practiced, the mind becomes completely free of the five obscurants, yet temporarily, and the five constituents of ecstasy (*jhānanga*) appear.

In other words, when this exercise is completed, the purified mind enters the first ecstasy (*jhāna*), followed by the second, third, and fourth. The four *jhānas* are collectively known as *samādhi*. However, the *jhāna* is temporary because it can be lost if the mind gets polluted due to lack of maintenance. The equilibrium will be permanently established only after the seven steps to awakening (*satta bojjhanga*) have been practiced, and *Nirvāna* is reached after completing level three. When *Nirvāna* is attained, one enters the tranquility that can never be disturbed. This is why *Nirvāna* is called the imperturbable serenity of mind (*akuppā-ceto-vimutti*)<sup>196</sup> or equilibrium without a break (*samādhim ānantarikaññamāhu*)<sup>197</sup>.

This level of practice begins with taking up the eight precepts. The beginners' level can be practiced even after taking the five precepts, though some take the eight precepts during the beginners' level. At this level, however, the eight precepts are a must. Some even take ten precepts at this stage. Recall that we learned to stop reacting emotionally in our selective thinking meditations, thereby purifying our behavior. It is only when our behavior becomes pure and complete (*ariya sīla*) that we can develop tranquility of mind in level two.

The beginners' level of meditation is not a mystical practice, but we cannot say so at the second level. At this level, we are entering *jhāna*, an experience that could be called mystical. This level of practice is meant for people who have renounced the worldly life and the pursuit of sensual pleasure. The term mysticism comes from the mystery behind this practice. It was a mystery to the householders because they could not understand why the mystics gave up sensual pleasures and began to live a secluded life devoted to a mysterious practice called meditation. However, the Buddha has explained everything connected with *jhāna*. A person who begins this kind of meditation does not have to wonder what it is all about.

When the five obscurants disappear, what appears is tranquility. We experience the first state of ecstasy (*jhāna*), which has five constituents – *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *piti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā*.

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<sup>196</sup> AN 5.95

<sup>197</sup> Sn 2.4

**TABLE 28: Comparative translation of the five *jhānanga***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<b>1. vitakka</b>	Initial application	Inference
<b>2. vicāra</b>	Sustained application	Inquiry
<b>3. pīti</b>	Rapture	Cognitive contentment
<b>4. sukha</b>	Joy	Physical pleasure
<b>5. ekaggatā</b>	One pointedness	Mental stillness

### ***Vitakka & Vicāra***

*Vicāra* means inquiring, and *vitakka* means inference. These are the essential constituents of conceptual thinking. Every time we form a concept, what we do is we ask a question – "What is this?" Then we answer – "Oh, this is a microphone." Thus, forming a concept. We can also create a concept while doing meditation on breathing. You inquire, "What is this?" "Oh, this is breathing in, this is breathing out." These are also concepts. We can also have ideas that produce excitement – "Oh, who is this?" "This is my enemy," and then you become angry. Anxiety is also dependent on the mental pictures and the concepts you hold. In meditation, we are cultivating ideas that produce calm. This conceptual thinking is *vicāra* and *vitakka*.

In the first *jhāna*, there may be basic and tranquil concept formation. Sensual, angry, and harmful thoughts will be absent. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* are usually defined as the initial and sustained application of attention to the meditation object. This is an error coming from the commentaries. The previous two *Suttas* given in translation both have the word *vitakka* in their title and were about conceptual thinking. *Vitakka* has the same meaning in this context as well.

### ***Pīti & Sukha***

When you have only good concepts in your mind, you experience happiness. We call it cognitive contentment (*pīti*). It is a state of tranquil happiness or contentment. *Sukha* is a physical pleasure because the tensions relax. Instead of releasing tension by obtaining what is desired or getting rid of what is hated, we learn to relax the tension consciously. It is, therefore, not a release but a relaxation of tension. When tensions relax, a pleasant feeling arises, and that is *sukha*. In other words, one feels happy or rapturous when the mind is free of emotional excitement, and physically one feels pleasure because the tensions are relaxed.

## ***Ekaggatā***

*Ekaggatā* is the stillness of mind, tranquility, mental repose, or a state of equilibrium. *Ekaggatā* is commonly translated as one-pointedness of mind, but it means stillness. The translation of this word as one-pointedness has led people to the idea that *jhāna* is attained through concentration on one object. The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God."<sup>198</sup> All religions talk about this stillness. When you have come to stillness, you have become God (*brahma bhuto*)<sup>199</sup>.

There are four levels of *jhāna*. As already described, there are five constituents or factors in the first state of *jhāna*. At the second *jhāna*, even the conceptual thinking, denoted by *vitakka*, *vicāra*, stops, and one is left with cognitive contentment (*piti*), physical pleasure (*sukha*), and mental stillness (*ekaggatā*). Percepts or mental pictures form in the mind at this level, but no concepts are formed. But one experiences contentment, pleasure, and mental stillness. At the third *jhāna* the cognitive contentment, a subtle form of excitement disappears, and one becomes further tranquil and experiences physical pleasure (*sukha*) and mental stillness (*ekaggatā*). At the fourth *jhāna*, physical pleasure also disappears, and one calms down further to reach *ekaggatā*, or the perfect stillness of mind. This kind of meditation, which calms the mind, is called *samatha bhāvanā* or tranquility meditation.

The purpose of *saṃādhi* is to rest the mind. The mind is not an entity different from the body. It is experienced merely as an activity of the body, which is mainly the nervous system's activity, consisting of the brain, the spinal cord, the nerves, and the senses. The entire body is involved in this activity called the mind, just as the whole engine is engaged in driving a motor vehicle. *Samādhi* is a gradual stopping of this activity called the mind until it comes to a complete stop. This was what the Buddha achieved. After having stopped the mind, he restarted it again. When he resumed it, he was able to see how the mind creates the self and world step by step. This led him to awaken from the dream of existence and thus became a Buddha. Details of this will be discussed in chapter ten. Therefore, achieving tranquility of mind is nothing but gradually stilling the activity called the mind. This is shown in the table below:

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<sup>198</sup> Psalm 46:10

<sup>199</sup> MN 28

**TABLE 29: Gradual stilling of the mind**

First <i>Jhāna</i>	Second <i>Jhāna</i>	Third <i>Jhāna</i>	Fourth <i>Jhāna</i>
Inquiry ( <i>vicāra</i> )			
Inference ( <i>vitakka</i> )			
Cognitive contentment ( <i>pīti</i> )	Cognitive contentment		
Comfort ( <i>sukha</i> )	Comfort	Comfort	
Mental stillness ( <i>ekaggatā</i> )	Mental stillness	Mental stillness	Mental stillness

The mind is focused within and free from all emotional disturbances in the ecstasy. Entering the different levels of tranquility is a gradual withdrawal from the emotional level that experiences a world outside. It is a gradual reduction of the experience of the sensual world. The world of experience that one enters in this ecstasy is sometimes seen as the spiritual world. Some even see it as entering heaven. Others call it a union with God. We, however, call it simple ecstasy, which is a gradual emptying of the mind or reduction of experience. As the *Sutta* says<sup>200</sup>:

Having withdrawn from sensual desires and harmful states of mind, one enters the first ecstasy (*jhāna*) consisting of inquiry (*vicāra*) and inference (*vitakka*), cognitive contentment (*pīti*), physical pleasure (*sukha*), and mental stillness (*ekaggatā*). Then by giving up inquiry and inference, one enters the second ecstasy consisting of cognitive contentment, physical pleasure, and mental stillness. Then one enters the third ecstasy, having given up cognitive contentment, while physical pleasure and mental stillness remain. Then one enters the fourth ecstasy, having given up physical pleasure, while mental stillness and apperception (*upekkhā*) remain.

The *Suttas* also describe the sequence of events that lead to ecstasy<sup>201</sup>:

1. When one has devotion (*Saddhā*).
2. One begins to experience freedom from remorse (*pāmujjam*).

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<sup>200</sup> MN 118

<sup>201</sup> SN 12.23

3. Freedom from remorse leads to cognitive contentment (*pīti*).
4. The body relaxes when experiencing cognitive contentment (*passaddhi*).
5. The relaxed body feels pleasure (*sukha*).
6. When the body is comfortable mental stillness is experienced (*samādhi*). This is the first *jhāna*.
7. When the mind is in equilibrium, you see how things come into existence. (*yathābhūtañāṇadassanassa*).

As indicated above, this is a gradual reduction of experience through relaxation of the body and calmness of mind. This meditation is not something that a person does. Effort will only lead to the hypnotic state if one attempts to do something, like concentrating. One has to remain passive, not active. It is only a matter of relaxation, which is doing nothing. The ecstasy has to happen through a gradual series of withdrawals or letting go of experience.

### **Gradual reduction of the experience of self**

The feeling of self is a result of emotions and tensions. With the deepening of calm during level two meditation, the sense of self is gradually reduced. When one reaches mental stillness, the feeling of self disappears. Of course, when people who are not aware of the Buddhist way of thinking attain these levels of tranquility and if they have been brought up in a theistic culture, they would say, "This is the presence of God, or I am uniting with God." As the self begins to disappear, they think myself is merging with God. Buddhists see this experience differently.

The Buddha has taught that if the self disappears when you become calm, and the self comes into being when you become emotional, then the self is only a creation of the mind. The self is only an experience that results from emotional disturbances and tensions. When you come out of *jhāna*, which are temporary resting states of the mind, and look at the body, you begin to see the body as body and not as self. Then you begin to see, "I have been identifying this body as myself all these years." Then when a feeling arises in the body, you begin to see, "here's a feeling arising in the body, it comes and goes, and it is not myself." In this way, you realize that the body is born, grows old, and eventually dies and that it is an impermanent thing.

Then, when an emotion appears, you begin to see, that an emotion arose and passed away like a wave in the ocean. They come and go, and they are not myself. They're

just emotions that arise in the body due to reactions to feelings. Then when you experience a concept or thought, "oh! Here's a thought that arose in the body." It results from a cognitive process and a reaction to stimulation.

Meditation at level two begins and ends with developing the harmonious exercise, the sixth step of the supernormal eightfold way. Level three starts with the development of harmonious attention, the seventh step in the eightfold way. It is necessary to experience at least the first ecstasy before one proceeds to level three. Ecstasy reached during level two is temporary. The ecstasy reached during level three meditation is the ecstasy from which one never returns (*samādhi-anantarika- aññamahu*)<sup>202</sup>. This is the level of purity where one's mind is never polluted again. It is the purity of mind attained by an *Arahant* or Buddha.

### **Breathing meditation instructions**

This is the primary meditation technique for developing tranquility at level two. It must be practiced together with the four steps of the harmonious exercise. This is not an exercise in concentration but one of relaxation of the body and calming the mind. When the body is relaxed and the mind is calm, attention automatically goes to breathing. Breathing is like a biofeedback mechanism that gives us feedback about our degree of tranquility. By learning to pay attention to breathing, we can calm the body and the mind. Let go of your whole body as you breathe out as if you are dropping a weight that you were carrying. Let the breath come in freely as well.

Remember, you are not trying to concentrate on breathing. You are focusing your attention on the whole body in general. Your attention should be on the experience of the body from within. Observe the feelings of discomfort and comfort that indicate tension and relaxation in the body. Continue attention to the breathing and the body in this way till your body relaxes gradually and the mind calms down. When the mind is tranquil and purified, you begin to experience happiness. When the mind is happy, the body relaxes further and feels more comfortable. With this experience of comfort comes perfect stillness of mind.

The mind that runs about in search of happiness stops running when there is happiness experienced within. At first, you might experience this tranquil state of mind only for a moment, and then it might disappear. With practice, it begins to stay longer and longer. When it remains sufficiently long, you are in the first *jhāna*.

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<sup>202</sup> Snp 2.1

## **Ānapānasati Sutta (MN 118)**

### **The Formula on Introspective Breathing**

Thus have I heard: Once His Holiness was sojourning near *Savatthi* in the Eastern Monastery in the mansion of *Migara*'s mother, together with several well-known senior monks and junior monks: the Venerable *Sāriputta*, the Venerable *Moggallāna* the Great, the Venerable *Kassapa* the Great, the Venerable *Kaccāna* the Great, the Venerable *Koṭṭhita* the Great, the Venerable *Kappina* the Great, the Venerable *Cunda* the Great, the Venerable *Anuruddha*, the Venerable *Revata*, the Venerable *Ānanda* and with other well-known senior monks and junior monks. The senior monks exhorted and instructed newly ordained junior monks at that time. Some senior monks exhorted and instructed a group of ten monks, and some senior monks exhorted and instructed a group of twenty . . . some thirty . . . some forty monks. Some newly ordained monks were of excellent progressive attainments. ....

Renunciates, there are Renunciates in this order who live intent on the practice of introspective breathing. Introspective breathing, Renunciates, if practiced and developed, is of great benefit, of great advantage. Introspective breathing, Renunciates, if practiced and developed, brings to completion the four-fold introspection (*cattaro satipatṭhāna*). If practiced and developed, the four-fold introspection brings to completion the seven steps to awakening (*satta bojjhangā*). If practiced and developed, the seven steps to awakening bring to completion freedom through consciousness (*vijjā vimutti*).

And how, Renunciates, is introspective breathing developed? How is it practiced? How is it of great benefit, of great advantage? Herein, Renunciates, having gone to a forest, to the root of a tree, to an empty place, sits down cross-legged, holding one's back erect, withdrawing attention from external objects (*saṇvara* and *pahāna*) and focusing attention within (*bhāvanā* and *anurakkhana*).

1. Focusing attention within one breathes in, focusing attention within one breathes out.
2. When one is breathing in long, one is aware that one is breathing in long; when one is breathing out long, one is aware that one is breathing out long. When one is breathing in short, one is aware that one is breathing in short; when one is breathing out short, one is aware that one is breathing out short.

3. Aware of how the whole body feels one breathes in. Aware of how the whole body feels one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
4. Relaxing the breathing (*kāya sankhara*), one breathes in. Relaxing the breathing one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
5. Experiencing cognitive contentment (*pīti*) one breathes in, experiencing cognitive contentment one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
6. Experiencing physical comfort (*sukha*) one breathes in, experiencing physical comfort one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
7. Experiencing feeling and sensation (*citta sankhara*) one breathes in, experiencing feeling and sensation one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
8. Calming the feeling and sensation one breathes in, calming the feeling and sensation one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
9. Experiencing the mood (*citta*) one breathes in, experiencing the mood one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
10. Super gladdening the mood one breathes in, super gladdening the mood one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
11. Steadying the mood one breathes in, steadying the mood one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
12. Stilling the mood one breathes in, stilling the mood one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
13. Perceiving instability (*anicca*) one breathes in, perceiving instability one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
14. Perceiving dispassion (*virāga*) one breathes in, perceiving dispassion one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
15. Perceiving cessation (*nirodha*) one breathes in, perceiving cessation one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.
16. Perceiving relinquishment (*patinissagga*) one breathes in, perceiving relinquishment one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself.

Renunciates, introspective breathing when practiced and developed thus, is of great benefit, of great advantage. ....Thus spoke His Holiness. Delighted, these Renunciates rejoiced in what His Holiness had said.

### ***Walking meditation instructions***

Beginners can often experience physical pain and discomfort during sitting meditation. Meditation should not be an exercise in self-torture or bearing pain. The best way to minimize this problem is to alternate between sitting and walking mediation. That way we can look after the body and meditate for longer periods. The keys to good walking meditation are:

1. Have a goal in mind - to relax the body and calm the mind. The goal is to keep awareness in the present moment and the body. It is not concentrating on one point but is dynamic.
2. Don't try to discipline yourself. That doesn't work. If you are too serious then tension builds up and you will not be relaxed while walking.
3. Don't worry about awareness, what is needed is only relaxation and very slow movement. Simply relax while walking very slowly and awareness will come automatically.
- 4.. Choose a path in a quiet place where you can walk back and forth undisturbed. It is good to practice walking meditation outside in nature if possible.
5. Withdraw your attention from the outside world. Focus your attention within, on the mind and body. Practice guarding the senses, that is not thinking about any sense experience.
6. Stand relaxed, then walk very slowly and relaxed. Look ahead, keeping the neck straight.
7. You may combine slow breathing with each step: breathe in + lift the foot; breathe out + lower the foot. Doing this for some time will make your whole body relax and the mind calms down. This is what people practicing Tai Chi are also doing. Simply slow relaxed movements.
8. When you do this slow walking, it doesn't allow you to fall back into ordinary unconscious walking.
9. If any thoughts of the outside world, the past, or the future arise, remove them ASAP.

10. With practice, you can see if your walking is a reaction or a response. For example, you may be unconsciously stepping forward and that is an unconscious reaction while a slow conscious step is a response.

11. When you turn, note that the turn may also be unconscious because it was pre-programmed. Simply know how it is happening. Every action is like that - there is a decision that leads to action.

12. Continue the relaxed, calm, and slow movements to all other daily activities such as eating, bathing, brushing teeth, etc.

13. The relaxation will lead to depersonalization. With deep relaxation, you will come to a stage where the feeling of "I" disappears. Then later when you return to normal activities the feeling of "I" returns. Then you begin to observe this disappearance and appearance of the feeling of self. So, the more you observe this the more you depersonalize. There should be relaxation and awareness for this to happen.

## ***Cūla Vedalla Sutta (MN 44)***

### **The Minor Discourse on Knowledge**

This is a continuation of the discussion of the *Cūla Vedalla Sutta*, which we started in chapter four. We can call it "The Minor Discourse on Knowledge." In this *Sutta*, Visākha went to his former wife, the *Arahant Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā*, and asked her several questions. She answered the questions in the way taught by the Buddha.

#### **MEDITATION & HYPNOTISM**

Today many people think that meditation is concentration. What are they concentrating on? They mainly concentrate on their breath, and they believe it is Ānāpānasati. Most people think that the mind is wandering. The mind is running here and there, and the way to stop that is to tie it to a post like tying a dog to a post. Some people even call it the monkey mind. That is the wrong way of looking at the mind. The mind is not a thing that is running about. You don't have to tie the mind to a post. Concentration is tying it to a post.

The better way of thinking is likening the mind to water. The water can remain in an unshaken state or a shaking state. What we call the mind running is the shaking. That is how we have to understand it: the mind that is shaking or the mind that is not shaken. When we think of the body, we think of the tensed body and the relaxed body. Similarly, the mind is shaking or not shaking. We are not tying the mind to a post but learning to relax the body and calm the mind. That is what meditation is about. *Samādhi* is not concentration. *Samādhi* is relaxing the body and calming the mind. *Samādhi* is the stillness of mind.

Attempting to concentrate for long periods makes the mind tired. When the mind is tired we start to feel sleepy. When we experience sleepiness during meditation we can slip into a state which is in between being awake and fully asleep. This is called the hypnagogic state and it is the state in which we normally dream. Some meditators fall into this state in meditation and start to see all sorts of dream-like visions. They mistakenly believe this is progress in meditation. This is important to understand, otherwise, you may enter the hypnagogic or hypnotic state when you meditate. This is why I don't translate *samādhi* as concentration.

## **Mesmerism**

Long ago, there was a man called Franz Anton Mesmer<sup>203</sup>. He hypnotized people and used it to do wonderful things like cure diseases. So, everyone started going to him when they were sick. This came to be called mesmerism. Some people criticized him and said he was misleading people. The government had a committee appointed to examine this. The committee decided it was fraudulent, and he was banished to another country.

Then there was a psychologist in England called Dr. Braid. He went and examined what the committee discovered. They had said that it was not a real cure, that it was based on the people's imagination. Dr. Braid re-examined these findings. He found that diseases could be cured but that it was all done by imagination. The imagination has great power. You imagine your sickness is cured, and you are cured if you believe it.

He is the one who coined the term hypnosis. Sometimes it is called the Braids method of hypnosis, after him<sup>204</sup>. He saw it as a kind of sleep. If you can put a person into a sleepy state and give ideas to them, they will accept them. The thinking mind thinks. The emotional mind cannot think. The emotional mind is susceptible to suggestions. It works through imagination. If you have a picture in your mind, the image can produce emotions.

For example: If I tell you that you are stuck in your chair and you cannot get up, what will happen? If you believe that, you will find that you cannot get up. But if you question, "oh, I have been getting up all the time, how can I not get up?" Then the thinking mind interferes. If you can stop that thinking mind, you can be made to fall asleep. Then whatever I suggest will just happen. It will be accepted. That is what is done in hypnosis. The easy way to enter the hypnotic state is to get a person to concentrate. Concentration is something that stops the thinking mind.

If you expect something to happen in the hypnotic state, you will begin to see it happening. Some meditation teachers suggest that students will see lights or other images that they call a *nimitta* when they enter *samādhi*. If the student falls into a hypnotic state because they concentrate on their breath, they begin to see whatever their teacher suggests. But these are hallucinations. This is how hypnosis works.

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<sup>203</sup> Franz Mesmer. (2023, September 26). In Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz\\_Mesmer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Mesmer)

<sup>204</sup> Hypnosis. (2023, September 26). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypnosis>

Unfortunately, people mistake the hypnotic state for *samādhi* due to this effort to concentrate.

Another reason the two states are sometimes confused is that in both states some people are able to recall past lives. Some psychologists use hypnosis to help people recall past lives. It is sometimes called past life regression. However, some people question whether such memories obtained through hypnosis are real or hallucinations. In *samādhi* some people are also able to genuinely recall past lives. If you have been able to recall a past life during meditation it does not necessarily mean you have entered *samādhi*.

Imagination is essential, and the Buddha used this. By using imagination, the Buddha was able to stop the shaking in the mind by holding on to good images. That is the meaning of meditation. There are two kinds of meditation. One is to calm the mind (*samatha bhāvana*), and the other is to correct the thinking (*vipassanā bhāvana*). It is the thinking that arouses emotions. We have to learn to keep the mind calm and correct the thinking.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA (continued from Chapter 4)<sup>205</sup>**

Lady, what is concentration, what are the objects of concentration, what phenomena are the supports of concentration, and what is the development of concentration? Friend Visākha, mental focus is concentration. The Four Establishments of Mindfulness are the objects of concentration. The Four Right Exertions are the equipment of concentration. Practicing, developing, and repeating these is the development of concentration.

#### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

Here the translator translates *samādhi* as concentration. Concentration is not a very suitable word for translating *samādhi*. We translate *samādhi* to mean the equilibrium/stillness of mind. *Cittasa ekaggatā* is translated as the unification of mood. (*citta* = mood, *eka* = one, *agga* = end) *Ekaggatā* means one end. That means the mind is in equilibrium. It is a mind that is completely calm and tranquil. This is

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<sup>205</sup> *Cūla Vedalla Sutta*: The lesser series of questions and answers (MN 44), translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle length Discourses of the Buddha*, (Wisdom: 1995)

the equilibrium of mind where the *citta* (emotional mind) is no longer in conflict with *mano* (thinking mind).

There are two words used in modern psychology: cognitive dissonance and cognitive consonance. Cognitive dissonance means the mind is divided. One part of the mind wants to go in one direction, and the other part wants to go in another direction. For example, when you are sleeping and the alarm rings, you have to get up, but you feel lazy. You want to sleep a little more. That means your mind is going in two different directions. One part of your mind knows it is time to get up, but the other part wants to sleep. That is cognitive dissonance. In this state of *samādhi*, there is no such cognitive dissonance. There is cognitive consonance. That means the mind is not divided. In the *samādhi*, the mind is still and unified.

### **Nimitta**

Many people think when you keep on concentrating, you will see a *nimitta*. Very often, concentration will lead you into a hypnotic state. You might see a light, and then you might begin to hallucinate and see a lot of things. Braid's method of hypnosis is to get a person to concentrate on something. As the person starts to concentrate, the person might see the *nimitta*, which is a hallucination.

In this *Sutta*, the question is asked, "What is the object of concentration?" Here, the translator uses the word object for the *Pāli* word *nimitta*. The term *nimitta* really refers to where the mind is focused. When you begin to practice *samādhi*, some people say you must have a *nimitta*, and they will ask what the *nimitta* is? The *nimitta* is what you are going to focus your attention on. Here, focus does not mean concentration. There is a big difference between concentration and focusing your attention on something. For example, when I speak to you, you are aware of what I am saying, and you are also aware that you are listening, but you are not concentrating. Concentration is a very strenuous activity which tires the mind and leads to sleepiness. Awareness is a relaxed state of being aware. There is no tension involved in being aware. Concentration can give rise to tension.

The translator says "the four establishments of mindfulness" are the basis of concentration. We prefer to use the words "the four focuses of attention." In the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, we focus our attention on four things. We translate *sati* as the introversion of attention or introspection. Introspection means to focus the attention within. In *satipaṭṭhāna*, there are four things on which you focus your attention. You focus your attention on the body, how the body feels, the emotional state and the cognitive experience.

The *nimitta* is where you focus your attention. The *nimitta* here is *satipaṭṭhāna*. The *nimitta* is not a light or any other thing like that. Your attention is focused on the body, the feeling in the body, the emotional state, and the cognitive experience. It is not concentration. Concentration means you are focusing your attention on one thing. But there are four things to be aware of here. Your awareness has to shift as necessary. The awareness is dynamic, not static. The *Pāli* word *parikkhārā* is translated as equipment. The word means accompaniment. For example, there is a thing called *dāna* that people offer to the *saṅgha*. In *dāna*, the main thing is offering food to the monks and nuns, but there is also the *parikkhārā* which is something that accompanies the *dāna*. The primary offering is the food, but in addition to the food, you may offer other requisites, like a robe or medicine. That is part of the *parikkhārā* that accompanies the primary offering. In this *Sutta*, *parikkhārā* refers to what accompanies the four focuses of attention. Here, the four right kinds of striving, which I translate as the harmonious exercise, are the accompaniments of *samādhi*. They also have to be developed to attain *samādhi*: prevention, elimination, cultivation, and maintenance. We have already described these in detail previously.

### **Question and Answer**

**Q:** Can you please explain the current teaching of being in the now and that there is no such thing as past, present, and future?

**A:** I am not saying you should live in the present. You are simply living in an absence. There is no present, past, or future there. Living in absence is something you will have to experience for yourself. When your mind is focused within the first thing you might experience is your body. But gradually, you realize the body is also an imaginary picture in your mind. When you give up that, you are left with feelings and sensations. You can also be aware of emotions and concepts. As you watch this, everything disappears, and you begin to feel sensation only. That's how it gradually disappears. Only by doing it will you be able to understand. For a more detailed explanation of the Level 2 practices as taught by the author please see the book "Inner Clam: A user's guide to tranquility mediation".

## CHAPTER 10

### VIPASSANĀ

#### PREVALENT ERROR TO BE ADDRESSED

We are coming to the end of our journey through Proto-Buddhism. In this chapter we will discuss the third and final level of meditation as taught by the author. Previously we have been discussing the two different processes of the mind that the Buddha described as *mano* and *citta*. Level one and two meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*) is aimed at calming and purifying the *citta* or the emotional aspect of the mind by removing the five obscurants. This however is only temporary as long as the *mano* or cognitive aspect of the mind is not further developed. In the final level of meditation, the aim is to develop the *mano* through *vipassanā* meditation. *Vipassanā* is really about correcting our thinking through the paradigm shift from existence to experience. This can only be done once the mind is in a tranquil state gained through *samatha* meditation.

Since many in the West first became interested in meditation what has been practiced as *vipassanā* meditation has mainly been various techniques taught by meditation masters from Myanmar. These approaches such as *Goenka vipassanā*, *Pa Auk* and the *Mahasi* method have explicitly based their approaches on later sectarian texts such as the *Abhidhamma* and the *Visudhimagga*. Many who utilize these exegetical texts don't seem to have critically analyze them by comparing them with the *Suttas*.

More recently, *vipassanā* meditation has been overshadowed by the mindfulness movement, which has become more mainstream.

However, according to the author's research of the *Suttas* what is really the most advanced and final stage of mediation is what the Buddha called *satta bojjhangā* or the seven steps to awakening, which is today largely ignored by meditation teachers. It is to an exposition of this vital concept that we turn to in this chapter.

## LEVEL 3 – AWAKENING FROM THE DREAM OF EXISTENCE

The consciousness of a self is not the result of reasoning. It is a delusion created by emotions. We must challenge it by reason in order to be free from it. Unfortunately, it cannot be challenged in the presence of emotion because the emotional feeling of self is more powerful than reason. When emotion and reason are in conflict emotion usually wins. Therefore, we must learn to stop emotion at least temporarily. This temporary stopping comes in the form of tranquility or *samatha* meditation and the challenge comes in the form of *vipassanā* meditation.

Today, *vipassanā* is translated as insight meditation. That kind of meditation originated in Myanmar and was taught mainly by *Mahasi Sayadaw* and *S.N Goenka*. They popularised *vipassanā* meditation, and it has spread all over the world. Now everyone speaks about *vipassanā* meditation, but I find that this is not the *vipassanā* that the Buddha spoke of. In my view, the cultivation of the seven steps to awakening is the *vipassanā* that the Buddha taught in the *Suttas*. The *vipassanā* that is taught all over the world today is based on the *Abhidhamma* and *Visuddhimagga*. The *Visuddhimagga* was written in Sri Lanka in the fifth century by Ven. *Buddhaghosa*. Our method is not based on the *Visuddhimagga* but on the words of the Buddha as found in the *Suttas*. Support for this interpretation of *vipassanā* can be found in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*,<sup>206</sup> for example. There in the gradual training that is described, the seven steps to awakening is taught as the last and most advanced practice. In fact, the *Pāli* word that is translated as meditation, *bhāvanā*, is defined as the seven steps to awakening in this *Sutta*.

The third level of meditation is the final and the most advanced level of practice in our system of meditation. This third level is the practice of the seven steps to awakening (*satta bojjhangā*). This practice is the final stage in meditation that awakens the practitioner from the dream of existence. This stage is for advanced regular meditators and not for occasional meditators. It is for those who have been practicing tranquility meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*) for a long time and have reached a high level of tranquility or ecstasy (*jhāna*).

This practice of *vipassanā* meditation can be compared to the last stroke in the game of golf because they are both only for players who have already completed the earlier stages. When the seven steps to awakening are practiced conscientiously, the

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<sup>206</sup> MN 2

five obscurants (*pañca nīvarana*) can be eliminated permanently. When the mind is thus completely free of obscurants, the emancipated individual remains with a pure mind throughout their life. This means an *Arahant* will constantly be in ecstasy because they stand out of the emotional world until the body's death. This explains the meaning of the *Ratana sutta* statement about the supreme uninterrupted equilibrium (*ānantarika samādhi*)<sup>207</sup>. This is nothing but the imperturbable serenity of mind, which is *Nibbāna*. It is also a return to the original clarity of mind (*pabassaramidam cittam*)<sup>208</sup> lost during everyday living.

If a person practices according to this final level conscientiously, it is possible for such a practitioner to become an emancipated destroyer of bonds or at least a non-returner (*Anāgāmi*). Today, many are believed to be *Arahants*, and some even claim to be *Arahants*. It is essential to realize that a person who has risen to the *Arahant* state will not broadcast this. They have ceased to exist as a personality and have no conceit or desire for grandiosity.

### **The approach to meditation found in the Suttas**

It is useful to quote an important passage from the *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta* to explain the reason for our choice of the three stages we practice. The *Arahant Sāriputta*, the chief disciple of the Buddha, came to him and expressed his great appreciation of the Buddha and his teaching. The Buddha questioned him as to how he came to recognize the value of the Buddha and the *Dhamma*. The answer the *Arahant Sāriputta* gave was that he knew the path to *Nibbāna* through his own experience. He then summarized the way to *Nibbāna* in the form of three steps<sup>209</sup>:

- (1) Overcoming the five obscurants (*pañca nīvarana*) – **Levels 1& 2**
- (2) Developing the four focuses of introspective attention (*cattāri satipatthāna*) - **Level 2&3**
- (3) Treading the seven steps to awakening (*satta bojjhangā*) - **Level 3**

The three stages in our method are precisely the three stages described by the *Arahant Sāriputta*:

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<sup>207</sup> Snp 2.1

<sup>208</sup> AN 1.49

<sup>209</sup> DN 16

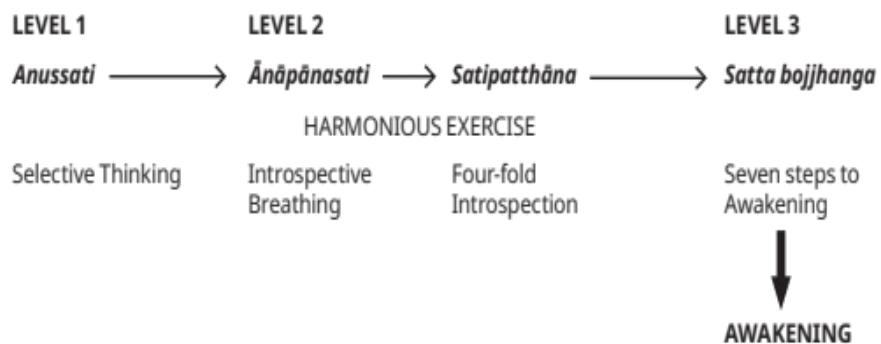
- (1) Selective thinking (*anussati*) and tranquility mediation (*samatha bhāvanā*) is the way to overcome the five obscurants.
- (2) The four harmonious exercises (*sammāppadhbāna*) are the way to commence the practice of introspective attention (*satipatthāna*).
- (3) The practice of the seven steps to awakening begins with introspective attention (*satipatthāna*) and ends with apperception (*upekkhā*).

The three levels of mediation gradually flow into one another and overlap instead of being completely separate. At the last stage, a paradigm shift occurs, and the individual awakens from the dream of existence, resulting in the breaking of bonds and imperturbable serenity.

Another important quotation that supports our method is from the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*<sup>210</sup>, where the Buddha points out:

Renunciates, when attentiveness to breathing is cultivated and developed, it is of great benefit and profit. It helps get rid of the five obscurants (**Level 1&2**). When attention to breathing is cultivated and developed, it fulfills the four-fold introspection (**Level 2&3**). When the four-fold introspection is cultivated and developed, they fulfill the seven steps to awakening. When the seven steps to awakening are cultivated and developed, it results in full comprehension (*paññā*) and emancipation (*vimutti*) (**Level 3**).

#### DIAGRAM 22: Overview of the Proto-Buddhist meditation system



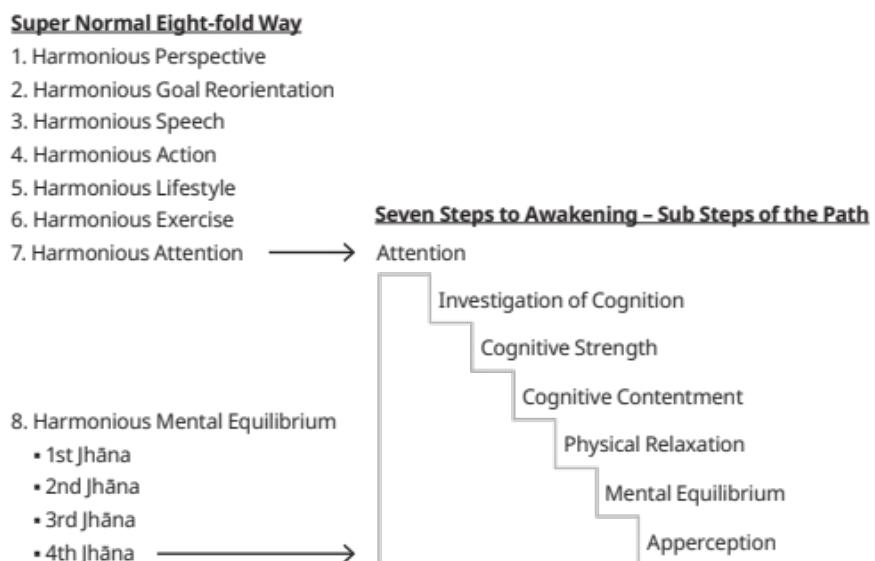
<sup>210</sup> MN 118

Thus, our method of *vipassanā* is different from the common *vipassanā* in a significant way. Our method is the development of the seven steps to awakening. In the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, it is stated that<sup>211</sup>:

- (1) The five hindrances are removed first
- (2) Secondly, the five personalized cumulatives are comprehended
- (3) Thirdly, the seven steps to awakening are completed
- (4) Fourthly the four-fold supernormal reality is fully comprehended (*paññā*).

This also clearly conveys the idea that the real awakening occurs only by completing the seven steps to awakening. The significance of the seven steps to awakening has been lost because of the failure to realize the connection between them and the supernormal eightfold way. The seven steps to awakening are the sub steps between harmonious attention and harmonious mental equilibrium. Thus, they are the final part of the practice of the supernormal eightfold way. As mentioned above, they are like the final shot in the game of golf.

#### **DIAGRAM 23: *Satta bojjhangā* and the supernormal eightfold way**




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<sup>211</sup> MN 10

## CULTIVATING THE SEVEN STEPS TO AWAKENING

Having explained the why of the third level of meditation in our system, we now discuss the what of the system. These seven steps to awakening are:

**TABLE 30: Comparative translation of the *satta bojjhangā***

<i>Pāli</i>	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>sati</i>	Mindfulness	Systematic attention
<i>dhamma vicaya</i>	Investigation of <i>dhamma</i>	Investigation of cognitive experience
<i>viriya</i>	Energy/effort	Cognitive strength
<i>pīti</i>	Joy/rapture	Cognitive contentment
<i>passaddhi</i>	Tranquility	Physical relaxation
<i>samādhi</i>	Concentration	Mental equilibrium/stillness
<i>upekkhā</i>	Equanimity	Apperception

### 1) Systematic attention (*sati*)

Systematic attention is the beginning of the third level of meditation. It cannot be practiced properly without completing the first and second levels of meditation. In other words, these three levels of meditation gradually flow from one to the other because they are three parts of the same supernormal eightfold way. This means that the third level comes after the practice of the harmonious exercise (*sammā vāyama*) which consists of four parts as follows:

- (1) Prevention (*sañvara*)
- (2) Elimination (*pahāna*)
- (3) Cultivation (*bhāvanā*)
- (4) Maintenance (*anurakkhana*)

The third step, *bhāvanā*, is the beginning of systematic attention. Systematic attention is cultivated through the *satipaṭṭhāna* or introspection, commonly translated as mindfulness. We have explained in chapter nine why we don't translate it as mindfulness. Without the first two steps, prevention, and elimination, it is difficult to practice the third step, cultivation. We withdraw attention from the external surroundings, memories, and imaginations in these first two practices. The

third and fourth procedures are systematic introspection and maintenance (*anurakkhana*). Here the attention is focused, not on the objects perceived but on the emotional reaction to those objects, which goes on within quite unconsciously. Consciously focusing on the unconscious reactions to circumstances stops them. They cannot continue consciously. They can continue only unconsciously.

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha points out how introspection should be practiced. When the attention is focused within, one begins to observe one's reaction to circumstances in four ways, as mentioned in this *Sutta*<sup>212</sup>:

- (1) *Kāyānupassanā* – Observing the physical manifestation of the reaction in the body as movements, changes, or tensions in the body.
- (2) *Vedanānupassanā* – Observing the manifestation as feelings in the body: pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- (3) *Cittānupassanā* – Observing the manifestation in the form of emotions or calmness of the affective mood.
- (4) *Dhammānupassana* – Observing the manifestation in the form of cognitive experience, which are interpretations of events past, present, and future.

Sometimes meditators are not sure whether the observation of body, feelings, moods, and thoughts should be practiced separately or together. My understanding is that the *satipaṭṭhāna* is the introspective observation of the reaction to sensory stimulation. This reaction is observed in its totality of four parts (body, feelings, emotions, and cognition). This means the emotional reaction is observed as two physical manifestations and two mental manifestations. As one becomes more and more aware of these reactions, these reactions begin to stop because the unconscious process cannot go on consciously. As a result, the emotional disturbances disappear, and one begins to enter a state of mental tranquility and physical relaxation (*samādhi*). However, to achieve this state, it is essential to maintain systematic introspection throughout the day, without interruption, while walking, standing, sitting, or even lying down.

The practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, while prevalent today, has mistakes compared with what is described in the *Suttas*. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is not the first step on the path to *Nibbāna*. Today, many who practice Buddhist meditation ignore the supernormal eightfold way altogether and start practicing *satipaṭṭhāna*. They believe that the

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<sup>212</sup> MN 10

path to emancipation is *satipaṭṭhāna*, but it is only the seventh step in the supernormal eightfold way. This mistake is due to an erroneous translation of the *Pāli* statement in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* "ekāyano ayan bhikkhave maggo." It is wrongly translated as "*satipaṭṭhāna* is the only way to *Nibbāna*." As a result, meditators practice *satipaṭṭhāna*, with no regard for the supernormal eightfold way.

Everyone knows that a student who has just entered the university is not ready to sit for the final examination until they have completed the course. In the same way, it is only by practicing the first six steps on the eight-stepped path that one is ready to focus on the seventh step, which is *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Of course, it is possible and even necessary to practice a certain level of introspection even at the beginning of the supernormal eightfold way. Still, that level is different from the level of practice required at this final point.

Another mistake frequently made is that *Satipaṭṭhāna* is understood as the four establishments of mindfulness. The English term mindfulness refers to keeping the mind in the present moment whatever you are doing. We can keep the mind in the present but our attention still might be on the outside world. This is not sufficient. *Satipaṭṭhāna* means focusing attention within (*sati* = attention + *upaṭṭhāna* = placing within). This is why we translate *satipaṭṭhāna* as introspection. It is looking within to observe the experience occurring quite unconsciously. What is occurring within is the emotional reaction to circumstances going on outside.

In one *Sutta*, the Buddha has given an analogy to explain *satipaṭṭhāna* as introspection<sup>213</sup>. There is a musical show before an audience in the analogy. A person is given a bowl full of oil and asked to walk between the front row of the audience and the stage. A ferocious man carrying a sword is following him, saying, "If you drop even a drop of oil on the floor, I will cut off your head." Imagine you are the one walking with the bowl of oil in your hands. What would you be doing? Will you be looking at the show or focusing on the task you have given? No doubt your attention will be on your mission. That is how introspection has to be practiced. This will help you understand the difference between mindfulness and the intensive introspection that has to be carried out throughout the day.

If this systematic introspection is practiced correctly, one enters the second step to awakening.

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<sup>213</sup> SN 47.20

## **2) Investigation of cognitive experience (*Dhammavicaya*)**

The fourth *satipaṭṭhāna*, *dhammānupassana*, gradually flows into *dhammavicaya*. This step examines the experience within to understand how it occurs. One realizes that the cognitive interpretation of circumstances makes one react emotionally. We have discussed this previously.

In the well-known Buddhist book of verses called the *Dhammapada*, the first verse points out clearly that the cognitive process precedes the affective. Therefore, it is possible to eliminate emotions by constructive cognition. The *Madhupindika Sutta* also explains how the cognitive process recognizes objects through the categorization of past experiences. The recognition of objects by placing them in categories makes an individual react to past, present, and future images (*tatoniḍāna purisa papancasaññā sankhā samudācaranti atitānāgata paccuppaññesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rupesu*)<sup>214</sup>. When this is fully understood, it helps one realize that most interpretations are not necessarily facts. When this is discovered, the strength of the interpretation is diminished. Then even the validity of the interpretation is doubted, resulting in the total elimination of wrong interpretations and the self-centered emotions that come with it.

This examination of the cognitive interpretation occurs due to systematic introspection. It helps one realize that emotions are aroused only because of how the circumstances are interpreted. Ultimately at the deepest level, this change of interpretation means to give up the concepts of the existence of self and the world. When this way of thinking is eliminated, it is possible to permanently eradicate emotions as emotions are a relationship between the world and oneself.

## **3) Strength of the Cognitive over the Affective (*viriya*)**

The realization that the cognitive process (*mano*) precedes the affective process (*citta*) gives strength to the cognitive process to overcome emotions. The cognitive process has only to change the interpretation of circumstances and the emotional disturbance stops. The human being with his advanced cognitive process has a power beyond the lower animals in being able to delay the emotional reaction to get sufficient time to decide the best response in a given situation and act accordingly. In other words, he can rationally respond to a problem instead of reacting emotionally. This rational response is achieved through systematic introspection.

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<sup>214</sup> MN 18

This awareness of the need to stop the aroused emotions and the power the human being has to stop the emotional arousal strengthens the cognitive process. This strength of the cognitive process arose because the cognitive process examined the experience within, and the examination was done because introspection was practiced. Thus, systematic introspection flowed into the examination of experience, awakening the strength of the cognitive process.

#### **4) Cognitive contentment (*pīti*)**

When the cognitive process begins to recognize the need to control the emotions and its power to do so, it experiences a degree of contentment and confidence. When the cognitive process can gain control over the blind but powerful affective process, the cognitive process experiences freedom from guilt and remorse and therefore experiences a sense of satisfaction and delight (*pīti*). This is not an emotional excitement but a calm, tranquil sense of repose or serenity. It is a cognitive experience of contentment rather than an affective experience of rapture.

#### **5) Relaxation of the body (*passaddhi*)**

With the experience of this contentment, the muscles in the body relax (*pīti manassa kāyañ passambhati*). This is the gradual flow of events as one treads through the seven steps to awakening. When the body is relaxed, the body feels comfortable (*passaddha kāyo sukha vediyati*). With this relaxation of body and physical comfort, the mind becomes free of all five obscurants (*pañca nīvarana*). This, too, is the natural flow of events in the process of awakening.

#### **6) Mental equilibrium (*samādhi*)**

We started with a conflict between our blind emotions (*citta*) and the reality observed by the rational *mano*. The irrational *citta* was playing havoc, and the rational *mano* attempted to control the problematic *citta*. Now the *mano* has recognized its power and gained control over the *citta*. This way, the conflict is resolved. The cognitive dissonance has been turned into cognitive consonance. Hence the mental equilibrium. With this unification of mind, there is a feeling of contentment and comfort and the disappearance of the five obscurants. The affective process then enters the state of equilibrium (*sukhino citta samādhiyati*) called the first ecstasy. In other words, the cognitive and the affective processes that were in conflict now enter a state of unity as the mind enters the state of equilibrium. When the mind is free of the obscurants, the five constituents of ecstasy are experienced (*jhānanga*), which were discussed in the last chapter.

The cognitive and affective unity occurred because of systematic introspection. When this was done, the activity of the cognitive process in arousing emotions was discovered (*dhamma vicaya*). This discovery gave strength to the cognitive process (*viriya*), resulting in the joy of liberation from emotional disturbance (*pīti*), which led to the relaxation of the body (*passadda kāyo*) and the feeling of comfort (*sukha*), which ended up in the union between the affective and the cognitive (*ekaggatā*) resulting in the perfect equilibrium (*samādhi*). Cognitive contentment flows into physical relaxation, which flows into the tranquility of the affective process, resulting in the first ecstasy. Thus, was the natural flow of events in the seven stepped awakening process.

## 7) Apperception (*upekkhā*)

Once in the first ecstasy, the process gradually flows into the second, the third, and the fourth ecstasy. Ecstasy is a gradual withdrawal of attention from the lower levels of experience. At the fourth ecstasy, the unified mind enters a transformation. It completely withdraws attention from the object perceived and becomes focused inwards on the process of perception (*upekkhā-ekaggatā*). The term *upekkhā*, commonly mistranslated as equanimity, combines two roots: *upa* + *ikkhati* (*upa*=within and *ikkhati*=seeing). It means seeing what is within.

Then the question arises, what is seeing within? The answer is that the process of perception consists of two parts: 1) the image perceived, and 2) the process of perception. At the fourth ecstasy, the mind withdraws attention from the image perceived and focuses attention on the process of perception. This is seeing within or *upekkhā*. The English term we use to translate *upekkhā* is apperception, which means to look at the process of perception.

The Buddha analyzed the process of perception into five parts that are commonly translated as the five aggregates. We translate this as the five cumulatives of the process of perception. These cumulatives are usually personalized to form the personality. Due to personalization, the five cumulatives of perception create a sense of self. Here again, we use the term personalization to translate the term *upādāna* because it does not mean mere grasping or clinging, as it is commonly understood. By personalizing the cumulatives of perception as mine, the personality comes into being.

We may compare this to another well-known statement made by the Buddha to *Bahiya Dharuciriya*. This statement, "ditthe ditthamattam bhavissati"<sup>215</sup> is often translated as "in the seen will be merely what is seen"<sup>216</sup>, which is commonly understood as looking at something without thinking about it. This interpretation, however, conveys the idea of guarding the senses, which means on seeing a form with the eye, one does not pay attention to its appearance, nor its associations (*chakkunā rūpan disvā na nimittaggāhi, na byanjanaggāhi*)<sup>217</sup>.

Our interpretation, however, is: "focusing attention on the process of seeing instead of looking at the object that is seen." This means becoming aware of the process of perception rather than the object perceived. This change in perception is what we call apperception. When the mind is focused on the process of perception through apperception, a paradigm shift occurs. One realizes that the entire world is merely a phenomenon of perception and not an actual existing noumenon. Even what we call ourselves is such a phenomenon. Therefore, a paradigm shift occurs from the sense of subjective and objective existence to a sense of impersonal experience. This is the awakening from the dream of existence (*sammā sambodhi*).

The Buddha has also stated<sup>218</sup>:

Develop mental equilibrium (*samādhi*), Renunciates. One, whose mind is in equilibrium, is aware of how things come into existence (*samāhito bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathā bhutan pajānāti*).

A statement we often come across in writings on Buddhism is "seeing things as they are," which is supposed to be a translation of the *Pāli* statement "yathabhūtam pajānāti." However, our translation of this statement is understanding "how things come into existence." These are two ways of comprehending the same idea. The term "things as they are" implies existence. The standard interpretation is existential, and our interpretation is experiential. In other words, this statement means becoming aware of antecedental concurrence, which explains how the world, the self, and suffering come into being and how it ceases. Seeing *paṭicca samuppāda* is the liberation from existence (*bhava nirodha*).

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<sup>215</sup> Ud 1.10

<sup>216</sup> *Bāhiyasutta*: To Bāhiya (Ud 1.10), translated from the *Pāli* by John Ireland. *The Udana and The Itivuttaka*, (Buddhist Publication Society:1997) p.21

<sup>217</sup> MN 107

<sup>218</sup> SN 22.5

The seven steps to awakening began with systematic attention (*sati*) and ended in apperception (*upekkhā*). This resulted in a paradigm shift from existence to experience (*abhiñña*). As we mentioned earlier, introspection (*satipaṭṭhāna*) is looking within, and apperception (*upekkhā*) is seeing what is within. What is within is not the object perceived but the process of perception. This focus of attention on the process of perception instead of the object perceived is what we call apperception. Though this paradigm shift was started by apperception, it ends in super-perception (*abhiñña*). This paradigm shift is also known as the liberation from existence (*bhava nirodha*). This paradigm shift makes one a spiritually emancipated breaker of bonds (*Arahant*).

Some people who awaken can do so at the level of the fourth *jhāna*. However, others must continue to even greater levels of *saṃādhi*, called *arūpa saṃādhi*, to awaken. Thus, the Buddha has spoken about two ways of awakening. If one continues the reduction of experience beyond the fourth *jhāna*, the gradual reduction of the cognitive experience begins. This reduction of the cognitive experience is also a case of letting go of the former level of cognition. Each progressive level is a letting go or an absence of the former level of experience or stopping mental activity. This cognitive reduction takes five steps as follows:

- (1) The realm of infinite space (*ākāsañcāyatana*) – the images perceived (*rūpa*) are absent. When images are absent, only space is experienced.
- (2) The realm of infinite perception (*viññāṇancāyatana*) – with the letting go of the perception of space, attention is focused on the process of perception itself.
- (3) The realm of nothing (*ākiñcaññāyatana*) – the attention is withdrawn from the process of perception and focused on nothing.
- (4) The realm of neither sensation nor no sensation (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*) – the attention is withdrawn even from the awareness of nothing. Therefore, the attention is not focused on any sensation, though not remaining unconscious. This is being at the threshold of consciousness.
- (5) The cessation of sensation and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) – the complete stopping of the mind.

This last state was absolute unconsciousness (*avijjā*), where the consciousness was absent though the body is alive. This state is similar to hibernation, which is often

misunderstood as the experience of *Nibbāna*. When the Buddha woke up from this state, he began to become aware of the mental process by which the world and the self we are aware of and the suffering we are experiencing came into being. All this came out of the process of perception, cognition, and affection. These psychological activities did not arise due to the commandments of a supernatural Creator but because of the necessary conditions.

This experience made the Buddha realize that we experience the mind, not as an entity separate from the body but as an activity of the body. When perceived subjectively, it appears to be mental and, when observed objectively, physical. In other words, experience is dichotomized into subjective and objective. He also saw that the cognitive process creates the objective world, and the affective, and emotional process creates the subjective self and the resulting suffering. In other words, he became aware of the chain reaction called *paṭicca samuppāda*.

If the gradual reduction of experience is practiced seriously and conscientiously, the meditator can become a non-returner (*anāgāmi*) if not a Breaker of Bonds (*Arahant*). It is possible to awaken from the dream of existence and reach the state the Buddha did. Yet, it is also possible to become awakened without going through the complete stopping of the mind (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). The individual who is emancipated by awakening at the fourth ecstasy (*jhāna*) is called one who has awakened through comprehension (*paññā vimutti*). The individual who goes through the four ecstasies plus the cognitive realms (*āyatana*) stops the mind and awakens by observing the process of creation is called a person awakened in both ways (*ubhato bhaga vimutti*). The chief disciples of the Buddha, *Sāriputta*, and *Moggallāna*, were among those who had gone through this "double awakening." A person who has gone through the four cognitive realms but has not attained emancipation is called affectively liberated (*ceto vimutti*). The affectively liberated person is not necessarily emancipated. (See Appendix 3).

## **Question and Answer**

**Q:** Why do you disagree with the *Visuddhimagga*?

**A:** Today, *vipassanā* practice is based on the *Visuddhimagga*. *Buddhaghosa*, the author, based it on a *Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* – The *Ratavinita Sutta*. Essentially, he wrote a thesis on this *Sutta*. *Buddhaghosa* speaks about nine insight knowledges in his book. Nowhere in the *Suttas* is there any mention of these nine insight knowledges. *Mahasi Sayadaw*, who started this Burmese method of meditation, studied the *Visuddhimagga*, and he labeled various meditative experiences he had using the words in the *Visuddhimagga*. It is like Columbus, who thought if you go toward the West, you will ultimately come to the East because the world is round. But when he landed in America, he thought he had come to India and called the people Indians.

*Mahasi Sayadaw* claimed that he could gain insight without *samādhi*. Another mistake he made was assuming that *samādhi* was the hypnotic state. Maybe he did not know about hypnosis, and when he observed people entering a trance, he thought that was *samādhi*. You cannot get insight by entering the hypnotic state. That is why he said *samādhi* is not the way to gain insight. What he called *vipassanā* was another form of *samādhi*, where the mind becomes calm and tranquil. But he said that it is not *samādhi*. The biggest mistake they are making is saying that *samādhi* is concentration. The hypnotic state comes through concentration. *Samādhi* is not concentration. The description of *samādhi* in the *Visuddhimagga* describes the hypnotic state. We can further explore these ideas by discussing perhaps the most famous of *Suttas*, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

## *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10)*

### **The Formula on Introspection**

This discussion was held at the Buddhist *Mahā Vihara* in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Brother Billy Tan, a student of the author, is asking the questions. He referred to the author reverentially as *Bhante*.

**Q:** *Bhante*, we begin by asking about the translation of the *Pāli* word *satipaṭṭhāna*. We often hear it translated as mindfulness. I have asked many psychologists, practitioners, and even some monastics about the meaning of mindfulness. When I asked five different people, chances are I might get five different answers. There are also secular interpretations of mindfulness, which don't seem to reflect what the Buddha was teaching according to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. So, I would like *Bhante* to elaborate on the translation of *satipaṭṭhāna*. What exactly does it mean?

**A:** The first thing that we have to understand is that the Buddha didn't speak in English, and therefore he never used the word mindfulness. Mindfulness is a translation given by the first person who translated the *Suttas* into English. That was Rhys Davids. Rhys Davids made a dictionary, and everyone used the dictionary to translate the words of the Buddha. I believe that some of these translations are not the words that we should use in English.

Unfortunately, when Rhys Davids and other translators came to translate the *Suttas*, the Buddhist monks who had been teaching these Western people didn't know English. How can they learn *Pāli* from these monks? They had to use translators. That means the translators were people who knew English. I don't think they were even perfect in understanding English. They also knew the *Sinhalese* language, which was the language of the monks. But they did not know *Pāli* enough. *Pāli* is probably the language or one of the languages that the Buddha spoke.

The English words currently being used can be misleading, and this is not the only word that has been wrongly translated. If we look at the problem, we begin to understand that we need retranslations. If I didn't learn English properly, I would not have known. I would also be using the exact words that Rhys Davids had used. Many people who talk about Buddhism misuse these English words, and the people who listen also understand something else, not what the Buddha said. This is a big

problem, and no one has been paying proper attention to this problem. This is why I am now trying to get people interested in this problem and retranslate these things.

This is what I have to say about mindfulness. The word *sati* means attention. The word *satipaṭṭhāna* comes from a combination of *sati* and *uppaṭṭhāna*. What is *uppaṭṭhāna*? *Uppa* means inwards. *Thāna* means to place. If you put something on the table, that is *thāna*. *Satipaṭṭhāna* means to place the attention inwards.

Usually, our attention is focused outwards. When we open our eyes, we look at what we see, focusing attention outwards. When we hear something, we focus our attention on what we hear, focusing outwards. When we smell something, we focus our attention on what we smell, focusing outwards. When we taste something again, we focus outwards. When we touch something, we are focusing our attention outwards. The Buddha is talking about the attention that is usually focused outwards should be withdrawn from there and focused inwards. That is the meaning of *satipaṭṭhāna*. That is not mindfulness. The proper word for this is introspection or introversion of attention. Introspection is focusing attention inwards.

If you are looking inwards, what are you looking at? If I am looking at this paper, am I focusing inwards? I am not focusing inwards. I am looking at the paper. To focus inwards means I am not using the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, or body. To focus inwards, the best thing is to close your eyes and look at what's going on inside. When we look at what's going inside, what we are looking at is the body. What is happening to my body? Is my body shaking? Is my body becoming tense or relaxed? I can also look at how the body feels. Do I feel comfortable, or do I feel uncomfortable? That's looking at the feeling. Then I can look at the mind, and what kind of emotional state it is in. Am I angry or frightened or worried or sexually excited? Then I can think about the cognitive experience. What kind of thought am I thinking? Now that is introspection. And that is what is called *satipaṭṭhāna*.

The Buddha has spoken of four *satipaṭṭhāna*: *kāyānupassanā*, *vedanānupassanā*, *cittānupassanā* and *dhammānupassana*. *Kāyānupassanā* is focusing on the body. *Vedanānupassanā* is focusing on the feeling of the body. *Cittānupassanā* is focusing on the emotional state. *Dhammānupassana* is focusing on the cognitive experience. We are looking at what's going on inside, not what is going on outside.

**Q:** *Bhante*, can you perhaps provide us with an example of how we can practice these four focuses in our daily life stage by stage?

**A:** *Satipaṭṭhāna* is not something that can be just started like that. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is the seventh step in the supernormal eightfold way. It is not correct to start with practicing *satipaṭṭhāna*.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>219</sup>:**

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country at a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. There he addressed the monks thus: “Monks.” “Venerable sir,” they replied. The Blessed One said this:

##### [DIRECT PATH]

“Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of Nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.

**Q:** The Buddha says, “*ekāyano ayam, bhikkhave, maggo.*” People have translated it into different words: this is the direct path, the one way, the single path, the one and only path. *Bhante*, what exactly does this statement mean?

**A:** It is crucial to understand this. ‘*Eka*’ means one, and ‘*ayana*’ means going towards. It is going towards one, not towards two or three. In other words, it has a single goal. *Maggo* means the way. *Ekāyano ayam bhikkhave maggo* means this is the way that goes straight to the goal.

To make it easy to understand, I compare this to golf. There is a small golf hole, and you have to hit a ball into that. You have to stand far away from that hole. The first shot is not something that will go into the hole. After hitting that ball many times, you ultimately come close to the hole. Then, at last, the shot goes straight into the hole. It’s the same way with this path to the final goal of *Nibbāna*. You start from far away. You have to take eight steps to reach the final destination. *Sammā sati* is the seventh step. It is the beginning of the *satta bhojjanga*, which goes straight to *Nibbāna*. This is what I call *vipassanā* meditation. It is the shot that goes straight to the goal. That is the meaning of that statement. It’s the single way to the goal or the direct way to the goal.

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<sup>219</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), translated from the *Pāli* by Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna - The Direct Path to Realization* (Windhorse:2003)

**Q:** Which do you think is the most appropriate to use?

**A:** I would say the direct way is the more suitable translation. We can also call it a specific way.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

##### [DEFINITION]

“What are the four? Here, monks, in regard to the body a monk abides contemplating the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to feelings he abides contemplating feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to the mind he abides contemplating the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world

**Q:** The statement "*kāye kāyānupassī viharati*" has been translated in different ways. These are: contemplate the body as a body, contemplate the body in the body, and contemplate the body of the body. This is quite confusing. What does it mean?

**A:** "*Kāye kāyānupassī viharati*" means to become aware of the body. The other translations given are the wrong way of putting it. Becoming aware of the body simply means looking from the inside and not from the outside. For example, I can open my eyes and look at the body. That is not what it is. You have to close your eyes and look at the body with your mind. When your body is moving, you can understand that the body is moving. But the important thing is to see whether what is going on outside influences your body.

This body is dependent on conditions, and because it is dependent on conditions, it is unstable. It grows old, falls sick, and dies because it depends on conditions. What is unstable is unpleasant and what is unpleasant is not under your power. What is not under power is not yours; therefore, this body is not yours. If the body is not yours, your body cannot be called myself. In the same way, what you call your mind is also dependent on conditions. It is unstable and not yours. There is nothing you can call myself. If you understand that properly, your idea of self disappears, and then you are free from the delusion of self. We are like mechanical robots who are unwilling to admit our real identity. It is a robot thinking we are selves existing

in this world. We can see this for ourselves by practicing these four *satipaṭṭhānas*. That is what we are trying to do here by observing the body and the mind.

## AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA

### [BREATHING]

“And how, monks, does he in regard to the body abide contemplating the body? Here, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut, he sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.

**Q:** Here the Buddha says "*parimukham satim upaṭṭhapetvā*," which is translated as establishing mindfulness in front of him. What does that mean?

**A:** This translation is a mistake coming from an incorrect interpretation in the commentaries. *Mukha* means face. Even in the language of Malay and Sinhalese, *mukha* means face. *Parimukham* means what is around the face. *Parimukham satim* means the attention focused on what is going around the face. This means what is going on outside. *Upaṭṭhapetvā* means that attention focused on external things is withdrawn from there and focused within.

Before you can focus attention on what is going on inside, you have to withdraw your attention from what is going on outside. How do you do this? When you see something, you have to stop thinking about what you see. When you hear something, you have to stop thinking about what you hear. When you smell something, you have to stop thinking about what you smell. When you taste something, you have to stop thinking about what you taste. When you touch something, you have to stop thinking about what you touch. This means guarding the senses, which we discussed in the last chapter.

Then there is *pahāna*. Although you may be guarding the senses, you might remember something that happened yesterday. You think about the quarrel you had yesterday. That means you not only have to guard your senses, you have to guard your memory. Or you may be thinking of the future. The future is all imagination. The future is a thing that has not even come. You have to stop thinking about the future also. It is only after you have been guarding the senses, guarding the memories, and guarding the imagination that you can look at what's going on inside.

When you look at what is going on inside of you, what are you looking at? You are looking at your emotional reaction to what is going on outside. When you look at the body, what is happening to your body? What is happening in your body to make you comfortable or uncomfortable? What emotional state comes to your mind when you see something or hear something? What are the ideas coming into your mind? This is what you are looking at. You have to keep on looking at it all the time. Not just one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. Throughout the day, you have to be watching what is happening to you inside. That is the meaning of *satipaṭṭhāna*. Only when you can keep doing that will your mind become purified. The aim is to purify the mind.

#### **AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

“Breathing in long, he knows ‘I breathe in long,’ breathing out long, he knows ‘I breathe out long.’ Breathing in short, he knows ‘I breathe in short,’ breathing out short, he knows ‘I breathe out short.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body,’ he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in calming the bodily formation,’ he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out calming the bodily formation.’ “Just as a skilled turner or his apprentice, when making a long turn, knows ‘I make a long turn,’ or when making a short turn knows ‘I make a short turn’ so too, breathing in long, he knows ‘I breathe in long,’ ... (continue as above).

#### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

So, paying attention to the breathing, one breathes in or aware of the breathing one breathes in. With attention, one breathes out. When one breathes in long, one is aware that one is breathing in long. When one is breathing attentively, one will notice whether the breathing is long or short. Then in the *Pāli* its states “*sabbakāyapaṭisamvēdī*.” *Sabbakāya* means the whole body. *Paṭisamvēdī* means experiencing the feeling. So, it means experiencing the feeling of the whole body. Is the body feeling comfort or discomfort as you breathe in and out?

Then the *Sutta* goes on to say in *Pāli* “*passambhayam kāyasaṅkhāram*.” *Passambhayam* means relaxing this bodily activity, which is the breathing. You see the tension and discomfort in the body. It's like biofeedback. The Buddha is teaching us how to read the body and relax. Then he gives the example of the turner to help us understand.

## AN EXCERPT FROM A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA

### [REFRAIN]

"In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally, or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. Or, he abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Or, mindfulness that 'there is a body' is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. "That is how in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body

**Q:** Regarding this contemplation of the body, there is this passage that talks about the insight, and the translation says, contemplate internally, contemplate externally, contemplate both internally and externally. What does this mean?

**A:** This is very important. This is where it turns into *vipassanā*. *Satipaṭṭhāna* is a combination of both *vipassanā* and *samatha* mediation. Internally and externally are not the best translations, though they are close to it. But because of the commentaries, there is a misunderstanding that it is about observing your own body and the body of others. I think this is a mistake. The better words are subjective and objective, not internal and external. You see, we can look at anything objectively and subjectively.

For example, if we take a cup. It is something I can look at as an object. I look at it and see it is a glass or something we call a cup. The existential philosophers use two terms. One is existence. That means the cup exists here. The other is essence. The cup may be made of plastic and not glass. That plastic part is the essence of what I see. The essence is 'what it is,' and existence is 'that it is. When I look at it as an object, we see these two aspects: existence and essence. We can also analyze how it is made or talk about how it comes into being. We say it's made of plastic, and some mechanical process is used to construct it. This is how it comes into existence. This is how science and materialism sees the world.

But there is another way of looking at it: the subjective way. If I look at it from a subjective point of view, it is only an image in the mind. When I open my eyes, an image comes in. How did the image come into being? Light came into my eyes, and

then my eyes worked like a camera. The picture taken by the camera is not out there but inside. So, what I see there is inside. That is a subjective experience, whereas the former is an objective experience. I can look at the same thing from a subjective and objective point of view. From a subjective point of view, it is only an image in the mind. From the objective point of view, it's something out there. This means the same thing can be looked at from two different angles. Only then do we begin to understand what we are experiencing. This is something that people usually don't understand.

That is what the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is about. When people see this, they become an *Arahant* or a breaker of bonds. We are bound to this world and existence through psychological bonds. There are ten bonds, which we described in chapter eight. These bonds are broken by understanding how we see objects in the world. There are two *Pāli* terms *ajjhatta*, meaning subjective, and *bahiddhā* means objective. We have to look at it from both angles. Towards the end of the *Sutta*, there are instructions on the observation of the sense fields. There, these two words are used again to describe the objective and subjective aspects of the sense fields. There we see that these two words don't refer to our own or other people's experiences as stated in the commentaries<sup>220</sup>.

**Q:** How do we contemplate the body objectively?

**A:** Normally, we are looking at the body objectively. That means we see it as an object with our eyes. If I look at my hand objectively, I can see it's a hand. That is how ordinary people use their eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. All these methods are looking objectively. The corpse and body parts meditation is about looking at the body objectively. But when we begin to look at it subjectively, we see it from a different angle. We see that everything is a product of perception. Just like looking at the cup from a subjective point of view, it is an image.

Comment by Brother Billy: So many people are teaching *satipaṭṭhāna*, in a very objective way like looking at the rising and falling.

Comment by Bhante: Yes, everyone is talking about the objective way. A better translation of this key passage would be:

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<sup>220</sup> See *Visudhimagga*

**TABLE 31: Comparative translation of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* insight refrain**

Pāli	Standard Translation	Author's Translation
<i>Iti ajjhattam vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati.</i>	In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally,	Abides observing the body subjectively
<i>Bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati.</i> <i>Ajjhattabahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati.</i>	or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally.	Abides observing the body objectively Abides observing the body subjectively and objectively
<i>Samudayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmīṃ viharati.</i>	Or, he abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body,	Abides contemplating how the body comes to exist
<i>Vayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmīṃ viharati.</i>	or he abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the body,	Abides contemplating how the body ceases to exist
<i>Samudayavayadhammānupassī vā kāyasmīṃ viharati.</i>	or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body.	Abides contemplating how the body arises and ceases
<i>Atthi kāyoti vā panassa sati paccupatthitā hoti yāvadeva nāṇamattāya patissatimattāya.</i>	Or, mindfulness that ‘there is a body’ is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.	Abides being aware of the body as a mere figment of knowledge and reflexive attention
<i>Anissito ca viharati.</i>		Abides independent of the body
<i>Na ca kiñci loke upādiyati.</i>		Does not personalize anything in the world

The above list of the stages of insight concerns not only the body (*kāya*). The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* lists similar statements about the other three focuses of attention: feelings (*vedanā*), mood (*citta*), and cognitive experiences (*Dhamma*).

**Q:** On this point, I think one of the mistranslations is the word *rūpa*. It is translated as a thing out there. But we all know that for people who understand the *Pāli* and even understand *Bahasa Malaysia*, *rūpa* means appearance or image and not a

physical thing. So, I think this is one of the most confusing words out there, making people look at things in a very physical and existential way.

**A:** You see, the Buddha is called the *Thathāgatha*. Do you know the meaning of this word? The word '*that*' means 'that.' Say a cup, we refer to it as that cup. '*āgatha*' means coming. '*Gatha*' means going. *Thathāgatha* means to come to that or arrived at that. The Hindus have a term in *Sanskrit* "*Tat tvam asi*." Here too, the '*tat*' means that, '*tvam*' means you, and '*asi*' means are. 'You are that'. What does that mean? That means the object is the subject. What you see out there is something inside. The object is subjective. And when you know that, you begin to realize that the entire world you are aware of is a creation of the mental process. To understand that is awakening from the dream of existence.

## **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta**

### **The Formula on Introspection**

#### **A new translation by the Author (condensed)**

As I heard:

Once the Holy One was sojourning among the *Kurus* in a village of theirs known as *Kammasadhamma*. While there the Holy One addressed the Renunciates, saying “Renunciates.” “Yes, Venerable Sir,” the Renunciates replied. Then the Holy One said:

“This is the specific way, Renunciates, for the purification of beings, for the transcending of grief and lamentation, for the eradication of physical and mental pain, for the surpassing of natural laws, for the realization of the imperturbable serenity of mind (*Nibbāna*)<sup>221</sup>. It is the four focuses of introspection. What four? It is the case where a Renunciate lives observing the body as a body, feelings as feeling, emotions as emotions, and cognitive experiences as cognitive experiences, systematically *ātapi*<sup>222</sup>, fully comprehending (*sampajano*)<sup>223</sup> and attentive (*satimā*)<sup>224</sup>, having abandoned the lust (*abhijja*) and hatred (*domanassa*) for things of the world.

#### **Awareness of Body (*kāyānupassana*) - Introspective Breathing:**

And how does a Renunciate live developing awareness of the body as a body? Herein, a Renunciate having gone to a forest, to the root of a tree, to an empty place, sits down cross-legged, holding their back erect, withdrawing attention from external objects<sup>225</sup> and focusing attention within.<sup>226</sup> With attention, one breathes in. With attention, one breathes out. When one breathes in long, one is aware that one is breathing in long. When one breathes out long, one is aware that one is breathing out long. When one is breathing in short, one is aware that one is breathing in

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<sup>221</sup> The goal is explained first and in different ways.

<sup>222</sup> *ātapi* is the application of *sammā vāyama*, which needs to be concurrent with the practice of introspection. Giving up lust and hatred requires the first two practices of *sammā vāyama*, whilst *sati* and *sampajanno* requires the third and fourth practices.

<sup>223</sup> *Sampajanno* is the application of *sammā ditthi*, which also needs to operate together with introspection

<sup>224</sup> *Satima* refers to *sammā sati*

<sup>225</sup> *sañvara* and *pahāna*

<sup>226</sup> *bhāvanā* and *anurakkhana*

short. When one is breathing out short, one is aware that one is breathing out short. Being fully conscious of the whole body, one breathes in, and fully conscious of the whole body one breathes out. Thus one trains oneself. Relaxing the breathing, one breathes in, relaxing the breathing, one breathes out<sup>227</sup>. Thus one trains oneself.

Just as a skillful turner or turner's apprentice when making a long turn is aware "I am making a long turn," or when making a short turn is aware "I am making a short turn," in the same a Renunciate is aware.... (repeat above formula for Introspective Breathing).

### **Insight Refrain**

In this way one abides observing the body subjectively, one abides observing the body objectively, one abides observing the body subjectively and objectively. One abides observing how the body comes to exist (integrates), one abides observing how the body ceases to exist (disintegrates), and one abides observing how the body arises and ceases to exist (integrates and disintegrates)<sup>228</sup>. One abides being aware of the existence of the body as a mere figment of knowledge and reflexive attention. One abides independent of the body and does not personalize anything in the world<sup>229</sup>. In this way, a Renunciate lives observing the body as a body. (Note: This nine-insight refrain is applied as a formula to all aspects of introspection)

### **Body positions:**

When walking one is aware that one is walking. When standing ...When sitting one is aware ...When lying down.... In any position of the body, one is aware of the position of the body.

(repeat insight refrain)

### **Body movements:**

Going forward, and coming back one is aware. Looking in some direction.... Looking in the other direction ...Extending the arm ...Every movement of the body...Putting on the robe ...Carrying the bowl ...Eating, taking food into the

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<sup>227</sup> This is similar to biofeedback. Where one sees the tensions, discomfort in the body. The Buddha teaches how to read the body and how to relax it.

<sup>228</sup> A body comes into being, due to a combination of the four data (solidity, fluidity, heat and motion). And the body doesn't come into being when these data separate. Thinking about integration, then disintegration and both integration and disintegration is *anicca*.

<sup>229</sup> This passage really describes the paradigm shift from the existence to experience.

mouth, chewing, swallowing...defecating, urinating ...Walking, standing, sitting, lying down .... Waking up, while speaking, when in silence one is aware.<sup>230</sup>

(repeat insight refrain)

### **Anatomical meditation:**

A Renunciate reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of repulsive things: 'In this body, there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, muscles, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, lungs, spleen, bladder, large intestines, small intestines, stomach, contents of intestines, bile, mucus, pus, blood, sweat, fat/oil, tears, ear-wax, saliva, nasal mucus, fluid in the joints, urine.

Just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain -- wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice -- and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, 'This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice. In the same way, a Renunciate reviews the body.

(repeat insight refrain)

### **Analyzing the Body in Relation to the Four Data<sup>231</sup>:**

A Renunciate lives observing the body, its mass, and movements, in relation to data, comprehending: 'This very body is an integration of data perceived as solid, liquid, heat, and motion.' Renunciates, even as a skilled cattle butcher, or his apprentice, having slaughtered a cow, might sit displaying its carcass at a crossroads, in the same way, a Renunciate, abides observing the body in relation to data.

(repeat insight refrain)

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<sup>230</sup> Here one is aware of all the bodily activities as impersonal processes.

<sup>231</sup> When we look at the objects in the world, there are four ways we can see them. They are called the four fundamental existents (*cattari mahā bhutani*): Solidity (*patavi*) - literally translated as earth, but actually refers to the solidity. liquidity (*āpo*) - literally translated as water, but refers to the liquidity or fluidity. Heat (*tejo*) - literally translated as fire, but actually refers to heat. Motion (*vāyo*) - literally translated as wind, but actually refers to motion. The four elementary precepts are comparable to the scientific concepts of matter (solidity and liquidity) and energy (heat and motion/kinetic energy) All concepts about the world are based on these.

### **The Dead Body and How It Decays and Disintegrates:**

Renunciates: “If seeing a corpse thrown into the grave, which is one, two, or three days dead, swollen, bloated, bluish-black, full of filth; one should draw this conclusion regarding one's own body: This body too has this nature, has this destiny, and cannot escape it!” If one should see a corpse thrown to the burial ground, gnawed and partly eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, or jackals, and creeping with all kinds of worms and maggots; one should draw this conclusion regarding own body: This body too has this nature, will also become exactly like that, and cannot ever escape it! If one should see a chain of bones, flesh hanging from it, splattered with blood, held together by the sinews... or bones disconnected and scattered in all directions, here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone; here the pelvis, the spine, the skull... or bones, now bleached, pale white and looking like seashells... or black rotting bones finally crumbling into dust; One should think: This body too has this nature, has this destiny, and cannot escape it!

(repeat insight refrain)

### **Seeing Feelings as Feelings (*vedanāupassana*)**

And how does a Renunciate live developing awareness of feelings as feelings?<sup>232</sup> When one experiences a pleasant feeling, one is aware one is experiencing a pleasant feeling. When one experiences an unpleasant feeling... When one experiences a neutral feeling... When one experiences a sensual pleasant feeling.... When one experiences a spiritual pleasant feeling... When one experiences an unpleasant sensual feeling... When one experiences a spiritual unpleasant feeling... When one experiences a sensual neutral feeling.... When one experiences a spiritual-neutral feeling, one is aware that one is experiencing a spiritual-neutral feeling.<sup>233</sup>

(repeat insight refrain)

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<sup>232</sup> There are three kinds of feelings: pleasant (*sukha vedanā*), unpleasant (*dukkha vedanā*) and neutral (*adukkhamasukha vedanā*).

<sup>233</sup> There are two kinds of *sukha*, *sāmisa* and *nirāmisa*. *Sāmisa* is linked to pleasant sensations due to sense pleasure. *Nirāmisa* is independent of sensual pleasure, it's the feeling of the comfort due to tranquillity of mind. In the same way there is the *nirāmisa dukkha vedanā* also. It is a discomfort of tension, not the unpleasant sensation coming from the senses contact. There is also *nirāmisa adukhamasuka vedanā*.

## **Seeing Moods as Moods (*Cittānupassana*)<sup>234</sup>**

And how does a Renunciate live developing awareness of moods as moods? When experiencing lust, one is aware of experiencing lust. When experiencing a mood free of lust...When experiencing anger or free from anger.....When experiencing delusion or non-delusion .....When experiencing calmness or agitation .....When experiencing broad-mindedness or narrow-mindedness.....When experiencing elevated mood or a lower mood .....When experiencing *samādhi* (mental equilibrium) or no mental equilibrium .....When experiencing freedom from emotional disturbance or no freedom, one is aware that one is experiencing freedom from emotional disturbance or no freedom from emotional disturbance.<sup>235</sup>

(repeat insight refrain)

## **Seeing cognitive experience as cognitive experience (*Dhammānupassana*)**

### **The Five Obscurants<sup>236</sup>:**

And how does a Renunciate live developing awareness of cognitive experience as cognitive experience? A Renunciate lives observing cognitive experience in terms of the five obscurants. One is aware when the desire for sensual pleasures (*kāmacchanda*) is present or absent, and one is aware when the desire for sensual pleasures arises, and when the desire for sensual pleasures is eliminated. One is also aware of the non-arising of sensual desires that have been eliminated.

(Repeat the same formula of awareness as described above for the other four obscurants: Anger (*vyāpada*), apathy/boredom/disinterest (*thina middha*), anxiety and worry about the past and future (*udacca kukucca*), cognitive dissonance (*vicikicca*)<sup>237</sup>.)

(repeat insight refrain)

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<sup>234</sup> This is how one sees the disposition, mood, or temperament, which could be good or bad. Technically it is called the affective stage.

<sup>235</sup> These are the various kinds of moods. This *sutta* is the explanation of the gradual advancement of the whole range of meditational progress and how the mood changes as a result.

<sup>236</sup> Obscurants or *nīvaraṇa* refer to the emotions that cloud one's vision. One cannot clearly see with an agitated mind.

<sup>237</sup> The above analysis completes the affective portion of the reaction. Below, the cognitive process is analysed.

### **Analysis in terms of the Five Cumulatives of the Process of Perception:**

A Renunciate lives observing cognitive experience in terms of the five cumulatives of the process of perception. One is aware of mental images (*rūpa*), one is aware of how mental images come into existence (integration) and one is aware of how mental images cease to exist (disintegrate).

(Repeat the same formula of awareness as described above for the other four cumulatives: feeling (*vedanā*), sensation (*saññā*), mental construction (*saṅkhārā*), and perception (*viññāṇa*.)

(repeat insight refrain)

### **Analysis in terms of the Six Subjective/Objective Perceptual-Fields:**

A Renunciate lives observing cognitive experience in terms of the six subjective and objective perceptual fields. One is aware of seeing and mental images and the emotional engagements (*saṃyojanā*)<sup>238</sup> that come into existence when they precede. One is aware of how the non-arisen emotional engagements come into existence. One is aware of how the arisen emotional engagements are eliminated. One is also aware of the non-arising of emotional engagements that have been eliminated.

(Repeat the same formula of awareness as described above for the other five perceptual fields: hearing (*sota*) & sounds (*saddha*), smelling (*ghāna*) & smells (*gandha*), tasting (*jivhā*) & tastes (*rasa*), cognition (*mano*) & mental experience (*dhamma*).)

(repeat insight refrain)

### **Analysis of the Seven Steps to Awakening:**

A Renunciate lives observing cognitive experience, becoming aware of the awakening of the seven steps of the awakening process. One is aware when systematic attention (*sati*) is present or absent. One is aware of how non-arisen systematic attention comes into existence. One is aware of how arisen systematic attention is maintained.

(Repeat the same formula of awareness as described above for the other six steps to awakening: Observation of mental experience (*dhamma vicaya*), cognitive strength

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<sup>238</sup> *Saṃyojanā* means ties, bonds or emotional engagements. There are ten engagements. By becoming aware of the *saṃyojanā* you can get rid of them.

(*viriya*)<sup>239</sup>, cognitive contentment (*pīti*), physical relaxation (*passaddhi*), mental equilibrium (*samādhi*), apperception (*upekkhā*).

(repeat insight refrain)

#### **Analysis of the Supernormal Four-fold Realities:**

A Renunciate lives observing cognitive experience in terms of the four supernormal realities. One is aware of the reality of stress. One is aware of the reality of the arising of stress. One is aware of the reality of the stopping of stress. One is aware of the reality of the way leading to the stopping of stress.

(repeat insight refrain)

(fruits of the practice of the Four focuses of Introspections....)

This is why it was said: This is the specific way Renunciates for the purification of beings, for the transcending of grief and lamentation, for the eradication of physical and mental pain, for the surpassing of natural laws, for the realization of the imperturbable serenity of mind, it is the four focuses of introspection.

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<sup>239</sup> *Viriya* is the four-fold exercise: Prevention (*sanvara*), elimination (*pahāna*), cultivation (*bhavanā*), and maintenance (*anurakkhana*).

## CONCLUSION

This brings us to the culmination of our voyage through Proto-Buddhism. We have endeavored to offer a holistic and systematic collage of the author's decoding of the *Pāli Suttas*. We have strived to capture the author's expression, his systematization of complex material, and the insights of his oeuvre. Proto-Buddhism is an ambitious hypothesis. We hope we have galvanized at least some of its promise and potential. It is up to you to decide. To do so we tender a new rendition of the adage recounting the salient qualities of the *Dhamma*. By applying these we can discover and verify the accuracy, validity, and fruitfulness of the views expressed in this book in the crucible of our deliverance.

***Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo***<sup>240</sup>: Well enunciated is the teaching of the Holy One

***Sandīthiko***: It is experiential

***Akāliko***: Independent of time

***Ehipassiko***: Verifiable

***Opanaiko***: Introspective

***Paccattam veditabbo viññūhī***: To be personally experienced by the perceptive.

As discussed in chapter two, according to the author, there are no truths in the world, only views. Of course, one and all, even and especially in the field of spirituality, imagines theirs to be the one bona fide path to salvation. In the absence of the Buddha or awakened brethren, his creed doesn't exist in an absolute, stainless form, free from the follies and constrictions of the human refractive lens. We want to candidly state that Proto-Buddhism is only the views of the author. Many of the notions expressed in this book are atypical and diverge from the interpretations of the Buddhist corpus found in modern Buddhist circles. Thus, we don't say these ideas are flawless. Some people may criticize such refashioning as conceit and hubris. If anyone is of the view that this deciphering is incorrect, we are not opposed to that. The ideas expressed here are only the author's discernment and they may be imperfect. At the time of his passing, his appetite for deciphering cognate nomenclature for translation was ongoing. If the reader can agree with his proposals they may agree but if they disagree they are also free to do so. Proto-Buddhist rhetoric will resonate with some and categorically fall flat with others.

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<sup>240</sup> AN 11.12

It seems fitting to conclude this expedition through Proto-Buddhism with one final fresh rendition of the dictums of the Buddha. He chose these maxims to inaugurate his soaring mission and in finale, as he preternaturally passed away from life into immortality, into history and mystery, and from human reign into religious iconography.

*Apārutā tesam amatassa dvārā*

Open for you is the door to immortality

*Ye sotavanto pamuñcantu saddham<sup>241</sup>*

May those who do have ears listen and be freed by this sound

*Vayadhammā sañkhārā*

All that is constructed is subject to destruction

*Appamādena sampādethā<sup>242</sup>*

Tread the path in sanity

These ultimate aphorisms of the Buddha, sum up His message to the world. The death of the body itself should remind us that the colossal delusion of self one creates is subject to destruction. The futility of constructing a self in the world has been clearly expressed. Clinging to this evanescent construct is insanity. To walk out of this delusion is sanity. Our task therefore is to stop being insane. This message of the Buddha is the message of freedom from the delusion of existence, which results in freedom from death. The Buddha achieved this freedom and taught this as the way of salvation to the world. The world, for the most part, preferred to ignore this message, in favor of the delusion of a prosaic existence. This task must be accomplished without delay before death can come to interrupt the task. This urgency is what Buddhists should recall in the Buddha's advice to "struggle on as if your head is on fire."<sup>243</sup>

Religion, in general, is faced with a crisis today. It is the challenge of secularism. People are moving away from religion because they do not approve of the mythology, symbolism, and rituals associated with religion. The result of this

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<sup>241</sup> MN 26

<sup>242</sup> DN16

<sup>243</sup> AN 10.51

secularism is that the human values that religions stand for are discarded along with the dogmas, like throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

If Buddhism is to survive in the modern world it has to take a new look at the traditional myths, symbols, and dogmas and understand and re-interpret them free from the accumulations of centuries of sectarian biases. It would be futile to attempt to defend and prove the outworn and unconvincing dogmas in this situation.

This call for periodic reform of religion by going back to early or the original teachings and sources is of course not a new idea. Throughout history, we have seen examples of it in the protestant reformation in Christianity and other revivalist movements in religions like Islam. But sometimes such reforms, harking back to antiquity, have the disadvantage of being draconian and bringing conflict with science, humanism, and modernity. One of the great advantages that Buddhism has is that the original teachings of the Buddha create no such conflict. In fact, science, human rationality, and modernity are increasingly converging, compatible with and complement the Buddha's teachings derived from Proto-Buddhist sources. It may even be that increasingly Buddhism offers the necessary panacea for the ills of the modern world.

Proto-Buddhism is paradoxically both ancient and a project in its infancy. It requires much ongoing nurturing to grow. It is a great challenge we are faced with today. The choice is yours. What do you choose?

### OUR DEEPEST HOPE

*Ciram tiṭṭhatu saddhammo*

May the worthy *Dhamma* long endure!

*Sabbe Sattā Bhavantu Sukhitattā*

May all beings be peaceful and happy!

## **Appendix I: *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2)**

We are reading the *Sabbāsava Sutta*. The *Pāli* word used by the Buddha is *āsava*. It means flowing in, that's why I translate it as an influence. An influence is something that is flowing in from the outside. This influence that the Buddha is speaking of is the reaction that happens inside which leads to emotions and the *dukkha* which comes as a result.

Sigmund Freud thought that emotions are things that come out of our body and flow outwards. He saw them as an outflow, not an inflow. But the Buddha says that our mood in its original state is pure. It is things that come from outside that pollute the mood<sup>244</sup>. It's like water. Water is a pure substance. It gets polluted only from foreign matter coming into it. But completely pure water can't be found in the natural state, it is always mixed with something. In the same way, although the mind is originally pure it is never found in the pure state naturally. Just as water can be purified by filtration or distillation, the mind can be purified through a proper technique. That technique is what is commonly translated as the Noble eight-fold path.

The influence of the environment on us which leads to emotion is actually what is called a chain reaction, like the different parts of a chain. This reaction is a series of reactions. It starts with the environment. The first reaction to the environment within us is perception, then cognition/conception, then emotion, and then action. That is why the Buddha called it an influence, your actions have been influenced by what happened outside. That influence is disturbing our whole body and mind. It can even result in crime, wars, terrorism, and all the destruction in the world. It is all due to the emotions. That stressful emotional disturbance is what the Buddha called *dukkha*, which is normally translated as suffering. The Buddha aims to stop this *dukkha*. To stop this the chain reaction must be stopped. In this particular *sutta*, the Buddha is talking about stopping this influence.

Although I use the word influence to translate the word *āsava*, below it is translated as fermentation. Sometimes it is also translated as taint, canker, or defilement. There are some other words for which I will give my translation when we come across them.

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<sup>244</sup> AN 1.49-52

## STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA<sup>245</sup>

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. There the Blessed one addressed the Monks: "Monks!"

"Yes, lord," the Monks replied.

The Blessed One said, "Monks, the ending of the fermentations is for one who knows & sees, I tell you, not for one who does not know & does not see. For one who knows what & sees what? Appropriate attention & inappropriate attention. When a Monk attends inappropriately, unrisen fermentations arise, and arisen fermentations increase. When a Monk attends appropriately, unrisen fermentations do not arise, and arisen fermentations are abandoned. There are fermentations to be abandoned by seeing, those to be abandoned by restraining, those to be abandoned by using, those to be abandoned by tolerating, those to be abandoned by avoiding, those to be abandoned by dispelling, and those to be abandoned by developing.

"And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by seeing? There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person — who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma — does not discern what ideas are fit for attention or what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, one does not attend to ideas fit for attention and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention.

"And what are the ideas unfit for attention that one attends to? Whatever ideas such that, when one attends to them, the unrisen **fermentation of sensuality** arises in him, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality increases; the unrisen fermentation of becoming arises in him, and arisen **fermentation of becoming** increases; the unrisen **fermentation of ignorance** arises in him, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance increases. These are the ideas unfit for attention that one attends to.

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<sup>245</sup> "Sabbāsava Sutta: All the Fermentations" (MN 2), translated from the *Pāli* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.002.than.html>

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

What the Buddha points out is that we should pay attention properly. This means we have to be conscious, we cannot pay attention if we are unconscious. Three kinds of influences are mentioned here. There are not three kinds of influences but three phases of an influence. The influence is a chain reaction. Here the Buddha is breaking down the chain reaction into three phases. The first phase of the influence of the environment on us is the emotional reaction to pleasant and unpleasant feelings felt through the senses. This emotional reaction to our sense experience leads to the second phase of an influence which is the feeling of existence. The *Pāli* word I translate as existence is *bhava*, which is usually translated as becoming.

The third *āsava* is translated as ignorance. The *Pāli* word is *avijja*. I translate *avijja* as unconsciousness, not ignorance. There is a difference. These influences are going on unconsciously, we are not merely ignorant about them, we are unconscious of them. This chain reaction, the desire for sensual pleasures, the feeling of existence, and even the unconsciousness are not things that we do but they happen to us. That is very important to understand. Because these are happening unconsciously we can stop them only by becoming conscious of them.

These three phases are also what the Buddha analyses in even more detail in what I call Antecedental Concurrence or what is normally called dependent origination. There the same terms appear. Antecedental Concurrence is the description of how the influence of the environment leads to *dukkha*. So to understand these three phases of an influence you need to understand Antecedental Concurrence correctly.

## STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA

"This is how he attends inappropriately: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?' Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?'

"As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view I have a self arises in him as true & established, or the view I have no self... or the view It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self... or the view It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self... or the

view It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self arises in him as true & established, or else he has a view like this: This very self of mine — the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions — is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will stay just as it is for eternity. This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

## AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS

This is a very important part. A person who has not understood the teachings of the Buddha begins to think like this. These are thoughts that arise in us very often and we think they are quite legitimate thoughts. I have seen in books where people even quote these questions. But here the Buddha points out that these are the wrong questions to ask. Thinking you will be existing in the future or you have been existing in the past is a mistake. If you are thinking in terms of past, present, and future you will never be able to get freedom from birth, old age, disease, death, and all the suffering. This is very important to understand. This is why I always say that the unique and original teaching of the Buddha is not *kamma* and rebirth. *Kamma* and rebirth was a teaching that was available in India even before the Buddha. The Buddha did not arise in the world to talk about *kamma* and rebirth. But he accepted that view, he did not say that it is not true.

There are two perspectives of the world. One the Buddha called the worldly perspective and the other one he called the transcendent perspective<sup>246</sup>. If you ask me, ‘Did you take your meals today in the morning?’ I have to say ‘Yes’. Or if you ask me ‘Did you check your blood pressure in the morning?’ then I have to say ‘Yes’. However, that is not the transcendent perspective. This is because I am talking about a self existing in the past. The past, present, and future is what we call time. Time and space is not the transcendent perspective. Science is based on time and space but all that is just a construct of perception. Even *Kamma* and rebirth is the worldly perspective<sup>247</sup>. This is why there is a new kind of science called quantum physics. Gradually they are discovering that whatever is perceived is ultimately a creation of the process of perception. These are not truths. But still, in

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<sup>246</sup>MN 117

<sup>247</sup>MN 117

our ordinary life, we have to use these ideas like time and space. Without using those concepts, we cannot live.

Existence is the worldly perspective. Existing means I exist, you exist, the world exists, everything exists. Thinking like that is what the Buddha called *bhava*. When we come out of that thinking, we are thinking of only seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. These are experiences and experiences are all that we know of. Everything else is built on experience. And whatever we have built on these things is existence. That is why the person who has awakened from the dream of existence is a Buddha. The Buddha thinks in terms of experience. That is why we call these two types of thinking existential thinking and experiential thinking.

To become a Buddha, there has to be a paradigm shift. Paradigm means your frame of mind, how you see things. The paradigm shift means you shift from existence to experience. Even this idea of existence is an influence that is coming from outside. Your reaction to pleasant and unpleasant sensations is part of an influence. The second part is that feeling that I exist and the world exists, and I exist in the world. The third part of an influence is unconsciousness. These things are happening unconsciously. That unconsciousness is also an influence coming in. We are caught up in this unconsciousness and we have to awaken from it.

### **A STANDARD TRANSLATION OF THE SUTTA**

"He attends appropriately, This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identity-view, doubt, and grasping at precepts & practices. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by seeing.

### **AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS**

Before a person understand the Buddha's teachings they are asking questions like did I exist in the past? How did I exist in the past? Will I exist in the future? That kind of thinking is misleading. The result is a belief in a self that exists and passes from life to life in *samsara*. Here the Buddha says that the right way to think is: this is *dukkha*, this is the cause of *dukkha*, this is the end of *dukkha*, this is the way leading to the end of *dukkha*. In other words, what are usually called the Four Noble Truths. If you begin to think that way, three things disappear. Here they are translated as identity view, doubt, and grasping at precepts and practices. These

could be translated more accurately. The *Pāli* terms are *sakkāya ditṭhi*, *vicikicca* and *sīlabbatā parāmāsa*.

*Sakkāya* means this is my body. The body here doesn't just mean the physical body but the five personalized cumulatives of the process of perception. I translate it as the personality perspective, which means that personalization leads to thinking in terms of a person. Personality means that you have personalized the body, the feelings, the sensations, the perception, the emotions, the thoughts, and all those things. The personalizing leads to the personality. You feel I exist, I am, you exist, and you are. That is the wrong way of thinking.

That way of thinking disappears when you think of *dukkha*, the cause of *dukkha*, the ending of *dukkha*, and the way leading to the end of *dukkha*. How does that happen? Most people are thinking 'I am suffering' or 'You are suffering' or 'Those people are suffering'. That means you are thinking of a person or people who are suffering. Here what the Buddha is talking about is not the suffering of people but thinking about suffering. What is it that we call suffering? Why is there suffering? And when you begin to think of that and if you understand it properly you will understand that the suffering arose because you are thinking in terms of a self. It is because you are thinking in terms of a self that suffers that there is suffering. That is when you begin to understand the cause of the suffering. You begin to understand that suffering is there only because you think 'I am suffering' or 'someone is suffering'. When you understand that the idea of a person suffering is a delusion, the suffering disappears. It is the personality that is causing the suffering.

If there is no personality or any relationships, say for example if someone dies, if that person is not your father, mother, brother or sister, or any relative or friend or anyone even known to you, will that make you unhappy? It is very rare for people to become unhappy because of that. Once I was in a house by the side of the road. Someone died there and everyone began to cry. I was a small child at that time. On the other side of the road, there was another house. I saw some people coming out from there and they were smiling. They were not feeling any unhappiness because these other people were crying. They were just saying that an old man had died. Because they were not related in any way, it wasn't painful for them. When someone dies, you care about it only if there is some kind of relationship. That means personalization and the personality is necessary for suffering to arrive. When you have understood that properly, then you understand suffering, how it arises, how it ceases, and the way to end it by awakening from the dream of existence. Once you have understood that, the personality perspective disappears.

Then another thing happens. Our mind has two parts: the rational and the emotional part. Normally these two parts go in different directions. One part may want to do something, but the other part says no. For example, if you are sleeping and you have to wake up to either go to school or a job. But you don't like to wake up and go. That means your mind is going in two different directions. One part of the mind wants to sleep and the other wants to wake up.

In the same way, if you have understood that suffering is because of your emotions, then you want to be free from them. But then you are carried away by emotions. The rational part says I must give up these emotions but the emotions refuse to go away. This state of mind, the pulling in two different directions, is called *vicikicca*. This is normally translated as doubt. It is not just doubt. The prefix '*vi*' means separate, '*ci*' comes from the same root as *citta*, which refers to the emotional mind, and '*kicca*' means what should be done. When combined, it conveys the idea of the mind being pulled in separate directions about what should be done. This is what I call cognitive dissonance. This is a new word that has come up in psychology which describes the mind divided into two and pulling in two different directions. In what I call the Supernormal eightfold way the first step is *Sammā ditthi*. This is usually translated as the Right view but I prefer the Harmonious perspective. This is understanding the Four noble truths or the Supernormal reality. When we begin to understand that, the mind pulling in two different directions disappears. The personality perspective also disappears.

The second step is Harmonious goal reorientation. The first two steps lead to speaking, acting, and living harmoniously. But that is not because someone else wants you to. You are not doing it out of obedience to God or Buddha or your parents or teachers. You are doing it because you have understood that it is necessary. That is called autonomous morality. If you are doing it because of someone else it is heteronomous morality. *Silabbata parāmāsa* means heteronomous morality. That's a better translation than grasping at practices and precepts. *Sila* refers to your actions and *bata* your inactions. *Para* means external and *āmāsa* means accepting.

Once personality perspective, cognitive dissonance, and heteronomous morality disappear you have become a stream enterer. You have entered the stream of the Supernormal eightfold way. That happens when you begin to understand *dukkha*, its cause, its end, and the way leading to its end. I have clarified the issues, so you can now read the rest for yourself.

## **Appendix II: Metta Sutta (SnP1.8)**

### **Aspiration**

Whoever wishes to attain to the Sublime State of Peace. Must be competent in their practice.

### **Qualification**

One must be able, upright, and extremely honest. Courteous in speech, humble, and not conceited. One must be contented and simple, with light duties and few obligations. One must have calm senses, be intelligent, modest, and not caste-conscious or class-conscious.

### **Benevolence**

One must never be angry, but be courteous in conduct, doing nothing that is blame-worthy, and constantly longing for the weal and welfare of all beings. Wishing they be comfortable, happy, and free from fear.

### **Universal**

Whoever living beings there be, weak or strong, long, broad, medium or short. Small or large, visible or invisible, far or near, born or being born. May they all be well and happy.

### **Peace**

May none harass others, or over conceited be. May none threaten others. May none wish ill towards others.

### **Intensity of concern**

Just as a mother would guard her only son, even at the risk of her life. Even so one should bear a caring attitude towards all that lives. Beyond all limits and discriminations, one should cultivate a mind full of universal benevolence that is boundless. Above, below, and all around, with no exceptions, anger, or enmity.

### **Maintenance**

All through one's waking life, whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. One should maintain such a watchful mind. This is called living the divine life.

### **Freedom**

Free from dogmatic views, and courteous in conduct. Clearly aware of one's inner experience. Free from greed for sensual pleasure. One is never born in a mother's womb.

### **Appendix III: *Kītāgiri Sutta* (MN 70)**

As I heard:

Once the Holy One was on tour, in *Kasi* along with a large gathering of disciples. While there, he addressed his disciples: “Renunciates, I abstain from the evening meal. As I do so, I experience no illness, nor discomfort, but lightness, strength, and comfort. You too should abstain from the evening meal. If you do so, you too would experience no illness, nor discomfort, but lightness, strength, and comfort.” “As you say, Venerable Sir,” the disciples responded.

While the Holy One was touring *Kasi* he arrived at a town called *Kītāgiri*. There he sojourned for a while. At that time, the group of Renunciates led by *Assaji* and *Punabbasu* were residing in *Kītāgiri*. Those Renunciates who accompanied the Holy One went to them and told them that the Holy One and his disciples abstain from the evening meal. It would be wise for them to follow suit for their benefit. When this was said, the group of Renunciates led by *Assaji* and *Punabbasu* replied, “We do eat morning, noon, and night, as usual, but we do not experience any ill health or discomfort; we remain quite healthy and comfortable. Why should we abandon what is an enjoyable experience in the present with the hope of gaining comfort in the future?”

They were unable to convince the group of Renunciates led by *Assaji* and *Punabbasu*. So, they went to the Holy One and told him about it. Then the Holy One asked someone to call the Renunciates led by *Assaji* and *Punabbasu*. Then they came to the Holy One and having kneeled in respect to him, sat on one side. Then the Holy One said to them: “Is it true Renunciates that you eat morning, noon, and night?” “Yes, Venerable Sir.”

“Have you ever heard me saying that when a person experiences, pleasant, painful, or neutral sensations, his unworthy qualities will diminish and his worthy qualities will grow?” “No, Sir.”

“It is out of my own experience, observation, and understanding that I say that when certain experiences, pleasant, painful, or neutral, are cultivated if unworthy qualities grow and worthy qualities diminish, those experiences should be abandoned. If on the other hand, when certain experiences, pleasant, painful, or neutral, are cultivated, worthy qualities grow and unworthy qualities diminish, those experiences should be cultivated.” “Yes, Sir.”

“Renunciates, I do not say that all Renunciates have a task to perform heedfully. Nor do I say that all Renunciates have no task to perform heedfully. Renunciates, those who have broken their bonds, who are free from influences, who have reached the summit, completed the task, laid down the burden, reached their aspired goal, destroyed the shackles of existence, who are freed through full comprehension; I don’t say of them that they have a task to perform heedfully. Why is that? They have performed their task heedfully. They are incapable of being heedless.

As for the Renunciates in higher training, who have not yet reached their aspired goal, and who still yearn for the unexcelled freedom from bondage; I say to them that they have a task to perform heedfully. What is that? These venerable ones, making use of suitable resting places, associating with suitable friends, and balancing their mental faculties, could reach and remain in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home to homelessness, with the hope of knowing and realizing the goal for themselves, here and now. Envisioning this wonderful fruit of heedfulness, I say to these Renunciates that they have a task to perform heedfully.

Renunciates, there are these seven individuals to be found in the world: (1) One freed in both ways (*ubhatobhaga vimutto*) (2) One freed through comprehension (*pañña vimutto*) (3) The bodily witness (*kāya sakkhi*) (4) One having perspective (*ditthi patto*) (5) One freed by devotion (*saddhā vimutto*) (6) Dhamma practitioner (*dhammānusari*) (7) Devoted follower (*saddhānusari*).

Of what nature is the individual freed in both ways? This is the case where a certain individual abides by experiencing with his body those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images (*arūpa samādhi*). One has also attained the complete ending of all influences, through awakening. This is the individual freed in both ways. Regarding this Renunciate, I do not say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why is that? One has done the heedful task. One is incapable of being heedless.

Of what nature is the individual freed through comprehension? This is the case where a certain individual does not abide experiencing with his body those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images. But one has attained the complete ending of all influences, through awakening. Regarding this Renunciate, I do not say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why? Having done the heedful task, one is incapable of heedlessness.

Of what nature is the individual who is a bodily witness? This is the case where a certain individual abides experiencing with their body those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images. But one has not attained the complete ending of all influences, through awakening; though one has attained a partial ending, some influences remain. Regarding this Renunciate, I do say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why is that? One has not completed the heedful task. Perhaps if one makes use of suitable resting places, associates with proper friends, and balances his faculties, one might attain the supreme goal of the holy life, for which laity rightly go forth from home to homelessness, with the hope of experiencing and realize for themselves in the here and the now. Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness I say to this Renunciate that one has a task to be done heedfully.

Of what nature is the individual attained to perspective? This is the case where an individual does not abide experiencing those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images. But having seen with discernment one has reviewed and examined with discernment the teachings proclaimed by the *Tathāgata*. This is called an individual who has attained perspective. Regarding this Renunciate, I do say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why is that? One has not completed the heedful task. Perhaps if one makes use of suitable resting places, associates with proper friends, and balances his faculties, one might attain the supreme goal of the holy life, for which laity rightly go forth from home to homelessness, with the hope of experiencing and realize it for themselves here and now. It is envisioning this fruit of heedfulness that I say to this Renunciate that one has a task to be done heedfully.

Of what nature is the individual freed through devotion? This is the case where an individual who does not abide experiencing those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images. But seeing with comprehension some influences are ended, and their devotion to the *Tathāgata* is settled, rooted, and established. This is an individual who is freed through devotion. Regarding this Renunciate, I do say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why is that? One has not completed the heedful task. Perhaps if one makes use of suitable resting places, associates with proper friends, and balances their faculties, one might attain the supreme goal of the holy life, for which laity rightly go forth from home to homelessness, with the hope of experiencing and realizing it for themselves here and now. It is envisioning this fruit of heedfulness that I say to this Renunciate that one has a task to be done heedfully.

Of what nature is the individual who is a *Dhamma* practitioner? This is the case where an individual who does not abide experiencing those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images. Nor has one attained the complete ending of all influences, through awakening. But with a sufficient measure of reflection and comprehension, one has come to accept the teaching of the *Tathāgata*. One also possesses the potential for devotion (*saddhā*), cognitive strength (*viriya*), introspection (*sati*), mental equilibrium (*saṃādhi*), and comprehension (*pañña*). This is the individual called the *Dhamma* practitioner. Regarding this Renunciate, I do say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why is that? One has not completed their heedful task. Perhaps if one makes use of suitable resting places, associates with proper friends, and balances his faculties, one might attain the supreme goal of the holy life, for which laity rightly go forth from home to homelessness, with the hope of experiencing and realizing it for themselves here and now. It is envisioning this fruit of heedfulness that I say to this Renunciate that one has a task to be done heedfully.

What is the nature of the individual called the devoted follower? This is the case where an individual who does not abide experiencing those peaceful states of mind that are free from mental images. Nor has one attained the complete ending of all influences, through awakening. But one has a sufficient measure of devotion and love for the *Tathāgata*. One also possesses the potential for devotion, cognitive strength, introspection, mental equilibrium, and comprehension. This is the individual called the devoted follower. Regarding this Renunciate, I do say that one has a task to be done with heedfulness. Why is that? One has not completed their heedful task. Perhaps if one makes use of suitable resting places, associates with proper friends, and balances his faculties, one might attain the supreme goal of the holy life, for which laity rightly go forth from home to homelessness, with the hope of experiencing and realizing it for themselves here and now. It is envisioning this fruit of heedfulness that I say to this Renunciate that one has a task to be done heedfully.

Renunciates, I do not say that the attainment of gnosis is sudden. Rather, the attainment of gnosis is after gradual training, gradual action, and gradual practice. And how is there the attainment of gnosis after gradual training, gradual action, and gradual practice? There is the case where, when devotion has arisen, one visits [a teacher]. Having visited, one grows close. Having grown close, one lends ear. Having lent ear, one hears the *Dhamma*. Having heard the *Dhamma*, one remembers it. Remembering, one penetrates the meaning of the teachings. Penetrating the meaning, one agrees through pondering the teachings. There being an agreement

through pondering the teachings, desire arises. When desire has arisen, one is willing. When one is willing, one contemplates. Having contemplated, one makes an exertion. Having made an exertion, one realizes with the body the ultimate reality and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees it.

Now, Renunciates, if there hasn't been that devotion, there hasn't been that visiting, there hasn't been that growing close ... that lending ear ... that hearing of the Dhamma ... that remembering ... that penetration of the meaning of the teachings ... that agreement through pondering the teachings ... that desire ... that willingness ... that contemplation ... that exertion. You have lost the way, Renunciates. You have gone the wrong way, Renunciates. How far have you strayed, foolish men, from this *Dhamma & Discipline*! Renunciates, there is a four-phrased statement that, when it is recited, a wise man will in no time learn the meaning through discernment. I will recite it, and you learn it from me."

"But, Venerable Sir, who are we to be learners of the *Dhamma*?" "Renunciates, even with a teacher devoted to material things, an heir of material things, who lives attached to material things, this sort of haggling [by his students] wouldn't be proper: 'If we get this, we'll do it; if we don't, we won't.' So how could it be concerning the *Tathāgata*, who dwells entirely detached from material things?

For a disciple who is devoted to the Teacher's message & lives to penetrate it, what accords with the *Dhamma* is this: 'The Holy One is the Teacher, I am a disciple. The Holy One is the one who knows, not I.' For a disciple who is devoted to the Teacher's message & lives to penetrate it, the Teacher's message is healing & nourishing. For a disciple who is devoted to the Teacher's message & lives to penetrate it, what accords with the *Dhamma* is this: 'Gladly would I let the flesh & blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through human firmness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.' For a disciple who is devoted to the Teacher's message & lives to penetrate it, one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis here & now, or — if there be any remnant of the sustenance of personalization— non-return." That is what the Holy One said. Gratified, the Renunciates delighted in the Holy One's words.

## **Abbreviations**

AN      *Anguttara Nikāya*

Dhp     *Dhammapada*

DN      *Digha Nikāya*

MN     *Majjhima Nikāya*

SN      *Samyutta Nikāya*

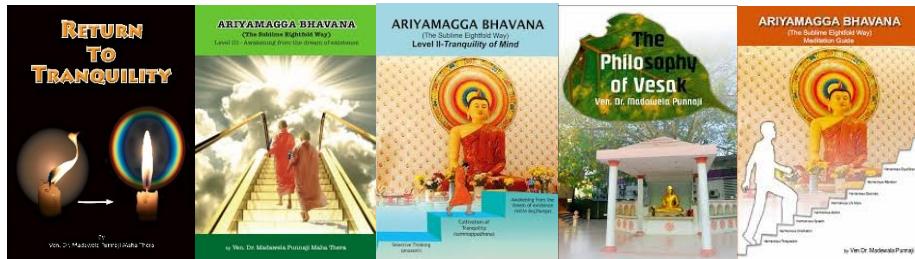
Snp     *Sutta Nipata*

Ud      *Udāna*

Vin     *Vinaya*

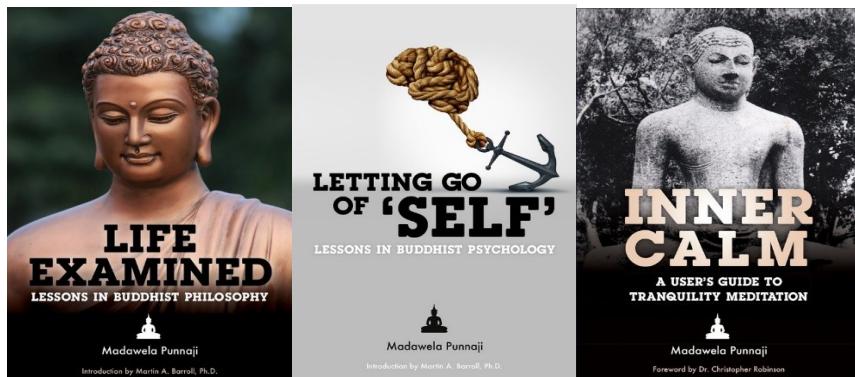
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### Websites

<https://buddhaoriginalteachings.blogspot.com/>

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