

*Rain on a mountain-top
fills the Ocean*

AN 10.61



BHIKKHU BRAHMALI

Wisdom & Wonders
Sutta Series
Vol. 1, No.6

Rain on a Mountain-top fills the Ocean

Wisdom & Wonders

Sutta Series

Volume 1, No.6

Bhikkhu Brahmāli

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This booklet is based on teachings given at the Buddhist Gem Fellowship in 2017.

Part 1: youtu.be/tWPekTgUsnM

Part 2: youtu.be/dXjAnYS8cMU

*The gift of the Dhamma excels all gifts;
the taste of the Dhamma excels all tastes;
delight in the Dhamma excels all delights.
The eradication of craving overcomes all suffering.*

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DRAFT

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BOOKLETS IN THIS SERIES

- 1 – DN 16, Mahaparinibbana Sutta
- 2 – AN 5.79, Future Perils
- 3 – SN 16.13, The Counterfeit of the True Dhamma
- 4 – AN 3.65, Kesaputtiya kalama sutta
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- 11 – AN 3.69, Roots
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INTRODUCTION

The Avijjā Sutta ([AN 10.61](#)) is an overview of what we are supposed to be doing on this path.

AVIJJĀ

While 'ignorance' is a common translation of *avijjā*, it may not be the best. When we think of someone who is 'ignorant', we think that this person does not know much about a particular topic. In this context, however, it is not about lack of knowledge as such, it is about the deep realisation of seeing things according to reality.

Avijjā then is this 'lack of insight', not understanding things according to reality. So I think delusion is a better translation because it better explains the Buddhist perspective, misunderstanding reality by thinking the world is one way while actually it is a different way; that we are one way, when actually we are a different way.

AVIJJĀ



On the Wheel of Life, *avijjā* is represented by an image of a blind person who blunders forward, unable to see where they are going. It is the main root of rebirth in Dependent Origination and is termed an *anusaya* (latent disposition)

A LACK OF INSIGHT INTO THE REALITY OF THINGS

‘*Vijja*’ is the opposite of *Avijjā*. It is often described in the suttas as:

1. having knowledge of past lives,
2. knowledge of the laws of *kamma* and
3. the final awakening experience – the destruction of the *āsavas* (meaning corruptions of the mind).

This is why I think a good translation of ‘*vijja*’ is ‘insight’. ‘*Vipassanā*’ is usually translated as ‘insight’ but I personally prefer ‘clear seeing’.

Insight is about a specific moment of clarity, whereas clear seeing is what we develop from the very beginning of the path to the very end. So, we have insight on the one hand and delusion on the other.

A FIRST POINT

“A first point of delusion, bhikkhus, is not seen as such that before this there was no delusion and afterwards it came into being.”

There are variations on this interesting phrase in many different suttas, such as ‘*samsāra* has no first point’ (e.g. [SN15.1](#)), which means that there is no certain point before *samsāra* came into being, and then from that point on, it continued.

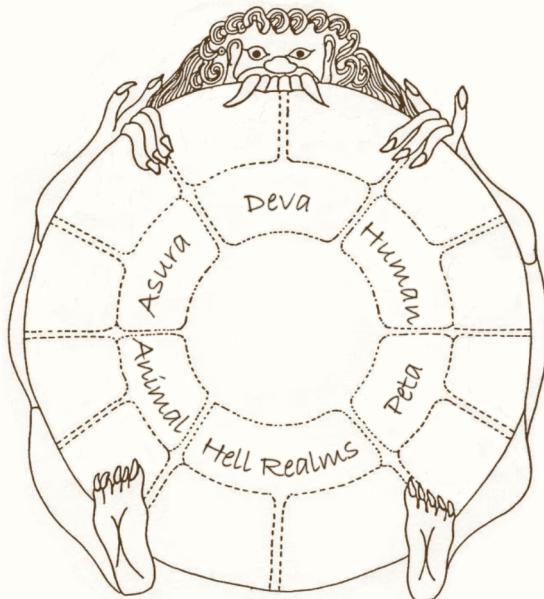
Most religions, philosophy or even science will say that there is a first point.

According to Christianity, the world was created by God in seven days. According to Hinduism, there are many creation myths, such as — first there was nothing, then Brahma said the word ‘Aum’, and somehow *samsāra* was created. One of the main functions of religions is to create a sense of a beginning because people want to know how the world works so that they feel in control over things.

Modern science too has a similar desire to find a sense of beginning and suggests that before the Big Bang there was nothing and after that, worlds came into being. The universe began with that single event.

I think it is unique in world history and philosophy that Buddhism says that there is no beginning. If we keep going further back, we can never find the point where everything began because there is always something prior to that. With *samsāra* there is always a previous time, there is always a previous past life.

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

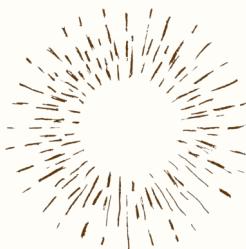


On the Wheel of Life, *samsāra* is depicted as six realms into which we can be reborn. In the suttas the Devā Realms are further split into 26 realms, bringing the total number to 31

To me, the lack of a starting point is very realistic because it is illogical to think that something came out of nothing. God created the universe but where does God come from? This way of thinking is not really explaining anything because we are creating some other complicated entity and putting it beforehand.

Although it can be a bit unnerving, Buddhism says there is no starting point, things are impermanent, and we can always see another cause, further and further back. To me this sounds plausible and reasonable. Interestingly the Buddha does not say that there is no beginning, he just says that there is no beginning that can be seen. This makes sense from a pragmatic point of view because it is simply impossible to keep looking into the past forever.

The Buddha's teaching is based on our personal experience and what we see for ourselves. In that way, it is very similar to empirical science. We observe the universe and draw conclusions from our observations, but we do not make philosophical statements beyond what is observable.

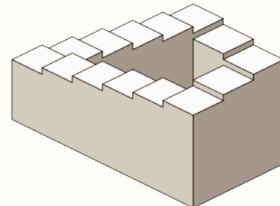


**WE OBSERVE THE UNIVERSE AND DRAW CONCLUSIONS FROM OUR OBSERVATIONS,
BUT WE DO NOT MAKE PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS BEYOND WHAT IS OBSERVABLE**

It is very interesting how Buddhism has much in common with the ideals of science: discovery, seeing things according to reality, not just a matter of belief, not just a matter of trust. It is direct experience. The Buddha observes the universe, saying “From what I have observed, there is no beginning.” Understanding that no first point can be discovered is, to me, a very nice way of thinking about existence.

One reason why I think the word ‘religion’ is misplaced for a description of Buddhism is because although faith is a factor, it is not the final factor. The final factor is insight, clear comprehension, seeing things according to reality.

DELUSION IS A SELF-PERPETUATING FORCE



Without a starting point, delusion is a self-perpetuating force. When there is delusion, that delusion creates more delusion. These forces keep driving us into the future unless somehow we are able to get some insight and understand what delusion is really about. If nobody tells us that there is no-self (anatta) or any permanent aspect, it is very difficult to see through the delusion. Unless we have somebody else to shake us up a little bit so that we can see reality in the right way, we always feel like, “Here I am! I feel real! Don’t tell me that I’m not real!” This is the big problem with delusion; it keeps on re-creating itself, potentially for eternity. It has this self-perpetuating ability to drive us on and on.

CREATING DELUSION

“Still, delusion is seen to have a specific condition.”

Importantly the Buddha says that delusion is seen to have a specific condition. If delusion, *avijjā* was absolutely solid, if there was nothing that could condition it, then there would be no way of getting rid of it. So, the way we do something about *avijjā* is to remove the conditions that support it.

By removing the supporting conditions there is some possibility of removing *avijjā* and then we may see things according to reality. This is really exciting because we have the opportunity to become wise. Wisdom (*pañña*) is the opposite of *avijjā*. This concept to me is the best among all religious and philosophical ideas. When we are wise, we understand where happiness is, where suffering is, and how to live in such a way that it gives rise to all the good things in life. If we look at the five spiritual faculties, we can see that the highest faculty is ‘*pañña indriya*’ or the faculty of wisdom. Knowing that delusion has its specific condition, something that causes delusion to arise, the next question is, what can be done about it? The Buddha goes on to summarise the whole path, starting with the five hindrances:

The five hindrances

“I say, bhikkhus, that delusion has a nutriment. It is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment of delusion? It should be said the five hindrances.”

What does nutriment mean? Nutriment is like food. It has two functions: firstly, it supports a condition to keep it going, and secondly, it makes that condition grow. The five hindrances (*pañca nivarana*) feed *avijjā*.

When our minds are under the power of the five hindrances, then we are deluded. When we have a strong desire, we feel

5 HINDRANCES

desire

ill will

dullness and drowsiness

restlessness and remorse

doubt

compelled to chase it, and then we are compelled to do immoral things as a consequence. If we are wise enough, when the five hindrances weaken, we may realise, “Wait a minute! Why did I run after it? That was a silly thing to do!” and we know that it was delusion at work. Having this realisation by observing these

things in our own life is far more powerful than reflecting on the suttas — they become very clear because we see them in our hearts, we see them in our mind.

Sometimes our meditation practice can make us nice and peaceful (*samatha*). We don't feel desire, anger, ill-will or restlessness in our mind. That degree of clarity means that sometimes when we sit back and rest, the answers to difficult questions just come to us. Reducing defilements and hindrances are a powerful way of penetrating difficulties; both *samatha* and *vipassanā* go up as the five hindrances go down. *Samatha* and *vipassanā*, are always paired together in the suttas because they are

not separate things. Ajahn Chah said that *samatha-vipassanā* are ‘two sides of a knife’.

Ultimately when we completely abandon the nutriment for delusion, we start to see things according to reality, as long as we do not start off with a wrong view. If we have a very strong wrong view, then that means that we are holding on to certain things. But even then, that delusion can be really penetrated, and it will gradually fade away. That is why the Buddha was able to finally break through and see things according to reality.

Conversely the stronger the hindrances, the more deluded we are. So, when we have very strong desires or when we are very angry, very restless or confused, we should be aware of this fact: “Now I am deluded. Now I really can’t see things clearly!” Just remembering that makes us a bit more cautious: “I’m deluded, so now may not be the best time to make any important decisions in my life”. On the other hand, a good time to make a decision is when we feel peaceful, when we have clarity, when we can see that the hindrances are weak, because that is when the natural intuition inside of us to see what is right tends to come out.

So, the next question is: ‘What is the nutriment for these five hindrances?’

16 DEFILEMENTS

covetousness/greed

ill will

anger

hostility

disdain

contempt

jealousy

stinginess

deceit

deviousness

obstinacy

aggression

conceit

arrogance

vanity

negligence

Three kinds of misconduct

“And what is the nutriment for the five hindrances? It should be said: the three kinds of misconduct.”

There are three kinds of misconduct (*ti ducarita*): by body, by speech and by mind. When our actions are immoral or unkind, the five hindrances increase. Conversely just by living well, keeping the five precepts and being kind, the five hindrances decrease.

The misconduct of the mind is very difficult to deal with. It is a very important aspect of the path because not only do we keep the five precepts and meditate, but we also need to effectively overcome such mental problems as anger and desire. The Buddha says that we can decrease these defilements by reflecting in the right way, and by viewing the world around us in the right way.

Lack of sense restraint

“And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of misconduct? It should be said: lack of restraint of the sense faculties.”

If we lack restraint of the sense faculties (*indriya-asamvara*), when we go out into the world we are either attracted or averse to people or things around us. We like somebody, or we do not like somebody. We see something we desire, or we see something that repels us. An unrestrained mind will always react to the world.

Sense restraint then is meant to reduce that feeling of being manipulated by the world. Instead of always being attracted to things or averse to the things in life, we try to work towards an even-mindedness without too many ups and downs. When the mind is not jumping around we have a degree of mindfulness. This mindfulness further enables us to react to the world in the right

WISDOM POWER IS MORE POWERFUL THAN WILL POWER



way. We can choose to react to external phenomena by following the Dhamma rather than following those defiled states of mind.

By learning sense restraint we get that sense of evenness that leads to following the Dhamma. Often people think that 'restraint' means using force to hold ourselves back, but this is actually the wrong way of going about it. The way the Buddha talks about restraint is that it should come about through wisdom, through understanding, through reflecting in the right way.

When we reflect in the right way, sense restraint happens almost automatically, because the mind understands this is dangerous territory. Wisdom power is much more powerful than willpower. The defilements tend to disappear easily when we use wisdom power. On the other hand, even though we are able to suppress defilements for a while using willpower, when we release

the pressure the defilements tend spring back up again. So, what feeds our lack of sense restraint?

Lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension

“And what is the nutriment for non-restraint of the sense faculties? It should be said: lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension.”

Mindfulness (*sati*) is like a guard who tells us that we are heading in the wrong direction. Mindfulness says: “If I keep on looking at this person much longer, ill will is going to arise in me. I am going to feel a sense of aversion. I am going to get upset” or “If I look at this Ferrari any longer, a desire for a Ferrari is going to arise in me!”

*Lack of mindfulness and
clear comprehension
leads to lack of sense restraint*

When we remember that clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) is about understanding the purpose and suitability of our actions, we can ask ourselves some important questions: ‘Is this action going to enhance or detract from my spiritual practice? Does it fulfill my purpose for my life? Is it suitable for what I am trying to achieve?’

So, *sati-sampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension) gives us the ability to see what is happening and whether it will

lead in the right direction. It helps us decide what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, and how we should restrain the senses.

Unwise Attention

“And what is the nutriment for lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension? It should be said: unwise attention.”

Ayoniso manasikārā is ‘unwise attention’. This is when we are looking at or attending to the world in the wrong way. *Yoniso manasikārā* (wise attention) is another important term in Buddhist teaching. Even from the very beginning of the path we need at least some *yoniso manasikārā* to understand that there is something that is valuable and worth practicing. *Yoniso manasikārā* stays with us along the path till the point when we become an arahant. Every insightful moment we experience is all because of *yoniso manasikārā*.

Yoniso manasikārā happens when our mind moves in the right direction on the path. Whenever we see more clearly, have a kinder heart, more compassion, or feel a little more peaceful, *yoniso manasikārā* increases. With *ayoniso manasikārā* those qualities are decreased.

Suppose I was looking at a cup of coffee right now. If I am thinking: “Oh that coffee looks so good and tastes so good! I really should treat myself to more coffee!” That is *ayoniso manasikārā* because it leads to desire. Before I knew it, I could have been holding a cup in my hand and



**“Oh that coffee looks
so good and tastes
so good! I really
should treat myself
to more coffee!”**

drinking away. Instead, if I think: “Oh that coffee could be useful if I am tired. I could drink just a little bit to have a little extra wakefulness”, this is thinking wisely because the mind is not yet too disturbed or obsessed by the coffee. So if I reflect on the coffee in the right way and it does not lead to desire, it is *yoniso manasikārā* otherwise it is *ayoniso manasikārā*. In fact, we can almost tell immediately which one we are applying.

While this example is trivial, it helps us to think in the right way out in the world where there are things that are far more disturbing, particularly in realm of relationships.

Lack of faith

“And what is the nutriment for unwise attention? It should be said: lack of faith.”

Lack of faith (*assaddhiya*) and lack of wisdom are closely related, because if we are wise we will also have strong faith. Perhaps confidence is a better translation of *saddha* than faith, because it arises from a proper understanding of the Dhamma.

When we first start out on the Buddhist path, the first hurdle that we face is that we do not understand. We do not understand what is going on around us; what is going on within us; what we are supposed to attend to; what the defilements are. We do not even understand that desire is inherently bad. After all, society tells us that desire is something to be cultivated. Because of this when we first start out on the path we rely on learning about the dangers of the world from the Buddha. We also rely on the Buddha to explain to us what it means to attend to things in the right way. After practicing in the right way, the Dhamma gradually becomes our own understanding. Faith leads to appreciating the Buddha’s teachings and this in turn leads to wise attention. So if we have lack of faith and confidence, where does that come from?

Not hearing the true Dhamma

“And what is the nutriment for lack of faith? It should be said: not hearing the true Dhamma.”

Not hearing the true Dhamma (*asaddhamma savanam*) leads to a lack of faith, so conversely, faith comes from hearing the true Dhamma (*saddhamma savanam*).

‘Dhamma’ in Pāli can mean any kind of spiritual teaching but here it means the spiritual teaching which leads us to see reality as it truly is. In the case of the Buddhist path, we claim that the early Buddhist teachings are relating us to reality.

Sometimes when we hear the true Dhamma we think: “Whoah! This is so good! Why haven’t I heard this before?” We probably have, but we may have forgotten. It has happened to me as well. I think that perhaps I might have heard this Dhamma in a previous life and thus in this life faith in the Buddha’s Dhamma has come back to me as a consequence of that.

But what would be the nutriment for not hearing the true Dhamma?

Not associating with superior people

“And what is the nutriment for not hearing the true Dhamma? It should be said: not associating with superior people.”

If we associate with inferior people (*asappurisasaṃsevo*) then we will never hear the true Dhamma. It is through ‘*sappurisasaṃsevo*’, associating with superior people that we get to hear the true Dhamma. These people are *ariyas* who have penetrated and understood the Dhamma. It is these superior people who are the

highest form of ‘good friends’ (*kalyāṇa-mitta*). In the famous Upadha Sutta, Ānanda suggests to the Buddha:

“Venerable sir, this is half of the holy life, that is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.”

[SN 45.2:1.4](#)

But the Buddha replies:

“Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! This is the entire holy life, Ānanda, that is, good friendship, good companion-ship, good comradeship. When a bhikkhu has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.”

[SN 45.2:2.1-2.3](#)

If we have the right *kalyāṇamitta*, if we hang out with the Buddha or *ariyas*, everything else will happen as matter of course and we have no choice, we are going to be awakened.

This sounds great but what does it mean to hang out with the Buddha especially considering he passed away more than 2,500 years ago? It means to read the suttas and to take them on board, to hang out with inspiring people. Without *ariyas* and the Dhamma, we are not going anywhere. But if we keep a close association, time and again, things will just happen as a consequence.

FILLING UP EACH STEP TOWARDS DELUSION

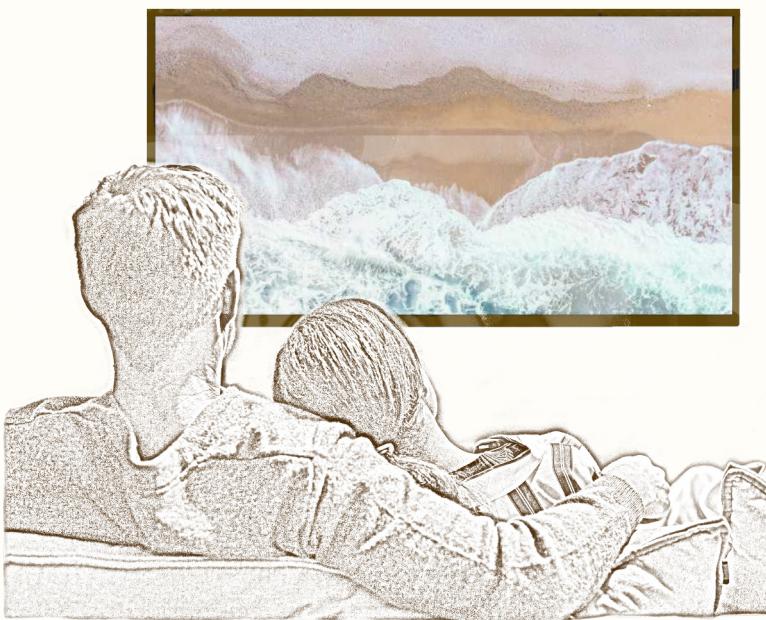
“Thus not associating with superior people, that becoming full, it then fills up not hearing the good dhamma.”

The idea of becoming full is interesting. If we hang out with good people, then we are likely to keep doing good things. We are filling ourselves up with goodness and we are becoming strong and powerful. On the other hand, if we do not associate with good people, if we hang out with bad people, if we hang out with ordinary worldly people who only think about worldly things, we are not going to listen to, read or discuss anything about spiritual qualities, values or Dhamma. Instead we are only going to hear about worldly things or even bad things. In these situations, some of us may think, “I’m strong. I can withstand these things. I know what I am doing!” But we should remember that our strength depends on our conditioning, which in turn depends on the kind of influences we have around us. If we keep on being influenced by bad or wrong people, we will gradually move in the wrong direction without noticing it. We gradually become full of these qualities.

This idea of being influenced relates closely to the concept of no-self. If there is no-self or permanent internal stability that can withstand that external pressure, then we are 100% a product of the conditions and influences around us. Because another conditioning activates when the previous one wears off, it is especially important that we associate with wise people. Otherwise, we will have some very serious problems.

“Not hearing the good Dhamma, becoming full, fills up lack of faith.”

WHEN WE DO NOT HEAR GOOD DHAMMA



IT'S EASY TO GET SIDETRACKED

A common example, is that when we do not hear the good Dhamma (*saddhamma savanam*) and then we start to think: “Buddhism is fine. My practice is fine. But there are more important things in life too!” By thinking in this way, we are easily sidetracked and we work towards acquiring material things.

Our faith in the Dhamma is no longer being ‘filled up’ and we gradually stop making progress on the path.

“Lack of faith, becoming full, fills up unwise attention.”

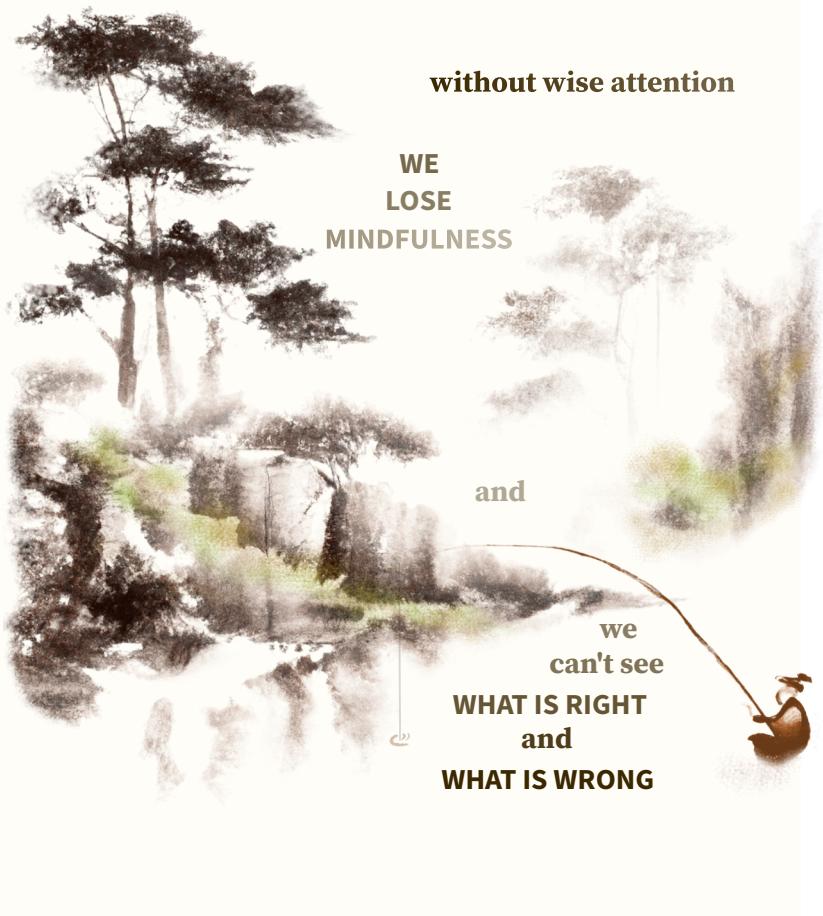
The idea of ‘unwise attention’ becoming full is scary because when we become unwise we do things that give rise to sense-desire, anger, ill-will, restlessness, sloth, torpor, doubt and so on.

“Unwise attention, becoming full, fills up lack of mind-fulness and clear awareness.”

Losing mindfulness means that we have less idea of what is the right thing to do and we are increasingly influenced by worldly phenomena that lead us in the wrong way.

“Lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension, becoming full, fills up non-restraint of the sense faculties. Non-restraint of the sense faculties, becoming full, fills up the three kinds of misconduct.”

When this lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension becomes full it fills up the nourishment of non-restraint of the sense faculties. Our mind becomes disorganized and unfocused, now desiring this, now having aversion towards that. We can’t hold ourselves back because our mind is out of control, we start to misbehave and the three kinds of misconduct start to fill up.



"The three kinds of misconduct, becoming full, fill up the five hindrances. The five hindrances, becoming full, fill up delusion.

When the three kinds of misconduct become full, the mind becomes packed with the five hindrances; they are everywhere. And because of that, *avijjā*, delusion itself becomes full. By

becoming more and more deluded, we become less and less aware of what is happening. This is a terrible and frightening cycle because it can be almost impossible to get out of it.

*When delusion becomes full,
we lose interest in the Buddha's teachings*

When delusion becomes full, we lose interest in the Buddha's teachings and we do not want to hang out with superior people anymore because we have less insight and less clarity. One negative thing influences other negative things and before we know it, we have moved in a completely different direction with no interest in spiritual matters.

We can see this happening to the vast majority of people because material phenomena are so important to most of us in the modern world. Sometimes we can shake them up by saying, "Listen, can't you see there's a problem here?" For a moment they may think, "Oh, maybe you have a point" but if they do not have insight and clarity they forget and they go back to the cycle of consuming and heading in the wrong direction.

The simile of rain on a mountain top

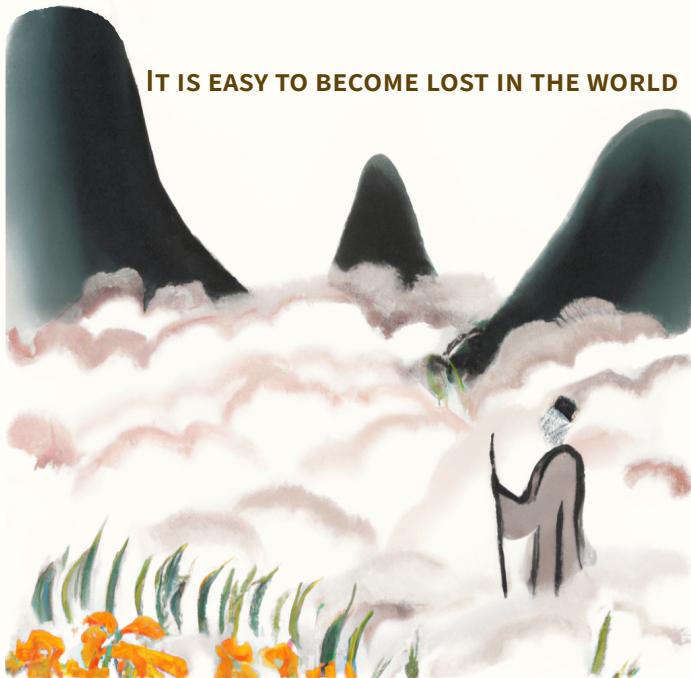
The sutta up to this point has shown how the various factors fill up subsequent factors all the way up to delusion. And what is the root cause? It happens when we associate with either the wrong kind of people or at least, not the right kind of people.

"Just as, when it is raining and the rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountaintop, the water flows down along the slope and fills the clefts, gullies, and creeks; these, becoming full, fill up the pools; these, becoming full, fill up the lakes; these, becoming full, fill up the streams; these, becoming full, fill up the rivers; and these, becoming full, fill up the great ocean; thus there is nutriment for the great ocean, and in this way it becomes full."

The only thing that is important here for the filling up of the ocean is that it keeps on raining on that mountain top. It takes a long time to happen but if the rain keeps on coming down on the mountain top eventually the great ocean itself will be filled up. This is precisely the way that our actions will either lead us to, or take us away from awakening. If we keep studying the Dhamma, spending time with superior people and hearing true teachings, eventually awakening must happen as a consequence.

It is so easy! All we need to do is to listen to nice Dhamma talks and then the entire sequence will happen as a matter of course. We naturally feel we want to practice these teachings, to do what is right and to be kind. We understand the power of skillful actions as we are guided in the right direction. We are gradually brainwashed in a nice way, which leaves us happy at the end of the path. We finally understand where real happiness lies in this world and where suffering is.

This is why I have talked a lot about allowing ourselves to be inspired by the right kind of people and listening to good Dhamma teachings. Wholesome actions are important especially when we feel like we are losing motivation in our practice. It is so easy to become lost in the world where we are surrounded by no spiritual interest; we need countless reminders of the path so that we will be pulled back to the things that really matter.



WE NEED COUNTLESS REMINDERS OF THE PATH

“So just as the rain is pouring down, fills up the great ocean, so too, not associating with good persons, becoming full, fills up not hearing the good Dhamma...”

“... the five hindrances becoming full, fill up delusion [avijjā], thus there is a nutriment for delusion [avijjā]. In this way it becomes full.”

Until now the sutta has illustrated the dangerous sequence of actions that occur through unwholesome nutriment.

CREATING TRUE KNOWLEDGE AND LIBERATION

In the second half of the sutta the Buddha shows us the positive sequence of actions from associating with superior people all the way through to true knowledge and liberation:

“I say, bhikkhus, that true knowledge and liberation have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment.”

As I have mentioned, *vijja* (true knowledge) is the exact opposite of *avijjā* and usually refers to three things: seeing our past lives, understanding how beings fare on according to *kamma* and insight into the Four Noble Truths that leads to awakening (*arahant*-ship).

True knowledge means seeing things as they truly are. If we don't see things as they truly are, then we are at least to some extent in delusion.

Liberation means freedom from suffering and our mind becomes unconstrained and free of the defilements.

Freedom from suffering is much more profound than most of us realise. We do not really understand suffering, and so we cannot really understand freedom from suffering. Along with freedom from suffering is freedom from the defilements. When

the mind is defiled, the defilements are in charge, and like a slave we feel constrained. It is only once the defilements die away that we finally feel free and think with clear comprehension. With this freedom we can guide ourselves in the right way and we can choose wisely. The real freedom in Buddhism is the freedom from the defilements.

LIBERATION

FREEDOM FROM SUFFERING
FREEDOM FROM THE DEFILEMENTS
AN UNCONSTRAINED MIND



So what is the nutriment for true knowledge and liberation, the two greatest benefits available on the Buddhist path?

The seven factors of awakening

“And what is the nutriment for true knowledge and liberation? It should be said: the seven factors of awakening.”

7 FACTORS OF AWAKENING

mindfulness

investigation

energy

rapture

tranquility

samādhi

equanimity

The seven factors of awakening (*bojjhaigas*) are closely related to the development of and include the four *jhānas*. They can be achieved by practicing meditation in the right way; it is the resultant power of the mind that enables us to penetrate the truth. In short,



SAMĀDHIS IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE WHOLE PRACTICE OF THE BUDDHAS TEACHINGS

samādhi is fundamental to the whole practice of the Buddha's teachings.

The four applications of mindfulness

"The seven factors of awakening, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the seven factors of awakening? It should be said: the four applications of mindfulness."

It is the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, the four applications of mindfulness. *Sati sambojjhaṅga* is the factor that relates to the awakening of mindfulness and this is where the rest of the *bojjhaṅgas* arise from.

4 APPLICATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

- body*
- feelings*
- mind*
- dhamma*

A good way to understand the four applications of mindfulness is to think of them simply as *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing). When this is practiced in the right way, we gradually become more still and more peaceful until we eventually enter a

very profound state of mind — *samādhi*.

In the Ānapānasati Sutta ([MN 118](#)) the Buddha tells us to watch the breath through many stages of refinement and eventually we will attain *vimocayam cittaṁ* ([MN 118:20.4](#)). *Vimocana* means liberation of the mind. These are the *jhānas*, *samādhi*.

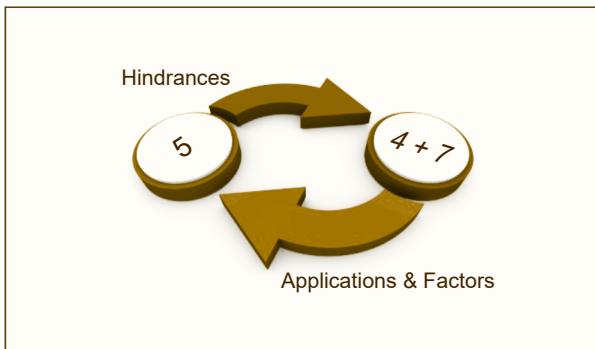
When we do this practice we are not allowing ourselves to feed the defilements. For example, desire needs a nutriment, and that nutriment is seeing pleasurable things in the world. While we are watching the breath, we are starving that desire. We are no longer thinking about those pleasurable things and so the desire dies down. The same thing happens with ill-will. It needs to be fed. For example, while we are watching the breath we are not thinking unkind things about other people. So gradually ill-will disappears completely.

When we watch the breath like this, eventually we abandon the very last remaining defilements. The last little bit of restlessness, remorse, sloth and torpor is fully gone.

Satipaṭṭhāna is always mentioned in the suttas as the cause and condition for *samādhi*, for the *bojjhaṅgas*.

In the sequence of progression along the path we can see that; they are opposite. When we practice the four applications of

mindfulness and the seven factors of awakening, we abandon the five hindrances.



From here on in, we find the same, but opposite sequence as we found in the first part of the sutta. So the nutriment of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* is:

The three kinds of good conduct

“The four applications of mindfulness, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the four applications of mindfulness? It should be said: the three kinds of good conduct.”

The three kinds of good conduct are the opposite of the three kinds of misconduct that we discussed before.

When we live a good and virtuous life we create the nutriments, the causes, the conditions for mindfulness which makes meditation possible.

When we keep the five precepts, when we are kind, when we do what is right, we are supporting our *satipaṭṭhāna* and meditation practice. If keeping the precepts, being kind and doing what is right is all that you do, you are doing great already. But if we want to continue along the path, we need to do a bit more and give more

support to our meditation practice. We do this by using wise reflection to purify the mind and this becomes an important part of *sīla* (good conduct). As our mind becomes more purified, we develop more *mettā*, an important foundation which enables us to watch the breath.

As the sutta says here, *Satipaṭṭhāna* can be summarised as just being kind and mindfully watching the breath.

Restraint of the sense faculties

“The three kinds of good conduct, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of good conduct? It should be said: restraint of the sense faculties.”

Then, as a result of restraining the sense faculties by using our wisdom power we will have all the three kinds of good conduct. Of course, we will still have a few ups-and-downs that will persist in our mind, but we do not experience the enormous fluctuations in mind states that we did before. In other words we are no longer pulled around uncontrollably by aversion or desire.

When the mind is more even, we are free from the strong control of the defilements and deep *sīla* becomes possible. The cause for this is:

Mindfulness and clear comprehension

“Restraint of the sense faculties, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for restraint of the sense faculties? It should be said: mindfulness and clear comprehension.”

When we are mindful, we see what is really going on, we deal wisely with the mind and we think in the right way. Without mindfulness it is impossible to master the mind and be in control of ourselves. Clear comprehension goes with mindfulness to ensure that what we are doing is suitable.

Wise attention

“Mindfulness and clear comprehension, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for mindfulness and clear comprehension? It should be said: wise attention.”

Yoniso manasikāra (wise attention) is done in such a way that wholesome qualities increase, and unwholesome qualities decrease.

Faith

“Wise attention, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for wise attention? It should be said: faith.”

This faith arises and increases when we realise that doing things in the right way is for our benefit and happiness. This is confidence in the Buddha's teachings that comes from:

Hearing the good Dhamma

“Faith, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for faith? It should be said: hearing the good Dhamma.”

We read the suttas and listen to nice Dhamma talks. We are get these teachings by:

Associating with superior people

“Hearing the good Dhamma, too, I say, has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for hearing the good Dhamma? It should be said: associating with superior people.”

And thus, the sequence is complete.

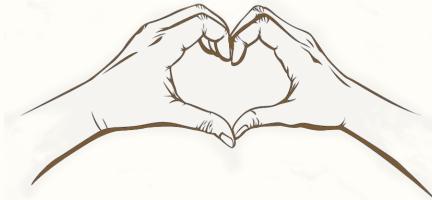
FILLING UP EACH STEP TOWARDS AWAKENING

“Thus associating with good persons, becoming full, fills up hearing the good Dhamma. Hearing the good Dhamma, becoming full, fills up faith. Faith, becoming full, fills up wise attention. Wise attention, becoming full, fills up mindfulness and clear comprehension. Mindfulness and clear comprehension, becoming full, fill up restraint of the sense faculties.”

We associate with superior people, and as we continue to hear the Dhamma our faith becomes full. Because our faith is full, we understand the importance of the teachings. We understand that when we attend unwisely, we are likely to be hijacked by negative states of mind. We are letting ourselves down and treating ourselves as an enemy; causing suffering for ourselves. Conversely, by attending wisely, we are treating ourselves as a friend; we are being kind and looking after ourselves.

Attending wisely in this way leads to an increase in wholesome qualities and a decrease in unwholesome qualities. Mindfulness arises because we need to be on the lookout, we need

that knowledge so that we can be careful. We develop *appamāda* (heedfulness) about what we are doing and clear comprehension that certain things have a wholesome outcome and others do not.



**BY ATTENDING WISELY,
WE ARE TREATING OURSELVES AS A FRIEND**

Then comes sense restraint.

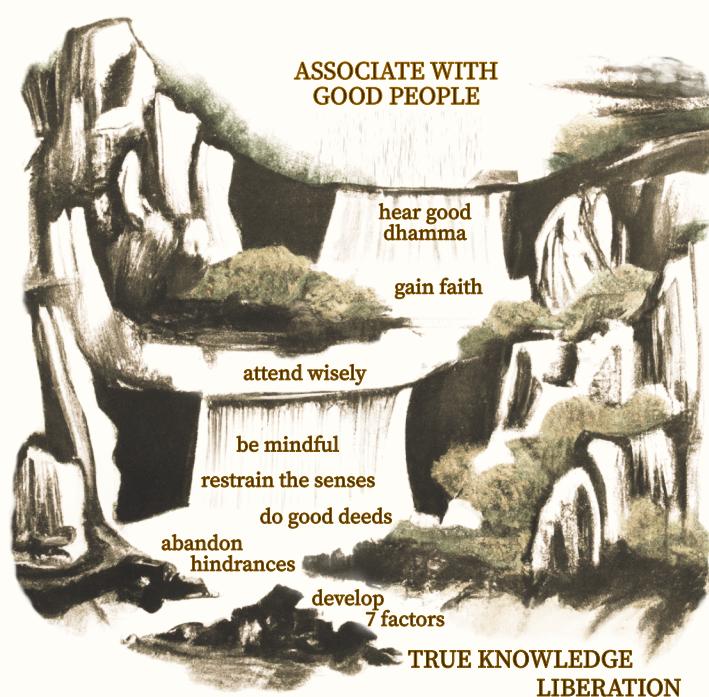
“Restraint of the sense faculties, becoming full, fills up the three kinds of good conduct. The three kinds of good conduct, becoming full, fill up the four applications of mindfulness. The four applications of mindfulness, becoming full, fill up the seven factors of awakening. The seven factors of awakening, becoming full, fill up true knowledge and liberation. Thus there is nutriment for true knowledge and liberation, and in this way they become full.”

The simile of rain on a mountain top

The Buddha returns to that wonderful simile to show how the sequence leads to the pinnacle of our practice. It starts with the basic nutriments that arise from associating with superior people which gradually feed through to true knowledge, and liberation.

“Just as, when it is raining and the rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountaintop, the water flows down along the slope and fills the clefts, gullies, and creeks; these, becoming full, fill up the pools; these, becoming full, fill up the lakes; these, becoming full, fill up the streams; these, becoming full, fill up the rivers; and these, becoming full, fill up the great ocean; thus there is nutriment for the great ocean, and in this way it becomes full. So too, associating with good persons, becoming full, fills up hearing the good Dhamma.... The seven factors of enlightenment, becoming full, fill up true knowledge and liberation.”

As the rain pours down on top of the mountain, as we get inspired, we know what we have to do, and the rest happens almost automatically.



Noble Eightfold Path

The way this sequence flows can also be applied to the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path starts with “right view” and from that “right view” we get *sammasañkappa*, often translated as “right intention” though I prefer “right aim” or “right purpose”. When we see things according to reality, we walk the path that accords with reality. Our aim becomes right. Our purpose becomes right.

*When we see things according to reality,
we walk the path that accords with reality*

So where does that “right view” come from? What is the nutriment? The nutriment is associating with superior people and reading the Dhamma. There are many consequences that flow on. We see things in the right way, we understand our priorities about what really matters in the world, and we see what leads to our long-term benefits and happiness rather than our short-term pleasures. For example, the idea of rebirth changes our perspective on life and we see the big picture rather than focusing on the tiny picture that is our current life.

The Buddha shows us that right view leads to right aim, which then leads to good conduct (right speech, action and livelihood) which gives rise to right effort, mindfulness and *saṃādhi*, until we attain final awakening, true knowledge and liberation:

“Thus there is nutriment for true knowledge and liberation and in this way, it becomes full.”

So now we are starting to see just why it is so important to read the suttas, to hear inspiring Dhamma talks, to do things in the right way and to associate with superior people. These things matter so much because it is easy to get sidetracked and become stuck in the self-perpetuating loop that is *avijjā*. It matters that we have the conditions that enable us to sustain our practice. It is the wholesome nutriments that push us in the right direction and keep us on the middle path to liberation.

When we read the suttas, we are, in many ways, in the presence of the Buddha. Hearing the true Dhamma is then combined with the feeling of being in the presence of superior people, especially the Buddha himself. The Buddha knew there would still be *avijjā* two and half thousand years later and there would be people still listening to his teaching, so he made it available to us in this way.

