

# Ven Anīgha Reddit Archive 2024

Ven Anīgha

2024



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# Ven Anigha Reddit Archive 2024

## New glossary entry for Yoniso Manasikāra

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-12-29 17:45:10

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-29 19:16:04 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Fixed and added clarifications. Thanks.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-30 01:41:25 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The former probably have the starkest deviations from the Pāli of all, with a lot of important things being overly watered down or distorted (“love” for *mettā* for instance), so I often have to do quite a bit of editing. I would have to make far less changes with the latter, but they have copyright and are not made for displaying Pāli line by line.

The Wisdom Pub. ones are not still perfect though; they still stealthily assert commentarial interpretations without explicit warning. But generally they’re significantly more reasonable.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-30 10:24:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Digital Pali Dictionary is basically the best there is at the moment, both in terms of functionality and accuracy. Most of the time it’s quite accurate, but not always (see for example the entry for *yoniso manasikāra*).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-30 17:56:29 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

But my understanding is that awareness of intentions, which is necessary for proper restraint, is a better basis for a puthujjana’s nascent YM.

Yes, but that's because they would usually not be sufficiently established upon the previous elements of the gradual training, and thus would still be acting out of certain pressures every now and then during the day without explicit awareness, even if they're keeping all the precepts in the letter. The "momentum" (or "emphasis on *manasikāra*", as I refer to it in the writing) that this creates means that they will inevitably overlook their present intentions, and end up trying to *attend* to the subtler "*yonis*" of the four satipaṭṭhānas.

For someone who has fulfilled those prerequisites and upholds them continuously, that is less likely to happen even if they don't quite have the Right View yet. This is likely why the Buddha is said to have taught satipaṭṭhāna to monks who were still puthujjanas, yet there are no accounts of him doing so to laypeople unless they were noble disciples. And even that is exceedingly rare in the Suttas; he seems to most often have instructed noble lay disciples in recollection of the Triple Gem, which is a less refined but still valid form of YM.

An acute awareness of one's underlying motivations, paired of course with the effort to act in accordance with it, may be the most *yoniso manasikāra* that someone who doesn't live like a monastic all the time\* is able to accomplish reliably. But this could be enough to understand the Dhamma, as it would reveal the general principle of wholesome and unwholesome and what craving actually is.

\*Someone who leads a more hectic, non-secluded lifestyle due to things like work and has to engage with society on a very frequent basis, but still keeps the eight precepts unbroken. Coarse engagements like these, even if they're of a neutral kind, still push more of the "weight" of your being towards *manasikāra* and away from the *yonī* (a more "constricted" or focused/absorbed mind), albeit much less than in someone who keeps only five precepts or less. That's why excessive duties and talk are said to be potential hindrances even for an ordained noble disciple in a lot of Suttas.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-31 06:55:23 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The catch is that you of course won't be able to recognize the assumption, for otherwise it wouldn't be there. But you can indirectly know that it's there because if it weren't, there would be no suffering no matter what happened to you.

"Assuming absolute control" doesn't mean you assume that you can fly or breathe underwater. It's fundamentally in regard to feeling, so even though you know very well that there are limitations to what you can do in/to the physical world, when there is unpleasant feeling there is still the vague but strong sense that there must be *something* within the things you can do that would get rid of it, even if you have no clue what that would be. And that's the result of the assumption of control.

If that assumption is destroyed, then it's a question of semantics whether you choose to call what's left "relative" control or something else. But what it would boil down to is the lack of any expectation that anything you do "should" result in a change (or persistence)

of how you feel. The change (or persistence) *could* happen, but it would never be directly because of what you did, which means it may just as well have remained the same (or vice versa, remained the same when you tried to change it). It's the attitude you would have when submitting a proposal to a person you have absolutely no leverage over, and that's how knowledge uproots all craving.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2025-01-01 19:40:41 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Pretty much, yes. And even your ability to “submit proposals” at all, or to even consider them, is itself a proposal that was accepted, and you have no idea for how long that will continue to be the case.

Also, you need to undo the assumption not in some abstract sense, but specifically in relation to the things that shake the mind at its core when it can't control them. Things like sickness, aging, and death, loss of cherished possessions and loved ones, unfair treatment and blame, etc. This means that the measure of having understood non-control is not a “eureka” insight, but the inability to suffer in the face of these things, or of anything else whatsoever that would arouse a sense of indignation and upset if your proposal is ignored.

Nibbāna is the abandonment of all entitlement towards the aggregates.

## Being fed up with something

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok\_Watercress\_4596 2024-12-28 16:47:56

I've been following Hillside Hermitage channel for a while now and I see the same theme in the videos I'd like to talk about and see what people have to say, strong emphasis on abandonment of sensuality and endurance of the pain, sort of implying that anyone who's not living in a monastery only focused on keeping the precepts is automatically an addict.

In the videos Ajahn always highlights at any given possibility that the work depends on abandoning sensuality here and now and that there is no other way to do it, but from my own experience I can see that it cannot go on forever and all things are unsatisfactory whether I abandon them or not. I personally and others too just get fed up with things and exhaust their desires. I still engage with sensuality and make no effort to get rid of it, just got fed up with most things naturally.

In my experience I am going through a ton of pain almost every day while engaging with sensuality and finding it unsatisfying, while at the end of each samsara cycle things get better. It doesn't matter whether I eat pleasant food or not, for the wrong reasons or not, the feelings come up anyway.

I find my experience to contradict what Ajahn Nyanamoli says.

- I'm suspecting for a while now that through feeling we accumulate experience.
- We are automatically ignorant and come with delusion about reality

- This delusion clashes with how reality actually is and it causes pain
- Pain = experience, enough pain = freedom
- Pain is unavoidable, Freedom is unavoidable

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-29 06:14:10**

The abandonment of sensuality comes from clearly *understanding* the gratification, danger, and escape from it. It doesn't come from just being apathetic towards it, for otherwise every 90 year old would be free from sensuality. The Buddha even said that there is an "equanimity of the household life", which is when a feeling of indifference arises by itself for someone who doesn't actually understand the danger in delight. So it's just a circumstantial indifference, and if their mood changes for whatever reason and life "regains its beauty", they'll start finding joy in sensuality again.

## **Personal advice on monasticism needed**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Pretend-Pirate4344 2024-12-26 15:49:27

I apologise if the mods deem this off-topic for the subreddit. If that's so and anyone had the time to message me in private, or re-direct me somewhere else, that would be greatly appreciated regardless.

I am 21 living in the UK and have started to see lay-life as mostly fruitless and quite obstructive to fulfilling the path. I have started to gain an interest in joining monastic life but the problem is that I'm transgender (MtF) and I expect that this completely excludes me from it. I started my transition before I ever considered that something could be more fulfilling than pursuing my desires. I am currently at the stage where it would be about equally complicated to either "complete" my transition, or fully de-transition, so this is quite a crossroads for me. I have come to recognise that my desire to transition is ultimately based on an attachment to the body, something which is non-self, but my main concern is that as a puthujjana, making decisions based on a *hope* to fulfil non-attachment to the body when I'm not there yet could be bad. For example: what if it messes up my mental health enough that it actually becomes an obstruction to the path? Alternatively, it could feel freeing to no longer try and find self-realisation in something that is ultimately not in my control. This is probably out of most people's direct personal experience and the decision **is** only mine but if anyone is able to at least offer me some wise considerations for making a rational decision here, I would be very grateful. I already feel slightly awkward interacting with my local monastery as all 1-to-1 interactions with monks/nuns are gender segregated.

TL;DR I have to choose between completing my transition and just trying to live as well I can as a lay-person, or make a fairly risky decision in the hopes I can establish a monastic life.

(P.S. I hope it is clear that I am only asking for personal advice, not for any broader social criticism.)



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-26 19:19:15**

Have you already been keeping the 8 precepts and abandoning everything unwholesome within your current situation? For your specific case, it may be worth trying that first and seeing whether you indeed have it in you to give the practice your all before you start taking steps towards de-transitioning.

as a puthujjana, making decisions based on a hope to fulfil non-attachment to the body when I'm not there yet could be bad

It cannot be any less bad than making decisions that fulfill the opposite (provided that liberation from suffering is what you value most). Trying to *force* non-attachment to the body through practices of self-mortification is potentially truly bad, but this is not quite that. It's *refraining* from going through with a decision that, as you yourself claim to now see, was rooted in attachment.

For example: what if it messes up my mental health enough that it actually becomes an obstruction to the path? Alternatively, it could feel freeing to no longer try and find self-realisation in something that is ultimately not in my control.

Your mental health and happiness can only deteriorate due to actions rooted in greed, aversion, or delusion. Actions that are genuinely driven by the opposites of these cannot lead to truly unbeneficial results. So if you don't start making *other* choices of the first kind and make sure to practice rightly, aiming to overcome any resistance to the discomfort of being paired with that which you dislike and being separated from that which you like, both regarding this matter and all others, then you would become mentally healthier than the whole world.

**Pali words translated differently by the HH community**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** hopefullys00n 2024-12-26 03:00:21

Does anybody have a list of the Pali words/terms that the HH community translates differently than other folks do? I want to learn Pali, and I think it would be great to have such a list so that if I take a Pali class I can keep those alternate translations in mind.

For example, I usually see 'yoniso manasikara' translated as 'wise attention', but I know the HH community tends to translate it as 'womb attention/attending through the origin/source attention etc', which is much more meaningful/useful.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-27 10:06:49**

There will eventually be a full list of all such terms here.

## How should a layperson approach food choices and cooking according to the Dhamma?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Pallantinus 2024-12-25 18:16:39

Hello everyone,

I have a question about food.

I understand that a monastic accepts the food offered by laypeople, regardless of whether they like it or not. The monastic eats the food without making decisions about what to eat.

Within the context of healthy foods, avoiding pre-cooked or junk food, my question is: How should a layperson behave in a supermarket or when planning their daily diet?

On one hand, there are foods they dislike but that could be just as healthy as those they like. Not buying them could be a form of aversion, while buying them just to avoid that aversion could be a form of self-mortification. This also applies to foods they like, but in the opposite sense.

On the other hand, there is the issue of how to cook the food or which recipes to choose. It's not the same to prepare boiled chicken with spices, serve it with a salad and yogurt, as it is to use the same ingredients to make a homemade kebab/shawarma, or simply roast the chicken (which is usually much tastier than boiled chicken). Here, too, the dilemma arises between the option of "self-mortification" and yielding to the "desire" to cook something more flavorful.

How should a layperson proceed according to the Dhamma in these cases?

Thanks in advance for your help.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-26 02:40:03

Put aside any considerations of aśte, either for gratification or avoidance, and choose what's most nutritious, easiest to prepare, and most affordable. From there, it would be a matter of standing your ground against the mind trying to either use the food for gratification or pressure you to doubt your choices and avoid things you know you didn't choose out of lust, just because they happen to be agreeable. Both entail falling from the context of sustaining the body to buy more time to practice and instead concerning yourself with how you feel.

## Discerning the General Feeling

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** still\_tracks 2024-12-21 09:46:42

I would like to share my current understanding of the "general feeling" and kindly ask for corrections. I will use Bhante Anīgha's approach from The Meaning of Yoniso Manasikāra

and distinguish between the **external/internal** domain of experience via formatting the text. In this way, I hope to expose any wrong understanding more clearly.

Today, I attempted to contemplate my current experience. When I **asked** myself “What is the *general feeling* right now?” I noticed that my **attention** had wandered to the area around my chest. I **sensed/perceived** a tightness and **felt** it unpleasant. Simultaneously, a **thought** arose, that the *general feeling* is unpleasant. I further thought “Oh, when I ask myself about the general feeling I immediately search for it on the level of **sensations**. Probably I am mixing up the *general feeling* with more **specific ones**, even confusing it with sensations. However, I learned that these sensations aren’t the general feeling, they simply correspond to a certain “contraction?” of muscles and I am able to **sense** this, because the *body* is already *here*. And just as I can’t **perceive** the *body*, but know that it has to be *here*, I also can’t **perceive** the *general feeling*. However, it also has to be *here*, as something that underlies my whole experience.” After these thoughts, the pressure which was concerned with managing these bodily sensations kind of disappeared and it seemed, that these bodily sensations aren’t “my” problem anymore. Next I recognized that I was feeling very pleasant now and my attention again has shifted to bodily sensations. However, now the *context* of the previous **reflections** was still *here* and I didn’t have to tell myself again that these sensations aren’t the general feeling (though I had the urge to do this and use these reflections as a method).

Do these reflections point in the right direction? Should the aggregates be “*known*” to be *here*, without the need to **look for / attend** them, as they can never be **perceived**? My native language German yields at least two possible translations for the term ‘discern’: 1. ‘wahrnehmen’ (to perceive something) and 2. ‘erkennen’ (to realize/understand something). Given this, I assume that ‘discern’ corresponds to the latter translation?

Edit 1: small grammar corrections

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-22 13:34:14

Do these reflections point in the right direction?

Yes, certainly. The “general feeling” is neither a specific sensation, nor is it some esoteric, hidden thing that is absent and that you need to “dig out”. Think of it as what’s already determining your actions and choices right here and now in a very real and potent yet nonspecific sense, whether you think about it or not. That also includes your attending to specific sensations in your chest and whatnot. Asking yourself *why* are you doing that, or anything else for that matter, would be one way to point in the direction of the “general feeling”.

And yes, it’s quite important to keep reminding yourself that you can’t *perceive* it, since that’s the natural tendency of a mind that hasn’t been trained, and is used to the “palpability” of sense objects and pleasures. It can’t acknowledge peripheral *as* peripheral, and needs to make it actual/foreground in order to feel like something exists at all. That applies to all the other aggregates as well.

1. ‘wahrnehmen’ (to perceive something) and 2. ‘erkennen’ (to realize/understand something). Given this, I assume that ‘discern’ corresponds to the latter translation?

Yes, the latter seems to fit the Pāli *pajānāti* much better.

## On Precepts

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** BestZebra6159 2024-12-21 05:21:10

I’d thought to reflect on the precepts since it occurred to me that I’d taken their meaning for granted and what “taking them up” really entails. The present writing will be a culmination of my thinking that has been going on for the past few days and will contain the following: what precepts are, what it means to “take them up”, and what the implications of that are. Any criticisms are welcome. \_\_\_\_

## What is a precept?

Is the precept to not kill merely non-killing? So that means, so long as one is not exposed to situations where one has to kill, one is “keeping the precepts”? In other words, a hit-man, on his days off or on his two hour lunch break, would be keeping the precept to not kill, even though he has the full **value of killing** wholly intact. Surely, this is not fundamental enough, and not what the Buddha intended by a precept.

Let us define a precept as the keeping of a value. That is, the precept to abstain from an action is keeping the **value** of not acting in such a manner.

But the latter part of “... keeping the value of not acting in such a manner” is not precise. What does “value” entail here, precisely? I say “value” entails not intending the action one has chosen to abstain from in any permutation the world may be in. Thus, we arrive at the most precise definition of a precept I can conceive of:

- A precept to abstain from an action means the presence of the intention to abstain from that action regardless of the permutation of the world.

## What does it mean to take up a precept?

First of all, it’s worth noting that there is the attribute of duration with regards to precepts. The uposatha day is one in which the precepts are kept for *a day*. Bhikkhus take up precepts for the rest of their life. So before proceeding to answer the question above, we may add a qualifier to our definition of the precept as follows:

- A precept to abstain from an action *for a certain period* means the presence of the intention to abstain from that action regardless of the permutation of the world *for that period*.

Thus, one is “keeping” a precept, or has “taken” it up, if upon reflection one finds the presence of such an intention of abstinence from a particular action in regard to *any permutation of the world regardless of its absurdity* for the period one has taken it up for.

## What the implications of such a definition are.

In all honesty, if the definition provided above is indeed the what the Buddha meant by the precepts, then it turns out that I've been mistakenly believing for all this time that I've been keeping the precepts and just need to work for a few more months to "check" all 8 and move onto sense restraint. It turns out, the definition above, disqualifies me from claiming of myself to be keeping even a single one: I'm keeping precisely 0.

Previously I'd thought I was keeping the "precept to not kill", since I didn't kill when the occasions to kill came up, majority of them being non-pressuring. But as the precept to not kill defined above, the keeping of it would imply that, *presently*, regardless of whatever the world's state may be, *I will not kill*.

To put it in harsh terms, but terms that are very necessary to be put into words: keeping the precept to not kill even for a day, would entail answering "no" to the question "if the only option you had to save your loved ones - ones who've taken care of you, only thought good for you - from being tortured to death, raped, mutilated, butchered is to kill the torturers, would you kill them?"

If you're keeping uposatha, that means if on that day, somehow, your family happened to have been captured, and your only way of saving them was through killing the torturers, **you would not do that**. Your value of not killing, for that day, takes priority over the value of the physical well being of you and your loved ones.

Bhikkhus are ones who've taken up that value *for the rest of their life*. I cannot even conceive of taking it up like that for a day, let alone for the rest of my life. Truly, the manner in which I'd thought of precepts previously, and precepts with the definition above, is like two wholly different leagues; the first allows me comfort at the thought that I'm making progress in the Dhamma, since I'm "keeping" the precepts, whilst the latter disqualifies me from even the first step and only forces immense existential burden.

I'd thought, "Although I would likely kill if such a situation arose, it's fine since I'll be able to work my way up to that after I've kept all 8 precepts, trained myself in sense restraint, gotten jhanas". But it seems *the other way around*, that I actually have to get to *that* point first, before even conceiving of sense restraint, and then jhanas.

If that's the definition of the precept, then I'm confident there are probably only a handful of people around the world who're observing uposatha days properly. I doubt even majority of the bhikkhus are keeping the precepts properly with that definition.

This also means, people who wish to avoid hypothetical scenarios like the trolley problem, yet think of themselves as keeping the first precept to not kill, could not be farther away from keeping the actual precept. They've disqualified themselves from even being able to discern whether they're keeping the precept, which means, they obviously aren't. Discerning whether you're keeping the precept would mean if there's any possible conceivable situation in the world in which you would kill. In the trolley problem, that means, it doesn't matter how many people are about to die, even if it's the entire universe of people, including yourself, *your value of not killing would prevail*. It means you're willing to take up the consequences of not killing, as well.

This is such an infinitely high bar for a precept, that I cannot think that this is actually the definition of keeping a precept. Yet, I cannot convince myself that there is any other “inferior” definition of precept that would work. This also makes it make sense, why, in gradual training, leaving the household life usually comes *before* keeping 8 precepts. **Truly** keeping the 8 precepts (with the definition above in mind), would entail you’ve **totally, top to bottom**, devalued the world.

It’s a huge bummer if this is actually what a precept is, but then my question would be: how should one develop oneself to the point where one is able to keep the precepts? The only thing holding me back from ordaining is my family, and that is largely because of our bad financial situation but also partly because in this cursed world that I’m nearly wholly tired of, the only thing I would say I’m attached to, is my family.

I have no issue giving up that attachment (well, clearly I do, considering I haven’t given it up yet, but I will give it up is what I know for sure), but after long thought, I’ve made up the decision that I will assist my family financially, and do not wish to mentally stress them with my leave as well as their vulnerability in old age and disease.

But, the reason why I wish to help them financially is *because* I do not wish to see them suffering. That is: I value their non-suffering. To even say: “I keep the first precept” (with the definition above), would be the *complete* devaluing of that value. So then it wouldn’t be possible for me to stay as a lay person to assist them?

So does this mean, sotapatti is essentially off the table for me even though I’m thoroughly fed up with 99.999999% of sensuality that the world partakes in? I live in the West, so even being dissatisfied with 99.999999% of sensuality (of the West) may be an extremely low bar.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-22 06:05:35**

The all-encompassing giving up that you describe is certainly the goal and a real measure of overcoming craving and ownership, but it’s not really something you can “do.” It would be what the suttas call the “higher virtue,” and it would be the *result* of keeping the precepts properly in the ordinary sense, i.e., within the much less extreme scenarios you are likely to encounter in daily life, but still *unconditionally*, as an effort to tame your own defilements rather than simply following a code laid down by some authority (which means you would never try find justified “exceptions”, or excuse yourself from things you know deep down are rooted in defilements but are not strictly against the precepts).

You can set up as intense a resolve as you like here and now, but fundamentally, you will still be liable to either give in or lose your sanity in such extreme situations unless the mind has been tamed and wisdom developed beforehand.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-23 13:30:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Bhante, so how should I discern whether I'm keeping a precept presently or not?

Simply ask yourself whether you're intentionally planning to break them, or are OK with keeping them indefinitely. If the answer is the latter, then you're keeping them. You don't need to overthink it.

I'm barely ever really put into situations where I have to "test" whether I'll kill in a situation or not, whether I'll steal in a situation or not, because they're fairly unlikely to occur here. But I can't hide the fact that if such situations were to occur, I would very likely end up killing, or stealing. So that means my determination of keeping the precepts isn't unconditional right now.

You have to draw a distinction between you volitionally determining to keep the precepts and valuing virtue, and there being underlying tendencies which could get you to break them in extreme situations despite your determination. So, again, the training is the former, and the destruction of the latter is the result.

I can only have partial unconditionality, realistically speaking, i.e., I won't kill in situations that aren't too challenging. Because simply thinking about the extreme situations for long is starting to make me go mad. I don't think I can ever mentally handle the burden of such situations with my current mental development, so that means I cannot entirely keep the precepts unconditionally right now.

It's worth checking from time to time how your mind reacts to imagining those scenarios, since that would reveal the extent to which you've actually developed immovability rather than just practicing management, but you don't need to be revisiting them all the time to wind yourself up. There's guaranteed to be more than enough ordinary situations in your daily life where you are not as restrained as you could—unnecessary distractions/entertainment, idle chatter, acting out of annoyance, laziness, restlessness, doubt, and similar—so you have to tame your mind in regard to those before you can hope to be unruffled, i.e., virtuous regardless, in the extreme scenarios.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-24 10:55:02 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So it could be the case that, an individual is fine with the thought presently, but if the situation were to actually arise, practically speaking, they'll end up choosing to kill.

That's right. You can only ever reflect and make choices in regard to the present (including any thoughts about the future since those are also *present*), so that's all you need to be concerned about. Not killing is a present choice that you have to *keep making* case by

case, no matter what takes place, and that's what it means to "take responsibility" for your actions. It's an incessant "renewal", and not a one-time determination that will last forever because that's just not how the mind works. It changes, and tomorrow it may have completely forgotten about what you promised to never do again today (which is something everyone who has undertaken the training will be able to relate to).

Only when the mind has been finally tamed is it not necessary to keep "renewing" the choice of virtue.

But how should one understand the meaning of "mastery of the precepts" from the point of view of a non-Arahant?

It's when you don't break them in the present anymore, and your mind has become relatively comfortable with them.

## Non-duality vs Buddhism

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok\_Watercress\_4596 2024-12-19 18:55:11

Hello, I have this question boiling for a while as it never truly got answered by myself or someone else.

I am trying to understand the difference between non-duality and arahantship. Non-duality is common among lay folks state of being that is another name for anatta from what I understand(I experienced it myself as well). A lot of people are trying to preach it, but there are notable differences in the lifestyle people live. I find it confusing that not necessarily restrained people get awakened all around which contradicts the words of Ajahn Nyanamoli and the Buddha that I have no reason to distrust. Is non-dual awakening not the purest and arahantship is the purest awakening or what is the difference?

Getting it to a more personal note, why would I want to leave lay life to become a monk if its not necessary? I will have to do it, even if I don't want to if that is what's necessary, but is it?

blind leading the blind, talking poorly of other traditions and teachings without understanding them because it's hard to stop clinging to Buddhist terminology.

Reality is not made of words, words are based upon reality

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-20 02:17:58

Non-dual awakening is simply one of the many possibilities for what the Buddha called wrong knowledge and wrong liberation. Notice that he doesn't deny the fact that there is a sense of awakening/higher knowledge and of being released from dukkha. But, perhaps contrary to one's intuition that any such experience/attainment must be right, he says that it's wrong, and that one who gains it is worse off on account of it than one who doesn't. Why is that? Because someone who finds a reliable way to cover up the symptoms of their illness will be much less inclined to seek the final cure to it.



Whether it's non-duality as discussed in Advaita, an experience of connection with God, or the supposed Nibbāna/anattā that most Buddhists experience through their meditation techniques—indeed, without making any fundamental changes to their lifestyle and devaluing craving and sensual pleasures a lot of the time, despite the Buddha's frequent injunctions to do so—are tools to allay and plaster over suffering that continues to arise. To use the famous parable from Advaita, you see a snake, and you remind yourself of your insight that it's actually a rope. This relieves the suffering, but *for the wrong reason*. It's a factual liberation, but it's rooted in wrong view.

Wrong view is the implicit assumption that something other than craving can be the root of suffering, i.e., not having discovered the ultimate non-dual truth, not having had a “glimpse” of Nibbāna, and pretty much anything that puts the burden of salvation on something outside of yourself that you need to perceive or come into contact with (hence the Buddha famously said one must “be an island to oneself”).

Right view is the recognition that the sole origin of suffering is craving: you suffer when you see the snake not because you still haven't been fortunate enough to have the great experience that reveals to you that in ultimate reality it's a rope, or that it's in a constant state of flux and is thus “empty of all intrinsic essence”, but because you still crave. Period.

When you reach liberation by uprooting craving itself instead of taking a roundabout way to remove dukkha, you cannot even begin to suffer ever again unless you want to (but such wanting is actually impossible), unlike with a non-duality/anattā insight that you could just forget. Thus, that liberation is “right”, and that is what true “Buddhism” is about.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-22 05:33:16 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

After Ven Sāriputta attained stream entry I recall Ven. Mahamoggallāna asked “have you seen the Deathless?” To which the the reply was “yes”.

To be more precise, the word was “reached” (*adhigata*), not “seen,” which highlights how it wasn't just a momentary event—it would have continued ever since. If it were there only for a moment and then somehow vanished, then it'd make little sense to call it “deathless”.

The wording is not necessarily the issue, but rather the implication that Nibbāna is something one comes into contact with, rather than the cessation of contact itself. Even if one refuses to call it contact and assumes it to be something greater, the nature of *being experienced having not been before* is what defines a contact regardless.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-23 03:12:43 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is it that what defines a contact is that it is a phenomenon not experienced in one moment but then is experienced sometime later?

Strictly, it's not the *definition*, but it is certainly a characteristic of every contact.

So the difference between that and Nibbāna that you're describing is that the cessation of experiences is a negative "phenomenon" uncovered through discernment and remains there perpetually available to an ariya, to the extent that they remember it?

Yes. One way to practically describe the cessation of contact, i.e., Nibbāna, is that there is nothing "new" to be experienced. Everything, without exception, is just form, feeling, perception, etc., and it will *never* be otherwise, not even in the most absurd imaginary scenarios. Complete "confinement".

For a puthujjana, owing to the gratuitous emphasis on the *content* of what he experiences, it will appear as if he wasn't experiencing what is there now in the past, or as if he will be able to experience something else in the future. That is enough to be liable to craving and passion. He doesn't need to make some specific wrong move for defilements to exist.

This is why you find passages like these in the Suttas, and why the precursor to Nibbāna is always said to be *understanding*, and not an experience that you just "have":

'The tides of conceiving do not sweep over one who stands upon these foundations, and when the tides of conceiving no longer sweep over him he is called a sage at peace.' So it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

By overcoming all conceivings, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace *is not born, does not age, does not die*; he is not shaken and does not yearn. For there is nothing for him by which he might be born. Not being born, how could he age? Not ageing, how could he die? Not dying, how could he be shaken? Not being shaken, why should he yearn?

Notice how it specifically mentions "conceivings", which you could practically understand as the implicit assumption that there can be *something* that isn't just form, feeling, etc. (or just the seen, just the heard, etc., as the Bāhiya Sutta puts it), such that the assumptions in regard to past, present, and future I mentioned above can arise. And often, views of Nibbāna being an "experience" go hand in hand with thinking that it's "outside" the aggregates, which, in light of all this, is clearly the opposite of what one is supposed to see.

You also get to see why Nibbāna is bound to be the opposite of joyful for one who still delights in the world. Instead of being some magical state that will solve all of their problems while leave everything else intact, it is the utter cessation not only of their sorrows, but of everything that motivates them to get up in the morning as well.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-24 07:04:02 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I'm used to thinking of it in terms of the meeting of the internal SB, external SB and the corresponding consciousness. Such as the case of me looking at these words on the screen.

Right, but that’s not what *phassa* is. As you rightly remember from Udāna 2.4 *phassa* exists due to appropriation, not because photons strike your retina or something like that (one of the many purely scholastic and conveniently easy misinterpretations popularized by the Commentaries, under which the Buddha’s descriptions of Nibbāna make no sense anymore).

Notice how the standard definition of contact doesn’t say that it’s only eye and sight “coming together”, but also consciousness. With the cessation of desire-and-lust (or simply appropriation) there isn’t that “union”, and thus no contact whatsoever, despite the eye and sights remaining intact. Consciousness is not “established”.

Hence, as the Buddha remarked, it’s purely for the cessation of desire-and-lust that the taught the Dhamma. Not for an “experience” of some special kind.

## Pitfalls in modern Buddhist emphasis on creating “kinder” internal narratives

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Devotedlyindeed 2024-12-19 12:53:58

In so many Buddhist groups, efforts are focused on taking up new narratives and ways of thinking. This can be useful in a number of ways.

New narratives can reshape the way we speak, both at present and in the future through habit-forming. The Buddha taught that in some cases, we can use wholesome thoughts to abandon unwholesome thoughts:

“Here, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is giving attention to some sign, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion, then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome... Just as a skilled carpenter or his apprentice might knock out, remove, and extract a coarse peg by means of a fine one, so too...when a bhikkhu gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated.” (MN 20)

Exploring new narratives can also help us see the world in new ways. Seeing situations in new perspectives is crucial for undoing deeply held beliefs, showing us the fallibility of perception, and bringing to light the reactions we have to our views being challenged. Are we like blind men fighting over the appearance of an elephant (Ud 6.4?)

Despite these uses of rewriting our internal narratives, this method can be broadly misused. Take for example an unpleasant human being, someone who insults and degrades us. “They’re mean and horrible,” we may be thinking. What are the chances that a modern Buddhist would tell us to find a way to feel compassion for them? “Perhaps they were abused as a child,” they might say, “and it’s simply their conditioning.” “They’re creating

the causes for suffering. We should see them as if they are injuring themselves.” Suddenly we don’t feel so angry. Anger solved, right? This may sound kind initially, but when rewriting a narrative, one should be cautious- extremely cautious- to examine the background intention. Is this example not an attempt to make the cruel person more tolerable? Seeing them as innocent certainly makes it easier to forgive, but not on account of our own growth in our ability to do so. This is yet another attempt to change the external world. We come to sickness and death, and are comforted with romanticized stories of how this is simply nature, and all is anicca; when we don’t get our way, we look for a silver lining. “Sukkhā-saṇṇā”, some might call it, if I am not misusing the term. This doesn’t change the fact that one is yet again seeking satisfaction and refuge by changing reality.

In those moments where we come to a point where we can’t explain it away, where there really is no further excuse (kind narrative) for which to reach (or when the mind tires of reaching,) we come once again to the fact of dukkha. We could spend our time learning and developing the ability to see our circumstances in a positive light, to create comforting narratives, but at the end of the day it will never be enough to secure us from our unsatisfactory experience of the broken world in which we live. Our endeavor is not to make our circumstances easier to accept, easier to tolerate, or more lovable.

Playing devil’s advocate against one’s own views and perceptions (or steel-manning, as Samanera Subhara explained) is absolutely critical to any form of true inquiry. An argument against my criticism is as follows:

“You can’t see clearly when you’re overwhelmed; better to lessen the intensity of the challenge.”

The commentarial metta method is the perfect example of this structure in practice. One starts by directing feelings of endearment (\*let’s call it what it is) at a dear object like a puppy, and learns to send these feelings toward increasingly non-dear objects. If one started with a difficult object, it would be like lifting the heaviest weights at the gym. Bringing this method’s structure to a difficult scenario, one might initially find it too difficult to accept/sit with/not react to a strong unpleasant feeling, such as grief for example. One might create a romanticized narrative (“they lived a life full of generosity!” etc) to lighten the load and recompose when in a losing battle sitting with pain. This argument is especially relevant to long-term painful feelings like grief because it is often not possible to sustain the willpower needed indefinitely.

The process is like climbing a ladder. (\*I had it in my mind that there was a source for this simile in the suttas, but I suspect it may have just been another narrative I heard.) One simply takes the highest rung that they can reach to safely pull themselves up, always striving higher. If they want to move towards the top, they don’t foolishly reach as high as possible and let go of all the lower rungs, because they will fall. One fears they might literally go insane if they just try to bear it all at once.

Against devil’s advocate once again (I was just going to leave it, but I can’t help myself,) I reach to the first verse of the Dhammapada.

“...When you speak and act with an impure heart, unhappiness follows as the

wheel of the cart follows the foot of the ox.”

A teacher once told me that when you act on wrong intention, the result is **always** bad, and when you act from pure intention, the result is **always** good. We may not see the immediate result of our attempt to get away from the unpleasant feeling for a few moments with an attempt to “think positive”, but despite the momentary relief, this is delusional. It is yet another cart wheeling along a rut, carving it deeper. Its result is a greater pull in the opposite direction from freedom.

Additionally, I wrote “lighten the load and recompose when in a losing battle sitting with pain.” Turning to the narrative for temporary relief, lightening the load, **is** a loss of the battle to sit with pain. It is choosing distraction, is it not?

I would especially love to hear from those willing to play devil’s advocate further, and those willing to argue the counters I made regarding 1. the risk of insanity from taking on too great a burden and 2. the sustainability of willpower.

Thanks for reading.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-20 02:36:54**

but despite the momentary relief, this is delusional. It is yet another cart wheeling along a rut, carving it deeper. Its result is a greater pull in the opposite direction from freedom.

Indeed.

There is something to say for lessening the intensity of the challenge to a degree that’s more manageable for where you currently stand, which is why the Buddha taught in terms of the Gradual Training, and wasn’t telling ordinary householders to try to abandon the five hindrances and enter jhāna. But that doesn’t mean one should start doing something completely unrelated to the initial challenge, such as the fully management-based metta meditation you alluded to.

If want to stop suffering in relation to unpleasant feeling, which is what the ultimate goal is, you have to train your mind in relation to unpleasant feeling. To avoid insanity and the requirement for an unsustainable amount of willpower, one can do that as slowly and gradually as one pleases, though it’s worth remembering that one’s time could be limited. But, as soon as your effort starts to involve changing the feeling into something else first, you’re not practicing for the same goal anymore.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-21 05:56:53 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It could be. Pretty much anything can become management, most especially when one isn’t sufficiently developed in virtue. That creates the need to “dampen” the pressure of phenomena, since letting them endure as they actually are would result in the mind buckling and sinking back into the world and distractions.

And once something has become repetitive, you can be sure that it's management either way.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-24 07:19:27 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So how do I prevent the repetitive nature of recollection from becoming a management technique?

See whether the kind of choices (those driven by craving) that led to things "getting tough" continue to be made.

Strictly speaking, virtue, restraint, and having a suitable environment are meant to prevent things from "getting tough" in the first place. Recollection comes later when those coarse disturbances are long gone but the mind is still agitated by subtler, comparatively minute cravings.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-24 13:46:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Great points!

## **Making the most of a coming "meditation retreat"**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Sukhena 2024-12-18 15:36:10

A few months ago, I signed up for a 10-day retreat that will start very soon. Reading the HH teachings, I'm questioning my practice accordingly. Because of that, I'm now wondering if this retreat could be a good opportunity to reflect on my practice and try to start practicing as the HH teachings advise. I'm still in the process of integrating the perspective shift these teachings bring, and I hope I won't just spend 10 days immersed in confusion.

Or maybe it would make more sense to just cancel this retreat and spend those 10 days alone, practicing sense restraint, reading, and reflecting on the HH teachings and suttas ?

i'd be glad to hear some thoughts on this situation, if possible.

Thank you very much for your time !

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-19 15:07:52**

If you'll get to spend some time keeping the 8 precepts and in seclusion on top of that, without any expectation to take part in "group meditation" (which is pretty much an oxymoron), then it would be beneficial, and at the very least, you'll get a palpable sense of how dependent your mind is on the pleasures and activities that you're used to. Just like

with any addiction, you simply do not see that clearly until those things are factually taken away, without being replaced with some other distracting activity (such as what people usually occupy themselves with during such “retreats”). Just don’t expect anything resembling genuine insight to arise out of a mere 10 days of practice, no matter how “intensive” it is.

## Sense restraint

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** noobknoob 2024-12-17 17:19:52

I’ve not been able to understand how to practice sense restraint for a while. Let’s say someone is restrained bodily and verbally, and dwelling in seclusion. Then, all sorts of intense and pressuring thoughts start arising.

As I understand it, sense restraint means to not let the mind dwell on unwholesome thoughts. But how does this work along with “enduring the thoughts”? What exactly am I not supposed to let the mind get into and what exactly am I supposed to endure?

Is it the “first arising” that’s supposed to be endured? If it is, well, as a puttujana I can’t discern that. What do I do then? Seems like the only choice I have is either to let the mind think what it’s thinking or just remove the whole thing. How do I actually practice sense restraint?

Also, can one take up virtue and sense restraint together? Or one should wait for some time after taking the precepts to start practicing sense restraint?

Thanks for reading.

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-17 18:38:20

But how does this work along with “enduring the thoughts”? What exactly am I not supposed to let the mind get into and what exactly am I supposed to endure?

More accurately, you don’t “endure” the thoughts. You endure the pressure to think certain thoughts.

So let’s say, pressure to go and do something against the precepts arises. Sense restraint means not only do you not go and do it (which is the first “step” of pure virtue that already needs to be established), but you also don’t proliferate and wallow in thoughts or fantasies about doing it, which could to some extent still be there for someone who has only established the precepts. But the key is that the pressure to proliferate will *still* be there, and if you try to get rid of that too, you are not training your mind, but are simply distracting it temporarily so that it doesn’t react in line with its still-ingrained tendencies.

That same principle taken to an even broader and comprehensive extent is how you fully “remove the fuel” from the five hindrances, as opposed to just suppressing the specific thoughts about them with something else. Having done so sufficiently, you cease to be

even *liable* to them for that period of time, and that's what *samādhī* is, and why sense restraint is a non-negotiable prerequisite for it.

It will take time and repeated attempts—provided all the prerequisites are in place—to become fully familiar with where the “line” between you thinking “out of” an arisen pressure and the pressure being there on its own is, but that's how you start to see the Middle Way very concretely.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-18 04:31:42 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

i don't think endurance of painful or unpleasant stimuli leads to any special knowledge or insight.

It does according to the Buddha, provided you don't conflate what we mean by “endurance” with pointless self-mortification like trying to endure physical pain in your knees, which is a common mistake.

The “pressure” we refer to is primarily mental, such as what you experience when your mind craves to do or think something unwholesome, but you choose to restrain yourself regardless. The Suttas sometimes compare this to pinning down a wild animal until it calms down.

It's also said that someone who is unable to endure (*khamati*, as in *khanti* or patience) the pressure of their five senses—which is what leads one to indulge in sensual desires—cannot attain right *samādhī*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-20 12:39:23 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

My advice would be to first establish the 5 precepts unconditionally. Determine to keep them no matter the discomfort you have to endure as a result of it.

It might feel mechanical initially, and that's not because of the precepts, but because you're not sufficiently clear about their purpose. And you'll be able to see their purpose for yourself when you've been keeping them unconditionally long enough.

Once the five precepts become easy, you do the exact same thing to upgrade to eight, and *then* you'll be able to practice sense restraint all the time, which is what you should really be aiming for.

It's possible to practice sense restraint temporarily if at least for that time you have resolved not to break the main precepts, but that is as effective as putting bread in the oven but closing the door only for one minute out of every 5—it won't get properly baked. Certainly not within the timeframe you need, at least.



## Is mind wandering necessarily unwholesome ?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-12-16 09:50:27

I was wondering if mind wandering is necessarily rooted in the 5 hindrances or ignorance.

If not, let's say I notice my mind was wandering, for example thinking about how I would write this very message. It doesn't appear rooted in either desire or aversion and in that case would choosing to keep thinking it be wholesome or maybe just neutral ?

If yes, well, let's say I'm aboard a train or walking in the street. Should I play hide and seek with mind wandering and just stop thinking intentionally when I catch myself thinking ? Or should I preemptively contemplate a theme, for example using the breath as a reminder that if this breathing body doesn't take the next inhalation everything will stop with me having no say in that ? Or any other theme related to the Buddha's teaching.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-16 18:20:52

No, "mind wandering" is what *vitakkavicāra* is, and the first jhāna is free from all unwholesome states despite still having "mind wandering."

The problem is thoughts rooted in greed, aversion, or distraction. Forcing the mind to stay occupied with a single object, no matter what it is, to prevent those things from coming up is a lazy and inevitably temporary fix.

When you want to train a dog, you have to punish it only when it makes mistakes and reward it only when it does the right things. There is no special technique or approach to dog training that can allow you to keep doing the same thing mechanically without having to notice what and how the dog is actually doing each and every time.

In exactly the same way, you need to contemplate and re-establish awareness of the right contexts *only* when you see that the mind wandering is currently going in an unwholesome direction, and that's what the Buddha instructed time and again. Otherwise, you won't be training your mind even if you're using the same reflections on paper; you'll just be adhering to some assumed notion of what the practice is and ignoring the actual state of the mind. And that's *sīlabbataparāmāsa* in a nutshell.

## Lofty aspirations

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-12-12 12:40:25

At several points in my practice there have been times where things become much clearer. The scale of Samsara and suffering, the unsatisfactoriness of anything in the world, and other things that lead to great dispassion, resolve, compassion, etc. These are the times of shaking up, pivoting, and doubling down to practice harder and abandon what needs abandoning. At times like this, I've made lofty aspirations and determinations that still drive me to one extent or another.

I was into Vajrayana and Mahayana when I first began learning about Buddhism, but I've overall inclined towards Theravada from the beginning, since I recognize that the Pali Canon contains within it the oldest, most authentic, most consistent teachings. One thing that remains from the course my path has taken is the desire to help others as much as I can with this life, and however many lives remain before awakening and before arahantship. I realized at some point that I *could* live my life in a way that does some minimum amount of harm and some maximum amount of good. This underlying determination to (eventually) live in such a way means that while I have gotten stuck and lost my authenticity many times, the drive to end suffering and recognition that I could live in such a way to do a minimum amount of harm (no harm, really) and a maximum amount of good means I've only stayed stuck for so long.

Now, aspirations can be useful. We use desire to end desire, conceit to end conceit. We want jhana a lot, and so we practice in a way to get it, which includes abandoning that desire. To be harmless is not optional in the end, and although this is achieved by *not* doing certain things, it is itself also the highest good you can "do". What I want to know is the proper place for aspiration to do good beyond that. Doing maximum good to help living beings.

This inevitably leads to the desire to teach. I am not at all qualified to do so. I think I would teach people if they asked as well as I could at the moment with whatever I know, but really one wants to be a sotapanna at least. I'd really want to be an arahant before I ever inclined towards *becoming* a teacher, if teaching would get in the way of work to be done. I've already seen the unwholesome things that can come from my aspiration. In the past I've attempted to teach people about what the Buddha taught to those who didn't ask and it hasn't done any good. It can easily become something to fantasize about. It can be used as a means of escaping the present, or shielding one from looking too closely at oneself and taking the practice personally enough by thinking too much about others.

Now, I recognize I can't take for granted the aspiration as I conceived it. I must know, what is a being? What does it mean to be truly help others? What is wellbeing? I can't know these things unless I'm awakened, so that must always take priority over ideas about others and doing good that will be incorrect unless one is awakened. The more I learn the dhamma the more I see how misplaced the idea of "saving living beings" is, but I want to know, how should I regard this sort of thinking, aspiring, determining, that I've spoken of? The Buddha didn't even incline to teach, which should really point to what the right attitude is. It's all suffering whatever I choose to do, but I'd like to help people.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-13 04:35:41**

You have to keep in mind that whatever notions you have about what enlightenment is and what you will gain from it are affected by your current ignorance and craving, and thus cannot be taken at face value.

The Buddha didn't even incline to teach, which should really point to what the right attitude is.

Indeed, which highlights that if your first thought is to try to help others, even *before* you have actually realized the Dhamma, there probably is a wrong attitude behind that.

If being able to “save” others is what carries delight for you, then leading the holy life for that express purpose would be an obstruction to progress.

## How is Mindfulness of Body Relevant?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Devotedlyindeed 2024-12-12 04:41:18

Simply put, I do not understand how the 1st Satipatthana is relevant to the endeavor we are undertaking. Is this simply a starting point for learning to direct and maintain awareness of what is happening inside of experience, or perhaps a starting point to questioning the reality of our perceptions? How does this practice relate to the process of finding right view?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-13 04:17:51

The purpose of mindfulness of the body—which includes Anapanasati—is to fully clarify the fact that not only the body itself, but anything whatsoever that you could experience is impermanent (since it will be on the basis of the body), and thus a mistake to delight in and appropriate. That is why it inevitably leads to Nibbāna.

Focusing on bodily sensations—which you won’t see advocated in the Suttas, yet is generally what contemporary notions about mindfulness of the body center around—is clearly unrelated to that goal.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-13 05:42:34 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

Well, thinking in terms of “proprioception” is where the problem lies. That will inevitably evoke connotations of focusing on sensations and minute movements, which doesn’t lead freedom from suffering any more than gardening does (in that it would take your mind away from it). And for anything to qualify as satipaṭṭhāna, it has to fulfill that criterion, since that’s how the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta starts.

Firstly, neither “mindfulness” (*sati*) nor “awareness” (*sampajaññā*) are the same as *attention* (*manasikāra*), so the tendency to try to focus and observe things in the name of mindfulness is clearly mistaken on that account alone. Furthermore, you don’t need to zone in on specific movements or sensations to *know* that your body is there, “underneath” your whole experience as an impermanent condition for it, even when you do mundane acts like extending your limbs. That background “knowing” is the purpose of that practice, so that you don’t forget what comes first, and thereby automatically assume that it’s *you* who comes first and is the master.

Closely observe your physical sensations is no different than getting absorbed in an external sight, since the actual body that you need to understand as impermanent is still there, “underneath” or “behind” that whole act and endeavor. But the focusing ironically makes you unable to recognize that.

but I suppose could help with keeping sīla.

Satipaṭṭhāna requires sīla being well established way beforehand, not the other way around.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-13 06:12:06 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Imagine you’re walking through a jungle that you know is teeming with venomous vipers. Without having to repeat to yourself “Deadly vipers! Deadly vipers!” constantly, you would have a background awareness throughout that entire journey that would influence your activities in that jungle, preventing you from becoming careless.

Now, extend that same principle to the body. No matter what you do and where you go, you don’t fully forget the fact that this mass of flesh and bone that your life depends on could get injured or destroyed without a moment’s notice, despite all your wishes to protect it.

If you start overly *attending* to that reflection and becoming absorbed in it, or in any other specific perception, you will lose sight of the actual body that is always a “background” to whatever you do or attend to. Similarly, if you start focusing on the sensations of your feet touching the floor as you walk, you will lose the awareness that truly matters in the jungle, and probably step on a snake sooner or later.

Therefore, mindfulness is not something you “do”; it must be established *in regard to* whatever you do, even on the mental level, and that includes the act of focusing. Some extent of focusing or attention is inevitable and necessary to function in life; the true problem is the *view* that focus is what mindfulness is.

Virtue and sense restraint need to be well developed already for proper mindfulness to be possible and sustainable, since the coarse mind of an unrestrained person inevitably “over-attends” and turns everything into a foreground. This is why the whole “meditation object” approach is what people usually find most congenial and can get on board with immediately, with no prior experience, unlike the true *satipaṭṭhānas* which, as shown repeatedly in the Suttas, require a lot of preliminary development and purification of one’s behavior.

## **How to reconcile SN12.19 with structural Dependent Origination?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Belozersky 2024-12-08 18:36:00

SN12.19 says:

/For an astute person shrouded by ignorance and fettered by craving, this body has been produced. But the astute person has given up that ignorance and finished that craving.

Why is that?

The astute person has completed the spiritual journey for the complete ending of suffering.

Therefore, when their body breaks up, the astute person is not reborn in another body.

Not being reborn in another body, they're freed from (re)birth, old age, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress./

The text seems to suggest that this current body is a result of ignorance and craving in the past lives. It also says that an enlightened person is freed from jati and jaramarana of the next life (since he doesn't take a new body), not of this life.

Do you think this sutta contradicts the structural (akaliko) DO? Is this an instance of 'objective' 3rd person DO?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-09 04:01:43**

The phenomenon of a new birth occurs *within* structural dependent origination, not the other way around. It's not like you get a new ignorance/craving for each new life. It's been the same one all along, and every new birth happens within that same "structure".

"Bhikkhus, it is said that no first point of ignorance is evident, before which there was no ignorance, and afterwards it came to be.

—AN 10.61

Structural, timeless dependent origination does not exclude the traditional multi-life interpretation; it *includes* it as an instance of the principle (although the emphasis is still different, with the latter being a mere explanation that doesn't free one from suffering).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2025-01-19 19:21:55 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

They basically *have* to.

And what should be described as subject to birth? Partners and children, male and female bondservants, goats and sheep, chickens and pigs, elephants and cattle, and gold and money are subject to birth. These acquisitions are subject to birth. Someone who is tied to, infatuated with, and has fallen for such things, themselves subject to birth, seeks what is also subject to birth.

(repeated for aging, illness, and death) —MN 26

And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; he is not shaken and does not yearn. For there is nothing present in him by which he might be born. Not being born, how could he age? Not ageing, how could he die? Not dying, how could he be shaken? Not being shaken, why should he yearn?

—MN 140

Birth is acquisition, aging and illness are deterioration, and death is final destruction. That general principle applies just as much to your sense of self as to things that sense of self takes ownership of, such as the body. Hence it's not like if you free yourself from attachment to the body, as the Buddha said a puthujjana can, you would be free from birth, aging, or death.

(This Sutta uses the same terms people often assume refer to “literal” birth only (e.g., the “descent” of name and form), and says that they cease as soon as gives up all “tendencies,” anusaya).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2025-01-20 04:57:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yes. Only with *upādāna* can there be *bhava*, as the Suttas say. From that you can tell that *bhava* is not simply the presence of things. When one “adopts” (*upādāna*) even the subtlest of things, to that extent there is [a mode of] being.

## **What is the extent of the 1st precept?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sillyguyyyyyy 2024-12-07 02:53:47

Does the first precept pertain to mites (like dust mites on laundry or scabies), parasites, and germs/bacteria?

In the Buddha's day, people didn't know about microorganisms or dust mites, so when they washed their hands or did laundry, this wasn't something they even had to consider.

My practical questions are: - Is this something one should be considering in regard to doing laundry (killing dust mites) and washing ones hands (killing germs)? - How can one keep the first precept in the case of a bacterial or parasitic infection (where the recommended treatment would involve killing the bacteria/parasites)?

I know that the precepts are supposed to help reveal your state of mind, and that killing (almost?) always involves at least one of the three poisons. I just genuinely don't know how to tell where the line is with the first precept so I would really appreciate hearing other people's perspectives on this, especially any monastics out there. I would love to hear WHY you are thinking about it in the way you are, not just what you would do in these cases.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-08 13:55:36**

You'll inevitably have to draw the line somewhere and take responsibility for that choice, based on a degree of common knowledge of what is considered an animal. You won't be able to come to a clear-cut conclusion always, and the general standard in the Vinaya is that if you're not sure about something, better not do it. Putting up with doubt with self-honesty is an essential part of developing oneself in actual virtue rather than mere external rule-keeping. From that perspective, lack of external clarity and definitions is an opportunity and not a hindrance, so that you have no choice but to look at your own mind.

That being said, we know from the Suttas and Vinaya that plants and fungi are not considered living beings. They indeed didn't know about germs back then, but I would place them in an even lower category than plants, which are better not to destroy without good reason. Not because of the first precept as such, but because other beings might live/depend on them.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-10 01:37:26 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yes, all these points are correct.

**Simile for Sensuality (1)**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** BestZebra6159 2024-12-06 16:55:37

In a previous thread on what craving is, I'd asked Ven. Anigha if understanding the hindrances would lead me to understanding the citta, to which Bhante replied yes. So I'll be creating a series of similes to communicate my understanding of the nature of the hindrances over the span of the next few weeks, and try to improve upon them after any feedback I get that I'm able to make sense of. I will divide this post into 4 parts: (1) the simile; (2) what the elements of the simile correspond to in terms of sensuality; (3) the implications of the simile; (4) my own questions. — *Simile:*

An individual finds themselves in the midst of a jungle with five hunters who can shoot them down with their bow-and-arrow, and of the five, there is one who is the chief among them with the rest following that chief's orders. The domain of the five is this jungle, prior to which comes a safe ground they cannot see or enter.

The five, not wishing for the individual's welfare or safety, shoot the individual in their domain with their arrows. On account of being shot, that individual – looking for safety, looking for freedom from being shot – further walks into the domain of the five to hide from being shot, or to destroy the various trees, plants, animals in hopes that doing so would provide them safety from being shot. They derive pleasure from the sense of safety they have achieved. However, on account of having walked *further* into the domain

of the five, that individual is now subject to even *more* torment and pain from them; that individual has risked their safety even more.

Not discerning as it is the gratification, danger and the escape in the case of being shot – the individual remains bound up to jungle.

What is the gratification? The false sense of safety derived from walking further into the domain of the five, thinking “surely, I will no longer get shot now”.

What is the danger? Remaining in, and walking further into the domain of the five.

- Why is that a danger? Because remaining in their domain keeps you *subject* to being shot again.

What is the escape? Not walking further into the domain, not remaining still, and running back to the safeground **on account of** having discerned the extent of the domain of the five, and seeing the **danger** always inherent in dwelling in there; this is the escape.

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*Elaboration on the Elements of the Simile:*

- ‘jungle’: the six-sense based body
- ‘trees, plants, animals’: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts
- ‘individual finds themselves in the midst of a jungle’: the fact that one’s (or majority of the individuals’) starting state is always that of appropriation of the experience of the six-sense based body.
- ‘five hunters’: the five hindrances
- ‘the chief among them’: hindrance of sensual desire; this is the chief since on account of this, one gets lured into the domain of the five, at which point one has to deal with ill-will on account of harm done towards one’s properties, the restlessness-and-worry that arises on account of having to think about how to protect them, and the fatigue, and doubt that follow.
- ‘the domain of the five is this jungle’: the five hindrances arise dependent on the body, having appropriated the body, one is subject to the five hindrances.
- ‘being shot by the arrow’: appropriated-experience of the five hindrances: sensual desire, ill will, etc.
- ‘looking for safety, looking for freedom from being shot’: one **always** does not want sensual desire, ill will, etc.
- ‘walking into the domain of the five’: further appropriation of the body on account of not seeing the danger of dwelling there. Equivalently, maintenance and fueling of the assumption that it’s the “trees, plants, animals” (i.e., that which is experienced on account of the body) which are the issue as opposed to dwelling in the domain on account of which you’re subject to the being shot in the first place.
- ‘they derive pleasure from the sense of safety they have achieved’: one thinks that finding a shelter *in* the jungle, or destroying the jungle *is* safety from being shot, and thus experience pleasure on account of it. In realistic terms, this would be the pleasure derived from giving into sensual desire, thinking that giving into it has resolved the problem of you being subject to the desire in the first place, the problem



you haven't even touched an inch, and in fact, the problem you've just contributed further to by giving into the desire and further appropriating the body. If one were to clearly see that destroying the jungle isn't solving the problem at all, the pleasure would cease to appear, i.e., if one were to clearly see that giving into the sensual desire never solved the problem that giving into it was intended to solve, it would be impossible to see giving into sensual desire as pleasurable.

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*Implications of the Simile:*

1. Taking 20 minutes out of your day to observe how it feels to be "shot" and watch that with equanimity, non-judgmentally, and from-a-detached-perspective, just to then go back to lashing out at the jungle for the rest of the day isn't going to solve the problem of you being-in-the-jungle in the first place, which was always the actual problem. And for that matter, doing that for 24 hours a day as a professional bhikkhu won't contribute to undoing your being-in-the-jungle either.
2. Digging an underground dwelling where you don't see the trees, plants and animals and where you're not getting hit by the arrows is also not solving the problem since the hunters know your exact location, and know that you're going to have to come out eventually, at which point you're subject to the arrows again.
3. Trying to destroy the hunters directly won't solve the problem either, because the hunters are experts at hiding and will never appear in front of you. All that'll end up doing is that you will end up further in the jungle, i.e., further appropriation of the body.
4. The hunters are also not the arrows, so destroying the particular sensual desire, ill will, or etc., the moment it arises by some "antidote" technique isn't undoing the hindrances. Applying an antidote technique like "pervading the world with metta" by thinking positive thoughts to get rid of the ill will is in fact simply "trying to destroy the trees, plants and animals" which were never the problem. The problem was dwelling in the jungle, walking further into it, on account of which one remains subject to ill will. And quite clearly spreading thoughts of good will to remove thoughts of ill will aren't undoing that dwelling at all, they're only pushing one further into the jungle.
5. Simply enduring the pain of the shots isn't solving the problem either. One has to make an effort to get back to the safeground, i.e., one has to walk back. Endurance is the first step to that.

So what is the escape from the jungle? It is:

Not walking further into the domain, not remaining still, and running back to the safeground **on account of** having discerned the extent of the domain of the five, and seeing the **danger** always inherent in dwelling in there; this is the escape.

"Not walking further into the domain" refers to the *endurance* of the hindrances. Whatever sensual desire/ill will/sloth-and-torpor/etc. arises, one endures that, and does not act out on account of that. "Not remaining still" means not engaging in neutral activities for long

periods of times which aren't contributing to your undoing of being-in-the-jungle but also not contributing to your walking-further-into-the-jungle. These would be non-sensual activities such as sleep, worldly duties, responsibilities, obligations. "Running back to the safeground on account of seeing the danger always inherent in dwelling there" refers to having discerned as it is, the extent of the body, the danger in dwelling "in" it, and not intending in any way that leads to the further "picking up" of the body. At this point, one makes an effort to discern whether there are still things one hasn't given up, on account of which one would walk further into the body, and make an effort to give up those things against the background of having discerned danger of dwelling in it. In other words, we get the gradual training: the eight precepts refer to "not walking further into the domain", "not remaining still" refers to being wakeful, and "running back" refers to sense restraint.

Having done this thoroughly, one abides in the safeground, or, the first jhana. This is my current understanding of jhana.

Given this perspective, it's entirely possible to achieve jhanas in the lay life, the only problem being that you'll be naturally hindered by a bunch of activities that have you "remain still" (work, responsibilities, duties, etc.). If a person had **thoroughly** established the perception of danger in regards to dwelling in the domain, it would be impossible to remain still; they would necessarily have to ordain since they would see that the army of death is always marching at them, and they never know when they'll be attacked, and seeing this, they would grow dispassionate with lay life.

Thus the rate at which one achieves the jhanas depends on:

1. How far one was already within the jungle
2. How much one does not tolerate being in the jungle

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*Questions:*

1. Is this an accurate understanding of the hindrances, and the escape from them? What needs to be improved in this picture?
2. If this is accurate, then what is the citta here? And what is the taming of the citta here?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-09 04:57:48**

Is this an accurate understanding of the hindrances, and the escape from them? What needs to be improved in this picture?

It is accurate theoretically. What's important to keep in mind is that, even more so than with anything else, it is impossible to accurately conceive of what the cessation of hindrances is without actually having realized it there and then. Not because it's a mystical state, but because that very attempt at imagination will be within the hindrances, and thus, associating that imagining with freedom from hindrances will be misconceiving. They are always "behind" you.

So how do you undo it? You make sure to maintain perspective within your inevitably limited perspective. To whichever extent you can discern something that's even more "behind" than the hindrances, such as the body as the container of your whole experience, you make sure not to fully forget about it regardless of what the hindrances "do." If you try to counter a hindrance directly, you will inevitably be feeding another one. And there is no chance to be able to discern neither them nor what is *actually* behind them unless one has stopped acting out of them for a long time, which is why the previous steps of the Gradual Training need to be fulfilled first.

If this is accurate, then what is the citta here? And what is the taming of the citta here?

Citta is what is constricted by the hindrances and pressures you to act out them and overlook them (and itself). Just like the hindrances, you won't be able to pin it down to this or that, and the attempt to do so will probably be your citta pressuring you to act out of a hindrance right there and then. So, it's also "behind" you. Citta remains invisible precisely to the extent that you are under the thumb of the hindrances.

## Is absorption always a problem?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-12-06 02:11:43

Is it wrong meditation to become absorbed into experiences while sitting?

Maybe I've misunderstood the talks I've heard and things I've read, but is it correct that if I'm meditating and become very absorbed into a pleasant feeling or a sensation or sight, then I'm no longer meditating correctly?

Can someone please tell me if there is any room for absorption on the Buddha's path?

To be completely upfront, I enjoy these states very much, but have been refraining lately because I've noticed they put my mind in a strong state of dullness and laziness, even when I'm not meditating.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-06 03:55:19

Is it wrong meditation to become absorbed into experiences while sitting?

Yes. Absorption = lack of perspective, and lack of perspective is what fuels ignorance.

The pleasant feeling that the Buddha praised is wholesome precisely because it corresponds with broadening one's perspective rather than limiting it. And that is the pleasure of renunciation, so it cannot be accessed before fulfilling the previous steps of the Gradual Training. "Absorption" is an attempt to bypass those prerequisites and get there quicker, but like most such attempts in life, it doesn't lead to the same thing.

**Can one use the senses to gladden the mind (appreciating nature, seeing children play, etc.) and is that practice useful for uprooting the three poisons? I'm finding it difficult to understand how laypeople can find the fruit of stream-entry.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** 25thNightSlayer 2024-12-05 19:00:02

I've been investigating further what sense restraint and renunciation means in practice to clear my confusions. I came across Thanissaro Bhikkhu's article (<https://www.dhammatalks.org/books/>) and it does make sense, but I wonder if this is optimal practice to root out the causes of suffering. How do I truly know if I'm getting to the root of the poisons and what does that look like for laypeople who are immersed in sensuality?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-06 03:33:35**

Can one use the senses to gladden the mind (appreciating nature, seeing children play, etc.) and is that practice useful for uprooting the three poisons?

Pleasantness on account of such things may potentially arise on its own, but it's far from something one should actively delight in and "use" to gladden the mind. That pleasure is still based on the senses, and delighting in it will maintain your appropriation of them, even if in a more refined way than more carnal pleasures.

How do I truly know if I'm getting to the root of the poisons and what does that look like for laypeople who are immersed in sensuality?

Laypeople who are immersed in sensuality have to un-immense themselves and start practicing sense restraint if they want to get to the root of the three poisons. Otherwise it's like continuing to smoke while trying to treat lung cancer.

You will be able to know you're getting to the root of them if you first of all see them in your own mind for what they are, and that will only be possible if you stop giving in to the actions that they push you towards. That basically entails no longer living like an ordinary layperson.

**Are Bhikkhu Bodhi's sutta translations problematic?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-12-05 03:16:46

If so, what is recommended by the Hillside Hermitage/Samanadipa community?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 03:41:44**

In terms of fidelity to the Pāli, he is often the best of all the major translators. But it's worth keeping in mind that when something is unclear from the Pāli itself, he will sometimes present the commentary's interpretation as if it's what the Sutta says. Hence, it's good to always check an alternative translation, and the differences you spot will highlight things that merit further research.

what is recommended by the Hillside Hermitage/Samanadipa community?

I plan to make all early books of the Canon available in full on our website eventually, though I'm placing emphasis on a different project at the moment.

**Distracting thoughts**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** No\_Squirrel4617 2024-12-04 19:50:53

I'm in need of some practical advice on how to go about undistracting myself from my thoughts. When I am in isolation, it's easy for me to not get carried away by unpleasant and pleasant feelings because they are so painful, and the context there is solid. However, when it comes to neutral feelings, I find myself already far down the line, and I need to bring it back and repeat. Unfortunately, I have been unwittingly cultivating this, and now I am trying to undo it for obvious reasons.

Can someone with experience please share how to practically go about this? Also, if someone has some material on the matter, it would be appreciated.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 04:10:46**

If your mind keeps trying to wriggle out of the neutral feeling, that can only be because you still sometimes indulge in pleasure and resist pain when you are not in seclusion. So make sure you are not doing either of those, in any form, and then your mind will have no choice but to get used to and stop running away from the neutrality. Any other "solution" than that will amount to ignoring the neutrality with another internal activity, and that's when your practice becomes a "technique", even if you're not strictly focusing on an object.

**Does the Hillside Hermitage take on jhana actually make sense in anyone's experience?**

**Subreddit:** r/streamentry | **Posted by:** 25thNightSlayer 2024-12-04 04:54:14

From what I gather, HH takes modern talk about jhana as chasing after pleasure. But, I'm not sure what they actually mean by this. Pleasure of the body developed through wholesome abiding is what modern approaches teach so I'm not seeing the contradiction

between HH and teachings from Burbea for example. Anapanasati feels good in practice. I've experienced bodily pleasure from meditation, but is that to be ignored? What is HH trying to convey?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-06 14:04:31 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

It does not “exclude” it. The point is that, as mentioned in my reply quoted in the root comment above, the Suttas don't say that one arrives at a calm mind free from hindrances by working with pleasant sensations, but entirely the other way round.

As a result of freeing the mind from all forms of compulsion, starting with sensuality, bodily pleasure will be experienced. And sure, bodily pleasure is experienced through sensations, but the sensations are not what jhana is. Jhana is the withdrawal from hindrances and unwholesome states, and the bodily pleasure serves as a proxy for the strength and depth of that withdrawal, thus pervading the body with it means that one is becoming *even more* aloof from unwholesome states.

Making the pleasant sensations themselves the goal instead of the seclusion from all forms of thirst is trying to take a shortcut in vain, since it turns it into a sensual practice, and thus not jhana.

**Why are Leigh Brasington's jhana teachings frowned upon when the Buddha spoke of a pleasure not to be feared?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** 25thNightSlayer 2024-12-04 04:42:05

Leigh teaches the classical gradual training: sila, samadhi, panna. The anapanasati sutta clearly suggests utilizing feelings of wholesomeness that arise in the body which lead to calmness. Metta for example is also felt in the body. Where is the line drawn between sensuality and wholesome bodily feelings? Why isn't there more engagement with Leigh's teachings by HH when they have led to transformative insights by many people such as Kim Allen etc. who teach suttas. Is there anyone here that claim to experience jhana in the way HH describes them?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-04 12:20:58**

Where is the line drawn between sensuality and wholesome bodily feelings?

One of the main ways the line is drawn is the fact that the correct, wholesome bodily pleasure *requires* no longer valuing sensuality internally nor engaging with it externally. While Leigh Brasington's teachings (and most others in the mainstream) may recognize the importance of *sīla* on a basic level of the five precepts, they don't emphasize the recognition of the danger of sensuality and withdrawal from it, internally and externally, to the

point that's necessary for entering jhāna. The pleasure of sensuality is not just inferior and less peaceful in comparison; it has to be seen as a factual *threat* to your well-being:

“Bhikkhus, having not given up these six things, it's impossible to abide having entered upon the first jhāna. What six? Sensual desire, ill will, indolence-and-lethargy, restlessness-and-anxiety, and doubt. And the peril of sensuality hasn't been seen clearly as it is with right understanding. **Not having given up these six things, it's impossible to abide having entered upon the first jhāna.**  
—AN 6.73

And how has a bhikkhu seen sensual pleasures in such a way that he does not harbor desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensual pleasures [i.e., abides free from the hindrance of sensuality]?

Suppose there was a pit of glowing coals deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals that neither flamed nor smoked. Then a person would come along who wants to live and doesn't want to die, who wants to be happy and recoils from pain. Two strong men would grab each arm and drag them towards the pit of glowing coals. They'd writhe and struggle to and fro. Why is that? For that person knows, 'If I fall in that pit of glowing coals, that will result in my death or deadly pain.'

In the same way, when a bhikkhu has seen sensual pleasures as like a pit of glowing coals, they have no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensual pleasures.

—SN 35.244

The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five cords of sensual pleasure is called sensual pleasure—a filthy, ordinary, ignoble pleasure. Such pleasure should not be cultivated or developed, **but should be feared, I say.**

Take a bhikkhu who, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, abides having entered upon the first... second... third... fourth jhāna. This is called the pleasure of renunciation, the pleasure of seclusion, the pleasure of peace, the pleasure of awakening. Such pleasure should be cultivated and developed, and should not be feared, I say.

—MN 66

The Buddha also never taught that you enter jhāna by focusing on your bodily sensations. He didn't teach anapanasati as a concentration object for entering jhāna as is widely thought today, but for developing the four satipaṭṭhānas (MN 118). And even there, he doesn't say that you focus on the sensations of your breathing, it says you establish mindfulness *while* you breathe. Mindfulness the four satipaṭṭhānas, none of which involve physical sensations.

When he did speak about jhāna, the way to attain it was to reflect on the danger in sensuality and the five hindrances, preceded by the thorough abandonment of any activities rooted in them (virtue and restraint). There isn't any instruction in the Suttas for enter-

ing jhāna any other way. If “reflecting on the danger” sounds too abstract and one needs something “more palpable”, it’s only because the basis of restraint hasn’t been fulfilled to the necessary degree. It’s not yet apparent how unpleasant and agitating sensuality and craving are because one keeps giving into them to some degree. The first step of the Gradual Training is not just keeping the five precepts as external rules and being a better person, but “seeing the danger in the *slightest* fault” (i.e., the slightest greed, aversion, or delusion). And if someone can attain true jhānas, there is no reason they would have difficulties with such renunciation.

You also cannot truly calm the hindrances, even temporarily, by observing and calming your body on the level of sensations. That practice is just a subtler form of sensuality, which is why it will never fully take you beyond it. Pleasant bodily sensations are one of the 5 cords of sensual pleasure, and you would be actively *seeking* them in that practice, but the Buddha said that passion, desire, and wanting for those 5 things is precisely what sensuality is.

When he described the development of samādhi, it was in the opposite order: once you’ve sufficiently cultivated the right way of regarding the hindrances—as a debt, an illness, etc.—and thus given them up, the body eventually follows suit. This means that to overcome the hindrances and enter jhāna, you need to understand what it is that agitates and disturbs your mind in the first place (which, again, will begin with things that you do in your daily life). Ignoring the entire domain of your intentions and mental states to focus on direct physical sensations and trying to make them pleasant is like quickly putting a pacifier into a toddler’s mouth or giving it a tablet or phone to distract it, never addressing the reason why it was crying to begin with.

they have led to transformative insights

It’s often assumed that “transformative” automatically means beneficial. There is such a thing as wrong insight and wrong liberation (AN 10.105). What you will hear touted as “insight” by those who teach such practices is essentially glorified cognitive reframing strategies that help you manage the symptoms of the illness of ignorance without addressing it at its core. They may well use the same concepts—three characteristics, Four Noble Truths, etc.—on a superficial level, but those insights are used for a very different purpose: as a tool to deal with and dispel instances of suffering that still occur from time to time, whereas for someone who actually understands the Dhamma, suffering and defilements are permanently unable to return despite the most extreme circumstances, even if they never revisit any of their insights again.

Nobody denies that such practices can bring mundane benefits. But it’s a severe error to equate them and their results with the Dhamma, akin to mistaking oxygen therapy and painkillers for an actual cure to a pulmonary embolism just because the symptoms go away for a while after you’ve used them.



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 02:05:59 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Quite simply, *vedanā* are not sensations, and this is apparent from reading the Suttas carefully. A few examples: the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta says that there are *vedanā* of the flesh and not of the flesh (*niramīsa*). If they were sensations, they would always be the former. Furthermore, you would no longer experience *vedanā* beyond the fourth jhāna, which MN 111 shows is very much not the case. *vedanā* only ceases in *saññavedayitanirodha*, long after all perceptions of the five senses have been surmounted. Lastly, MN 74 says that one cannot experience more than one type of *vedanā* at a time, which a cursory investigation will show is not the case with sensations.

may i ask how you consider vedananupassana - is this to be conceived of as mindfulness of feelings arising from the senses? or even mindfulness of sensations?

Just as the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta says, one should be mindful of what kind of *vedanā* is there overall at the time, without having to focus on a specific sense base.

Sensations are the external counterparts of the fifth sense base, exactly like sights are to the eye. In the same way as a sight, being pleasant, unpleasant, or neither can be a *quality* of a sensation, but it's not the sensation. Thus, it's no more accurate to equate *vedanā* to bodily sensations than to sights, sounds, or tastes.

I suppose "affectivity" would be one way to translate *vedanā* as it is used in the Suttas.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 02:22:45 (in reply to a comment not included)**

so they had to drop something(s) to enter a jhana right?

Correct. What one has to "drop" is the five hindrances, which, as described in SN 46.51, is done by starving them of fuel through *yoniso manasikāra*, not by replacing one object causing a hindrance with another object such as the breath. The latter would only "transmute" the hindrance into another one in relation to the new object.

It's certainly not the case that just through external renunciation a person will abide in jhānas at will, although practically speaking that is the vast majority of the work. Once that's done, one has to abide in seclusion for prolonged periods of time (which is why that's what always immediately precedes abandoning the hindrances), and that will start to reveal the "signs of the mind" (*cittassa nimitta*) more clearly (my essay on the topic). Referring back to what I wrote above, that practically means "understand(ing) what it is that agitates and disturbs your mind in the first place", which is nothing other than intentions rooted in craving. At the point we're discussing, those intentions are already quite subtle and would not be visible from the outside, whereas in the beginning they would've been coarse external indulgences of breaking precepts. That's the refinement that unfolds through the Gradual Training.

Only when the signs of the mind are sufficiently seen is it possible to gain peaceful abidings in the present experience, i.e., jhānas. To use the simile in that Sutta, meditation techniques taught today are akin to the cook who doesn't *discern* the subtly implied wishes of the king for what they are, and instead serves him dishes based on his own preferences or some cooking manual he has read.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 02:50:34 (in reply to a comment not included)**

“Mindfulness **of** in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit.”

The Pāli doesn't actually say “of”. The term *ānāpānasati* can be interpreted as “mindfulness in relation to breathing”, and that interpretation is verified by Iti 85, which separates the compound into “*ānāpāne patissato*”, i.e., “mindful *in regard to* in and out breathing” (unfortunately the translators seem to overlook that subtlety, however).

Mindfulness (or remembering) also isn't the same as *attention*, so it makes little sense to say that one is practicing Anapanasati *by virtue of* attending to the breath regardless of what one interprets the preposition between *ānāpāna* and *sati* to be.

I read the above, from MN 118, that mindfulness can be anchored by focusing on the qualities of the breath, or breath energy in the body, as Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu puts it.

The “focusing” part is a very common assumption and is never actually mentioned in the discourse (or in any other in the Canon, for that matter). If anything, focusing is discouraged. “Breath energies” are never mentioned anywhere either.

The first satipaṭṭhāna is mindfulness of the body, including breathing? So, this would seem to also indicate mindfulness of the breath / physical sensations?

Body > physical sensations is quite a jump, and it's taken for granted in contemporary Buddhism without a second thought. The body is the internal counterpart of the six types of sense objects, corresponding to the conglomeration of the six “internal” sense faculties. Thus, equating the body with sensations is fundamentally no different than equating it with sights or sounds.

In SN 35.238, the Buddha says that the internal sense bases are empty, hollow, and void, like an empty village, and that they are “attacked” by external sense objects, a type of which would be bodily sensations. So equating the body with sensations is a failure to distinguish between the empty village and the attacking thieves, which nobody would do with the eye or the ear, but is easily done when it comes to the sense of touch just because physical sensations seem more “intimate”. But in the Buddha's definition, they are *external*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 03:58:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Depends on what you mean by “encompass”. If you mean that both physical sensations and mental phenomena can be a basis for *vedanā*, then that would be correct, and is how the Suttas describe the relationship. If you mean that *vedanā* can **be** either physical sensations or mental phenomena, then no, and that would confuse *vedanā* with *saññā*.

The simplest illustration of the distinction is in how in some cases the connotation that a physical sensation carries can make you either pleased, displeased, or indifferent, even though the sensation itself remains unchanged. That’s why self-harm is a thing at all.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 05:48:23 (in reply to a comment not included)**

i use ‘sensations’ in the sense of anything coming from any of the six the sense bases, so i see a difference of definitions and not understanding.

I see. I guess that’s possible, but using it in that way would probably be misleading for many, since the Vipassana tradition equates *vedanā* with tactile perceptions, where “body scanning” is supposedly *vedanānupassanā*, and that understanding has seeped into other modern traditions.

i wasn’t sure what you meant re MN74 - i didn’t grasp how more than one type of vedana can be experienced at a time for bodily sensations. could you clarify what you mean by this?

I meant that we can experience more than one physical sensation at a time, which rules that out from being *vedanā*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 06:52:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Simply replace “giving **close** attention” with “giving **proper/correct** attention”, which is the meaning of *sādhuka*. Moreover, the physical sensations of breathing are not the in-and out-breathing any more than the sensations in your mouth while speaking are your speech, so it’s gratuitous to place the emphasis on them either way, exactly like trying to practice mindfulness in regard to speech by watching those sensations.

A feeling being seen among/within feelings means that the feeling present while practicing *anāpānasati* will be seen with *yoniso manasikāra*, i.e., one will be the exact opposite of absorbed in it, and instead completely detached, dispassionate, and equanimous in regard to it, even if it’s the most sublime pleasure, thanks to the mindfulness in regard to breathing that has been established already.

In contrast, the way anapanasati is almost always practiced today is just an internal way of chasing after pleasant feelings, in much the same way as one used to pursue sensual

pleasures. When it says “experiencing joy, I shall breathe in, etc.”, it’s not a willful, sensual fabrication of pleasant physical sensations while breathing. Truly wholesome joy comes from abandoning the five hindrances, which are *mental defilements* (*cittassa upakkilesā*).

Thus, in order to practice Anapanasati while experiencing joy, the person needs to already know how to abandon the five hindrances through *yoniso manasikāra* and not just suppress them with a concentration method—hence the Right View is required—and then while that joy is there on account of a mind liberated from the debt, illness, prison, etc., they see it as conditioned by the breathing that could stop at any moment, and thus as impermanent, such that there is not the slightest room for ownership in regard to even that wholesome pleasure. There will be no ownership even in regard to the most acute discernment of impermanence and letting go, which is the last tetrad (and that points to how the Right View is being taken for granted there; otherwise one doesn’t have any understanding of impermanence to disown in the first place). As defined in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the goal of all the four is to “abide independent, without taking up *anything* in the world”, and that is what Anapanasati fulfills in a very acute way.

Thus, Anapanasati was given to noble disciples in MN 118, so that they would obliterate the subtle traces of ownership and mine-making, even in regard to the Dhamma itself, that were still barring them from Arahantship, as a moving cart would scatter a large heap of sand. And that’s why the Ānāpānasamyutta centers around touting how it will completely destroy all impurities if practiced rightly (i.e., by a sotāpanna or higher). Modern teachers would themselves acknowledge that the breath meditation they teach cannot *in itself* destroy the fetters. They instead see it as a self-hypnosis tool used chiefly to lull the mind into a trance state, at which point one puts the breath aside and tries to get a glimpse of some mystical hidden truth. There is none of that in the Suttas.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-05 07:23:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

What you’re referring to is that you can only *focus* on one sensory phenomenon at a time, and that’s quite correct. But there is a totality of sensory phenomena which precedes your attention, and you are able to choose to attend something specific within that. That is why no matter how engrossed you are in one sensory experience, a change in one of the aspects of that totality that you were not focusing on can snap you out of it (e.g., starting to feel cold while engrossed in a book).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-06 03:00:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Even if we decided to call the movement of the air element “breath energy”, the greater problem is that the usage of that concept has nothing to do with freedom from suffering or with actually abandoning the hindrances, but merely giving oneself something to entertain oneself with that is less coarse. The Buddha didn’t teach to “play” with the air element as a means to calm the mind down. He in fact called the four great elements

“four deadly vipers” that one should run away from (i.e., develop dispassion towards) so “playing” with one of them and basing one’s pleasure on it is not exactly something he would’ve encouraged.

On the other hand, in the very act of practicing Anapanasati properly, one would be understanding the air element as a deadly viper and developing dispassion towards it. Hence it fulfills the seven awakening factors (for a noble one) and culminates in complete relinquishment of all being. But that is generally not what Venerable Thanissaro’s conception of wisdom is. It’s rather a management-oriented view of letting go of fabrications to let go of dukkha—which is an endless task—and the permanent liberation is supposed to come from contacting a mystical, unfabricated reality supposedly outside the five aggregates, and not, as the Suttas describe, from full understanding of the mundane reality of the five aggregates in and of itself (which ironically includes such lofty experiences too, no matter how much one thinks it doesn’t).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-06 03:19:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

How different is the concept of focusing on the breath when compared to the first foundation of mindfulness which is mindfulness of the body which includes knowing that one is breathing (short or long and so on)? Are we getting caught up in semantics when trying to draw a distinction here?

I wouldn’t say so. The first and most important difference would be that focusing on breathing sensations will not reveal what the body actually is any more than focusing on a visual image will reveal your eyes. The practice of Anapanasati described in the Suttas is to be mindful of the body *while* breathing, which is a very different thing, and means that one must be able to discern the body properly *first*, the point being to undermine any sense of fundamental ownership over that body even though the act of breathing, let alone coarser acts.

What do you make of other prominent Theravada monks like Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sona, Thānissaro Bhikkhu, Bhante Gunaratana, etc who promote “focusing” on the breath (in my use “focusing” and “mindfulness of” may be the same)? In other words, why is there a divide on this issue among monks?

They are simply engaging in yogic practices unrelated to the Anapanasati taught in the Suttas, which was not taught as a focusing object that could be replaced with any other arbitrary object or sensation, but as a way to develop full understanding of the nature of intentionality/action and abandon it, which is how it directly leads to eliminating even the subtlest of fetters. It was also only taught to monks who were not content with anything less than full liberation and had aligned their entire lives with that goal, and not to lay people looking for just about anything that helps them cope with the stress caused by their own lack of restraint without having to actually address it. The general interpretation of mindfulness as focusing is also at variance with the Suttas.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-07 02:00:40 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Depends on what they do the other 22 hours.

**Is unshakeable conviction only available with Right View?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-11-30 19:18:35

I lack conviction to the point that when I hear one teacher, I am totally on board with what they are saying. But then, when I hear another teacher with a contradictory message, I agree with them and disagree with the one I previously agreed with. This lack of conviction in a solid interpretation of the Buddha's teachings is leaving me feeling like I'm getting nowhere despite a lot of effort. Then I think I just don't need a teacher and should "know things for myself" - but I even lack conviction in myself. After all, if I could end suffering on my own, wouldn't I be a Buddha? I've heard the advice of, just pick one teacher or one tradition for a while and see where it leads you. But, I can't authentically do that with the background awareness that this *\*might\** be the wrong way.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-01 10:44:21**

Focus on what the Suttas unambiguously tell you to develop, which is virtue, self-restraint, and not tolerating greed, aversion, and delusion. You can't go wrong if you do that, and any teacher who would have you omit those practices and do something else entirely isn't teaching the true Dhamma.

If you've established that foundation to some extent, you'll be in a better position to see for yourself who is worth listening to and who isn't, and won't have to take their words on faith, or see who can sway you more with their outward presentation.

**Peripheral Awareness Clarification - Extent of Immediate Knowing**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Queasy-Astronaut9546 2024-11-30 01:53:39

I understand the common description of peripheral awareness being like an anchor that you throw out and let it drift away. You don't directly attend to say, the body itself or even the thought of the body being there. You recognize it being there as the container for your experience, there regardless of what you attend to particularly, and let it endure on its own. That makes sense.

However, what isn't clear is the extent to which something is known "in front of you" in this practice. From the above description, the "anchor" simile, it sounds like what you are presently aware of in front of you doesn't matter. Meaning, you could have no inkling of the basis after establishing it - the fisherman isn't constantly thinking about their anchor,

and they might even forget whether it's down or not. Which implies then that you go about doing other things and the start and end of peripheral awareness is recognizing the yoni once and then it can literally vanish from your entire sphere of immediate attention and that doesn't matter.

But then in the video "Q&A on peripheral awareness" AN clearly says the difference between a normal person who knows, for instance, that their body is present and one who is practicing peripheral awareness is the "awareness of it" - implying that the importance of "you being aware of the background" goes beyond how I described it above.

What I'm guessing is that while you don't want to be constantly making sure you still have a body, which is indeed ridiculous, YOU do want to have that thread of knowing that you know your body is there - which is reflexive, (was confusing to me at first) knowledge OF your knowledge. So you recognize that you already know - not nothing, but something particular - that your body is present. And THAT isn't let go of. You do keep that thread "in front of you" but without making it your sole object of attention.

So it's not that peripheral awareness is tossing the anchor and forgetting about it. You know you tossed the anchor in, you keep that in mind, which means in the sphere of your attention. But it's the mind's knowing that matters, NOT something YOU do because you know. The effort required is not to keep it there necessarily, but to re-establish it (in front, or literally in your immediate sphere of perception) when it falls away. Which happens when you completely forget. In view 1, it's like the forgetting I just mentioned IS the point, and you're meant to take on faith that \*something is happening behind your entire sphere of perception and immediate knowledge. But then even the mind wouldn't know right?

Am I correct with my attempted answer? I have realized that I won't ever be sure if I'm correct until I hear from one who understands this for sure, because both sides of the interpretation (completely letting it go from even your sphere of attention, keeping it there just a little bit IN FRONT OF YOU, in the domain that you do attend to) have a good amount of evidence to support them from the perspective of being unsure. I do lean towards number 2 being correct if I had to guess, but would not be surprised at all if the answer ends up being "you're overthinking this, number 1 was more correct."

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-30 05:11:49**

I do lean towards number 2 being correct if I had to guess, but would not be surprised at all if the answer ends up being "you're overthinking this, number 1 was more correct."

It is closer to #1 than #2. The way you describe it, #2 sounds like it would just result in directly attending to a mental sense object, as elaborate as it may be, which is not yoniso manasikāra.

The point is that the things that you can and should recollect are already there in your experience, whether you attend to them or not. So the goal is not to attend to them constantly to get some sort of result, but to train your mind so that it *keeps perspective* over

whatever is going on. And perspective is not something you can attend to; it's something that "colors" your attention, so to speak.

The act of thinking about the body is a separate thing from the perspective of the body. Thinking about the body *rightly* "triggers" the perspective of the body that was always possible to have because the body comes first. So it's not like you have a choice to continue to attend to the anchor or not. If you *can* keep attending to it, it's not an anchor/perspective in the first place. It's not sati. It's a mental sense object that could have uncovered the perspective, but since you misconceived it as having some use in and of itself and became fixated on it, it won't actually do so. That's why right understanding needs to come *before* mindfulness, not the other way around.

All this being said, it's not that your attention is completely irrelevant. It does matter somewhat in the sense that sense restraint needs to be your mode of being, and seclusion and non-distraction are also necessary at times when you want to truly strengthen the perspective. But within those prerequisites, the training is to put the perspective first and your attention second.

## Would the monks from HH or Samanadipa consider creating a discord?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-11-28 18:37:13

This way we can have some guidelines in discourse, a central area for resources, voice channels for sutta study, and maybe even regular Q&A with the monastics. Plus the sense of community might be beneficial.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-29 11:17:35

I don't think Discord is as suitable for serious Dhamma discussion. I find the instant messaging style can make one more inclined to type something quickly in the moment instead of deeply reflecting on the topic before posting a reply, and that might encourage pointless conversation and banter much more than the slower-paced, forum-style Reddit format.

## How to endure the pressure of unwholesome mental states properly

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** No\_Let\_3303 2024-11-28 04:03:37

I'm trying to get some more clarity on what it practically looks like to properly endure unwholesome states such as craving for sensuality, ill will etc. For me it seems that the confusion comes from the mano getting overly involved in the immediate pressure. For example a craving for food will pop up i immediately recognize it as an issue and then it



goes away but then I think to myself, that seemed to easy, did I just unknowingly distract myself from it by acknowledging it as unwholesome? maybe I should try to discern where it's coming from right after the moment of its arrival because it's still fresh in my mind. Then another part of me is like no you can only discern that if your mind is unhindered which would be impossible if an unwholesome state just arose lol. I think I might just be overthinking it so I'd appreciate another perspective on this please.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-30 03:37:43**

This all sounds like a broader hindrance of restlessness and doubt that's making you look for the problem on an overly particular level of individual thoughts, where it actually isn't. And it's not about “catching things in their arrival” in a momentary, focused attention sense, as if unwholesome states could suddenly pop into your mind without you having any say in it. Indulgence is always intentional, so all you have to do is ask yourself whether you're willingly delighting or harboring hateful intentions against something, and if the answer is no, then whatever remains is not your responsibility.

## **What is meant by “Reflexive eye” and does internal have two meanings?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-11-28 02:50:42

I'm often not confident I understand some terms correctly or fully, and seek clarification. I've included my understanding of more terms on the eye to see if those need correction.

“But there is a further point. The body (or senses) in its mode as a material object perceived (or imagined) by other senses, is in the world. This is important; for it is the correlative to the description of the material body(or senses) as the reason, or instrument, whereby there is a perceiver and a conceiver of the world. **(Reflexively described the eye is, in fact, the perceiver and conceiver of the world-the atta-: but neither reflexive eye nor Atta is to be found.)** As soon as conception of the world (lokamaññanā) ceases, so, of course, does the world-and at one blow the body (or senses) ceases both as what is indicated by the conception of the world (i.e. the phantom perceiver and conceiver) and as a thing in the world. (Remember that Atta and loka are correlatives-atta is what is indicated by loka.)” - \*StP, L.92

My understanding is there's:

External eye: the appearance of an eye, in a mirror or another sense, or in the body of another individual.

Internal: The sheer negative that meets forms externally. “As long as one cannot see the full extent of their negative nature, one will assail them with the assumptions and mis-perceptions, because of which the internal senses will *exist*[bhava] and *appear* (either reflectively as some view or another, or being confused with their external counterparts.”

- *Meanings*, N.59

“Matter because of which one can perceive and conceive the world” - *Meanings*, N.60

“If experience were confined to the use of a single eye, the eye and forms would not be distinguishable, they would not appear as separate things.” - *NoD*, phassa

Image of the eye: When one looks in the mirror and reflects on an eye, the image that is negative to the external eye, which may be confused for the internal eye, but is actually the object of Mano, and thus another external.

Reading further, I just noticed in *Meanings* N.65 Ven. Nyanamoli says “The meaning of ‘internal’ is limited to ‘one’s own body’ and to nothing else, but the reasons are different than what you suppose... You say:”But my eye as I see it in the mirror or touch it with my hands is an *internal* eye according to MN 28, because it belongs to ‘this body’ like the kidneys.” This is absolutely so, but again the only way to know that that eye belongs to the body, the only way to know it is internal is externally, because internally the eye (or any other sense or bodily organ) cannot appear to itself. So the eye that you see in the mirror is indeed an internal eye, if by that you mean “*that* because of which there is seeing in the first place.” Thus an eye is *that* organ, that thing in the world because of which there is world. And it is this *dimension* ‘because of which’ that differentiates internal and external. And the same dimension, or rather the ignorance in regard to the same dimension is responsible for the appropriation of the world and senses (“that because of which one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world”). **To put all of this simply: it is the appropriation of one’s body and senses as *mine* that makes them *internal*** (cf. Ven. Ñāṇavīra saying that in the subject-object pair the subject doesn’t appear, and in the sense organ-sense object pair, the sense organ doesn’t appear; ignorance in regard to this superposition and the identification of sense organs (i.e. one’s body as a whole) and the subject occurs.)”

The letter goes on.

I don’t get why he’s calling the eye one can see in the mirror internal. It’s external, out there. And is the appropriation part about discerning internal here and external yonder from the there of the experience as a whole?

I didn’t plan for the latter half of this post and now I’m quite tired and confused from reading and thinking so maybe I’m missing something obvious.

I appreciate any help to see where my understanding is correct or incorrect. Thank you. I’ve read this stuff a lot so I’m surprised that this confusion has come up. Sometimes it feels like understanding comes and goes. I seem to progress the most by obsessively reading and contemplating but it’s exhausting, especially the reading. I’ve messed around with my own perceptions in the past, even without drugs. The most regrettable is intensely determining what I’m reading in front of me as the immediate, direct communication of the highest importance from an *other*. I did this very intensely and the effects were strange, but what lingers now is that reading can be oppressive because of it. I don’t know if that makes sense but please don’t try stuff like that.

Edit: Regarding internal, I think last night when I posted this I wanted to look over or deny the fact that I guess I already knew internal refers to the closest body (Which can only be known as internal, externally, as an appearance through another sense), **and** also refers

to the pure negative “field” that external forms arise in. I don’t understand why the words are used this way. There is the appearance because of which there is seeing, but if we’re talking about a reflection in the mirror, to call it internal seems wrong. I guess using the word “internal” is better than using “your” when teaching the dhamma. One can’t be in the position of the senses. Experience as a whole comes first. “Closest body” should be seen in reference to the “directional experience as a whole”, while it will inevitably first be taken as “closest to **me**” and be caught up with views and assumptions about the internal and/or appropriating consciousness. It’s hard not to view oneself as the one behind, the one watching.

Edit 2: maybe I was getting mixed up because it’s external to consciousness, but it still want to say it isn’t an internal eye, that it’s a reflection in the mirror. Perhaps I’m being pedantic and it isn’t wrong to say it’s the appearance of an internal eye. I know he says “is indeed an internal eye, if by that you mean...” but it seems wrong to call an eye I can see internal. I would have used the wording “the appearance because of which there is seeing” instead of calling an eye I can see internal, but perhaps that means the same thing. I think it comes down to internal does appear, to other senses, but I got mixed up because it is also said of them that they are sheer negative and don’t appear, except through views or assumptions. It might just be that I want to deny it too much. Or maybe I might just want to make sure I’m not assuming that the reflection is that form, and assuming “this is the appearance, but the form **is** something else”. The “is” being the problem because it implies its existence.

Edit 3: I can’t reconcile the internal being sheer negative and also appearing. Right now I just wanted to type “Those appearances are perceptions, and I don’t see because of perceptions (but because of form.)” But oh, isn’t that interesting? Regarding the two meanings of internal, I think an appearance because-of-which there is seeing can be found, which one would normally consider “my” body. I feel this is only internal in a certain sense. The sheer negative, however, does not appear. I keep reaching a point where it seems clear the senses do not exist, but then it’s lost and I wonder how I got to that understanding. I think this is the point of circling around appearance and existence, and assuming the senses located somewhere and I need to stop searching *onwards* and start searching further *into* the experience.

I’ve made a few edits to this post. I think the main thing is wanting to assume the body or senses being somewhere. This is probably a confusing post to read and I think it contains some repetition and contradictions, but if anyone has any pointers I’m very grateful.

Here is letter 92 of StP

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-02 03:35:48**

I don’t get why he’s calling the eye one can see in the mirror internal.

Note that he qualified this by

if by that you mean “*that* because of which there is seeing in the first place.”

The only way that eye can be perceived is through external means (including a mental image of it), but if you don't misconceive the perception/image of the eye to be that because of which there is seeing—but also without denying the perception and insisting in coming closer to the “real” eye... through another perception—then the internal dimension can be revealed peripherally. So it's not that the reflection of the eye in the mirror *is* what's internal, but you certainly would not be able to discern the internal without it.

When the “internal” is discerned rightly, all the thoughts and perceptions concerned with the eye are still intact, but none “stand” for the internal eye anymore. So even the most engaged thinking and reflecting on the eye, which is real as such and doesn't need to be denied, cannot get you to misconceive those thoughts as actually *being* the internal eye. And you also don't imply that there is some *other* manifestation of the eye you can access that is somehow more real or valid than all the others: *that too* would be a misconceiving, no matter how subtle that manifestation is. Still, it would also be wrong to say that the eye “doesn't exist”, since you clearly experience sights while knowing that if someone impaled those fleshy orbs you see in the mirror, that would no longer be the case.

The purpose of all this is not abstract pondering, but revealing a sense of complete “confinement”, of never being able to reach beyond the pre-determined limit no matter how hard or accurately you try, and only then can the actual impermanence of the eye become apparent—it's completely inaccessible by anything that you can intend, but nevertheless you know it's there. Thus, the ludicrousness of assuming that you could avoid its abrupt destruction and lamenting if it comes about is revealed. When that is the case, you won't be able to take the eye as yours even if you want to—true *\*anattā\**—and that's the end of suffering. Anything less than that, and you *will* be taking it as yours, no matter what you do or tell yourself.

This talk may be helpful. It's more about the body in general, but it's the same principle of not allowing any images and thoughts of the body to imply that they *are* the body, and instead staying mindful of the “actual” peripheral body while those thoughts are there, being careful not to overly objectify *that* into a new thought. That's the practice of *sati-paṭṭhāna*: putting the thoughts about the body second to the body, i.e. seeing body within body. And the result is the same, a sense of complete confinement, which might be unpleasant initially if you're not well developed in virtue, but at the same time frees you from the burden of ownership if maintained long enough.

## How to take care of myself during burnout?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** serculis 2024-11-26 20:08:31

Well, I am officially burnt out from work. It's crept up on me gradually and went unnoticed, then the final straw just broke the camel's back. It's become poorly managed, we are all suffering from low morale, our concerns are not being listened to, the upper-ups are making terribly unprofessional childish decisions and it is having ripple effects across the company. I'm emotionally exhausted, not motivated, feeling cynical about the patients I see (having irrational bouts of restrained anger towards them that I know is wrong). This

has happened a few times since I started the job 4 years ago. Work is just a rocking ship being hit by the waves at the moment and it will take a while to settle.

The problem is it's affecting the rest of my daily life and I don't know how to actually overcome it under the new context of virtue. Every bit of advice I've looked up online recommends yoga, ""meditation"", journaling, talking to a therapist, travelling, socialising etc. and nothing from what I've seen is actually wholesome. There was a video I saw where NT talks about people deluding themselves into relaxing from a hard day of work by watching a film and further making themselves restless and agitating the senses instead of just actually sleeping... and yeah, unfortunately I'm in that camp. Simply sitting around doing nothing feels like drowning to me, and I understand that it is completely my fault for not overcoming my habitual use of technology and I'm bearing the fruits of my wrong actions. I am coasting with my virtue and I realise this now. I'm gonna have to have a real read of these posts and essays because I feel lost on how to start it. The only thing I'm good and confident with is my eating, but the pressure to eat as a coping mechanism is becoming stronger and stronger and I feel sick from all of it. It's the only thing I can continue to restrain myself when times are tough but I am wondering whether I should "allow" myself a treat in the same way that a heroine addict is given a small dose of methadone to taper off their addiction in a controlled manner. Despite that, I feel repulsed and burdened at the idea of doing it, which I don't know how to interpret. Everything else however I find myself delighting at "allowing" myself to do (youtube, films etc.)

Is there anything I can do right now to properly take care of myself? Or is this exactly what NT was talking about - "when things were going your way, you haven't been keeping your mind in check". My burnout is a result of my circumstances, but the actions that I have taken have made the situation worse and now all I want to do is vent to people, quit my responsibilities and distract myself every second of the day, and the pressure of restraining myself in any regard is making me feel sick.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-29 16:19:11**

Or is this exactly what NT was talking about - "when things were going your way, you haven't been keeping your mind in check"

It sounds like it very likely is.

The burnout is in itself not something you necessarily could've had prevented. Sometimes the mind will become fed up with certain things, and that's not your fault, nor does it *necessarily* involve ignorance or craving. What you're responsible for and does involve ignorance is the fact that when things get unpleasant like that, there is still the valuing of sensuality and distractions as means to escape the pain. The extent to which there is still that tendency to seek pleasure in response to suffering shows you the work you have to do; the goal is not to prevent the burnout itself. And, counterintuitively, if that tendency was not there, no amount of displeasure could make you suffer internally, precisely because you would no longer resist it or hope to replace it with something else.

“Allowing” yourself even more things will not be a long term solution to this in any capacity; it will only reinforce the same wrong view that external pleasures are a solution to the pain generated by your own craving, and absolve you from having to tackle the craving itself. At the same time, if you’ve been severely neglecting your mind and letting it get wild for a while, it will may be difficult to abruptly restrain everything, so my advice would be (1) recognize that the pain of burnout is not in your direct control and don’t try to deny it (2) make sure that you are not backsliding with your virtue and restraint even further, since that will only make it harder to get back on track. Find things that you *can* restrain without it being too painful—one of them might be speech and actions rooted in anger or annoyance—and work your way back up from there.

All of this should also serve as a lesson of why it’s better to start containing yourself long before the mind starts getting out of control, since painful situations will inevitably arise sooner or later, finally making you feel the weight of the craving that you’ve been building up.

Craving, and thus suffering, can only subside if you stop providing the fuel for it through your own actions and wrong ways of attending to phenomena in your experience. Everything else is either a very flimsy fix that may even make the problem worse, or just wishful thinking.

## What is craving?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** BestZebra6159 2024-11-26 20:06:32

I believe I’ve made a grave error in understanding craving thus far. Initially a few years ago, I used to identify it with the sensation of heat present in the body when I inclined towards sensual pleasures.

Then I realized that that’s not craving since we’re not trying to change bodily reactions. Up till now, which has been at least two years, I’ve been identifying it with non-physical “force” (what I believe HH designates as ‘pressure’) directing the entirety of my being towards something.

If a sensual image arose, that force would be present towards that image, this force isn’t the physical feeling of heat that’s accompanied by it. And I thought the presence of this is an issue, and that it’s the power of this force that I need to reduce. It made sense to me that the cessation of this force would be peaceful, since if it ceases then it doesn’t really matter how unpleasant the external situation is, it was this force that was the issue. But it never made sense to me how I could change the power of this force since I didn’t choose for it to arise as such. So I thought the practice was to figure out how to intend in a manner such that it would lead to the diminishing of the power of this force, and the complete cessation of this force would be the cessation of suffering.

To give a practical example. If someone says something insulting to me, then it’s unpleasant to listen to that, and unpleasant to be in that situation as a whole. But there’s that extra force present in that situation which feels almost as if it’s pushing me to act and

say something back, and I thought that this force is the craving, and what needs to be removed.

Now I'm starting to suspect that perhaps craving is none of this. Now I'm thinking that craving is the **intention to resist** what is present. And this actually makes sense, since regardless of the situation, fundamentally, I am responsible for intending by way of body, speech and mind in terms of whether I resist the situation or not.

Now on a similar note, on account of this, I've come to conclude that delight and craving are different aspects of the same phenomenon. Both of them refer to a kind of intention. Craving is intention to resist what is present, but simultaneously, that intention implies an intention to "pick up" (not in a literal sense; i.e., to make one's own) what is not present. So craving and delight go hand-in-hand.

When there's craving (the intention to resist what is present), there is necessarily delight (the intention to make one's own what is not one's own), but one must intend in such a manner **only if** the extent of "what is not one's own" is not adequately recollected **and** the dangers that accompany alongside it. Namely: that that which is not yours is subject to change. It doesn't matter at all how strong or weak that force is, or how that force operates, one's job is to maintain perspective in regards to what is not one's own, the implication of that, and intend in accordance with that perspective established. When that perspective is genuinely maintained on account of having thought and pondered upon the dangers of delight, it would be impossible for one to delight in what is present.

The enlargening of this perspective, that is, the enlargening of the recognition of the extent of things which are not one's own, and acting in accordance with it (i.e., you drop delight in regards to even more things gradually), is the practice. Until eventually, all craving/delight (intention to resist/intention to make one's own what is not) cease, trivially, because all those intentions have been undone. And this is the cessation of suffering, and this only naturally implies gradual training is the **one and only way** towards it.

The issue now is, seeing the connection between this (A) intention to resist and (B) the presence of suffering. I regard seeing the fact that "A iff B" as precisely the attainment of Right View as HH defines it. One could logically derive that suffering implies an intention to resist and vice versa, but such an exercise is of no practical use in terms of inducing an intuitive shift in one's understanding of the world and consequently, one's previous habits. Previous habits being namely, regarding of the arisen phenomena (including that "force" that seemingly pushes one towards things) as suffering. So I would appreciate it if I could get the following from the community:

1. An evaluation of my understanding of craving/delight and the practice described in the 2nd last paragraph and beyond.
2. How it is that one *sees* that A implies B and B implies A. Or in another words, (1) what it is that obstructs the seeing of that; (2) why it is that that obstructs the seeing of that; and (3) what it is that leads to the removal of those obstructions.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-29 04:34:44**

But there's that extra force present in that situation which feels almost as if it's pushing me to act and say something back, and I thought that this force is the craving, and what needs to be removed.

You could also say that this too is "an intention to resist", or craving or delight. It's just that you're not directly responsible for it, i.e., it's not volitional, and you also cannot simply choose to stop it. That pressure has accumulated due to your past volitional choices of resisting what is present, as you put it. So if from now onwards you were to no longer exercise intentions of resistance *even* in regard to that "extra force" (which automatically rules out any sensual or averse actions), it would diminish. Like a fire that dies out when not provided any further fuel for long enough.

Where people usually go wrong is that once they've established restraint and no longer act out of coarser pressures, they think they are justified in resisting that "extra force" because it's bad, not realizing that that very act is an intention of resistance/craving, which is the sort of intention that led to that force being there to begin with. Thus, it's only a slightly less coarse form of the same vicious circle (denial as opposed to indulgence). Hence our frequent insistence on "enduring things on the right level", even when it comes to the pressure of unwholesome mental states.

(1) what it is that obstructs the seeing of that; (2) why it is that that obstructs the seeing of that; and (3) what it is that leads to the removal of those obstructions.

- (1) The "extra force", i.e. the five hindrances.
- (2) Because everything one does becomes subtly rooted in avoiding the arisen discomfort of the pressure/"extra force", whether it be to just appease it by indulging in the objects it points to, or trying to remove the pressure through aversion. Both attitudes blame the issue on the pressure and miss the greater goal of not fueling craving, which is where the suffering truly comes from, not the pressure itself.
- (3) No longer acting out of any "intentions to resist" by following the Gradual Training long and diligently enough.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-01 11:22:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I had overlooked this aspect. However, it seems you're trying to say that that force is the citta, or the wild animal/child we're paired up with as recent HH videos have been discussing. Am I correct?

Yes.

So that means citta can intend on its own?



No, it's not quite that it "intends on its own". It's more like it pressures you to intend, and because you're either unaware of that—you don't see the signs of the mind—or are simply careless, you intend what it wants you to intend.

In (1) you state that the extra force is the hindrances, so I understand that to mean that it's the *citta*, i.e., the wild animal which is hindered. The hindered *citta* pressures. I had thus far thought that it was the pressure (the felt sense of "you should do something about this situation") that was craving, which had to be destroyed, but this is mistaken.

You can say that the pressure of the hindered *citta* is a form of craving, and it also has to be destroyed. But you cannot do so directly. Only by ceasing to engage in craving yourself will the animal eventually be tamed. If you act out of aversion to the pressure of the animal, you're acting out of craving, and thus continuing to agitating the animal in your very attempt to tame it.

it's not the hindered *citta* which is the problem but rather, what one does on account of it being hindered

The hindered *citta* is a problem. It's what will obstruct any attainment of higher wisdom. It's just that you don't fix the problem of the hindrances by acting out of more hindrances, i.e., aversion to the pressure of the *citta*.

one cannot but see that it's the intention and intention only which is the problem, and that would be the understanding which constitutes Right View?

The Right View would be fully understanding the indirect method through which the mind is tamed, which again requires enduring the pressure of that same mind without aversion or impatience, but without denying that the final goal is to overcome that pressure.

Another point that's important to consider is what a tamed *citta* actually is. It doesn't mean it's focused on a single object and doesn't "move" at all, which is more like a temporarily lulled *citta*. It means it no longer pressures you regardless of which objects you attend to, and that's what *samādhi* is.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-12-01 20:00:56 (in reply to a comment not included)**

In other words, what is the "greater harm" that the ill-directed mind inflicts on us? Why should we tame this animal that isn't ours?

Because it inflicts pain on you, and pain + ignorance = craving (on "your" part), and craving on your part feeds the craving of the *citta*, because of which it then inflicts more pain, and so on. So taming the *citta* is not the same as abandoning ignorance, but it's an indispensable prerequisite. *Samādhi*, i.e., pliability and unification of *citta*, is absolutely not optional; it just has nothing whatsoever to do with "absorption" and meditation techniques.

You can say “the citta is not me/mine”, and that’s true in theory, but the fact remains that if you haven’t tamed it, you are the one who has to experience displeasure due to its tantrums when it doesn’t get what it wants or gets what it doesn’t want. Yes, you can and should endure those pressures no matter how intensely they arise because the *citta* is not yours, but in the end, some extent of pliability of it is necessary for true knowledge to take root. But that pliability itself comes out of enduring the *citta*’s pressures, so you actually catch two fish with one net (which is another way of saying that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are inseparable).

And why is pliability necessary? Because ultimately, you alone cannot understand the Four Noble Truths as they really are, as all “you” can do is deal with abstract concepts and ideas. The *citta* needs to cooperate for those concepts and ideas to be seen concretely, and it won’t do so if it’s still restless and defiant, just like a child:

When his mind (*citta*) has become composed like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of defilements, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—he extends *it* (*cittaṃ abhininnāmeti*) towards the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes. He understands as it is: ‘This is suffering’ ...

—MN 39

...

The issue, more accurately, is *why is it that it’s the citta which harbors the five hindrances?*

The question “why” is kind of irrelevant and would fall into metaphysical speculation. But you can see for yourself that it isn’t *you* who harbors the hindrances simply because you cannot get rid of things like anger or anxiety as a matter of choice. You have the option to follow them, try to override them with external distractions, or to simply endure them, but still, they are *there*. Thus, it’s not “you” who creates them, and that aspect of experience which is not “you” but nevertheless puts the most intimate sort of pressure on you is called *citta*.

So will it be correct to say if I understand what the five hindrances are, I will understand the citta? Because if I were to understand the five hindrances, I would have to understand where they are and why they are there and not elsewhere. To understand “where they are”, I would have to understand the nature of the citta.

Yes, that’s quite correct. Understanding the nature of the citta concretely and accurately, AKA “seeing the signs of the mind”, is the same as understanding the five hindrances, and both are prerequisites for the Right View.

And here we arrive at the reason why virtue and restraint from sensuality and ill will are on no account negotiable, and are the prerequisite for purifying/taming the citta (which is in turn the prerequisite for purification of view). Only if you have been enduring the pressure of the citta long enough by not spilling out into certain actions on account of it can you start to get acquainted with what a hindrance actually is—you will “feel” it whether

you like it or not—and that familiarity gets refined as you ascend the stages of the gradual training.

## Practical Practice

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Wild-Brush1554 2024-11-25 15:24:57

Hi everyone! Im still figuring out how to practice properly, Ive been watching dhamma talks and reading some material for about 10 months and now I want to develop a very serious practice.

I am keeping good sila, following the 8 precepts other than eating once a day, but I do my best not to eat with craving.

I have also been practising anapanasati, because what I have learnt is that in order to gain insight into reality through Vipassana one has to have great concentration, jhanas etc.

But now after going through hillside hermitages talks I can see that right view is an essential prerequisite for meditation. Am I correct in saying so? If I am then does my meditation practice which is aimed at increasing awareness, concentration in order to cultivate jhanas useless( since i do not have right view)

If so how do I actually practice? I do from time to time sit without doing anything and broaden my awareness, this has not been too challenging as my mind doesn't pull me too much with distractions, however it does still go into thought patterns from time to time, often reminiscing fun times and doubting my practice, buddhas teachings etc. Do i still continue this? And how is one supposed to measure progress and know that they're doing it correctly or that the method is working.

Also how does one contemplate? Do i just think of something and keep trying to get an answer until i find the root cause?

What should be the 1 thing I should focus on right now? And is there a step by step kind of checklist i can follow, so I focus on something or a few things now and once i am good with them i move on to the next?

Any help will be appreciated

Thank you

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-26 04:01:35

If I am then does my meditation practice which is aimed at increasing awareness, concentration in order to cultivate jhanas useless( since i do not have right view)

With or without right view, increasing awareness and concentration (by focusing on an object until your mind gets fixed to it, presumably) is not the way to attain neither jhānas

nor insight, and you won't find such instructions in the Suttas. Freeing yourself from the five hindrances, which is a very different thing, is the way to achieve both.

If so how do I actually practice?

The Gradual Training is what leads to the eventual overcoming of the five hindrances. That's the "checklist" you should follow. If you're already keeping the precepts well, the next step is sense restraint, which isn't about not seeing or not hearing, but about making sure that whenever you do intentionally pay attention to something, it's not rooted in greed, aversion, or distraction. The goal of the gradual training is to progressively develop the ability to directly discern the presence or absence of the three poisons at the background of whatever you are doing, saying, or thinking. When your intentions have been purified from defilements for a while even on the most refined level, you enter the first jhāna (but it will most likely take a long time to reach that point).

It's worth noting that at no point do you try to "stop thinking". Such effort is rooted in subtle aversion, and the first jhāna is composed of thinking purified of hindrances.

Also how does one contemplate? Do i just think of something and keep trying to get an answer until i find the root cause?

No, that would be more like abstract psychologizing. Reflection should be directed at dispelling defilements if and when they have arisen. Not to get rid of them, but to develop clarity about how it is that *you* are acting out of them, and to remind yourself of why you shouldn't. When you're not being controlled by unwholesome states as far as you can see, you can try to develop clarity about the nature of your experience—the body, feelings, the Four Noble Truths, etc.—and that would in turn withdraw the mind from defilements even more.

What should be the 1 thing I should focus on right now?

Understanding and recognizing what greed, aversion, and delusion actually are. That's what leads both to the right view, and to the ability to purify the mind from those things, which is what "meditation" and *samādhī/samatha* proper are about.

## Humility in the face of criticism

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** devot3e 2024-11-25 10:35:03

What do you think about the following phrase?

"If you have an issue with someone and they're 99% in the wrong, and you're 1% in the wrong, you should apologize."

I was taught this by a mentor and have found an interesting phenomena occurring when I employ it in practice.

Recently someone was criticizing me partially fairly, partially unfairly. Typically, I find myself believing narratives in an argument: blaming them or something else, because un-

der the surface I am deeply not okay with being flawed. I justify my actions in a desperate plea to escape the painful feeling of not being good enough, and when the truth is incontrovertible, it feels like death. I slip into a strange mixture of self-hatred and humiliation, all the while still justifying.

Following the example, I found myself apologizing for that in which I was wrong, not defending myself whatsoever, deciding to be humble, to not be caught up in this person's opinion of me as right or wrong, to not try to "fix" the pain of being blamed. And giving the person the benefit of the doubt in whatever ways they were unkind. However, it's so difficult to see intentions. I suspect some of this was actually fear of being a trouble maker, and wanting to identify myself as the more mature person- yet another attempt at not seeing myself as flawed.

The Buddha taught we should treasure criticism. And we shouldn't react to the pain of it, obviously. But many of us have built up so many "coping mechanisms" over time in reaction, that the waters are muddy. True non-reaction just isn't accessible to this muddied mind, because the intention to not react here (at least as I'm describing above) just converts into another unwholesome reaction.

I feel like I can't fix it on this level because I can't see. Perhaps just a matter of trying repeatedly toward more pure conduct despite not seeing, walking that line until the mud settles with sila. Or perhaps this is not the root, another symptom of a deeper thing to be addressed.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-26 04:16:17**

However, it's so difficult to see intentions. I suspect some of this was actually fear of being a trouble maker, and wanting to identify myself as the more mature person- yet another attempt at not seeing myself as flawed.

It's easy to make the mistake of looking for "intentions" on that overly broad and abstract level, but fundamentally, it can only be three things: desire or non-desire for pleasure, aversion or non-aversion to pain, and distraction or non-distraction in regard to neutrality.

In this case, the solution is not to find the perfect course of action that would've prevented those unpleasant feelings from arising. It's to not resist displeasure in the first place. That resistance is the root of the entire issue and suffering, so if you were to remove that, *whatever* you did or said—whether you apologized or not—would be fine and would not lead to suffering.

Perhaps just a matter of trying repeatedly toward more pure conduct despite not seeing, walking that line until the mud settles with sila.

Indeed, if you want to make your mind less prone to resisting displeasure on the fundamental level, you need to stop doing things that are rooted in resisting displeasure or chasing after pleasure. You can't suddenly teleport back to baseline when you're no longer pleased with the mental state your actions have been building up.

## Is Buddhism only for monks and nuns

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-11-25 02:15:04

If meditation is only for those with Right View, and Right View is likely near impossible for a layperson to attain in the modern world, then what exactly is the purpose of Buddhist practice for laypeople?

How is someone who isn't ordained and staying in monasteries on a regular basis, really supposed to attain stream entry, let alone enlightenment?

I could be wrong, but the practice for lay people that is put forth by the monastics at HH is to keep the 8 precepts and refine sense restraint. Basically, that turns the entire practice of Buddhism for a layperson into denying yourself the basic pleasures of life that everyone else around you partakes in, and to cut yourself off from society in a major way (basically becoming a monastic but without the benefits of living in a society with a shared lifestyle), and without the joy and tranquility of meditation.

I'm struggling to see the point in that kind of practice, especially when you can still follow the Buddha's teachings and be a good person keeping 5 precepts and meditating.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-25 13:58:04

I'm struggling to see the point in that kind of practice, especially when you can still follow the Buddha's teachings and be a good person keeping 5 precepts and meditating.

Sure, that's perfectly possible. Although 8 precepts are the standard we set, it's expected that hardly anyone will follow it. It's mainly for the benefit of the few (lay)people whose sense of urgency is strong, and who refuse to live with the very real possibility that they will die or lose their health and ability to practice before attaining the Right View. There are many such people who may end up not realizing their potential if they're not clearly told what it takes to do so.

But anyone who isn't too concerned about the possibility of not reaching the ultimate goal and is content with just being a better person is free to not take it that far. But they will at least have heard the message, and will hopefully be a bit more inclined to take responsibility for their own choices and their consequences, rather than blaming their failure to realize the Dhamma on something else (which is what many if not most modern traditions would incline one to do).

So, in a sense, no "Buddhism" isn't just for monks and nuns. But Nibbāna, which is something else, is only for those who are willing to regard *all* craving, regardless of what the rest of the world thinks and what clothes they wear, as equally problematic.

## Is the realization that sensuality is a thorn, a very dark realization?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** ChairOk548 2024-11-24 01:48:33

I suppose this question is coming from a putthujjana's point of view, but if all sensuality is suffering and to be abandoned.. Then what's left?

Everything that is seen as desirable by society, even fundamental things like being a good parent and spending time with your children, are now seen as trapping you in suffering.

At that point you would likely live the rest of your life avoiding most engagement with the world, simply out of necessity because acting out of any craving will trap you in suffering. This feels dark to me. Please tell me how this view is wrong. Thanks.

Edit: thank you for the replies

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-24 12:29:53

Then what's left?

Dispassion and detachment, which initially appear painful only because of one's passion and attachment. To an addict, it may feel as if never using his drug again would deprive his life of any meaning, but if he successfully overcomes his addiction, he'll come to see that there is, and always was, a lot more to life than the pleasure the drug gave him. He'll then see that what he (and probably most of the people he associated with) regarded as pleasant was actually a self-destructive pathology all along, and that the truly "dark" thing is to be in that state.

That being said, the practice is a lot subtler than just avoiding everything that's pleasant.

## Doing and not doing

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-11-23 14:12:16

I understand one isn't supposed to do asubha when lust arises, or metta when anger arises, as a reaction or attempt to fix things. The problem was that the thing arose in the first place. One doesn't train the mind not to move by moving it, so you should just endure the mind rightly and let that which has arisen cease on its own.

I just watched the video "Why are you not an arahant yet?" It's an excellent video on seeing the real cause of suffering, or a feeling of inadequacy in our current state. Not in the things, not in the mind, but in that attitude towards the mind. "Why is that a problem?" It always comes back to feeling. The example in the video was Thaniyo's presently enduring tired, dull mind. Following the line of "Why is that a problem?" it reaches an attitude in regard to feeling, in regard to mind. An assumption that things should be otherwise (or that the attitude could make it so).

How does this relate to the Buddha's instructions on seeing our unwholesome qualities like a dead dog around our neck, or earnestly striving to abandon them? To the Buddha's instruction regarding the factors of enlightenment, and when to cultivate which factors, based on whether the mind is sluggish or restless? SN 46.53

I have a strong compulsion to fix things and do something. I recognize this as an issue. I'm learning to sit with things and question why I want to fix things. My mind is still looking for something to do. My efforts are going from coarser to more refined, but they still feel too coarse. Now when the mind is tired(most of the time) I recollect the dhamma and investigate to stir up energy. When it's restless, I try anapanasati or have a cup of tea, or otherwise try to settle down. I don't know if these efforts are misplaced. There was emphasis in the video on not doing things for the sake of getting rid of or getting more of this or that state. One can even adopt that attitude for the sake of getting rid of things.

How much of this is relative to where one is on the path? Naturally one starts with lots of doing and regarding things incorrectly. Efforts and ideas get refined and things wrongly attended to get rightly attended to with time. I feel so strange about actions and doing things now. I read through *Meanings* at least five times over the last several months and it's made more and more sense, to the point most of the stuff doesn't seem out of reach, and a significant amount of assumption has been uprooted(although I can't see how much is left). The desire to read again or check if I'm clear on this or that or drill the understanding is diminishing. I'm really confused about doing. Sometimes it feels like I'm picking up a controller that isn't plugged in and watching the game on the screen thinking I'm the one playing it. I watched the video "Abiding in Non-activity" too, which is similar to the one above. Do you just reach the point of seeing it all as not-self, seeing yourself and I am as second, and let things unfold(through actions not rooted in craving, aversion, delusion)? I still have a lot of work to do with my assumptions, especially my harsh attitude towards myself and wrongly judging others too. I'm trying to learn to relax and not crave the end of suffering, but I don't want to throw away urgency or relax my effort until I'm free from suffering.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-25 04:33:46**

How does this relate to the Buddha's instructions on seeing our unwholesome qualities like a dead dog around our neck, or earnestly striving to abandon them? To the Buddha's instruction regarding the factors of enlightenment, and when to cultivate which factors, based on whether the mind is sluggish or restless?

The implied assumption seems to be that having a dull, tired mind is an unwholesome quality in itself. It's not. What's unwholesome is the tendency to attend to it wrongly, which is what makes it turn into a hindrance of sloth and torpor:

"And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sloth and torpor and for the increase and expansion of arisen sloth and torpor? There are, bhikkhus, discontent, lethargy, lazy stretching, drowsiness after meals,



sluggishness of mind: **frequently not attending to them through the origin** (*ayoniso manasikāra*) is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sloth and torpor and for the increase and expansion of arisen sloth and torpor.  
—SN 46.51

...

Now when the mind is tired(most of the time) I recollect the dhamma and investigate to stir up energy. When it's restless, I try anapanasati or have a cup of tea, or otherwise try to settle down.

This does sound like management, dealing with the symptoms of the problem rather than its actual root. The root is that your mind *craves*; the specific way that this craving manifests (sensuality, aversion, tiredness, restlessness, doubt) is secondary. Thus, if you continue to act out of craving, even in the name of solving what *feels* like the problem at first glance, you'll just keep going around in circles, getting rid of the present hindrance with another hindrance.

Instead, try to see an arisen unpleasant feeling as an arisen unpleasant feeling, regardless of its particular content and put aside the sense of duty to “deal” with it, and keep reminding yourself that the way to deal with it properly is to give up the craving and resistance to it to begin with. And that giving up of resistance is not something you need to hope will be bestowed upon you at the end of some practice; it's something you willfully cultivate (or not). And the right kind of calm is born precisely out of this lack of need to manage whatever feeling is there, since the now-expanded mind is no longer yoked to it in the first place.

Do you just reach the point of seeing it all as not-self, seeing yourself and I am as second, and let things unfold(through actions not rooted in craving, aversion, delusion)?

Yes, but that point doesn't magically arise on its own one day as a result of a special type of doing. You'll only reach that point if you yourself have properly understood how to see things as not self, etc., and *that* requires consistent effort. And for as long as you're choosing management in the name of practice, you are not seeing that genuinely *nothing* is worth taking as self, including your own feelings.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-25 14:08:49 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Could you say more about the “negative effort” I've heard on HH? Is it “just” not acting out of whatever the presently arisen feeling might be?

Yes, that's what can make an “inspiring subject” be wholesome to begin with. That passage is not referring to some antidote reflection or concentration object used to get rid of an arisen feeling or phenomenon that one is averse to. If something is wholesome, it has to come through *yoniso manasikāra*, i.e., non-delight and non-resistance regarding

whatever has arisen, although its specific content might vary (in the form of any of the subjects for contemplation found in the Suttas).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-26 07:27:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So, I think I need to remember the truth of what I realized, but be careful not to use it as a management technique or a tool that does nothing other than refine the craving.

Yes, very true. The “management” begins not when you misremember the insight or some nuance connected with it, but when whatever you’re reflecting on is fundamentally rooted in trying to get rid of the displeasure that has arisen. That attitude is craving, so if you take it up even with the stated intent of purifying your mind, you are precisely feeding the underlying tendency to become angry in the broadest sense (and other hindrances too) even if you manage to suppress the particular manifestation of anger at that moment. You can’t truly get rid of any hindrance with another hindrance.

So in this particular case the anger may have lifted immediately, but make sure not to fixate on bringing about that result, and instead on neither giving in to the anger, nor trying to get rid of it, no matter how long it persists. That’s how you cultivate non-craving on the fundamental level, and train your mind to be unmoved in regard to the entire domain of pressure, so that eventually, even though the *trigger* for anger (or any other hindrance) is still present—you’re not suddenly overjoyed by whatever the person did to you—there is no suitable basis for it to arise.

## **What is the state that Ajahn Brahm is calling jhana?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** solacetree 2024-11-18 23:13:35

Ajahn Brahm describes an absorbed state, which he calls jhana. It’s characterized by:

1. Extreme bliss
2. Disappearance of the 5 senses
3. Prolonged period of clarity of mind upon coming back out (this is important- if this is absent, it isn’t [what he calls] jhana)
4. Absence of acute manifestation of the 5 hindrances, which also lasts for some time afterwards
5. He also describes the non-visual perception of a pleasant light, but my impression is that’s just a common experience of it and he doesn’t say that HAS to be there for it to count, or may manifest differently.

He has been describing it like this without changing his story for a long time, so it’s pretty clear this is a repeated experience that he personally has; I am not challenging that, simply want to know what it is. If you heard someone describe this experience without using

any particular label for it, what would you think this state is? Is it described in the suttas anywhere?

I heard of a sutta where the Buddha is asked if someone is practicing arupa jhana correctly because they can still feel their body, and he says not quite (sorry, I don't know the source, but maybe someone remembers it?) Could AB's experience be an arupa jhana (and if so, why is it describes as being so much more blissful than other states?)

Thank you!

Final note: please do not speak rudely of any teachers on this post. Even if we disagree we should still be respectful to senior monastics (and everyone for that matter.) It is wise to speak straightforwardly but kindly.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-19 10:02:46**

I wouldn't expect to find anything in the Suttas matching the "absorbed state" that Ajahn Brahm teaches. It's a very common misconception that no longer experiencing the body (which the Suttas do say is the case in arūpa states) must mean "absorption", and it's equally wrong to think that just because the body disappears in a certain state, it must correspond to the arūpa states taught in the Suttas.

You can become unaware of sensory input by entering a state of trance in various ways (including not only meditation techniques but also certain drugs), *or* by developing so much clarity about the general aspects of your experience that transcend the multiplicity of the five senses to the point that this multiplicity disappears (and that's how you enter arūpa states). The latter is like someone who doesn't hear the conversations happening in the area because they're surveying the entire terrain from above, considering aspects that are way more fundamental. The former is like someone who also doesn't hear the voices but for a different reason—because they're engrossed in a movie playing at full volume while wearing noise-cancelling headphones.

A listener may think that the state is the same just because of what's absent, but one of them is training the type of qualities and ways of seeing experience that lead to Nibbāna, and the other one isn't. Thus, the criterion should be *how one arrived at it*, and that's why that's what the Suttas put the most emphasis on (and it is never absorption).

I heard of a sutta where the Buddha is asked if someone is practicing arupa jhana correctly because they can still feel their body, and he says not quite

I can't find the specific Sutta right now, but I'm sure I read something similar at some point. There's also the incidents described in DN 16 where the Buddha himself didn't hear extremely loud sounds while presumably abiding in arūpa states, and the story of the monk Sañjīva who didn't realize he had been on fire for a whole night while in the cessation of perception and feeling. None of that is a result of absorption.

Edit: Also, if AB's state is supposed to contain points 1 and 2 simultaneously, it can be neither the jhānas nor the formless attainments since arūpa states (as defined in the Suttas)

are not blissful, they're neutral, and the five senses/body doesn't disappear even in the fourth jhana, let alone the very first one.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-20 05:06:32 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The qualities and ways of seeing that lead to Nibbāna include unawareness?

No, that's the crucial point. It's not that not perceiving sensory input is of any intrinsic value, and thus the fact that a certain state matches that description means nothing in itself. What's of value is what you would have to do for that to happen, which is develop an immense amount of *yoniso manasikāra*. That's why the Buddha knew that his former teachers who had developed arūpa states would be able to grasp the Dhamma very quickly.

If I attend the fundamentals at the expense of the particulars that is still ignoring a necessary aspect of experience any way you slice it.

Indeed, which is why you don't "ignore" anything; that's how you would fall into absorption. If something falls off, it has to do so on its own because it has become too coarse, not because you were intentionally trying to remove it by attending to something else. The latter would be acting out of the five hindrances already.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-20 06:19:30 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

how does this, as entry to the arupa states, differ from how we're working toward jhana?

It doesn't in its essence. See MN 104, which says that through the same practice of purifying the mind from any interest in sensuality that would lead to jhāna, the mind would eventually arrive at the imperturbable, which is an epithet for the fourth jhāna and the first two arūpa states. The way to attain the other two is described further below in the Sutta, and what stands out is that it's done by *reflection* (which must be firmly distinguished from the usual abstract thinking about Dhamma), not by focusing on an object.

I have a hang-up. One of the criteria for Ajahn Brahm's jhana is that this state brings piercing, present-moment, and direct clarity. In his description of the experience, the clarity also lasts after exiting the state and allows deeper seeing when doing reflections and questioning the nature of reality. I'm not suggesting that this means the state is jhana. But wouldn't that be useful?

Increased clarity doesn't necessarily equate to right understanding. Most meditation teachers would say that their practices lead to heightened clarity, and a lot of people indeed wouldn't be after the blissful states themselves, but after the knowledge that supposedly comes out of them. But the Buddha stated clearly that there is wrong knowledge and wrong liberation, and that they are the consequence of wrong samādhi, wrong sati,

etc., all the way to wrong view. Not to mention that the idea that the clarity comes *after* the jhāna and that reflection is not possible within it already contradicts the Suttas.

*Now imagine that when looking at the one doing the looking using the mirrored telescope, suddenly the image of the eyeball completely disappears, taking everything with it, leaving not even emptiness. One soon realizes, after the event has passed by, that if all that is known vanishes, then that which does the knowing must also have vanished. The deep insight arises that the one who knows is impermanent, and that the knower is not me. This is precisely what happens as one proceeds through the jhānas and the immaterial attainments.*

Ajahn Brahm's descriptions of insight carry the idea that having special *perceptions* or *experiences* and inferring things out of them is understanding, and that's the categorical mistake present in almost every spiritual tradition, including modern Theravada Buddhism, and which is most succinctly described in MN 1. Ignorance cannot be removed by perceiving or experiencing something, no matter how extraordinary it is, because *avijjā* is embedded into the very structure of a puthujjana's perception, from top to bottom. Even when he has the most earth-shattering experiences of not-self, he will do so through his appropriation, misconceiving, and sense of self\*.\*

The solution is to go in the complete opposite direction, and start developing knowledge of the *nature* of all perception, regardless of what specifically is perceived. And that's precisely where *yoniso manasikāra* comes in: the nature of something has to be known **simultaneously**, but on a different level, than the thing itself. If you try to observe the nature of a thing directly, as you would inevitably do when your practice is based on absorption, it becomes a new thing with its own nature, and if you then try to see observe the nature of *that*, the same thing happens, ad infinitum. In the description I quoted above, that "deep insight" is a new phenomenon, on the same level as a sight or sound, whose nature is not seen. And the implicit idea is that having had that perception is enough in itself, so one won't be trying to see what actually matters either.

Is there an alternative method to arriving at a sharp and clear mind with which to investigate?

The Gradual Training that the Suttas describe. The fact that people who haven't given up sensuality and acting out of hindrances in their daily lives—which is the true cause of muddledness according the Suttas—can succeed in Ajahn Brahm's method shows that it's not the type of clarity worth striving for. The issue is that what actually leads to the right type of sharpness and tranquility, the Gradual Training, is of course difficult and prolonged, and the results aren't nearly as immediate, palpable, and gratifying.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-21 05:32:09 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So if wanderers from other sects should say that the followers from the Sakyan are addicted to these 4 forms of pleasure seeking, they should be told ”

Just FYI, this is one of the Suttas I've been working on translating, and “*addicted* to these 4 forms of pleasure seeking” is a very liberal translation, and so is Ven. Sujato’s “*indulgence* in pleasure”. “Devotion” or “dedication to pleasure (or even ‘ease’)” would be more accurate.

“Addiction” and “indulgence” have to be abandoned in order to attain the pleasure of the first jhāna to begin with, since that pleasure comes precisely from abandoning all such compulsions and dependencies. It’s not only the coarse seeking of external sense objects that constitutes the first hindrance, which is frequently listed as “longing” (*abhijjhā*) in the Suttas. Also, the Buddha emphasized that even a tiny speck of *bhava* should not be welcomed, and it is only through that sort of attitude that the hindrances can be truly surmounted. That’s why the pleasure of jhāna is wholesome and leads to Nibbāna whether one wishes for it or not; its very presence implies thorough dispassion and relinquishment and the *absence* of “addiction”. Thus, by all means, one should live devoted to it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-21 15:23:39 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

As I experience it, there’s only ever one thing arising and passing at any given moment.

That’s the mainstream understanding of experience that’s taken completely for granted most of the time, but careful scrutiny shows that it’s not really accurate. There certainly is only one thing that you can *attend to* at any given moment, but “simultaneous knowing” or yoniso manasikara doesn’t mean “splitting” your attention into two.

For example, let’s say you go to the mall, but you only have 30 minutes of free parking. If you take longer than that, you’ll have to pay \$100. If there’s only one thing in your experience, how come you (and every other functioning human) would be able to go inside the mall, find the right store(s), get in, find what you need, etc., all the while *simultaneously* remembering (sati) that you only have half an hour and you must not get sidetracked by all the alluring things you’ll be encountering along the way?

That knowledge that is continuously remembered is not something that you actively think about or attend to; it’s just “there”, in the background, while your attention is shifting from this to that as you’re walking around. Now, if you develop that same type of knowledge but in the context of Dhamma, to the point that you never forget certain fundamental truths about your experience no matter what specific phenomena come or go, you would have samadhi and be free from hindrances and suffering for that period of time. And this is why, at least in the jhānas proper, it wouldn’t even matter which posture you’re in; what would matter is the context/recollection that has been so thoroughly fortified at the background that it’s become imperturbable (though, as is always mentioned in the Suttas, you do need to be in seclusion, which is one of the many reasons why “group meditation” is so misguided).

But, as we (and the Suttas) so often repeat, the practice doesn’t begin with samadhi or meditation. The “simultaneous knowing” is developed through virtue and sense restraint

first and foremost.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-23 07:07:21 (in reply to a comment not included)**

do these first two stages steer away from sensuality and instead align more closely with the Buddha's teachings on taming the mind through gradual training—avoiding aversion, desire, or delusion—perhaps resembling *right sense restraint* as described in the gradual path?

I would also reply with a definitive No. If the abandoning unwholesome things were about

*...not even thinking about your work, your family, your commitments, your responsibilities, your history, the good or bad times you had as a child ..” you abandon all past experiences by showing no interest in them at all. You become someone who has no history during the time that you meditate. You do not even think about where you are from, where you were born, who your parents were or what your upbringing was like,*

then a newborn baby would already abide in ultimate purity, and a blind and deaf person would be accomplished in sense restraint. Sense restraint is not measured by how many things you don't perceive; it's measured by the absence of lust and aversion in regard to what you *do* perceive:

“And how, Kuṇḍaliya, is restraint of the sense faculties developed and cultivated so that it fulfils the three kinds of good conduct? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, **having seen an agreeable form with the eye**, a bhikkhu does not long for it, or become excited by it, or generate lust for it. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated. But having seen a disagreeable form with the eye, he is not dismayed by it, not daunted, not dejected, without ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated.

—SN 46.6

This of course doesn't mean you should go out of your way to perceive things that could give rise to unwholesome states. It will inevitably happen unless you actively try to cocoon your mind as described above, which amounts to avoiding defeat by not showing up to the match in the first place.

## What is the precise definition of sensuality?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** BestZebra6159 2024-11-16 15:00:23

In Ven. Anigha's translation of MN13, there is the following comment:

Even though technically the term usually occurs as plural in Pāli, I have chosen to translate kāma as “sensuality” throughout because it can accommodate

both the instances when it refers more to desirable objects as well as when it refers to the desire itself.

So in the context of this sutta, do we regard sensuality as “desire” or “desirable objects”, or both? I cannot see how desire *or* sensual objects makes sense in the context of this sutta. Let me take an example of the danger of sensuality that is provided in the sutta:

Furthermore, **for the sake of sensuality** kings fight with kings, aristocrats fight with aristocrats, brahmins fight with brahmins, and householders fight with householders. Mother fights with son, son with mother, father with son, and son with father. Brother fights with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, and friend fights with friend. Once they’ve started quarreling, arguing, and disputing, they attack each other with fists, stones, rods, and swords, resulting in death and deadly suffering. This too is a peril of *sensuality* that’s presently evident, a mass of suffering with *sensuality* as it’s reason, source, and basis, purely caused by *sensuality*.

If I take sensuality to mean “desirable objects” in this instance, then it makes sense, for example, that “for the sake of desirable objects” there is violence in the world. But the issue then is the last sentence. If we were to substitute “desirable objects” into “sensuality” we get that,

This too is a peril of *desirable objects* that’s presently evident, a mass of suffering with *desirable objects* as it’s reason, source, and basis, purely caused by *desirable objects*.

But the implication of this would be the removal of desirable objects, i.e., the removal of things in the world. But that’s clearly not what the Buddha’s teaching; it’s craving that’s the root of suffering, not the world. So although regarding sensuality as “desirable objects” makes the first sentence makes sense (the “for the sake of desirable objects ...”), the last absolutely does not make sense.

Now if we treat sensuality as “sensual desire” itself, then for the last sentence we get that: > This too is a peril of *sensual desire* that’s presently evident, a mass of suffering with *sensual desire* as it’s reason, source, and basis, purely caused by *sensual desire*.

Which is starting to make a bit more sense since this would locate the removal of desire (not the things of the world) as the end of suffering. But.. we now look back at the first sentence and we get the following:

Furthermore, *for the sake of sensual desire* kings fight with kings, aristocrats fight with aristocrats, brahmins fight with brahmins, and householders fight with householders ...

To me this sounds like “for the sake of *obtaining* sensual desires”, kings fight with kings, etc. So although the issue with last sentence has been resolved, there is now an issue with how I understand the first sentence. But a bigger issue is with the escape if we take sensuality to mean sensual desire:



And what is the escape from sensuality? Removing and giving up desire-and-passion for sensuality: this is the escape from sensuality.

If we take sensuality to mean sensual desire, then the Buddha is instructing us to give up desire-and-passion for sensual desire. This is the same thing Ajahn talks about in his video regarding “Stop Wanting the Wanting of Sensuality” wherein he defines sensuality as sensual desire and elaborates on how we want sensual desire and how development of not-wanting towards that want-of-sensual-desire is the escape.

The issue is, I simply do not see myself “wanting sensual desire”. If in theory a button existed to remove sensual desire, I would not hesitate. I mean, wasn’t the point of the video on the fact that sensuality is not wanted precisely the fact that people do *not* want sensual desire? It was precisely after watching this that I had come to realize that I do not want the desire.

But at the same time, Ajahn is stating that we want sensual desire in the “Stop Wanting the Wanting of Sensuality” video? How is this not a contradiction?

Going back to the quote from MN 13, removing and giving up desire-and-passion for “sensual desire” (if we take sensuality to mean sensual desire here) also implies there is desire-and-passion for sensual desire, but I just cannot see it at all for myself.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-17 06:36:20**

But the implication of this would be the removal of desirable objects, i.e., the removal of things in the world. But that’s clearly not what the Buddha’s teaching; it’s craving that’s the root of suffering, not the world.

Indeed, and that’s clear enough from the description of the escape: giving up desire-and-passion *in regard to* *kāmā* (plural, i.e. desirable objects). So the fact that desirable objects are what leads to conflict does not automatically mean that the only solution is to get rid of them.

At the end of the day, the distinction between desirable objects and the desire itself is purely pedagogical; experientially, they’re inseparable, which is why the Suttas use *kāma* to refer to both pretty much simultaneously. Unless you’re already free from sensuality or have attained the first *jhāna*, you cannot even think of a desirable object without sensual desire being right there with it to the same extent. You can bring up perceptions that you *remember* to have aroused desire in the past, but if desire is not there at that moment, it’s because that object is at least there and then not desirable.

So, technically, for one who is free from sensuality, desirable objects too have ceased, similar to how feelings, not just craving, are said to cease in an Arahant. It’s just that if you tell that to someone who isn’t free from sensuality, they’ll usually end up thinking that suppressing the desire that’s actually still there is the escape. They won’t know how to actually uproot it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-18 06:59:12 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is my understanding correct?

In essence, yes, and the practical takeaway is that you cannot abandon sensuality simply by abandoning specific objects or thoughts about objects. That's a prerequisite for the actual abandonment (i.e., sense restraint), but sensuality itself is the way the world appears to you (due to the mind that has been inclined in that direction by past sensual engagement), and thus you carry it no matter what you do or where you go. You can't simply "stop" that; you can only undo it *from within*. Hence the need to practice "Not Wanting the Wanting", as opposed to trying to remove the wanting directly.

Edit: One point I forgot to mention is that the "for the sake of" is actually Ven. Sujato's rendering, which I originally did not think worth modifying. But now I changed it to "on account of [sensuality]", which is more in line with the Pāli and probably avoids some confusion.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-19 07:22:43 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yes, you undo it by getting the mind (citta) to fully understand that wanting what the senses want—"forms cognizable by the eye that *are agreeable, likeable...*"—is like putting its head under a guillotine that could fall at any moment. Dealing with what the senses want directly is dealing with circumstances. That can only remove particular sensual cravings, like a game of "Whac-A-Mole", never solving the *liability* to sensuality. But for that uprooting to be possible, you do need to have actually, physically stopped engaging with the senses, thus sense restraint comes first.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-19 11:00:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Would this devaluing come from seeing the danger that naturally comes (in a sense of potential suffering, or not even potential but guaranteed) with every prospect of delight. As if it is bound. By sensuality (delighting in it) it is implied suffering?

Yes. It needs to fully sink in that the very *presence* of delight is a compromise to your safety, and means that suffering is *already there*, regardless of what ends up happening afterward.

## **Meditation/Contemplation prior to Stream Entry**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** eric2800 2024-11-16 13:34:12

I have watched a lot of youtube HH videos over last year. I have read articles on the website. HH resonates with me and my experience and also makes more sense in light of the Pali Suttas. I also believe Nanananda is similiar in some regards.

AN 10.61 states in part listening to true teaching->faith->yoniso manasikara -> mindfulness-> sense restraint -> good conduct-> Mindfulness(MN10)

So it seems yoniso manasikara (YM) and sati can be developed prior to sense restraint but not to degree of the description in MN10. So what should I be contemplating prior to stream entry? What are videos that drill down on that on youtube HH channel?

Contemplations I remember or seem to be good but from my modest understanding is:

Faith

Liability to sensuality

My intentions for contemplating and following Buddha and Dharma

Is it still practically viable to be mindful of hindrances in mind or is it better to wait on that one. Also I do know there was a video about isolating mind and hindrance and “seeing it” in play and over time mind will become tame. I f someone can point me to that or give a good explanation on it I would be grateful.

Thanks all,

Eric T

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-17 07:17:44**

Just to be clear, there aren’t any contemplations or practices that will lead you to stream entry just because you do them, inasmuch as there isn’t a magical food that will get cooked even if the pan that you put it in is cold. What leads to stream entry, or any noble attainment, is purifying your mind from obstructions, from the “dust” that blocks clear seeing (greed, aversion, and distraction). If you have sufficiently removed that, any basic reflection—say, of how you’re liable to sickness, aging, and death whether you like it or not—would reveal and signify the Dhamma.

The problem of a *puthujjana* (assuming he’s had plenty of instruction, as you say you have) isn’t that he doesn’t know what to contemplate. It’s that whatever he contemplates won’t sink in deeply enough because there’s too much dust in his eyes still (or, in another simile, the log is still too wet to light a fire). Therefore, purification of view hinges on purification of mind, which in turn hinges on purification of virtue.

If you have at least the information about what needs to be understood, understanding will arise on its own if the work of abandoning the hindrances in every aspect of your life has been sufficiently completed (which takes years).

So, if one wants to practice contemplation prior to stream entry, it should be done as a means of purifying the mind from hindrances once bodily and verbal acts have been

brought in check. And literally any theme or reflection from the Suttas that appeals to you will fulfill that purpose if it's done with *yoniso manasikāra*, and not as a mechanical repetition of an idea.

## Gratification

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** noobknoob 2024-11-14 12:51:25

If the gratification of sensuality is limited only to the domain of 'delight', then why is it that if one, after delighting in the possibility of engaging in a sensual object (which already is releasing some pressure of the sensual desire), goes on to actually engage with the sensual object physically, they feel temporarily satisfied and it releases the pressure almost completely?

If the domains of 'delight' and physical sense engagement are completely independent (as is sometimes mentioned in the talks), why then the pressure (which is in the domain of delight/desire/craving) is released after engagement in the physical domain?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-15 18:02:52

The assumption that "the pressure is released" is precisely where the fundamental wrong view lies. The particular desire would often subside, but the *liability* to desire and other hindrances—which is a pressure that's more in the background—always inevitably increases whenever you seek sensual gratification.

That's why you never actually "get away with it": you're always increasing the weight of sensuality and the hindrances whenever you give in to them, but because for most people it's already so heavy and they're so used to carrying that load, each couple of pounds added doesn't feel like much.

And you'll see if you reflect carefully that there has never, ever been an instance where you were *truly* satisfied upon scratching a sensual itch ("satisfied" meaning, you were perfectly equanimous about what happened afterward and felt no need to do anything else). At best, you felt at ease only insofar as you expected to have *further* access to the same pleasant experience or object, or to a different one. The promise of satisfaction is always a mirage; it's not there once you actually walk there.

So, indeed, it's like a leper whose only concept of a "resolution" is to cauterize his wounds for temporary relief, as opposed to curing his leprosy altogether.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-16 05:42:25 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

But then stress piles up and tiredness increases, it's like I'm in auto pilot.

This doesn't happen by accident. If your mind's pressure to give in becomes stronger, it can only be because you were already giving in to its pressure before in other ways, and thus it gets agitated and wants to keep going with the same momentum. Like an untrained dog: the more you let it run around excitedly, the less it will be willing to stop when you pull on the leash.

So my advice would be to check other actions and behaviors by body, speech, or mind that you may be taking for granted, especially those that took place in the recent past, whenever you feel intense pressure to use your phone for distraction and similar. The only thing that can ever intensify the five hindrances is previous acts rooted in the five hindrances.

## A little confusion about a teaching

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Print-Remarkable 2024-11-13 02:23:43

Been studying the Mahadukkhakkahandha sutta in the MN and having trouble lining it up with Ven. Nyanamoli's interpretation. Not to say I think his is wrong, I'm just confused. When discussing Gratification, danger, escape he often emphasizes that gratification is only found here and now in the specific delight being imagined and not in the specific object. Thus following through with the actual object is redundant. This interpretation makes total sense to me even though I probably didn't do it justice in my explanation but I can't find that same description with in the actual above mentioned sutta?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-15 19:10:55

gratification is only found here and now in the specific delight being imagined and not in the specific object

If you read more closely, it says:

And what is the gratification of sensuality? There are these five strands of sensuality. What five? Sights cognizable by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and enticing.... (and so on). The pleasure and joy that arise **based on** these five strands of sensuality: this is the gratification of sensuality.

So the Sutta itself is also telling you that the gratification is not *in* the object, even though the object itself is already pleasant. The gratification arises *based on* the pleasant object, which is why completely abandoning gratification is possible to begin with (meaning, there is no need to dismantle everything that's agreeable, which would be an endless task).

That gratification and the agreeability of the sense object are completely separate things can be seen from how, if you establish and maintain the context of eating purely for survival, like someone who eats their only child while stranded in a desert so that they can hopefully make it out alive, gratification would be absent from that meal even though the

taste itself might be very agreeable—the very same taste (say, of your favorite food) that, with that context being absent, would’ve been purely sensual simply because of that.

## Mn 18 The Lump of Honey

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Difficult-Strain-580 2024-11-09 04:57:20

Could someone help me understand Venerable Mahākaccāna’s explanation in MN18?

<https://suttas.hillsidehermitage.org/?q=mn18#mn18:22.3~no-highlight>

In this sutta, the Buddha explains how one “is not underlain by perceptions”. In his further explanation, he seems to imply that he’s not referring to any and all perceptions but “perceptions and considerations born of proliferation”.

As I understand the Buddha’s explanation, this state not underlain by perceptions is reached “if there is nothing to be delighted in, welcomed, or rested upon” in regards to these unbeneficial proliferations.

The bhikkhus are confused and ask Mahākaccāna’s for help.

His explanation is a variation on the description of the 12 links of dependent origination ripening in “perceptions and considerations born of proliferation” instead of old age and death. He seems to explain that with a functioning eye (and the 2 related factors) comes contact, feeling, thinking and then proliferation.

He even doubles down on his explanation saying that with a functioning eye, this chain of dependencies is conceivable. Fair enough, I can see that in my own experience.

Then he describes the cessation of this chain of dependencies explaining how if the eye was not functioning (and corresponding objects and eye-consciousness), it would be completely inconceivable to speak of contact.

I can see that too, fair enough again. Knowing the eye is impermanent and not-self, I can see how there being no eye (this eye at least) is inevitable and then no perceptions would beset me.

However, right now, I do have a functioning eye. Knowing its impending cessation does not free me at all from this chain, practically.

I find the Buddha’s brief explanation clearer as he seems to say that I should not delight in or welcome these proliferated perceptions.

At least, I can try to follow that instruction. I can see how it would stop ““perceptions and considerations born of proliferation” and not any and all perceptions which I cannot stop since my eye IS functioning.

How is Mahākaccāna’s explanation practically useful?

It sounds to me like he’s going too far by explaining how there could be no perception whatsoever in my experience. Then, of course, at that point, no proliferation.

To me it sounds like someone telling another person to bomb the whole neighbourhood, heck the whole planet, so stray cats won't come begging for food at his door. No planet, no neighbourhood, no cats, no problem. Thank you very much, that'll be 50 dollars plus taxes and travelling expenses.

Whereas the Buddha's brief explanation was more like "stop feeding the damn cats".

I can use my knowledge of dependent origination to remember periferally that these perceptions are impermanent, not mine and should not be grasped if unwholesome, but I can't say that it makes them "inconceivable" here and now in my experience. Perceptions are very much there and conceivable for me as I do have a functioning eye and can only imagine not having one.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-12 17:15:20**

However, right now, I do have a functioning eye. Knowing its impending cessation does not free me at all from this chain, practically.

It wouldn't free you if you're expecting that to get rid of the besetting perceptions. But the whole point of the Sutta is that that's fortunately not necessary. But for it to "work", you do have to give up *all* expectations of management, i.e., of something that will give you peace by ridding you of the perceptions themselves, and recognize that the practice is to (1) not act out of lust or aversion towards perceptions (virtue) and (2) have the right context while you continue to not act out, and in this case, the context is impermanence, i.e., the fact that what pressures you stands upon a foundation that's not in your control. In this way, you train your mind to not suffer amidst pressure, without having to exert the slightest effort to get rid of it or replace it. Hence the name of the Sutta and the metaphor behind it: the "sweetness" of true unburdening, since management is a huge burden.

## **Taking things for anxiety**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-11-08 10:40:37

When, if ever, is it appropriate to take things for anxiety? Obviously things that intoxicate are out of the question.

Things like magnesium and catnip have calming qualities, and magnesium helps relax your muscles. I experience an almost constant tension in my neck and shoulders (from anxiety, I would wager) and having any sort of relief from this is a godsend. The pain can make it difficult to focus or meditate, and can increase my stress. To make matters worse as soon as I experience relief from the tension for whatever reason, the mind starts creating fear and anxiety that the fear and anxiety will come back, which can get me wound up until it does come back. It feels like I'm intentionally trying to scare myself. It's almost like an OCD sort of thing.

I'm working on enduring on the right level and I have been able to find peace at times even when it's there.

I used to use drugs a lot, so I'm aware that there can be a desire to try and control feeling and I'm becoming more and more aware that it's a futile effort. My mind *can* have that attitude of "consume to feel better" or just to not experience reality as I do.

I don't know if that means it's always bad to take things with the intention of reducing the tension, like catnip or magnesium, or taking them without that intention(which seems hard to do once you are aware of such effects).

I'm aware in a strange way how consuming this or that food or substance can alter the way I experience the "others" I seem to carry around with me. I discerned at some point in the past that personality isn't as solid as I thought and that there are all these "parts" or things that seem "other". Regarding the alteration of the perception of them changing upon consuming this or that, it's made me understand why some foods are considered aphrodisiacs, or why pork is considered spiritually unhealthy by certain religions(it certainly isn't good for me). I think understanding this framework of others is important. I'm trying to stop attempting to interpret or psychologize them and instead see them all(including self) as appearances and stop assuming their bhava. This might be a more important point of discussion but I wouldn't know what to ask about it.

See the sutta below on plant medicine and plant spirits. (I'm not dying or in the pain of death, of course, and I'm not linking that as a justification for anything, it's just relevant to this discussion). A fascination and attachment with them has been an issue and motivator for consuming certain plants in the past. From the horrific datura to basil and thyme tea. <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn41/sn41.010.wlsh.html>

Edit: down vote if you feel it's appropriate, but consider leaving a comment with your thoughts instead. If the answer to a question is worth knowing, the question has value, and the Buddha encourages the asking of questions.

Given the honest history I laid out above, I think I'll continue to proceed with caution. I was considering buying some ashwagandha again to see if that would help with this horrible neck tension, but I'll put that on hold. I still don't know where the milder things I listed above like magnesium and catnip fit.

It might be that part or all of the problem lies in looking for, valuing, and assuming a solution that isn't instead about letting go of the problem. There is a place where I stop "making *the* problem" but it's hard to find.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-09 05:44:29**

As long as something isn't an intoxicant, it's fine in itself. Everyone inevitably engages in management to some degree. It's wrong if (1) the management takes you outside the precepts or (2) you fall into the view that managing the circumstances that *trigger* your liability to suffering is the way to liberate yourself from suffering. But if you draw the line of allowable management somewhere (the precepts being the most fundamental "line"), and then move on to doing the actual work of undoing the liability, you won't get side-tracked.



## Eating in moderation and working out

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-11-06 17:15:47

I would like to eat in moderation, and I would like to work out and gain weight. Trying to find the middle way here has been difficult, and anxiety and doubt about it has resulted in lots of internal conflict.

I thought it might not even be possible, but Ajahn Nyanamoli works out and has got muscles, which requires eating a calorie surplus to gain. When he speaks about moderation in eating, as in all things, the intention is emphasized, not eating slowly or chewing 30 times or something. He's even said something along the lines of (I apologize for not having a direct quote) whether you eat a lot or a little doesn't matter, as long as you keep the right context in mind.

The reasons I got into working out (and eating enough to gain weight) were for: 1. Mental health 2. Physical health 3. Being able to sit more comfortably 4. Being strong and able to do whatever I need to do, and to generally feel more comfortable in my body.

How does one navigate eating in moderation and eating to gain muscle at the same time? I think of the Bodhisattva and his intentions eating Sujata's offering. To make the body strong and comfortable enough for jhana. His beauty would have also increased along with this, but that wasn't his intention, it was just a side effect.

It's a bit more complicated when I have to eat a lot to gain weight, eating before noon.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-07 14:23:36

How does one navigate eating in moderation and eating to gain muscle at the same time?

You'd better make sure you sort out the former first and foremost (assuming the 8 precepts and sense restraint are already in place). Then you'll have some sort of reference point as to what the right context behind eating actually is, and you'll be able to tell when you drift away from it. Also, the idea that you need to actively try to eat more to gain muscle could easily become a way for someone who doesn't see their own mind clearly to rationalize their finding safety in food, a tendency which will naturally increase once all the other avenues for sensual gratification have been blocked by the precepts.

So, if you have the free time and will to commit to physical exercise, then just to be on the safe side, I would still recommend eating only for the sake of assuaging hunger. If you have enough energy to complete your workouts and your lifts are improving over time, you're probably eating enough. And if you're not, you'll likely feel hungrier, and thus naturally eat more.

I think of the Bodhisattva and his intentions eating Sujata's offering. To make the body strong and comfortable enough for jhana. His beauty would have also increased along with this, but that wasn't his intention, it was just a side effect.

That's because he had been outright starving himself for years, to the point that he didn't even have the strength to urinate or defecate without falling. It doesn't mean that an average, perfectly functional person *needs* to eat more and become stronger in order to develop their minds. Strengthening the body is a very secondary thing that's almost completely tangential to the practice, and should be done only if you're sure that the intention behind it is not tainted with passion, and is not fueling further appropriation and delight in your own body.

## Are there any things that involve peripheral awareness?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Future\_Plastic\_9910 2024-10-26 10:08:24

Any normal thing like a game or an activity that require peripheral awareness more than usual

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-27 14:01:55

There's nothing that "requires" the supramundane type of awareness that uproots the defilements, for otherwise a worldly endeavor would train you to transcend the world. It's something that can only be developed through a deliberate choice because it's about "swimming against the stream".

As for things that are *compatible* with the effort to develop peripheral awareness: if you delight in doing something and if it involves other people, it's incompatible. So a "game" would be out of the question. If you don't particularly delight in something nor hate it, then peripheral awareness of the relevant kind could be maintained while doing it.

## Dealcoholized Beer (0.5%)

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-10-25 22:06:38

I used to enjoy drinking a dealcoholized beer here and there, I realized that the 0.5% might be a breach of the fifth precept so I stopped due to doubt if it's a good idea.

I know the rules are very strict when it comes to monks and alcohol(not even a drop on a blade of grass) but I'm wondering what the situation is like for laypeople. The "that lead to intoxication" part of the precept seems most relevant here, along with my intentions of course. I find it very refreshing, and I enjoy the taste(and it's only 10 calories). I only drink one at a time. Drinking a cold beer in a hot shower is really relaxing, although I worry if that might be a bit too sensual. Probably the most sensual thing I'd do.

Not as relevant, but when I was conflicted about this before(unrelated to the alcohol content issue) I had a dream Ajahn Chah told it was fine to drink them. Drinking one in the afternoon/evening actually helped me get over my strong attachment to hot cocoa and chocolate, which was an endless craving for me(a consequence of replacing the evening

meal with a piece of chocolate or cocoa when I first started taking the precept about eating times). I realize I can't do things just because dream Ajahn Chah says I can, but his advice certainly helped at the time.

Edit: It's clear that I **was** trying to justify it or look for external validation(not that I've even had a drink since I realized it may be a compromise). Like Bhikkhu Anigha(I am deeply thankful for your guidance) says, it seems more like it's an issue of consuming for the sake of pleasure. I imagine it's difficult to give advice on this topic given my circumstances(see below) and not wanting to push me in a wrong direction. I got worked up over my eating issues but I found some peace last night by determining "I won't die so it doesn't matter" towards food and seeing that to as an issue dependent on having a body and being attached to it.

Also, last night I dreamt I attended a debate. There were elderly people who told me this was a "beverages allowed" event and I told them I was grateful for that. They were FOR "allowing beverages" and waxed on about the history of their leadership. But then the other side showed up, the party of Ethics. They had a very powerful presence and were very passionate about their cause and I came to favour them.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-26 05:28:21**

The problem wouldn't so much be the technicality of whether the alcohol percentage makes it count as an intoxicant—it probably doesn't because apparently the body metabolizes it almost as quickly as you drink it, so getting drunk is almost impossible—but the fact that your mind seems to be keen to justify it even though it clearly serves no practical purpose. So I would see it as a failure to give up eating for the sake of pleasure (a subtler stage of the training) and not a breach of the 5th precept per se.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-26 05:22:17 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

We don't need to mortify the body and deny life to be liberated, and if we are clinging to such austerity then we are in fact in the way of our liberation.

It's quite preposterous to suggest that keeping just the eight precepts is a way of mortifying *the body*. We have been pretty clear that taking on further "austerities" than that is usually not advisable. A pretty comfortable life on the bodily level is still very much possible even as a monk keeping the entire Pātimokkha, let alone the 8 precepts.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-26 05:50:23 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

This very poster said they have a tendency toward self mortification.

And the solution is not to risk making them feel at ease with potential sensuality just because it will be less unpleasant. It's to tell them to tread carefully if they see themselves

going in that direction of self-mortification, but without moving the goalpost and falling into the other extreme: the view that craving is not an obstacle to the Dhamma of non-craving, which the Buddha severely criticized.

But if realizing that Dhamma for oneself is not the goal, then none of this applies. These actions are not “dangerous” in some external moralizing sense.

Yet these are simple things laypeople are worked up about in this subreddit, causing them stress.

That’s not inherently bad. Enlightenment isn’t reached by going with the flow of one’s existing tendencies, and the Buddha couldn’t have been clearer about that.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-27 06:11:47 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yes, it’s all about preemptively restraining actions that would be born out of one’s mental delight so that that delight can be revealed and then abandoned, because delight is the root of suffering, as the Buddha said, and acting out of delight precludes seeing delight.

Every aspect of the training is about revealing and restraining the unwholesome attitudes of the mind, not about toughening up the body (although that might come as a secondary bonus).

## 7th precept question

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** wisecameron 2024-10-25 00:49:22

I work as a software developer. I often read textbooks to learn new skills related to my job, and dedicate a large amount of time to go above and beyond in terms of my professional contributions and expanding my skillset. I take it to be okay due to the phrase “accomplished in his sphere of activity” but would appreciate further insights into this matter. Frankly, it has been difficult for me to determine whether this all falls under entertainment to some extent. I legitimately do enjoy it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-26 10:05:17**

As long as you are making sure that while you are doing it, the purpose is to support your livelihood and not entertainment per se, then even if you happen to find it entertaining, it would not be an automatic breach of the precepts like listening to music, watching movies, or playing videogames would be.

Now, that’s not to say that spending a lot of time and effort in mundane endeavors even if they’re not against the precepts won’t detract from your efforts in the Dhamma. It will, simply because the time and energy you have each day are limited, so you can’t make optimal progress in two things at once. Hence the Buddha said that delighting in and

overdoing talk, work, and sleep—none of which are against the precepts—would hinder progress even as a noble disciple.

Nevertheless, you have much bigger “leaks” to address than this if you’re still breaking other precepts from time to time.

## 6th precept

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** wisecameron 2024-10-25 00:43:52

Hello, just wondering if permanently sticking to a 8-eat / 16-fast schedule and not snacking (ie; two meals within the window) would be within the spirit of the precept. I have an odd sleep schedule largely related to work habits and am very physically active. Im trying to be pragmatic here because I believe the solar noon interpretation would be very unhealthy for my body and thus unsustainable. But I also don’t want to be making a compromise, I want to actually be following the precept where it counts.

Thanks.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-26 16:01:10

It would be more conducive to recognizing the mental craving for pleasure and restraining it than eating whenever you want. The specific timing of the meal(s) is not necessarily essential, although 4 hours would be better than 8, and a single meal better than a time window. But you can progress towards that gradually.

As an aside, you may also want to reconsider whether eating before noon is what’s unhealthy/unnatural and not the odd sleep schedule.

## Is dealing with sloth and torpor through caffeine bad for the gradual training?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** StriderLF 2024-10-22 16:49:59

Hello everyone. Sloth and torpor has been the hardest hindrance for me. Once it settles in, it seems like there’s nothing to be done besides waiting.

I’ve been trying to quite caffeine too, so my sloth and torpor is quite strong. Things get even worse because I have to work in a very thinking demanding job, so sometimes I feel defenseless without caffeine.

How do you deal with sloth and torpor without coffee? Is it bad to drink coffee if one is trying to practice the gradual training?

Thank you so much!

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-23 12:03:21**

Sloth and torpor is not the fact that you're drowsy or tired. That will happen to the body at times regardless of what you do. It's the fact that you attend to that state wrongly, i.e., wallow in it, or try to get rid of it as if you were the owner of your aggregates. And that's why it makes you suffer.

So drinking coffee is not good or bad in itself. What's bad is the view that coffee or any sort of external remedy or lifestyle change can address the hindrance of sloth and torpor. They can't; they just remove the obvious *trigger* for that hindrance. So it would be like thinking that you're free from aversion just because annoying things no longer happen to you.

### **Uprooting anxiety - Beginner here**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** SoberShire 2024-10-21 15:50:36

Hello hoping to get some clarification to my understanding as I am new to this. I recently stopped trying to hide from life through the use of alcohol and am trying to learn how to live on life's terms

Anxiety is a major hindrance for me (though obviously, I suffer from all 5). I was listening to the podcast episode "Unwelcoming of the Hindrances" and it made sense that I am strengthening this hindrance by two major factors:

- 1) Running away/distracting myself from it - This was my primary reason for drinking/escape
- 2) Attaching my attention to it by obsessively worrying about my health, the future, etc. Thinking that I need to pay attention to the stories and sensations produced by this hindrance or something horrible would happen.

So these are both wrong attention and perpetuating the anxiety itself - is that accurate? To eventually uproot it, I need to learn how to let anxiety be here, do it's thing, but not try to escape it and not give it the attention it wants (or the attention I've habitually given it in the past) ? Sort of like feel the fear and do what I need to do in life anyway?

I would like to start practicing/experimenting with this, but I don't want to unintentionally do this wrong and feed the anxiety more so any clarification would be most welcome.

Thank you so much :)

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-23 12:11:36**

So these are both wrong attention and perpetuating the anxiety itself - is that accurate? To eventually uproot it, I need to learn how to let anxiety be here, do it's thing, but not try to escape it and not give it the attention it wants (or

the attention I've habitually given it in the past) ? Sort of like feel the fear and do what I need to do in life anyway?

More accurately, don't just try to "deal" with the anxiety, which is often just one of the byproducts of the underlying problem. Look instead at what's making you *liable* to anxiety to begin with, which is bound to be passion and attachment of some sort that you still keep maintaining. When there is that which is dear, anxiety about losing it is inevitable. And by nurturing passion towards specific things, you also nurture passion towards your aggregates as a whole, so sickness, aging, and death will become even more distressing.

Once you've stopped engaging in acts of passion that increase the liability to anxiety (i.e., are established in virtue and restraint), then yes, the rest of the work is to learn how to balance your attention while anxiety is there (not give in to it without trying to get rid of it).

That last step is like heating up the water that's left in a pan until it all finally evaporates. You're not getting anywhere if you're still adding water to the pan by creating and maintaining existing cravings and attachments.

## Mind-moments

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-10-19 14:24:19

I'm listening to this discussion:

[https://youtu.be/xw4d3kPrGd0?si=p3DoY7Ad\\_9uTPhjp](https://youtu.be/xw4d3kPrGd0?si=p3DoY7Ad_9uTPhjp)

And so far have gathered that the Ajahns refute the abhidhamma and commentary claim that the mind is made up of "mind moments."

1.) Why are they refuting this? 2.) Why do they see the Commentaries and abhidhamma as untrustworthy or inaccurate? 3.) How then should the mind be described, and what would they base that description on?

I have not finished the discussion because there is so much there that I want to listen to it in blocks so I can stop and digest what I've heard. I apologize if these questions are answered later in the video.

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-20 17:03:39

It doesn't even matter whether the mind is made up of "mind moments". The problem is not that that specific idea is wrong, and we're suggesting an alternative. The entire premise that suffering is resolved by figuring out how your mind and experience "work" is in itself a very inaccurate conception of what wisdom is. It's on the same level as the pointless speculation that the Buddha denounced as a form of *ayoniso manasikāra* in MN 2:

This is how he attends not-through-the-origin: ‘Did I exist in the past? Did I not exist in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? After being what, what did I become in the past? Will I exist in the future? Will I not exist in the future? What will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? After being what, what will I become in the future?’ **Or he is undecided about the present thus: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? This creature—where did it come from? And where will it go?’**

Instead of figuring out what your mind is made of, the problem is (as MN 2 explains) how you attend to things and how that either feeds or starves your defilements. As a result of purifying your mind from greed, aversion, and delusion through virtue and sense restraint coupled with proper attention, you will get to understand *anattā* and the Four Noble Truths for yourself, and be liberated from suffering eventually. Not as a result of abstract rationalizations that you use to downplay and cover up the suffering you generate through your own actions—until that doesn’t work anymore.

Why do they see the Commentaries and abhidhamma as untrustworthy or inaccurate?

Because they consist either of descriptions of how to develop the opposite of mindfulness (complete absorption in one thing at the expense of everything else, depriving you of the perspective to distinguish wholesome from unwholesome) or abstract information that will make you think you understand what the Buddha meant just because you can parrot it.

## Losing Mindfulness?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Anemone1k 2024-10-18 23:05:11

How can mindfulness be lost if the very act of recognizing that loss implies its presence?

An animal, for example, could be said to have legitimately lost its mindfulness of virtue since animals don’t appear to have any reference point for virtuous recollection, but in contrast a human who recognizes he is breaking the precepts has not lost his mindfulness (otherwise he would not know he is breaking precepts). At most he has chosen to suppress his mindfulness to the degree required to act in that way, which indicates that the unfortunate choosing of that choice itself was rooted in mindfulness. So it doesn’t seem possible to ever get outside of mindfulness once it is established, even if an entire life is lived making choices antithetical to it. This doesn’t seem like a particularly skillful way to live, nor very peaceful, yet it would not seem to ever completely leave behind the mindfulness of what is wholesome.

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-20 17:13:36

but in contrast a human who recognizes he is breaking the precepts has not lost his mindfulness (otherwise he would not know he is breaking precepts).



*HAS ANYONE TYPED UP AJAHN NYANAMOLI THERO'S HANDWRITTEN TRANSLATIONS OF THE MAJJH.*

At most he has chosen to suppress his mindfulness to the degree required to act in that way, which indicates that the unfortunate choosing of that choice itself was rooted in mindfulness

In a certain sense you could put it that way, but “being mindful” in itself doesn’t do anything. Freedom from suffering is not attained simply through mindfulness but also through effort (another one of the basic faculties and enlightenment factors). So if a person acts in unwholesome ways, their effort is lacking, and their mindfulness too, present as it may be, clearly isn’t sufficiently developed. You wouldn’t walk into a pit of burning embers if you were truly mindful of it as such.

## **Has anyone typed up Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero’s handwritten translations of the Majjhima-Nikaya?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** ProfessionalIcy1980 2024-10-18 16:36:37

Just downloaded the handwritten translations from Path Press and was wondering if anyone had typed them up/had a typed copy.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-19 05:47:17**

You’re probably referring to this. The author is not the living Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero from Hillside Hermitage, but an English monk named Ñāṇamoli who died in 1960.

## **Touched by joy and sorrow: Questioning some quotes of supposed Arahants.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** devot3e 2024-10-15 01:58:48

I’ve heard some teachers believe that an Arahant still feels emotions including negative ones, but simply does not hold them. This has been bubbling in my mind since I heard a teacher who I best not name say that an Arahant still experiences dukkha, but that there is no self in it, that it is simply “dukkha arising and dukkha passing away.”

One anecdote of Ajahn Chah’s interaction with a palm reader who read his palm and said: “You have a lot of anger!” to which Ajahn Chah replied: “Yes, but I don’t use it.”

Some Western monks asked Luang Por Piak about this passage. His reply was along these lines: “Luang Por Chah was very creative with his use of language, he wanted to shake people up sometimes. The mind of an arahant is totally free from defilements. What he was referring to was the results of past kamma that were still present.”

Similarly:

In 1979, Luang Pu Dune went to Chantaburi to rest and to visit with Ajaan Somchai ... He discussed different points of meditation practice with Luang Pu, finally asking him, "Do you still have any anger?" Luang Pu immediately answered, "I do, but I don't pick it up."

When Luang Pu Dune was undergoing treatment at Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok, large numbers of people came ... Mr. Bamrungsak Kongsuk ... broached the topic of the practice of the Dhamma by asking, "Luang Pu, how does one cut off anger?" Luang Pu answered, "There's nobody who cuts it off. There's only being aware of it in time. When you're aware of it in time, it disappears on its own."

And finally, another Ajahn Chah quote:

"The Buddha said that the Enlightened Ones were far from defilements. This doesn't mean

The mind of one who practises is the same; it doesn't run away anywhere, it stays right

These activities of happiness, unhappiness and so on are constantly arising because th  
(in "Opening the Dhamma Eye")

—

As I consider these quotes, it of course occurs to me that the teaching within may be a misrepresentation of what Arahantship means, an underestimation of the enormity of the shift. Obviously, if that were the case, it comes with certain implications about many teachers, which I should navigate with care. That being said, it's possible it is in fact I that am misunderstanding here.

- (1) First, perhaps I am reading too much into things said with conventional language (as well as having been translated), in a conventional context and not precise but rather for the benefit of the one listening. Perhaps LP Piak's description points to this, and is very clear on the matter re: defilements- and as far as I can tell, in line with the suttas. And with the second LP Dune story, he could perhaps be pointing to anatta- especially, once again, in context & with convention so that the person listening might better understand. I best not underestimate the tendency for language (and doubly so through translation) and context to muddle the meaning.
- (2) Second, it I must examine the texts.

"...In all matters the sage is unsupported, nothing that makes dear, nor undear, sorrow and avarice do not stain that one, As water does not stay upon a leaf. As a water-drop on lotus plant, as water does not stain a lotus flower, even so the sage is never stained by seen, heard, or whatever's cognized. Certainly the wise do not conceive upon the seen, the heard, and cognized, nor wish for purity through another, for they are not attached nor yet displeased." Jara Sutta, Sn4.6

I read Dhammapada 83 before:

"Virtuous beings are unattached.  
They do not indulge in heedless speech

about sensual pleasures.  
They experience both joy and sorrow  
but are possessed by neither."

This translation is by Ajahn Munindo, an Ajahn Chah follower (and also associated with the likes of LP Sumedho, whose talk "Do Arahants Like Ice Cream?" is worth hearing just to understand his idea of it.) I found something different in other translations:

True persons give up everything,  
Sabbattha ve sappurisā cajanti,  
they don't cajole for the things they desire.  
Na kāmakāmā lapayanti santo;  
Though touched by sadness or happiness,  
Sukhena phuṭṭhā atha vā dukhena,  
the astute appear neither depressed nor elated.  
Na uccāvacam paṇḍitā dassayanti.

This one is by Bhante Sujato, who I suspect favors a similar view, but translated those two lines more literally. Ajahn Munindo's liberal use of "joy" and "sorrow" for "sukha" and "dukkha" implies the same take as before. (Disclaimer- I don't know Pali, and only picked out those words.) A number of other translators chose similarly.

I know dukkha had different and sometimes nuanced meanings depending on context. The dukkha of the three characteristics to me implies the inherent unsatisfactoriness of anything of the world, which the Arahant still knows, along with anatta and anicca. For the Arahant, "though still in contact with the world, unshaken the mind remains, beyond all sorrow, spotless, secure." (Mangala Sutta) And there is of course the dukkha of the first arrow vs the second arrow, the second of which would match with the dukkha of the Four Noble Truths.

I'm not really sure what my exact question is here. It's not my place to cast a judgement on whether these respected teachers are Ariya beings, especially considering my first possible misunderstanding. However, the idea that comes out of these words, while it might be a creation of my own mind rather than actually intended, feels shaky when cross-examined. If I understand correctly, HH might have something to say about all this. Happy to be pointed to a piece of writing already completed (but would appreciate help with anything super technical, please.) Would appreciate if anyone can add to this!

Sorry for the length of the post. Gratitude ☸

Edit: adding AN 4.195 (worth reading in its entirety)

"manasā dhammaṃ viññāya neva **sumano** hoti na **dummano**; upekkhako viharati sato sampajāno. Knowing a thought with the mind, they're neither happy nor sad, but remain equanimous, mindful and aware."

Excerpt From Aṅguttaranikāya [Pali-English]: Numbered Discourses Bhikkhu Sujato

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-15 14:01:44

See Itivuttaka 44:

And what is the element of extinguishment with residue? It's when a bhikkhu is an Arahant, who has destroyed the influxes, completed the renunciate journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, arrived at the highest goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of being, and is liberated through the right, ultimate knowledge. His five sense faculties still remain unimpaired, and so he continues to experience the agreeable and disagreeable, to feel pleasure and pain. The ending of passion, aversion and muddledness in him is called the element of extinguishment with residue.

See also MN 152, which states about an Arahant:

...when seeing a form with the eye, there arises in a monk what is agreeable, what is disagreeable, what is agreeable and disagreeable. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome and what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants — in the presence of what is loathsome and what is not — cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, aware, & mindful.

In theory, it's not wrong to say that pleasure and pain remain in an Arahant. But it also depends on the context and the audience. If they incline towards the view of being—welcoming, delighting, enjoying—which is the more common scenario, then it's more accurate to say that Nibbāna is the destruction of feelings (even of consciousness altogether) since that can bring *them* closer to the middle, and away from their delight in feelings. But if they incline towards the view of non-being—resisting and denying—which can happen more with monastics and very earnest practitioners, then stating that not everything needs to be destroyed might nudge *them* closer to the middle. But, one thing for sure, there is no room for debate concerning the acts an Arahant is incapable of, regardless of which angle you take.

You can't necessarily judge the validity of what someone teaches based solely on how they describe the final goal, especially if it's expressed as generically as, "X is still there, but you are no longer attached to it." Even the most erroneous views about the Dhamma can be made to fit into such a broad framework.

an Arahant still experiences dukkha, but that there is no self in it, that it is simply "dukkha arising and dukkha passing away."

Taking this as an example, you would need to dig deeper to find out what does \*\*\*dukkha" actually mean *for them*, and whether the views, attitudes, and practices that they proclaim for reaching that goal actually match what the Suttas instruct. Using the right phrases doesn't amount to much in itself. Hence, the Buddha said that someone can get the phras-

ing of a teaching right, but not the meaning, and vice versa. This topic is a case where that distinction becomes particularly evident.

## Monks online

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Print-Remarkable 2024-10-11 11:43:05

Lately I've been trying to limit internet usage as a form of entertainment. Obviously the Venerables have internet access. I was wondering do they avoid frivolous browsing like reading news or social media for example and just stick to things dealing with study, teaching and spreading of the Dhamma?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-12 02:58:52

I was wondering do they avoid frivolous browsing like reading news or social media for example and just stick to things dealing with study, teaching and spreading of the Dhamma?

By being aware of your intentions even before you pick up a device and while you are using it too, making sure that it's never one of distraction or entertainment, which could easily happen even if the initial intention was appropriate.

“And how, bhikkhus, has a bhikkhu comprehended a mode of conduct and manner of dwelling in such a way that as he conducts himself thus and as he dwells thus, evil unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure do not flow in upon him? Suppose a man would enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of him, thorns behind him, thorns to his left, thorns to his right, thorns below him, thorns above him. He would go forward mindfully, he would go back mindfully, thinking, ‘May no thorn prick me!’ So too, bhikkhus, whatever in the world has a pleasing and agreeable nature is called a thorn in the Noble One’s Discipline. Having understood this thus as ‘a thorn,’ one should understand restraint and nonrestraint.

—SN 35.244

## Sense pleasures

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Wild-Brush1554 2024-10-09 14:59:02

There is a lot of emphasis on abandonment of sense pleasures in the dhamma talks.

What would one mean exactly by that? For example, when im free i mostly use my phone(most of it is consuming dhamma content), listen to music, talk to family or exercise. Is one not to do these at all? And if one can still do it, how do you start to devalue sensual pleasures.

When i dont use my phone or do any other things i just sit in one place and stare at the wall. Is that the correct thing to do? And how do i be mindful of my intentions and truly be self aware.

Please offer me your advice and do correct me in case I got something wrong.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-10 04:16:54**

It's more about abandoning sensual craving than avoiding every pleasant sense experience as such. However, certain things are *always* done out of sensual craving, and listening to music would be one of them. If you give up all sexual activity, beautification of the body, entertainment, and eating for the sake of pleasure, you will have eliminated the specific actions that are always driven by sensual craving.

Everything else, such as exercising or talking to family, isn't sensual in itself; it becomes sensual depending on how and why you do it—whether you're engaging in conversation just to pass the time and have fun or for a practical purpose, whether you're exercising to improve your outward appearance or for health reasons, etc.

When i dont use my phone or do any other things i just sit in one place and stare at the wall. Is that the correct thing to do?

Occasionally it could be (in dedicated periods of contemplation once you're well restrained), but it's not mandatory by any means. It could easily be an unwholesome intention of self-mortification if you think you *have* to do it.

It hardly matters what you *do*; that will change from day to day depending on circumstances and events in your life. What matters most is what you *don't* do, no matter what: breaking the precepts and engaging in any of the inherently sensual acts I listed above.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-10 09:07:02 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I understand that its about abandoning but would me not indulging in the sense pleasure result in that?

For example: if i stop listening to music now and then a few months later I hear a track I really used to like, I would imagine that I would still crave to listen to it. It's different that im being disciplined but the craving would still be there.

Restraint alone will certainly not result in that by itself. But what will happen is, when you start to restrain yourself, you won't simply "forget" about those things for months at a stretch. Your mind will be very frequently trying to convince you to listen to music again, or whatever the case may be. That's when the practice begins; the precepts and avoidance of specific things was just the "setup" for the practice.

When the mind is craving for that which it can no longer have, you start contemplating the danger in sensual indulgence, and how it's pointless and leads to nothing but further dissatisfaction—like a dog gnawing on a fleshless bone. Over time, your mind would begin to regard sensual pleasures like that automatically, and restraint would no longer be a matter of “discipline” since there would simply be no interest.

Also food is a big thing that my mind goes towards or looks forward to when i restrain it from other pleasures. But i have to eat, so how do I develop the understanding of when im eating out of duty and when im eating out of pleasure.

I would focus on perfecting the other things first, since eating with the right motivation is a subtler practice that comes a bit later in the training.

Your mind will likely be delighting in food more than before when you've taken away everything else, but that alone is not an issue. You still have the option to eat with the context of survival and not the context of pleasure despite the mind craving for the food. And then you begin to realize that sensuality really isn't in the sensual objects themselves but in the attitude of indulgence: even though you may well be eating the same things, the mind will be unhappy simply because you're not allowing it to wallow in the food internally.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-11 03:56:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Kamma is not some sort of moral energy that you accumulate. There can of course be external consequences for your actions as well, but the core of “bad kamma” lies in what you're doing to your own mind. You're fueling its craving and thus making it more liable to suffering when you allow it to act out of greed, aversion, or delusion. So yes, any action whatsoever that is rooted in those things is “bad kamma”, even if the whole world thinks it's fine or even praiseworthy:

“Bhikkhus, there are these three sources that give rise to actions. What three? Greed, hate, and delusion are sources that give rise to actions. Any action that emerges from greed, aversion, or delusion—born, sourced, and originated from greed, aversion, or delusion—is unbeneficial, blameworthy, results in suffering, and leads to the production of actions, not their cessation. These are three sources that give rise to actions.

There are these three sources that give rise to actions. What three? Non-greed, non-aversion, and non-delusion are sources that give rise to actions. Any action that emerges from non-greed, non-aversion, and non-delusion—born, sourced, and originated from non-greed, non-aversion, or non-delusion—is beneficial, blameless, results in happiness, and leads to the cessation of actions, not their production. These are three sources that give rise to actions.”

—AN 3.111

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-11 10:20:03 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

What is kamma then, what does the word refer to? And what determines where someone is reborn?

Kamma is the action itself. In the Sutta I quoted above, the Pāli is *kamma* each time “action” occurs. So, you don’t “incur” bad kamma; you *do* bad kamma right at the moment of the action if the intention is one of greed, aversion, or delusion. Thus, beings are the direct owners of their actions, and there is no external force or divine principle that can interfere with that.

Is the only benefit of giving dana or generating merit the fairly temporary wholesome state of mind that it produces?

There can be a temporary pleasant state that only lasts shortly, but the inclination towards non-greed (in relative terms) shapes your character and mental tendencies, thus influencing your future actions and decisions and where you end up in subsequent existences.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-12 05:22:41 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Do we then get a clean slate with each rebirth?

You get a clean slate to *choose* every second of your life, i.e., the momentum of your past choices cannot possibly force you to make the same choices again. It’s you who chooses to give in to the pressure of habits.

And it’s the same throughout this life as it is throughout multiple ones. In this very life, the fact that your mind pressures you to keep drinking or smoking if you’ve been doing it before doesn’t mean you can’t say no. It’s just that the habits that pass on to the next life are much less specific (lack of virtue, covetousness, dishonesty, hatred, arrogance, stubbornness, etc.).

## **Citta is Where the Heart Is?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Anemone1k 2024-10-09 13:17:29

In Hillside Hermitage’s latest talk Learning the Language of the Mind it is mentioned near the end that citta is where the heart is. For me this doesn’t compute. Like, at all. I have been trying to see citta as the container of the experience as a whole such as the mood or the shape of experience, but this citta being located where the heart is making me doubt I even know up from down anymore. Anyone able to shed more light on the heart being talked about here?



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-10 04:42:51**

I have been trying to see citta as the container of the experience as a whole such as the mood or the shape of experience

I would suggest continuing in that same direction and not making a big deal out of the confusion. You would come to understand the point rightly based on that, as opposed to sensation-based meditation practices that would only lead you to misconceive the body even more while thinking you're seeing it clearly.

The disclaimer in the description of the video is there for a reason:

This practice is only applicable to those who are already sufficiently established in virtue and have been restraining their senses from intentional distraction and unbeneficial states, **otherwise any notion of “heart”, “body” or “mind” that they have will not be pertaining to the true internal physicality of rupa.**

Simply put, the reason why that's a prerequisite is that sensuality and non-restraint keep one's mind and views firmly planted in the domain of external sense objects. So when an unrestrained person tries to discern the body, they cannot help but “objectify” it and misconceive it as a collection of sense objects (most commonly tactile sensations). But the actual “internal” body (the “physicality” as referred to in the talk) is something else, described as a “hollow, empty village” that gets attacked by bandits, and it can only be seen clearly once the pull of sense objects is no longer able to lure you into acts of greed, aversion, or distraction.

The mind is also a sense base, so even if you don't misconceive the body as sensations, you can start descending into and proliferating abstract notions about the body. Even if they are correct in theory, those are still sense objects, not the “internal” body that was being referred to where you would discern the “heart”. And that's what the citta *corresponds to*, as said in the video; not that that *is* the citta.

(This discussion is also relevant to the topic).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-12 02:51:27 (in reply to a comment not included)**

My question is, is there any danger of going too far with this inclusion? In other words, can I “over” include to the point where I miss the mark?

Yes, that can and often does happen, in the form of the view that all thinking is bad, and it's about “just being mindful”, etc.

You do need to think, ponder, and clarify when you have evidently lost the clarity, i.e., when you catch yourself starting to incline towards carelessness and unwholesome actions even on a mental level. Then you “refresh” the contexts and contemplations, but only to the extent that there is a practical purpose for it (i.e., a direct connection with abandoning unwholesome states here and now) and not more than that.

## [A question about moderation and secular living.]

]([https://www.reddit.com/r/HillsideHermitage/comments/1fz5kd6/a\\_question\\_about\\_moderation\\_and](https://www.reddit.com/r/HillsideHermitage/comments/1fz5kd6/a_question_about_moderation_and)

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** DaNiEl880099 2024-10-08 17:33:14

Hello. Let's assume I'm an ordinary person and I don't have a strict ambition to achieve stream entry. As a lay person, is it necessary for me to follow the 8 precepts? What if a given person is interested in Buddhism as something that is to constitute his spirituality as a form of defense against complete absorption by "worldly things", but at the same time does not see the power of renunciation. I think Buddha also gave some advice for this type of person, such as collecting "merits", "generosity", eradicating traits that harm other people?

In short, I mean how do you see the approach to life for such an ordinary person. In Buddhist countries there are often millions of people who declare themselves to be Buddhists, what compromise do you see for them?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-09 08:28:12

Let's assume I'm an ordinary person and I don't have a strict ambition to achieve stream entry. As a lay person, is it necessary for me to follow the 8 precepts? What if a given person is interested in Buddhism as something that is to constitute his spirituality as a form of defense against complete absorption by "worldly things", but at the same time does not see the power of renunciation.

No, eight precepts would not be "necessary" for such a person. It's almost guaranteed that they wouldn't even have the motivation to forego sensuality and distractions unless they were aiming for liberation anyway. Even if they happened to be celibate for some reason, they would find another way to fill that gap emotionally. Thus, they wouldn't be truly living aloof from sensuality, which is the practical meaning of "8 precepts".

I think Buddha also gave some advice for this type of person, such as collecting "merits", "generosity", eradicating traits that harm other people?

Certainly. He would advise everyone no matter who they are and what they want to keep the five precepts and to be generous (and so do many other religions at least in part). That's the type of person he would give instructions similar to those in the Sigalovādasutta.

## 2 questions about the three characteristics formula

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-10-08 15:04:19

Sabbe sankhara anicca

sabbe sankhara dukkha

sabbe dhamma anatta

In this classical formula there are two points that are still unclear to me.

First :

I don't get why does it switch from sankhara to dhamma. It would imply that something escapes one of the categories ?!

Does it mean that everything is not self but not everything is anicca and dukkha ? Or that all determinations are anicca and dukkha but that not all determinations are anatta ? So either something(s) in the dhamma category is not sankhara or sth in the sankhara category is not a dhamma...

Second :

I'm trying to see some kind of logic in the order of the three statement.

For example,

Anicca would be the fact that everything that something depends on is liable to change.

Anatta would be the fact that I am subjected to this change. I can't do anything about it. My eye through which I'm getting sights does his own thing; I can't choose to not see or not have a declining eyesight. Even If I would be taking medicine, the healing process (anicca) would be totally out of my control (anatta). As such, all those ever changing determinations, pertaining to *that body because of which* that are outside my reach are inherently and always unsatisfactory (dukkha).

So the order : anicca >anatta>dukkha makes quite a lot of sense but apparently if the correct order (if there is one) is anicca>dukkha>anatta the causal step between dukkha and anatta is hazy to me. What am I missing ?

Any input is welcome !

EDIT :

I kinda found an answer in a previous answer from u/AlexCoventry quoting Nanavira even though I'm still not entirely clear how dukkha helps in understanding anatta...

Sabbe sankhārā aniccā; Sabbe sankhārā dukkhā; Sabbe dhammā anattā. (*'All determinations are impermanent; All determinations are unpleasurable (suffering); All things are not-self.'*) Attā, 'self', is fundamentally a notion of *mastery over things* (cf. Majjhima iv,5 <M.i,231-2> & Khandha Samy. vi,7 <S.iii,66>[7]). But this notion is entertained only if it is pleasurable,[c] and it is only pleasurable provided the mastery is assumed to be permanent; for a mastery—which is essentially a kind of absolute timelessness, an *unmoved* moving of things—that is undermined by impermanence is no mastery at all, but a mockery. Thus the regarding of a thing, a *dhamma*, as *attā* or 'self' can survive for only so long as the notion gives pleasure, and it only gives pleasure for so long as that *dhamma* can be considered as permanent (for the regarding of a thing as 'self' endows it with the illusion of a kind of super-stability in time). In itself, *as a dhamma regarded as attā*, its impermanence is not manifest (for it is pleasant to consider it as permanent); but when it is seen to be dependent upon *other dhammā* not

considered to be permanent, its impermanence does then become manifest. To see impermanence in what is regarded as *attā*, one must emerge from the confines of the individual *dhamma* itself and see that *it depends on what is impermanent*. Thus *sabbe sankhārā* (not *dhammā*) *aniccā* is said, meaning ‘All things that things (*dhammā*) depend on are impermanent’. A given *dhamma*, as a *dhamma* regarded as *attā*, is, on account of being so regarded, considered to be pleasant; but when it is seen to be dependent upon some other *dhamma* that, not being regarded as *attā*, is manifestly unpleasurable (owing to the invariable false perception of permanence, of super-stability, in one not free from *asmimāna*), then its own unpleasurableness becomes manifest. Thus *sabbe sankhārā* (not *dhammā*) *dukkhā* is said. When this is seen—i.e. when perception of permanence and pleasure is understood to be false –, the notion ‘This *dhamma* is my *attā*’ comes to an end, and is replaced by *sabbe dhammā anattā*. Note that it is the *sotāpanna* who, knowing and seeing that his perception of permanence and pleasure is false, is free from this notion of ‘self’, though not from the more subtle conceit ‘(I) am’ (*asmimāna*);[d] but it is only the *arahat* who is entirely free from the (false) perception of permanence and pleasure, and ‘for him’ perception of impermanence is no longer unpleasurable. (See also A NOTE ON PATICCASAMUPPĀDA §12 & PARAMATTHA SACCA.)

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-09 09:29:51

Does it mean that everything is not self but not everything is *anicca* and *dukkha* ?

In theory, yes, something which isn’t *saṅkhata* (“conditioned” or “determined”) will not be *anicca* or *dukkha*. But it’s not that there is one experience or state that you can just arrive at that would in itself be *asaṅkhata* regardless of *your* way of relating to it. As I’ve mentioned before, *saṅkhāras* are things for which one is entirely responsible due to one’s ignorance. Nibbāna cannot be an outside thing that “rescues” you from *saṅkhāras* because nothing can destroy your ignorance for you.

So practically speaking, until ignorance is abandoned, even (your idea of) Nibbāna is *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*.

So the order : *anicca* > *anatta* > *dukkha* makes quite a lot of sense but apparently if the correct order (if there is one) is *anicca* > *dukkha* > *anatta* the causal step between *dukkha* and *anatta* is hazy to me. What am I missing ?

You could say that the full “sequence” is *attā* > *anicca* > *dukkha* > *anattā*. In order for it not to be abstract, you need to start by recognizing that you have *already* taken certain things as yours. Even if you deny it through the learned notion that “there is no self,” wherever there is delight, passion, and any concern about something being destroyed, there is appropriation.

Only from that personally applicable as opposed to theoretical starting point is *anicca* automatically and directly seen as *dukkha*. The fact that something is liable to perish is only painful because you delight in and assume ownership over it. Seeing that sufficiently automatically results in disenchantment and abandoning of what you used to grasp, i.e.,

what was *attā* (or belonging to *attā*) becomes *anattā*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-10 10:11:28 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

You're probably thinking in terms of Ven. Ñāṇavīra's definition of *saṅkhāras* as "determinations"—things that are a basis for other things. That's not necessarily wrong and it can be enough to uproot self-view, but there's a more accurate way to look at it (which is why these days we translate *saṅkhāra* as "activities" or "activations").

In fact, the Suttas don't really use the word *saṅkhāra* in that sense in most contexts where it occurs. See for example this well-known verse:

*"Impermanent are all activities (saṅkhāra), of the nature to arise and pass away.*

*Having arisen, they cease; their **stilling** (vūpasamo) is what's pleasant."*

The standard definition of Nibbāna:

*"This is peaceful; this is sublime—that is, the stilling of all activities (sabba-saṅkhāra-samatho), the letting go of all appropriation, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna."*

And also Suttas like SN 36.11, where the "progressive cessation/stilling of *saṅkhāras*" is described (i.e., the *jhānas*). "Determinations" are not something you can "still" in that sense. The body will always continue to be the necessary basis for your experience, for example.

Therefore, the most common meaning of *saṅkhāra* in the Suttas could be rendered as "a doing/activity", and hence you are responsible both for their continuation and for their cessation. But being responsible is not the same as having a direct, immediate choice in the matter, as some people would think they do when practicing "letting go of all doing". As I mentioned, *saṅkhāras* are a direct result of ignorance, so if ignorance is still there, they will be there too even if you let go of everything in sight, and when ignorance is not there anymore, they *can't* be there even if you want them to.

So you could say that what you're directly responsible for is acting out of the five hindrances and lack of restraint, because of which ignorance would be further fueled.

Going back to the three characteristics "formula", seeing that all "doings" are impermanent and suffering *indirectly*—similar to Ñāṇavīra's approach—uproots the taking of any *dhamma* as "mine". That illustrates how whether you think you have a self or not is irrelevant; what determines the presence of selfhood (certain *dhammas* taken as self) is the presence of *saṅkhāras*, and these only continue for as long as they are not seen clearly (as impermanent and unpleasant). The most fundamental *saṅkhāras* would be passion, aversion, and delusion, as per SN 36.11.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-11 12:37:26 (in reply to a comment not included)**

And in all the other instances (i.e. the three fold formula or *Anicca vata sankhara*) where *sankhara* is used with a passive meaning and ends up being more or less equivalent to *sankhata*, keeping using “conditioned phenomena” which seems more intuitive.

I don’t see any justification in the Suttas to assume a passive meaning for *saṅkhāra* in any instance. I would call that “patchwork”, which becomes necessary when people (especially scholars) prioritize fitting things into a theoretical framework rather than seeing for themselves how the Buddha’s usage of these terms pointed directly towards freedom from craving and suffering.

The word *saṅkhata* exists and is used in the Suttas a few times, so the Buddha could’ve easily said “*sabbaṃ saṅkhataṃ aniccaṃ*” to avoid ambiguity. But that wouldn’t free you from suffering, precisely because it’s “more intuitive” (i.e., it doesn’t take a Buddha to discover it and noble insight to understand it).

In fact, if *saṅkhāra* were to mean “conditioned phenomenon”, it wouldn’t be possible to free oneself from them entirely. Apart from all the other “conditioned phenomena” that an Arahant would inevitably continue to experience, Nibbāna itself, the *asaṅkhata*, depends on the condition of having freed oneself from passion and ignorance, so it’s not “unconditioned”. Not only that, but that condition itself is also permanent, which would invalidate the statement “*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*”.

But Nibbāna is free from all “doing” (or even “condition-ing” or “determining, if one insists), i.e. devoid of *saṅkhāras*. That’s why it’s also the cessation of *kamma*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-12 04:25:32 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Even though I totally understand your reasoning which runs against taking *sankhara* as *sankhata* in certain instances, isn’t it just possible that we could have in pali too some words which covers passive and active meaning? I mean “formation” can be understood as the action of forming, being formed, or as a structure or arrangement of something.

Yes, but again, there would be no reason to risk ambiguity when *saṅkhata* exists and isn’t uncommon. Plus, there isn’t any instance in Nikāyas where reading *saṅkhāra* as “conditioned phenomenon” is justifiable, let alone necessary. It remains impersonal and abstract, unrelated to suffering and its cessation. If you at least understand it as *things that condition/determine (you)*, as Ñāṇavīra did, there would at least be an implication of *paṭīcasamuppāda*, which is indeed practical and relevant, and would free you from suffering.

Could you elaborate a little bit on how to understand properly “doings” where indeed scholars and most of the buddhist establishments understand

sankhara as a passive thing and HH not ?

“Doings” wouldn’t be the best general rendering because it’s limited to your intentions. That’s one type of *saṅkhāra*, but not all of them. “Makings\*\*\*” might be better, since it covers both the things you do and the things that make (you). In either case, it’s *active*.

I mean, nobody thinks an activity is permanent, right ? An activity/doing necessarily implies a change.

Worldly activities, sure; analyzing things on that external level would make no difference. Understanding “*saṅkhāras* are impermanent” won’t make you a *sotāpanna*; what does is to truly see that **all** *saṅkhāras* are impermanent. In other words, you have to see that certain subtler things in your experience you may not even regard as such *are* actually *saṅkhāras*. You have to stop overlooking them, taking them for granted. And that’s what it means to grasp the sign of the mind.

For example, most people wouldn’t see that the five hindrances are activities that take place *in regard to* their thoughts. Thus, they would try to get rid of the thoughts themselves, believing that they are the problem.

But the relevant activity (or “movement”) there is non-endurance/delight/aversion in regard to the arisen pressure, so whether you proliferate *or* deny the thoughts by focusing on physical sensations instead, it will be within that same *saṅkhāra* that remains unseen. There will be internal motion even in that seeming quietude of no thinking.

Only once you clearly see and “still” the activity of sensuality-and-aversion properly can you go on to still the activity of thinking, hence you need to be established in the first *jhāna* in order to enter the second. Otherwise, you end up with neither (i.e., with “absorption” or “concentration”).

Have a closer read of SN 36.11, which shows that it’s *saṅkhāras* as “activities” (e.g., speaking, thinking, breathing, even feeling, ultimately) that the Buddha refers to when he says they’re impermanent:

And I have also said: ‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering.’ That has been stated by me with reference **to the impermanence of *saṅkhāras***. That has been stated by me with reference to *saṅkhāras* being subject to destruction ... to *saṅkhāras* being subject to vanishing ... to *saṅkhāras* being subject to fading away ... to *saṅkhāras* being subject to cessation ... to *saṅkhāras* being subject to change.

“But, bhikkhu, I have also taught the **successive cessation of *saṅkhāras***. For one who has attained the first *jhāna*, speech has ceased. For one who has attained the second *jhāna*, thought and examination have ceased...

At the end of the day, Ñāṇavīra’s interpretation of *saṅkhāras* is good enough because it factually conveys *paṭiccasamuppāda* (the more popular “conditioned phenomenon” one doesn’t) and would thus bring you to the same place—cessation of ignorance > cessation of activities—if rightly pursued. It’s just that it’s not really how the Buddha was using the term in the Suttas.

## Question from Ajahn's essay 'Appearance and Existence'.

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** noobknoob 2024-10-05 17:57:42

Full Essay: <https://www.hillsidehermitage.org/appearance-and-existence/>

“There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; there is this world and the other world; there is mother and father; there are spontaneously reborn beings; there are in the world good and virtuous recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.” (MN 117/iii,72)

“This easily overlooked passage offers a very acute description of an *authentic* attitude of a *puthujjana*—the attitude of recognition and acknowledgment of the existence of things *as* phenomena (“*there is...*”). Someone might argue that one does not necessarily see the spontaneously reborn beings for example, **but the point is that one should recognize the mere fact that there *could be* spontaneously reborn beings—the possibility of spontaneously reborn beings exists as such.** And if one recognizes the validity of the appearance and existence of that possibility, an *expectation of the concrete proof* that can be obtained only through *senses* (i.e. one needs to *see* those beings) ceases to be relevant, in the same way that a view that a thing exists only if it can be experienced through the senses ceases.”

The argument made here in support of the possibility of existence of spontaneously reborn beings is that the possibility of their existence is real as such.

It can be argued that the possibility of them not existing is real as such as well. So how can one believe one over the other?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-06 08:06:28

It can be argued that the possibility of them not existing is real as such as well.  
So how can one believe one over the other?

The point of that is to go beyond the scientific point of view that most people are trapped in—a form of “mundane wrong view”—where they assume that something can be real only if it appears to their five senses. You would only begin to prioritize the possibility of the thing not existing if you’ve fallen back into that scientific mindset.

The phenomenological point of view, which the entire Dhamma is founded on, would not *deny* scientific evidence but would recognize that it’s just another phenomenon in your experience that isn’t intrinsically more fundamental than all others. Regarding it as the lens through which everything else should be seen is a *choice*. And that choice is not necessarily wrong when it comes to mundane matters, but it is when it comes to the five aggregates because science is *within* them, not the other way around.

If you acknowledge that, you would see that there always remains the possibility, no matter how remote, for things to be otherwise than the evidence from your five senses shows



you. And that recognition is enough to return to the phenomenological perspective. You don't have to believe in specific possibilities right from the start.

## So I feel like I'm possessed

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-10-05 16:13:51

This might seem like a strange and mystical subject that doesn't belong here, but anyone who has read Nyanamoli's *Meanings* will know that the phenomenon of "feeling possessed" is a thing that *can* happen, even along the path.

For me, it precedes my Buddhist practice. It's difficult to communicate what it's like feeling yourself as a plurality, or a plurality in yourself. I've experienced the inverse too, like I was a thief in my own body, like I stole a life, body, and memories that don't belong to me. It hasn't been a continuous thing and its current manifestation is more unnerving than it's been for a while.

Like Mathias said in *Meanings*, it undermines one's ability to act. Who is acting? If I doubt my current state of mind and feel like "I" am not in control and fight to "regain" control from the possessing force, why should I believe "my" attempts to "regain" control are "my own"? How should I consider the intention to fight for control? Does acting out of the perception of being possessed reinforce this very phenomenon?

I had a dream a while ago. A wicked man was talking. He finished whatever he was saying with the chilling words "*I have the best seat in the house. **Behind your eyes.***" I had another similar dream this morning.

Now, the Buddha taught that one who keeps the upasotha cannot be possessed by spirits. I ought to be safe from *them*, but is that all that can possess someone? What about this "self"? Do we dare go into the psychological notions of possession here?

Anyway, I don't actually feel all that worried now that it's passed. I try to see it as an image that has arisen, much like self. I used to have a deep fear of losing my mind and losing control. That actually served as a big motivator on the path. Because if someone restrained and virtuous who wants nothing loses their mind, can you even tell? They just sit there like usual. I'm the owner of my actions. I'm gonna keep my precepts and restraint and just keep going. I appreciate any advice or input on this subject.

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-06 06:19:10

I would try not to read into it, and focus on the same principle as always: making sure not to act in unwholesome ways, regardless of what the origin of the pressure is. You won't lose your mind unless you fail to do that, even in the worst of scenarios.

Also, you might have to be extra diligent with that if you have a history of mental health struggles. That can often be due to your mind wielding more power over you than "normal", so it will tend to have more tools in its arsenal to trick you. But it's not that people

with mental health issues belong to a different category; it's just the normal condition intensified (or no longer successfully covered up).

## **Video of Ven Nanamoli removing ticks from a snake**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** LeUne1 2024-10-02 09:28:30

Does harming the ticks not go against perfect virtue?

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DffOpUbrhTo>

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-02 10:30:38 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

People on this sub said you should let mosquitos take blood.

That's not true, and such an attitude would tend to fall into self-mortification. But killing them categorically falls into indulgence.

## **Is jhana only attainable by a sotapanna and above?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Substantial\_Suit5367 2024-10-01 03:11:05

Maybe I'm misreading or misunderstanding the suttas I have looked at, but did the Buddha say that only someone who has gone beyond sensuality can attain jhanas? And does going beyond (valuing) sensuality make one a sotapanna?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-01 16:08:29**

The Suttas clearly state that even eternalists can attain jhānas. The question whether what's generally regarded as jhāna today—not requiring dispassion and withdrawal from sensuality, but rather skill in focusing on an object—actually is what the Buddha taught and leads to genuine freedom from suffering is a separate issue, to which our answer is no.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-02 04:29:46 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

We implemented highlighting a long time ago. That's the point of the pound sign. It's not showing on your device?

*I'M GOING TO VISIT SAMANADIPA MONASTERY THIS WEEK AND IS MY FIRST TIME EVER VISITING A M*

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-02 08:48:53 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The point wasn't that you would never experience the hindrances again. It's that if you haven't clearly discerned the danger in sensuality (the 6th item in the Sutta), it's impossible to attain the pleasure of renunciation (i.e., jhāna), because that context of danger is where the right type of "release" comes from. Not from focusing on an object.

So, it's not stream entry that's indispensable for entering jhānas, but rather dispassion for sensuality. That's why some ascetics outside the Buddha's teaching sometimes did achieve it.

**I'm going to visit Samanadipa monastery this week and is my first time ever visiting a monastery and a monk in person.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** MBBWS 2024-09-30 13:39:41

Please, can someone advice me on how to approach the monastery?

- should I bring food or other things as an offer to the monastery/monks?
- how to interact with monks (everytime we engaged should I have joined palms? I want to learn about such formalities)
- other things I should be aware of but I currently not

Thank you for your responses in advance ☺

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-30 15:34:39**

should I bring food or other things as an offer to the monastery/monks?

It's not mandatory, but you're welcome to do so if you wish.

how to interact with monks (everytime we engaged should I have joined palms? I want to learn about such formalities)

We generally don't place any emphasis on such things here.

other things I should be aware of but I currently not

I assume you've already emailed the office? Email address is on the website.

**How important is the unconditionality of the 8 precepts? (the additional 3, that is)**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ok-Addition-7759 2024-09-29 15:39:13

So, I've cut off all entertainment except for one thing, the Dungeons and Dragons campaign I've been it for the past 3 years. We're very near the end of the campaign. It's a big source of internal tension because I've been celibate and sleeping on the floor and not eating after noon for a long time and this is the one thing holding me back from taking the 8 every day, all the time, for the rest of my life. I often don't enjoy it, or don't get nearly as much enjoyment from the game or company as I used to and I don't delight in what delight remains. Part of me has wanted to just drop out for a long time.

Obviously there's issues with company, idle chatter, and the violence that's a part of the game. It's once a week for like 3 hours. Am I worrying too much? Is it that bad if I see it through to the end? It seems absurd to imagine some magical boost to my practice by finally fulfilling the 8 precepts without exception when this is the **only exception**. It's really made me see how much pressure can come from the expectation of others, because it's much harder to abandon something that will affect others.

Edit: As I said above, I've wanted to drop out for a long time, and I have. It was my intent from the beginning and I see now I wasn't "worrying too much" about the effects of continuing to play, because it feels much better having the 8 fulfilled. I think it's clear to everyone that it's **better** not to play, but what you see above is a genuine question about **how** such a compromise as continuing to play affects one's path. And yeah, it's also the defilements squirming, hoping to find a way to preserve something that I know would be **better** to be totally abandoned. Thank you for your responses, which have had the added benefit of helping me see how proud and defensive I can be.

Relevant sutta(MN 61) "Rāhula, it's like a royal elephant: immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles. Having gone into battle, it uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail, **but will simply hold back its trunk**. The elephant trainer notices that and thinks, 'This royal elephant has not given up its life to the king.'

"But when the royal elephant... having gone into battle, uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail **& his trunk**, the trainer notices that and thinks, 'This royal elephant has given up its life to the king. There is nothing it will not do.'

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-30 03:55:22

An excerpt from an essay in progress:

It's important not to deceive yourself into thinking that, as a layperson, the threshold for what constitutes greed, aversion, or delusion is somehow more lenient, and you can get away with more. We all have the same defilements, and wearing jeans instead of robes won't magically prevent indulgence in those defilements from obstructing anyone's progress in the Dhamma. If anything, it's the opposite. The fact that, as a layperson, your environment and lifestyle most often already put you at a disadvantage—you're trying to grow a very delicate plant in less fertile ground—means that complacency

carries a greater risk. And complacency in your views is not justified no matter how you live externally.

If keeping all the precepts is too difficult for you at the moment, the solution is not to move the goalpost and justify the shortcoming with the excuse that laypeople are not expected to do more. Taking what others do or don't do and not what you can discern for yourself as rooted in greed, aversion, or delusion as the guideline for what's wrong is an attitude that will keep you bound to *silabbataparāmāsa*.

Instead, you need to be self-honest and stick to the same universal definition of what constitutes a fault—anything involving greed, aversion, and delusion, and which an Arahant would not engage in—even if that means feeling remorse for some things you still can't give up. If you don't obscure that recognition, don't cover up the ensuing regret whenever you fail, and strive to do better than last time, then you may still be progressing despite the imperfections in your restraint. But if you re-define what a fault is to leave out the things you still have difficulty giving up, you are shooting yourself in the foot.

The first two of the five powers that a noble one possesses and that drive them further along the path are shame and remorse (*hiriottappā*) in regard to unwholesome qualities.

This means that even when someone still lives as a householder keeping only the five precepts despite having attained the Right View, as was the case for many in the Buddha's day, they won't try to evade responsibility and find an external justification for fulfilling the training only partially. They would acknowledge that as a weakness on their part, even if it means feeling ashamed and remorseful. And this is precisely why, as said in the Suttas, everyone who has Right View is ultimately destined for full liberation sooner or later. Even when they're heedless, they're unable to lie to themselves about the fact that they're not fully living in accordance with the Dhamma. This means that they will inevitably begin to do so at some point, and continue walking further on the same path until they reach the culmination.

The Buddha didn't teach two modes of practice: one for laypeople and one for monastics. He taught one practice—the taming of passions and the giving up of attachments—that each individual is free to follow to whichever extent they please. How much they'll be able to achieve is proportional to the extent that they undertake it. But someone who shifts the target so that they no longer need to see craving as craving and unwholesome as unwholesome has abandoned Right View and is no longer on the same path, even if they keep all the other precepts perfectly.

*“Gotamī, the things that you would know lead to passion, not dispassion; to attachment, not to detachment; to accumulation, not diminution; to abundance of desires, not fewness of desires; to discontent, not contentment; to socializing, not seclusion; to laziness, not effort; to being burdensome, not being unburdensome. Categori-*

*cally, you should remember these things as not the Dhamma, not the training, and not the Teacher's instructions.*

*“Gotamī, the things that you would know lead to dispassion, not passion; to detachment, not attachment; to diminution, not accumulation; to fewness of desires, not abundance of desires; to contentment, not discontent; to seclusion, not socializing; to effort, not laziness; to being unburdensome, not being burdensome. Categorically, you should remember these things as the Dhamma, the training, and the Teacher's instructions.”*

— AN 8.53

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-30 11:48:09 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Why are these things said to be about virtue?

All the ones about avoiding entertainment and beautification are already within the 8 precepts, and the ones about speech are also relevant. All of those fall within virtue because they're things that involve defilements on every occasion, no matter who you are. Sense restraint is not categorical in that way; it's about what you should avoid only if the intention behind it is unwholesome.

But the ones about not harming plants, not receiving money, raw grains, etc., are specifically for monks, mainly due to societal expectations.

(Note that there is a bit of a mistranslation in one line. The Pali mentions “watching shows” in general, not just “unsuitable shows”).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-30 13:54:53 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Yes. It's still a very suboptimal condition, especially today when there's so much more room for sensuality and distraction within the five precepts than in the Buddha's time, but at least they haven't entirely fallen off the path as long as they don't justify their remaining indulgences and still see them as unwholesome.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-30 15:14:00 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It's as if developing the courage to face and endure the overwhelming gravity of one's situation (If you know you know) has been conveniently replaced by focusing on perfecting a set of rules because by doing so one doesn't have to face the overwhelming gravity of one's situation.

Some people may end up misconstruing it that way if they don't read carefully enough (as with anything) but the purpose of breaking the five precepts, incelibacy, and indulging

in entertainment *is*, knowingly or not, in every possible case, to avoid facing and enduring the overwhelming gravity of one's situation. Perhaps that part of the message doesn't always come through, but preventing that avoidance is exactly the purpose of the precepts, provided they're taken on with the right attitude. And that's why adding any more rules than the eight or overly defining them to include more than they're meant to is not advisable, since it will often result in the opposite: covering things up again.

If most people were self-honest enough to see what's coming out of sensuality, aversion, or distraction right off the bat, there would be no need to talk about individual "rules" (as was the case with the early Saṅgha). And once you do have that self-honesty and become accomplished in virtue, you don't really think in terms of individual rules anymore. You're either being heedless and turning away from the Dhamma, or not.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-02 09:09:34 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

These things lead to attachment and more suffering(they are harmful), and because the intention behind those activities will be out of line with the path.

Yes, so they are obstructions *for someone who hopes to reach freedom from suffering* because they increase craving and obstruct wisdom. They are unskillful from that point of view. That's not to say that they're "immoral", which is more about cultural norms than about liberation.

Keeping just the five precepts properly may even be considered "immoral" by some people, since you would categorically refuse to kill any living being, no matter what threat it poses to you or others, and would refuse to tell a deliberate lie no matter what's at stake.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-03 05:09:25 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is there perhaps a distinction between virtue and morality that I'm missing?

There is, or at least there tends to be in the context of Dhamma, which is why translating *sīla* as "morality" or "ethics" can be very misleading. *sīla* has to do with not acting out of the coarse cravings in your own mind in order to tame it; what society says is irrelevant in that regard. Morality is imposed from the outside, and changes relatively quickly even within the same culture.

## **How does one resist things ajjhatam?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-09-29 13:44:23

"Bhante, I am developing mindfulness of breathing."

"In what way, Ariṭṭha, are you developing mindfulness of breathing?"

“Bhante, for me sensual desire for past sensuality has been abandoned, sensual desire for future sensuality has gone away, and the perception of **resistance towards things both here** and externally has been completely removed. Mindfully, I breathe in. Mindfully, I breathe out. In this way, Bhante, I am developing mindfulness of breathing.”

“Ariṭṭha, this is mindfulness of breathing. I do not say that it isn’t.”

– SN 54.6

If *ajjhatam* is the dimension of that which is here that makes it possible for things to be out there (*bahiddhā*), is “resisting things *ajjhatam*” resisting my situation, having been thrown into and being enclosed within that body, feeling, mind, ~~these dhammas~~ my experience as a whole?

Also, is it what craving for non-being is?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-30 10:13:35

If *ajjhatam* is the dimension of that which is here that makes it possible for things to be out there (*bahiddhā*), is “resisting things *ajjhatam*” resisting my situation

Yes, but that’s a bit too theoretical. The “internal” dimension is what you’re currently feeling here and now and pushes you towards external directions. Even if there’s no blatant action externally, you can still resist things internally, even just a neutral feeling. That keeps you liable to the hindrances, even if none of them are acutely present there and then.

Also, is it what craving for non-being is?

Craving for non-being would be what’s left over once you’ve achieved what this Sutta describes, which is the state of an *anāgāmi*. The resistance to internal and external phenomena is inseparable from sensuality, so if one is there, the other is too.

## Not really sure what to make of AN 4.166

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** devot3e 2024-09-27 00:29:08

“Bhikkhus, there are these four modes of practice. What four? (1) Practice that is painful with sluggish direct knowledge; (2) practice that is painful with quick direct knowledge; (3) practice that is pleasant with sluggish direct knowledge; and (4) practice that is pleasant with quick direct knowledge. (1) The mode of practice that is painful with sluggish direct knowledge is declared to be inferior for both reasons: because it is painful and because direct knowledge is sluggish. This mode of practice is declared to be inferior for both reasons. (2) The mode of practice that is painful with quick direct knowledge is declared to be inferior because of its painfulness. (3) The mode of practice that is pleasant with sluggish direct knowledge is declared to be inferior because of its sluggishness. (4)



The mode of practice that is pleasant with quick direct knowledge is declared to be superior for both reasons: because practice is pleasant and because direct knowledge is quick. This mode of practice is declared to be superior for both reasons. These, bhikkhus, are the four modes of practice.”

I am confused, because this seems to be promoting a preference for pleasure. It does not match with my understanding. For more context if you're interested, AN 4.162

“Bhikkhus, there are these four modes of practice. What four? (1) Practice that is painful with sluggish direct knowledge; (2) practice that is painful with quick direct knowledge; (3) practice that is pleasant with sluggish direct knowledge; and (4) practice that is pleasant with quick direct knowledge. (1) And what, bhikkhus, is the practice that is painful with sluggish direct knowledge? Here, someone is by nature strongly prone to lust and often experiences pain and dejection born of lust. By nature he is strongly prone to hatred and often experiences pain and dejection born of hatred. By nature he is strongly prone to delusion and often experiences pain and dejection born of delusion. These five faculties arise in him feebly: the faculty of faith, the faculty of energy, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, and the faculty of wisdom. Because these five faculties are feeble in him, he sluggishly attains the immediacy condition for the destruction of the taints. This is called practice that is painful with sluggish direct knowledge. (2) And what is practice that is painful with quick direct knowledge? Here, someone is by nature strongly prone to lust ... hatred ... delusion and often experiences pain and dejection born of delusion. These five faculties arise in him prominently: the faculty of faith ... the faculty of wisdom. Because these five faculties are prominent in him, he quickly attains the immediacy condition for the destruction of the taints. This is called practice that is painful with quick direct knowledge. (3) And what is practice that is pleasant with sluggish direct knowledge? Here, someone by nature is not strongly prone to lust and does not often experience pain and dejection born of lust. By nature he is not strongly prone to hatred and does not often experience pain and dejection born of hatred. By nature he is not strongly prone to delusion and does not often experience pain and dejection born of delusion. These five faculties arise in him feebly: the faculty of faith ... the faculty of wisdom. Because these five faculties are feeble in him, he sluggishly attains the immediacy condition for the destruction “of the taints. This is called practice that is pleasant with sluggish direct knowledge. (4) And what is practice that is pleasant with quick direct knowledge? Here, someone by nature is not strongly prone to lust ... hatred ... delusion and does not often experience pain and dejection born of delusion. These five faculties arise in him prominently: the faculty of faith ... the faculty of wisdom. Because these five faculties are prominent in him, he quickly attains the immediacy condition for the destruction of the taints. This is called practice that is pleasant with quick direct knowledge.” These, bhikkhus, are the four modes of practice.”

(Bhikkhu Bodhi)

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 04:30:30**

The part that shouldn't be overlooked here is that in neither case (speed or pleasantness) is it a matter of choice.

If you have weak passion, aversion, and delusion—which you would judge not by what your intuition tells you, but by whether your mind rebels in the face of the eight precepts, sense restraint, and solitude—either by nature or because you're already far along the path, the practice won't be unpleasant; quite the opposite. As the Buddha said, the joy of sensuality is excrement compared to the joy of renunciation, which is not only great in itself, but also pushes you further on the path simply by virtue of cultivating it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-28 04:51:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Not sure I understand the question. The first and second practice are with strong defilements and thus unpleasant, and the third and fourth are with weak defilements and thus pleasant.

**meditation not taught to non stream enterers**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Secret\_Invite\_9895 2024-09-26 20:54:08

So when the Buddha prescribes meditation it is never mentioned that he is talking to a puthujjana but, it's also usually not mentioned whether or not he is talking to a stream enterer. And there are suttas where the Buddha is trying to inspire people by describing samsara(how unending and unsatisfying it is and how it is enough to become disenchanted with the world and commit to attaining nibbana) and then he says to go sit at the roots of trees and meditate. If the buddha knew he was talking to stream enterers then why would he need to inspire them in this way? Would it not make more sense that he was considering that at least some of the people he was talking to would not be stream enterers?

What is some evidence from the suttas that Buddha did not want puthujjanas to meditate?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 04:07:19**

And there are suttas where the Buddha is trying to inspire people by describing samsara(how unending and unsatisfying it is and how it is enough to become disenchanted with the world and commit to attaining nibbana) and then he says to go sit at the roots of trees and meditate.

Such instructions were not given to “people”; they were given to monks. So yes, there are some occasions where he would describe meditation to *puthujjanas*, but they had to be monks at least, because there can be no right *samādhī* for those who, on top of not having the Right View, still live enjoying sensual pleasures.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 04:45:26 (in reply to a comment not included)**

In some cases, presumably when the Buddha knew that they had already covered the required bases.

Some examples are SN 47.4 and SN 35.71. Still, those instances are not what most people would understand by “meditation”, i.e., a mechanical concentration practice. He’s telling them to *try to understand* fundamental aspects of the Dhamma directly linked to the Four Noble Truths, which is the only thing that can give rise to the Right View.

And in all accounts in the Suttas where someone becomes a *sotāpanna*, no concentration practice is ever mentioned, but only the taming of the mind through virtue and seeing the danger in sensuality, and then the Four Noble Truths once that’s sufficiently established.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 05:02:59 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Would HH advise against even basic concentration meditation like keeping awareness of the breath.

Most certainly. Anapanasati especially was only taught to monks, and requires a great deal of wisdom to not be turned into wrong meditation.

The reason why your mind is unruly and is prone to distraction is because of the unwholesome acts you do in your life, not because you’re not aware of your breath. Those actions create the “momentum” that prevents you from completing basic tasks without getting distracted. So if you begin to keep the precepts and restrain your senses, you will address the root cause of your mind’s wildness, instead of applying a topical cream to alleviate its symptoms.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 05:59:03 (in reply to a comment not included)**

If it’s taught to someone and they basically are thinking they only need to mindlessly follow the steps to achieve enlightenment

The thing is, that attitude goes way deeper than one might think. There are obvious instances of it that many people with common sense could see through, but the root if it remains for whoever hasn’t given up sensuality.

Hence, he may have taught it to monks without the Right View who were well established in virtue (since even being a monk doesn’t guarantee that). But not to laypeople who still engaged in sensuality, because they wouldn’t be able to help but do it with the same sensual expectations that they still carry and fuel throughout their day.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-01 13:55:11 (in reply to a comment not included)**

the Buddha ever specify in the suttas that “I am teaching this specifically to monks or laypeople who are sotapana, because otherwise you are not ready.”

In some cases it was implicit, such as when he would say “a learned noble disciple does this”. But he did state explicitly that the noble eightfold path begins with sotāpatti. Based on that, the common view that one can practice right mindfulness as a *puthujjana* and become a sotāpanna as a result of it would be incorrect. Instead, you become a sotāpanna by understanding what right mindfulness is, which is inseparably bound up with understanding the Four Noble Truths. Understanding that is always how people entered the stream in the Suttas, and *then* they would be able to meditate correctly without thereby increasing their wrong views further.

The reason why it's necessary to state that explicitly is simply because otherwise many people won't be trying to *understand* and to correct their wrong views. They'll just keep doing what they're already doing based on hearsay, tradition, reasoning, and how it makes them feel, hoping that some magical insight will pop up. When it does, they'll often read the Four Noble Truths into it, meanwhile their views have not changed much at all.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-02 04:27:19 (in reply to a comment not included)**

That's describing Arahantship. After virtue it already says “endowed with this noble aggregate of virtue”. A *sotāpanna* is defined in some Suttas as one who has fulfilled virtue.

**Is the culmination point the complete elimination of the second arrow? That is to say - the arrow can not / does not appear. Or is it more like a point when the second arrow does appear but there is perfect understanding of the mechanics of it and thus perfect equanimity in its midst?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** OppositeMountain176 2024-09-26 16:52:12

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 04:49:07**

a point when the second arrow does appear but there is perfect understanding of the mechanics of it and thus perfect equanimity in its midst?

That's managing the suffering by psychologizing it, and that's not liberation, nor the Right View.

The Arrow Sutta plainly states that the second arrow no longer even arises.

## Rebirth, citta, mano, sankhara

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Difficult-Strain-580 2024-09-24 04:55:47

Bhante Anigha,

Following your latest summary post, I was rereading your answer to my question on rebirth and the citta. In it, correct me if I am wrong, you explained that the citta is this second order of experience, the feeling towards feelings, the intention towards intentions, which is not solely physical / biological as choices can be made regarding biological urges.

Could you elaborate a little on how this description relates to your latest video where you explained, among other things, the difference between citta and mano. If the citta is the intention towards the intention, what is mano in that context? I understood in that conversation that the citta was more passive and mano active.

Finally, how is mano/citta related to “when avijja ceases, sankhara ceases”. How should sankhara be understood here and how does it relate to citta/mano? What does it mean for sankhara to cease?

Thank you ☺

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-24 15:45:41

Could you elaborate a little on how this description relates to your latest video where you explained, among other things, the difference between citta and mano. If the citta is the intention towards the intention, what is mano in that context? I understood in that conversation that the citta was more passive and mano active.

*mano* in the context of that discussion refers to choice/action, not to the mere cognizing of mental phenomena. It's the third in the common categorization of action in the Suttas: bodily, verbal, and mental.

So, the *citta* exhibits certain inclinations and pressures influenced by your past choices from this life and before, but ultimately, you're always responsible for your *present* choice to go along with that or not, so that's all that really matters. By making the right choices of restraint and renunciation now, the *citta* is tamed, which is how you overcome sensuality and aversion. But that's not the Dhamma yet; it's only the basis for it.

Finally, how is mano/citta related to “when avijja ceases, sankhara ceases”. How should sankhara be understood here and how does it relate to citta/mano?

Understanding the complete cessation of *all* choices, even the right ones—which of course doesn't mean reverting to what you gave up before—is where noble insight lies. *saṅkhāra* means “activity” in the broadest possible sense, and choices are one specific instance of that. Neither *citta* nor *mano* survive the cessation of ignorance: with the cessation of ignorance, *saṅkhāras* cease, and with that, consciousness and *nāmarūpa* all cease.

What does it mean for sankhara to cease?

Pretty much any answer to that question would distract from the fact that it has to be realized for oneself, first and foremost by taming the *citta* through the gradual training, and then, with that purified mind, trying to understand *paṭiccasamuppāda*—in the structural, timeless sense explained in the Suttas, and not the time-bound, sequential “cause-and-effect” or “flux” sense—in your own experience. It is genuinely impossible to imagine it in theory because that very imagination will be affected by ignorance, and will be a *sāṅkhāra*.

It’s also not the sort of magical “cessation experience” you would hear about these days, since ignorance doesn’t need to cease in order for you to have that.

## **Questions regarding not trying to get rid of the sense object or trying to cover up pain with “ideas, attitudes, and Information” while trying to restraint. PLEASE HELP!!!!**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Unfair\_Sink\_3280 2024-09-22 04:38:06

I understand that in the beginning, I will not be perfect, and I will try to either “overshoot the mark or undershoot the mark” as ajahn always says. I still need advice on this topic so I could be headed in the right direction:

1. when trying to restraint, I always think this: “am i doing this correctly, is this rooted in covering up pain?” and then I often get confused and my mind become relentless. Even when writing this post, I am thinking that my desire for figuring this out and not getting relentless is rooted in sensuality. What should I do about this?
2. When I try to apply some of the concepts that HH talking about: for example, I often hear that my starting point is already rooted in ignorance. Therefore, when I try to restraint, I would question everything because in my mind, I constantly think that I existent is rooted in ignorance. HOWEVER!, I have realized that even thinking that could be used as a technique to manage pain and coverup what is there present in front of me. How should I go about this?
3. when trying to restraint, for example: A lustful thought has arisen. Now, I want to restraint because that lustful thought is captivating and addicting. My restraint would be to kill it, shut it down, and think of it no more. In the place of lustful thought, there would be this darkness and I would just bear pain. IS THIS THE CORRECT WAY? or the second way I tried: I would recognise that lustful thought has arisen. Now I would think “this lustful thought is pressuring because I want this lustful thought” then, I would let to stay there and run as wild without trying to indulge in it and I would bear the pain. Which way is the correct way?
4. when trying to restraint, I do things that feel right. I have realized that I am addicted to having to make sure that everything I do is correct. So when I am trying to restraint, I would do things to “Reveal the pain of my existence” and to avoid swimming too fast, or swimming too slow or trying to stay still when crossing the

river. However, this exact attitude leads to my coverup of pain because it provides me with certainty. SO HOW DO I CORRECTLY REVEAL ENDURE AND REVEAL THE PAIN WITHOUT engaging with sensuality on the LEVEL OF ATTITUDE and VIEWS.

THANK YOU bhante. my goal right now is to correctly establish in 5 precepts for life, once I have enough mental strength, then I would go to 8 precepts. But, right now I am too weak!!!

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-22 14:59:32**

my goal right now is to correctly establish in 5 precepts for life, once I have enough mental strength, then I would go to 8 precepts.

There's no hope in being able to permanently disentangle yourself from the subtle pressures you're describing before your virtue is firm and unconditional, as Keller commented.

Having said that, the problem here isn't what your mind is projecting it to be, i.e., the sense objects and whether you're dealing with them the right way or not. It's the whole framework of doubt that's pressuring you and making you go around in circles. *That* is a sense object that you're not properly restrained in regard to, and as a result, the lust and aversion towards other sense objects might even intensify.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-23 08:07:58 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The reason for doubt is to reveal my intentions behind my actions and question is I am headed in the right path.

In this case, it's clear that the questioning is not directed at your actual intention behind the action, since you seem to be overlooking the fact that you're giving in to pressure in the name of practice.

If questioning and clarifying is driven by pressure and compulsion, it's the hindrance of doubt, which obstructs wisdom. The right path is not determined by the content of what you do, but by the absence of craving underneath your present actions. So, *in this situation*, if there is pressure to doubt, not giving in to that is the right path. In another situation, if the pressure is towards being careless and doing whatever feels right at the moment without reflecting, doubting is the right path.

That's what it means to see wholesome and unwholesome on the level of your intention, not on the level of external criteria.

## **Visiting HH / Samanadipa**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Difficult-Strain-580 2024-09-21 15:32:13

This summer, I am going on holiday to Slovenia with my wife and two daughters. This would be a good opportunity for me to visit HH and/or Samanadipa.

To this end, I would have a few questions:

- Is there a a schedule (timetable during the day, certain days of the week, a best time to visite, etc.). Best in the morning ?
- Would it be appropriate to come with my wife and daughters (not Buddhist and clueless about it) ? I would think not, but just to make sure. It might be good for my daughters to see Buddhist renunciates, this would be new to them. I would make sure they behave well, but they're kids. It might be best if they don't come.
- Is it possible to visit both HH and Samanadipa ?
- Can I make myself useful in any way ? I know there's often works going on. I would love to contribute if needed / appropriate
- Is there an opportunity to exchange with a monk ? With the wealth of information here and online, this is not truly necessary, but I don't get to discuss the Dhamma in person much, especially with people as advanced as the monks at HH / Samanadipa.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-22 05:46:28**

- Is there a a schedule (timetable during the day, certain days of the week, a best time to visite, etc.). Best in the morning ?

No. The only thing that happens daily is the meal. Occasionally, there are small jobs to do here and there, usually finished before noon. The best time to visit would be after the meal duties are finished, at around 10AM.

- Would it be appropriate to come with my wife and daughters (not Buddhist and clueless about it) ?

Not for staying overnight, since we wouldn't have enough rooms, and also because every guest should be a practitioner and keep the eight precepts during their stay.

They could still come with you on a day trip, although if you really want to discuss Dhamma and not just have a look at the place, it'd probably be better to come by yourself.

- Is there an opportunity to exchange with a monk ?

Certainly.

- Is it possible to visit both HH and Samanadipa ?

HH is in a very remote location, and is reserved for monastics only.

## **The deathless (Thanissaro)**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Difficult-Strain-580 2024-09-20 16:59:19



What is your opinion of Thanissaro's description of the deathless in the following video (first 10min):

<https://youtu.be/ef1vxDMt-7k?si=8AcqPMTf6t8ocQgI>

It sounds to me like he is taking consciousness to be nibbana. Am I missing something?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-21 09:59:16

The problem with this view is not only the obvious contradiction of positing *something* that lies outside the five aggregates—whether you call it consciousness or something else doesn't really matter—but also the implication that Nibbāna is an *experience*. That's what the Buddha called “conceiving Nibbāna” in MN 1:

They perceive Nibbāna as Nibbāna. Having perceived Nibbāna as Nibbāna, they conceive Nibbāna, they conceive in Nibbāna, they conceive apart from Nibbāna, they conceive ‘Nibbāna is mine’, they delight in Nibbāna. Why is that? Because they haven't fully understood it, I say.

Nibbāna is not a specific experience; it is the absence of conceiving in regard to *any* experience, and that's precisely why freedom is possible in the first place. You don't need to wait for something that takes you outside of what you have now. You need to *fully understand* (which is why the Suttas go on endlessly about understanding this and that) the fundamental nature of whatever you have now. That nature is common to everything else you might experience, including “Nibbāna”, precisely by virtue of being experienced.

Any “outside” you discover is still going to be bound with the same ignorance as everything else, but because all the emphasis is placed on the *contents* of that new experience—its peacefulness, its being “outside of space and time”, etc.—you may not realize that. The fact that you're talking about it means you experience(d) it, regardless of how special and extraordinary it is, and thus it is within the aggregates. It is a phenomenon.

Furthermore, when Nibbāna is (mis)conceived as an experience—a hallmark of wrong view—it follows that something other than the **training** the Buddha outlined, even in theory, *could* give rise to it, and that all you need to become awakened is to have that experience through any means. This includes meditation techniques, drugs, Tantric practices, koans, etc., and that's how modern Buddhism has come to be. It's against the Buddha's own statement that true knowledge can only arise as a result of gradual training, not abruptly, and that Nibbāna cannot be attained without arduous striving.

If you fully understand the aggregates—which won't occur magically from watching your breath and similar practices—nothing will “find a footing” in consciousness anymore, as described at the end of DN 11. That is *viññāṇa anidassana*, which is still *viññāṇa*, and is therefore within the aggregates too (otherwise the Buddha would've used a different word). There is no inherent issue with it being so, since the aggregates and ordinary experience are not the source of *dukkha*. Craving is.

One who fully understands and is free from all passion has no conceiving, appropriation,

or delight in regard to *anything*—no matter if it’s utterly mundane like earth and water, or the most sublime and transcendental experience of “Nibbāna”—and that’s what true Nibbāna is.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-22 05:33:45 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

This requires a willingness to thoroughly abandon passion for any and all forms of consciousness—no matter how luminous or immeasurable—allowing them all to cease

He’s saying that you should abandon passion for all *other* states of consciousness that could be mistakenly regarded as noble attainments. The assumption being that the experience of consciousness without surface he refers to is already free from passion, while in reality, the passion (or rather, delusion, though they’re inseparable) is on a much subtler level, and is below the (insufficient) established criteria of what constitutes passion. It’s the simple regarding of that experience as somehow safe and trustworthy, as not a dart, not a disease, not a boil, and the conceiving (*maññanā*) I referred to above.

So, I’m afraid this really isn’t “the same tree with a different name”. It’s the same name (“Nibbāna” or “consciousness without surface”) being applied to a very different tree, in quite blatant contradiction with the Suttas, and based on the assumption that the Buddha was clumsy with his chosen terminology.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-22 13:20:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Glad to hear that you’ve benefitted from my writings.

Instead, he says the very opposite: approach any consciousness by the means of “smashing, scattering and demolishing... making it unfit for play.” The only way that this consciousness without surface could undergo this rough treatment he prescribed is if it is not categorized as special when found, but approached in the same way as any other consciousness.

It doesn’t really matter how convincingly one argues that that consciousness is free from passion. The main issue is the view that Nibbāna is something you can “find”, that it’s some sort of experience you have on one particular occasion, and that this experience qualifies as Nibbāna by virtue of *what it is*, rather than by the absence of conceiving. This view implies that passion towards that experience is there, whether the person realizes it or not.

The mere act of regarding *any* experience as pure and ultimate—even if it’s somehow factually indestructible—makes that experience fabricated and subject to passion, even though one’s definition of what fabrication and passion are may be too narrow to see that. That’s why it would never occur to someone who knows the cessation of fabrication to

equate it with a specific experience, and doing so is a hallmark of wrong view, as I wrote above.

Nibbāna is the total cessation of all such tendencies for glorification, in all possible forms. Not finding safety in anything whatsoever is the only true, unfailing safety. Not regarding anything as pure is the only true purity. When one has fully understood and is steady in that attitude, nothing can find a footing in consciousness, hence it's "*anidassana*".

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-23 04:41:08 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I'm not necessarily saying that they're not the same. I'm saying that they're not meditative experiences (most especially not the focusing type). They are the perpetual mode of being of an Arahant owing to non-conceiving and dispassion towards all experience whatsoever, and they cannot be arrived at suddenly, but through gradual training.

Saying that an experience can be intrinsically pure and unfabricated for anyone who has it is like saying that a sentence can be intrinsically heard by anyone in the vicinity. Fabrication is on "your" side of the equation, not on the side of the experience, and *that's why* Nibbāna cannot be taken away. Not because it's an experience that has indestructibility as an inherent characteristic.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-23 05:40:23 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Such terminology might seem to give credence to Nibbāna-as-a-special-type-of-consciousness

Well, I'm not saying it's an ordinary type of consciousness, and that there's no difference between an Arahant's consciousness and a puthujjana's. The point is that consciousness is deprived of surface on account of the all-pervasive absence of passion and presence of knowledge, which is something you *develop*, not something that pops up fortuitously as a result the sort of effort Ven. Thanissaro describes.

A puthujjana's consciousness can be "luminous", but never *all around*, since there are dark spots of ignorance that he's not even aware of and thus cannot take into account.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-23 06:44:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

the consciousness aggregate becomes radiant and all around because craving is not establishing it anywhere, not even on a perception of boundlessness or radiance?

Exactly, and that's why saying or even indirectly implying that *viññāṇa anidassana* is a specific experience—as opposed to the *manner* in which all experiences, regardless of

their particulars, inevitably arise for an Arahant—is a straight contradiction in terms. “I am pure because of *this*”.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-23 10:31:58 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

would this understanding, if truly seen, be the equivalent of Right View?

Yes. Or more accurately, knowing for oneself what conceiving even is and the way to abandon it is the Right View. That’s what sets a *sekha* apart from a *puthujjana* as per MN 1.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-27 04:21:44 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Looking at the description in MN 1, you need to start dealing with the grossest level of the problem that you still have, which for most people will be delight, and start undoing it in reverse order.

Sutta Nipāta 5.5 gives a concise but clear description of the extent to which delight should be abandoned:

*“Whatever you are aware of—*

*above, below, across, and in the middle—*

*having dispelled delight and settling in regard to that,*

*consciousness will not stand within being (bhava).*

*A bhikkhu who fares abiding like this,*

*recollected and diligent, having abandoned appropriations,*

*would give up birth, aging, and sorrow and lamentation—*

*suffering—having seen right here.”*

As always, the obvious first step to that would be virtue and sense restraint.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-10 07:21:26 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

If we take the consciousness aggregate as it is defined as the consciousness that associated with space and time in SN 22.48

Viññāṇa anidassana would certainly be *present*, otherwise you wouldn’t be able to talk about it. So it still falls within the consciousness aggregate.

The former is the condition of the arahant's consciousness aggregate (before death) and the latter is the total absence of craving associated with any of his aggregates

You could also say that what gives rise to that consciousness is the total absence of passion and craving in every way, and that's something that you can only *train* towards, in every aspect of your life. It doesn't come from a meditative experience or a special insight.

At the same time, the Arahant doesn't delight even in that consciousness or in any of the other pleasant and lofty "side effects" of the absence of craving, as doing so would remove the very condition that enables those effects.

## Mano/citta and the 5 aggregates

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Difficult-Strain-580 2024-09-19 16:00:13

How does mano relate to the five aggregates? Is it the same as sankhara as in intentions/choices ?

If vitakka is on the level of mano and dhamma on the level of citta, I wonder if the following way of seeing this scenario is correct :

I am talking to someone who mentions a woman I know. I hadn't thought about her in a long time. This sudden mention brings forth thoughts of sensuality in my mind. These images just pop up on their own. They're dhammas. There is this sudden moment when I realise that thoughts of sensuality are present. There is also this pressure being felt to consciously go with them, to proliferate them. That is vittaka. This is where my mental sense restraint kicks in. I endure the desire to actively think about this woman and do not fuel these dhammas.

It's not easy to see the difference between the two because, in my experience, when thoughts appear there is this initial moment of identification. It's like all there is is these thoughts, I am these thoughts. They're my entire experience. Then sudden realisation comes that it's just thoughts having appeared. I am not these thoughts, they are not mine. Like waking up from a dream. But there is pressure to continue to day dream. Is it at this moment that sense restraint should kick in and where dhammas are differentiated from vittaka or has the ship long sailed and I missed the initial opportunity for sense restraint and I am now only catching up with my own negligence?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-21 10:55:07

There is also this pressure being felt to consciously go with them, to proliferate them. That is vittaka. This is where my mental sense restraint kicks in. I endure the desire to actively think about this woman and do not fuel these dhammas.

Yes, that sounds right. You don't give in to them, but you don't act like you're in control of their arising either. That's how you "destroy" an arisen *kāma* *vitakka*, while the enticing *dhamma* remains, as a poisonous drink that you've refused.

## What's the alternative to willpower?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** devot3e 2024-09-18 08:12:57

For reference, I am a lay steward in a monastery.

Throughout my time in various monasteries, I have watched many people, especially young men, come to monasteries perhaps a bit over-enthused by things like dutangas, and ready to ordain despite only having practiced for a very short time. I have frequently seen (and myself had) an attitude that seems like *bhava tanha*, with the idealization of masculinity and of "toughness", commonly seen for example in certain sports like ultra marathon runners, praised for their grit and determination. Eventually I see most of these characters, typically the ones most excited by ascetic practice and most strict, falling back into sense pleasures. They find their attitude unsustainable. Many of them never come back. Occasionally, one will stay on- like myself. In my current location I find myself surrounded by gentle, humble, and fluid (flexible?) folks, yet most of them keep their virtue beautifully.

I feel confident to say that willpower is a finite resource. Willpower even changes depending on our circumstance, like if we have low blood sugar, bad sleep, etc etc. This is a well studied phenomenon (though I suppose science is limited in its objective and external takes.) Now I've asked this question of a lot of teachers in the Thai Forest, with fascinating, useful, and varied responses. However I'm curious what I might find here. So what, then is the alternative? What is superior to willpower, less finite, more sustainable, more accessible?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-18 14:43:35

What is superior to willpower, less finite, more sustainable, more accessible?

A sense of being under genuine threat, regardless of whether you even know about the Dhamma or not. That is why in the Suttas, the recognition that precedes the undertaking of the training is "I am prey to suffering, mired in suffering," and it's when monks forgot that was the reason for their going forth that they would become careless.

We are all in exactly the same situation of being prey to suffering. It's just that some people feel compelled to do something about it even though nothing particularly bad has happened to them personally, while others can't be bothered to honestly recognize the gravity of their situation despite the worst misfortunes, and despite hearing the Dhamma. Thus, they remain distracted by the joys and pleasures of the near shore until the tiger comes and eats them at last.

So if the practice feels like it requires willpower, the most a person could do is clarify the danger of their current state. For a person who truly sees that danger, *not practicing* is what would require willpower (strictly speaking, it wouldn't even be possible, since willpower only makes sense when you genuinely expect a future benefit to come out of a present action).

especially young men, come to monasteries perhaps a bit over-enthused by things like dutangas, and ready to ordain despite only having practiced for a very short time. I have frequently seen (and myself had) an attitude that seems like bhava tanha, with the idealization of masculinity and of “toughness”, commonly seen for example in certain sports like ultra marathon runners, praised for their grit and determination.

Yes, and that's why dhutangas should ideally be taken on only with the Right View. They're not magical vows that will purify your mind regardless of the tangle of wrong views and misguided attitudes that you carry. Once you're able to reliably read your own mind, you can do them if it's apparent that they'll help you abandon that which you recognize as unwholesome with full certainty.

To reach that point though, the precepts are not negotiable, and uncompromisingly keeping even the 8 precepts is never “self-mortification”. Introducing further external observances than that out of various wrong views is what is.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-19 09:09:42 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

it's very hard to restrain myself from not reacting with a “fix it” attitude (fruitlessly) when I am living with a lot of anxiety.

...

I worry that spending too much time reflecting in this way without the balance of practices that point toward contentment

The right contentment will be possible when you eradicate your mind's tendency to recoil from what is nothing other than the truth (the ever-looming possibility of death, ultimately). It's the contentment of no longer holding to anything that death or loss can take away, thus being beyond the *liability* to worry, not just free from worry at that moment. That's the wholesome joy of renunciation, and any other form of joy is within sensuality.

Sure enough, that doesn't mean you need to take on the entire weight of anxiety all at once. You can do it gradually. But don't fool yourself into thinking that looking away from the problem somehow helps you fix it, which is what people usually mean with “contentment” and “joyful practice”.

## **What is the difference between “hindrance” vs “fetter”?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** plucesiar 2024-09-17 23:13:50

I was listening to the recent YouTube video on “Q&A - Freedom through the Right precepts”, and around the 51:32 mark, Ajahn Nanamoli was talking about hindrance vs fetter, but I’m still not really following, other than the point that hindrances are more “fundamental”, and hence fetters fall off first. Can someone please clarify? Thank you!

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-19 12:21:31**

An important difference would be that you have no direct input on the fetters, whereas the entire practice—the whole Gradual Training going from virtue to jhānas—takes place with reference to the five hindrances. Those are the pressuring, unwholesome mental states that you can be presently aware of and not give in to, and doing that sufficiently weakens the fetters.

## **Does the Buddha recommend the eight precepts?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** WaxyBloom 2024-09-17 14:49:40

For the monks the Buddha says follow the Pāṭimokkha. For lay followers he says the five precepts (with extra right speech sometimes). The only place I see the eight precepts is on the uposatha. Is that correct?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-18 15:13:31**

For lay followers he says the five precepts (with extra right speech sometimes).

But does he ever *say* that by keeping just the five precepts, a lay follower who doesn’t see the Dhamma will eventually come to see it, or was he just telling that to people who were likely only interested in ensuring a good rebirth with the least possible amount of effort in this life? When the audience was made up of those who regarded themselves as trainees practicing to make further progress even though they were laypeople, they were instructed to practice like monks. In MN 53, this is compared to a hen who properly sits on her eggs so that her chicks will eventually hatch.

There is no recorded instance in the Suttas of a layperson hearing the Dhamma for the first time, failing to attain Right View on that very occasion, being instructed to observe only the five precepts, and later becoming a *sotāpanna* on the basis of that, which is how people today often hope their practice will unfold. Laypeople who attained Right View were those whose minds were already ripe to realize the Dhamma on the very first encounter, even though externally they had been leading normal lives: their eggs were already on the verge of hatching before meeting the Buddha. Everybody else needs to be “sitting on their eggs” for a good while if awakening is what they’re after, and that requires giving up sensuality, even if they still have a job and are externally a “householder”.



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-19 04:48:14 (in reply to a comment not included)**

However, before going down this path doesn't the Buddha tell the person to shave his head, wear a robe, and leave all possessions and family/friends behind?

Yes, that seems to be the case. That's because back then, if someone truly wanted to realize the Dhamma, they wouldn't have stayed living at home in the first place, so it's natural that there are hardly any examples of lay renunciates in the Suttas. Hence, all the discourses that deal with profound Dhamma and things like jhānas were given to monks, or to already-attained laypeople in some cases.

Remaining a householder, even while observing the 8 precepts, is somewhat of a compromise in terms of its potential to ripen the mind. However, it is the most realistic path for most people today, and with several years of diligence, it would be sufficient. Not because going forth today is necessarily more cumbersome than it was back then (often it's the opposite: thanks to social insurance programs in many countries and higher overall safety, your family usually won't die), but because people's faculties are generally weaker, and they are more attached to comfort, safety, and certainty, not only to pure sensuality. Granted, few monasteries today are even suitable for practice, whereas back then basically every monastery was.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-20 04:26:30 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Would you say that is mostly kammic/innate or due to environment/education?

That's not really a valid dichotomy. Your environment cannot have an influence on your mind in a fundamental way except through the intentions that you exert in regard to it. In other words, everyone is entirely responsible for where their mind is currently at in terms of greed, aversion, and delusion.

I wonder if there's an opportunity for skillful practice here or one should just stick to precepts + speech guidelines and then the rest of the gradual training.

If keeping the 8 precepts without fail until your last breath has become a trivial matter, then you can consider taking on dhutaṅgas. Otherwise, it will be a distraction from your incomplete restraint in the areas that are way more significant.

**Is the Puthujjana's meditation mere confinement?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** robkhaw 2024-09-16 23:41:39

I have noticed a recent trend in most modern meditation instruction which tries to "sell you" their specific brand or technique by emphasizing the pleasure of meditation. Either that pleasure is supposed to be immediate ("meditation should be fun", "you should want

to meditate”) or comes about as a consequence of diligent practice (“this method will eventually lead to jhana, which are very pleasurable states”, “meditation will eventually increase your baseline happiness”). If this is not always stated so explicitly at the outset there remains a lingering assumption, at the very least on the part of the practitioners, that meditation should lead to pleasure.

Yet, it seems to me that for a puthujjana (or rather for a mind which has not been sufficiently tamed), meditation should be an utterly terrifying prospect. It is comparable to solitary confinement in prison—often considered the worst possible punishment—yet even more severe because the confinement not only requires that you keep the body still (thereby becoming like the confinement of a paraplegic), but extends even to the mind. You are not allowed to “escape” the pain of confinement via day-dreaming, sleeping, planning, or yes, even meditation techniques.

One measures progress in such meditation not so much by advancement through some series of pleasurable or esoteric experiences but by how much the mind still thrashes around when it is confined and how long it can endure that confinement.

Seen this way, meditation seems to be a form of “death before dying”. And it is easy to see how the mind would be strengthened from such an undertaking, how the pressure of the everyday baits of Mara in the world would begin to pale in comparison to this self-imposed exile. If this confinement were made into an inescapable fact of one’s life (as indeed it’s greater cousin, death, surely is) then it’s also easy to see how sensuality would soon become burning coals, extortion, danger. One could not engage carelessly with them any longer, knowing how much the greater the torment will be when it comes time for the daily confinement.

Is this the right way of thinking about and practicing meditation? How does one avoid crossing the threshold into self-mortification with this line of thought (if it hasn’t been crossed already)?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-17 14:08:49**

How does one avoid crossing the threshold into self-mortification with this line of thought (if it hasn’t been crossed already)?

By not turning it into just another mindless “method,” and keeping in mind that you still need to remain aware of your intention behind that practice at all times. Otherwise, you might be thinking you’re practicing the right “confinement” and so on, but internally, what you’re really doing is acting out of aversion and wrong view, which means there’s no confinement in the true sense.

Ironically, saying no to everything is actually easier than keeping an eye on your intentions and restraining them on the right level because you’re still to an extent running with the momentum of your mind, just in a different direction. You’re still going with the grain.

There will be many times where, indeed, the right thing to do is to tie down the mind

because *right now* it's trying to go where it shouldn't (sensual pleasures, irritation, or distractions). But really, you only need to prevent it from going *there*, not from moving altogether.

People naturally crave the safety of something they can “just do” every time, without any need for consideration. That leads to overlooking the fact that—apart from the precepts, which are carved in stone—restraint is to be done in relation to *presently arisen* unwholesome intentions that are being recognized, and not in relation to a predetermined list of things that are always bad (which will often be what people default to when they hear about “confinement”). Such a list could be infinitely expanded since the defilements will always manage to shift elsewhere. Every time something goes wrong, you would assume that *that action* was the problem, so it must be added to the list.

The latter attitude is what results in frustration and the unbeneficial pain of self-mortification: you're overlooking your own mind and are instead proceeding mechanically, like the unskilled cook.

So, contrary to popular belief, it would be self-mortification not because you're “too restrained” and you need to make way for a bit of pleasure (which would inevitably be sensual pleasure), but because you're not restrained on the right level and with right understanding.

The *same* practice of right restraint would become pleasant when your mind no longer values what you're saying no to and sees giving it up as true safety, not when you intentionally fabricate pleasure through some other means. You don't need to be fabricating pain either, for that matter. The criterion for rightness must be that defilements are being consciously given up, not how you currently feel.

## Would Venerable Anigha give some words on craving?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Endmakerstruckdown 2024-09-16 02:04:00

If the Venerable were to give some words on craving, may he answer in any way. I'd be very grateful for the guidance.

By possessing what internal weaknesses do we allow craving to ensnare us? By possessing which internal strengths could we evade it?

Upon becoming aware of the ensnarer in the background, what attitude should we develop towards it?

Once having eaten the bait, ensnared by craving, how could we become aware of our predicament, and avoid further pain, so as to quickly recuperate? And what attitude should we possess to not repeat the mistake of becoming ensnared?

As long as one's day contains what attitudes, would a discriminating follower of the Tathagata, weaken craving?

As long as one maintains what internal spirit, would a discriminating follower of the Tathagata, endure the long drawn out battle against craving without his effort slacking or diminishing completely?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-16 19:18:56**

By possessing what external weaknesses do we allow craving to ensnare us?

Ignorance (of what craving is).

By possessing which internal strengths could we evade it?

Knowledge (of what craving is).

It's more important to remember that, prior to *sotāpatti*, one still doesn't understand what craving truly is, than to focus on trying to give it up. The latter would only rely on and take for granted one's current, inaccurate understanding of the problem.

As long as one's day contains what attitudes, would a discriminating follower of the Tathagata, weaken craving?

The attitude of relentlessly trying to understand, and seeing that as the practice, rather than the attitude of seeking a fixed method of practice that will absolve you from trying to understand.

A puthujjana cannot perfectly avoid everything that's unwholesome since that requires understanding craving and its cessation, but what he can reliably do is abandon all deliberate misconduct of body, speech, and mind. Within that, the effort of "trying to understand" comes in, namely, a consistent attempt to remind oneself and to recognize on even subtler levels that unwholesomeness is fundamentally determined by the internal pressure that motivates the action, and not by the external criteria related to the action itself, such as the letter of the precepts, what the action resulted in, the opinions of others, how you feel, what you were told you should do even by your own teacher, etc.

Once having eaten the bait, ensnared by craving, how could we become aware of our predicament, and avoid further pain, so as to quickly recuperate? And what attitude should we possess to not repeat the mistake of becoming ensnared?

A sense of urgency, coupled with the firm conviction that freedom from suffering is the only thing that truly matters in this life—and the terror of dying without having attained the Right View—would ensure that you always get up quickly as possible whenever you fall, and would hopefully prevent you from falling as much in the first place as well. However, undaunted perseverance is more important than how many times you fail, as not getting up after one fall is all it takes to fail completely.

## Who are the ariyasāvakas?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sallekha 2024-09-14 02:24:39

Hello everyone, is there any conclusive interpretation of what ariyasāvaka means in the suttas? Is there a meaningful distinction to be made with sutavā ariyasāvaka? Or has there been some sort of study on the ways these phrases are used?

It does seem to make a meaningful difference in interpretation: (learned) disciple of the noble ones has very different implications than (learned) noble disciple.

Thank you for any light you could shed on this.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-14 08:46:56

In contexts where it's just "*ariyasāvaka*", and not *sutavā ariyasāvaka* contrasted with *as-sutavā puthujjana*, it's technically possible for it to mean anyone who is devoted to the Buddha's teaching (e.g., AN 7.69). Accordingly, such instances don't explicitly attribute any significant insight or development to the *ariyasāvaka* simply by virtue of being one.

But whenever *sutavā ariyasāvaka* is contrasted with *assutavā puthujjana*, e.g., the Arrow Sutta, it's a categorical divide between the 8 types of noble individuals and everyone else. Hence it's said that the former is skilled and trained in the teaching of the noble ones, while the latter isn't.

Part of the confusion is also due to the fact that when the Buddha was alive, being wholeheartedly devoted to his teaching very often would've meant being at least a faith-follower, and so these two "types" of *ariyasāvaka* would've overlapped almost totally. There was little to no room for misinterpretation or counterfeits.

Today, however, much what is presented as the Buddha's teachings bears only a very superficial resemblance, if any, to what's found in the Suttas, so even the deepest devotion to what the majority of Buddhists regard as true Dhamma would not make one a faith-follower.

## Seeing things as things

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** dhamma\_ 2024-09-13 01:50:00

All things stand on equal footing, that is to say they are manifest. What ever is does not reach beyond that. What ever seems otherwise is not seen in its nature rather it's content is taken to be that which it implies.

For some time I have been trying to understand yoniso manasikara yet whatever attempt I made it was just another liner investigation assuming what is to be understood is at the end of that investigation. Overlooking what is and what could not be otherwise is already right here.

I am wondering is this what is meant by “seeing a thing as a thing” phenomenology or yoniso manasikara?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-13 03:46:20**

I am wondering is this what is meant by “seeing a thing as a thing” phenomenology or yoniso manasikara?

Yes. The key is that it needs to be applied to the things that you are attached to and regard as “special”, such as your sense of self, people and things who are dear to you, views that you hold, feelings that you want to keep enduring, ambitions, etc. Those are the things that your mind *doesn't want* to treat as things, but as somehow “more” than that, because then their impermanence (and thus suffering) becomes apparent.

On the other hand, the mind has no problem acknowledging random sense objects as just things, so contemplating that is of no real use.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-13 08:25:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So could it be said that it's about maintaining the perspective rather than seeking these things out which are dear?

It's not that you have to “seek them out”. They will arise on their own sooner or later, and you want to make sure that you don't fall away from the attitude of seeing *them too* as phenomena. And the measure for when something is made into “more” than just a phenomenon is when you act out of it, not when it's merely pressuring you to do so.

At certain times, if it seems like the mind is mostly calm and established in the context, you can make effort to bring to mind those things that would tend to threaten/pressure it (i.e., that it wants to treat as more than just phenomena, not on equal footing as everything else). If it gets perturbed, then it wasn't the right type of calm. But, you can strive towards it by seeing *that perturbation* as a phenomenon, without trying to suppress it.

Right equanimity is when *the mind* is, as the Suttas say, “boundless”. The mind cannot be toppled by whichever phenomena arise, even if one wishes it, while the phenomena themselves remain the same as they were before. Wrong equanimity is making everything “smaller” (i.e., less pressuring), or even non-existent, so that it no longer challenges the mind, and that's what you get out of most mainstream meditation practices.

## **Is this enough to make any eventual headway in renunciation?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-09-13 00:23:34

I posted yesterday about my long standing addiction to distraction (watching videos online) and lying in bed for hours. Today after coming home from work, I decided I would make myself do things in order to not fall into the “I’m so tired from work and all I can do is lie down now” trap again. So, I took a shower and did some cleaning.

I still ended up watching internet videos, but did not allow myself to do so while lying in bed, but only while I was cleaning and sitting on the floor. I was thinking that I can try to make gradual changes to eventually break the behavior pattern I feel stuck in, and my first step could be to not lie down in bed except for when I am going to sleep in the evening. I also will not watch any shows while I’m in bed.

Is this too small of a step to even be counted as moving in the right direction? I sort of feel like I’m just negotiating with the addiction, but I also am finding it super uncomfortable to really consider just stopping cold turkey. I realize how much I’ve become attached to the pacification of the videos and the way that they consume my time so I don’t have to feel very uncomfortable or bored.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-13 03:39:43**

There are apps for computers and smartphones that allow you to set a block on certain websites. You could try that.

It will be unpleasant for sure, but that’s when all the teachings of the Suttas cease to be abstract information, and become presently applicable. That’s when you have to start contemplating the danger in sensuality, the lack of satisfaction, how fruitless every instance of indulgence in the past has been, the goal of peace and enlightenment that all of these habits are obstructing, etc. These contemplations won’t be a magic fix, but if you persist in them *within the unconditional renunciation*, at some point in time the mind will have to start listening. But if you let it have what it wants, you have to restart the taming all over again. Just like a wild animal.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-13 13:52:23 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Sure, that would likely be helpful.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-14 07:59:29 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It means you determine to make no exceptions, regardless of how you feel or the situation you find yourself in, once you’ve decided to start keeping a precept or to give up an unwholesome habit. You can’t give something up “part-time”.

That’s why it’d be better to take on fewer precepts, but do so *for life*, than to go from no precepts to 8 precepts on retreat or on special occasions. The latter doesn’t even count as virtue.

## Feeling tired as an excuse

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-09-12 01:43:45

I've been in this pattern now for maybe a year or more, where I feel exhausted and then I just basically become really lazy and give up on my intentions of practicing renunciation. This is in regards to over indulging in sleep or relaxation (like just laying around basically) and that leads to entertainment. I suppose I realize that the only way to get out of this pattern is to stop playing it out every time the tiredness or exhaustion arises, but it's like a whole chain or set of behaviors that seem to just play out.

I'm sure there is a moment there when I decide to give in, because I often am aware of that moment. But even though it looks like a choice to give in or not give in, it always *\*feels\** impossible not to give in when I'm in that moment. Afterwards, I think oh I shouldn't have given in again. And beforehand I think, when I feel tired later, I will not give in this time. But... I always do.

I feel like I've made zero progress on the path for a long time, and sort of don't know what to do in order to progress more anyway. I keep the 5 precepts, I am committed to celibacy for life and am making really good progress with refraining from masturbation, which when I first decided to be celibate for life, I was masturbating almost weekly. But that is no longer the case, and even though desires come up now and then, I am much more able to refrain from acting on them. (I'm sorry if that is too much personal information).

I used to meditate a lot and every day. But I have stopped for a while because of doubt. Doubt in the methods, doubt in my ability, doubt that I am doing something beneficial when I meditate, and doubt that it will actually lead anywhere beyond a temporary good feeling while I'm doing it and shortly after.

The path seems very hard now. I see my main work as developing more in renunciation, but I feel like I'm not good at it, and am probably lying to myself often about how committed I truly am. I also want there to be more than the practice of refraining from things and restraining my senses. I want the calm and pleasant and sometimes intense experiences that meditation brings. But I struggle to really maintain a regular practice for the same reason that I struggle to keep to renunciation and the 8 precepts... I just get very tired and decide to lay around instead. I would like some advice on how to move forward so I don't just die with this being the farthest I've gotten on the path. I'm tired of vacillating between decisions (meditation or no meditation, one method or the other, working to keep the 8 precepts or not push that hard yet).

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-12 11:40:02

I'm sure there is a moment there when I decide to give in, because I often am aware of that moment. But even though it looks like a choice to give in or not give in, it always *\*feels\** impossible not to give in when I'm in that moment.

That's quite a common pattern, and it always has the same cause: you have been making careless choices in the recent past that have made your mind incline more strongly



towards further carelessness. There is not much that you can really do at that moment except dig in your heels and not give in. The aim should be to not end up in that situation *in the first place*, and you do so by being even more watchful of your choices the next time, long before such coarse tendencies towards unwholesomeness arise.

You mentioned the five precepts and celibacy, but are you fully restrained from all forms of distraction and entertainment? If not, that would explain the issue.

Doubt in the methods, doubt in my ability, doubt that I am doing something beneficial when I meditate, and doubt that it will actually lead anywhere beyond a temporary good feeling while I'm doing it and shortly after.

That's good. You should start seeing value in taming your mind, not in drugging it temporarily.

. I also want there to be more than the practice of refraining from things and restraining my senses. I want the calm and pleasant and sometimes intense experiences that meditation brings.

That's a false dichotomy. As the Suttas often show, the right calm and joy is born out of nothing other than successful restraint. The caveat is that successful restraint requires discernment of one's intentions, and it cannot be achieved by simply following somebody else's instructions. Apart from the precepts, which are unconditional, you need to see for yourself what is rooted in defilements *for you* at any given time, even at the level of mental choices.

Also, the emphasis should not be in what extraordinary experiences the practice will give rise to, but in freeing yourself from all craving (which is the right type of pleasure). The orgasmic experiences that most people think are *samādhī* and *jhāna* have nothing to do with what the Buddha taught, which always centers around dispassion and relinquishment.

## Provoking the right anxiety

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** upasakatraine 2024-09-11 12:34:10

u/Bhikkhu\_Anigha

Hello Bhante,

With the gradual upgradation of virtue, and tightening of restraint - and provoking the right anxiety of the impermanence of practically everything - there has been a cloud of unease thickly permeating everyday experience.

As my practice has involved extended periods of dwelling in solitude, with little to no distraction - there is a heightened sense that there is 'nowhere to run to' to escape this. I know there are things I could do to 'take my mind off it', but it is amply clear to me that doing so is unjustified and senseless. I don't experience a pressing desire to make it go away (have got quite used to it being a periodic occurrence), but there isn't a nonchalant ease in staying with it either.

So for the past many days, there has been this ‘stewing’ in a general anxious unease / nervous energy - that anything can give at any point; and literally no-one can be safely depended on. The profound weight of the factual loneliness of every individual, has been bearing down on me.

I was reading Ajahn Chah’s account in *Stillness Flowing*, where he describes a certain experience

Then, after a while, I started to weep. It just happened by itself. Tears started to roll down my face. Before that I’d been thinking how like an orphan I was, sitting there shivering in the middle of the pouring rain. I thought that probably none of the people happily asleep in their houses would imagine that there was a monk sitting out here in the rain all night; they were probably snuggling up in their warm blankets. ‘And here I am, sitting here, soaked to the skin – what’s it all about?’ As I started dwelling on those thoughts a sense of the sorrowfulness of my life arose, and I began to cry. The tears were streaming down: ‘That’s alright, it’s bad stuff. Let it all run out until there’s none left.’ That’s what practice is.

As I was reading, I could very closely relate to what he meant - and there was a spontaneous outpouring of tears in me, at the thought of what Ajahn must’ve been through, and at my own present state.

I wonder if there is something you might say regarding tuning my practice, to ‘deal’ with these circumstances in the right manner.

Thanks in advance !

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-11 13:31:02**

There isn’t really anything special that you need to do.

I know there are things I could do to ‘take my mind off it’, but it is amply clear to me that doing so is unjustified and senseless.

Keep making sure that you act in line with that clarity.

The goal is not to make any of that anxiety and displeasure go away, but to fully understand, *while it is there*, that that’s not what suffering is. Then, the anxiety “remains”, but when you’re no longer trying to wriggle out of it, it’s not anxiety anymore, and it’s not unpleasant. It’s just the inherent, inescapable uncertainty of existence.

That’s what the Buddha meant with neutral feeling being unpleasant if not understood.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-05 08:10:17 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Partially, although it’s the part people would tend to lack the most due to their unrestrained lifestyle, in which either full-on pleasure or some form distraction or engage-

ment is sought at every turn.

Understanding the gratification, danger, and escape in relation to all three feelings would be the right view.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-05 15:09:13 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I was instructed to go into non-activity and dive into the neutral feeling

Yes, that's not wrong. But you want to come face to face with the neutral feeling and stop resisting it only to eventually become dispassionate towards it too. It's better than the other two because it doesn't partake in sensuality and aversion, but it's still unsafe.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-10-11 03:46:03 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

But what would understanding gratification, danger, and escape from neutral feelings free me from and how is that relevant to the right view?

It would free you from appropriation of those feelings. You don't start with a pure mind that then starts taking things as "mine"; mine-making is already there perpetually, always in relation to something. So anything that you don't see clearly can become a basis for the assumption of self, and that in itself is a problem, even if that thing is not as harmful as sensuality.

It's because they couldn't see neutral feeling too as impermanent, suffering, and not-self that the few members of other sects in the Buddha's time that had developed *samādhi* were ultimately still *puthujjanas*.

## Question about Phassa

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** hotoke\_follower 2024-09-11 11:46:02

[removed]

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-11 13:25:28**

So, if craving ceases, does phassa just become "contact" because there is no longer a self that is pressured by it?

There is a reason why the Buddha made no concessions, and instead of saying something along the lines of "X experience of a puthujjana becomes Y in the Arahant", he instead said that all of those things, including consciousness and all the other aggregates, *cease* when ignorance ceases. That's because one cannot even abstractly imagine what Arahantship is

like (accurately) while still being a puthujjana. Nibbāna is the cessation of a puthujjana's entire existence.

## Teachings of Thanissaro Bhikkhu

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-09-10 01:39:59

I often listen to dhamma talks by Thanissaro Bhikkhu and I have practiced his meditation methods in the past (though not regularly). Does he stay pretty consistent with the suttas when he speaks about Dhamma? I have only just begun reading the suttas on my own, and have to admit that they are difficult to understand unless I spend additional time finding online talks explaining them afterwards.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-10 06:46:11

Does he stay pretty consistent with the suttas when he speaks about Dhamma?

Only on rather superficial, theoretical points, and not when it comes to the actual practice.

and have to admit that they are difficult to understand

That happens mainly due to lack of development on one's part. The main basis for understanding them rightly is not someone else's explanations, but adopting the lifestyle and values that they put forward.

## Can I please get some honest feedback on something I likely am not seeing clearly?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-09-08 15:11:34

This has to do with the 6th precept and observing it "to the letter" vs "in spirit" and I'm sorry but it's a long post:

I had an eating disorder (anorexia) for over ten years but have stopped engaging in it for a little over two years now. But when I try and observe the 6th precept as eating only before noon, and I get hungry in the evening, I begin to notice what are like echoes or a return of that old disordered process coming back up (as in similar thought patterns are present). It seems like unnecessary restriction for the sake of following a rule. Most of the eating disorder was comprised of obsession with following rules that I would set for myself around food, and then a great deal of anxiety, remorse, fear, and self-loathing if I broke the rules. I also would use the feeling of hunger and the act of not alleviating it as a way to punish myself, and at other times as a way to cope with anxiety and anger.

I don't have this inner struggle when I'm staying at a monastery and keeping the 6th precept, because I'm in an environment where food is just not available in the evening. So I

know it isn't the hunger that is triggering the aversion, rather it's the fact that I feel hungry, I have food available, but am not allowing myself to relieve that hunger. Everything in my mind tells me in that moment that what I'm doing is self-destructive and wrong.

I have never seen a mental health professional, but I stopped engaging with the eating disorder on my own because over time the things that motivated me to do it were not present anymore. Mostly, the high level of anxiety and self-hatred are no longer present in my mind. I also saw how what I believed to be a solution to a problem was in fact just another problem. When I was undertaking a lot of vipassana practice, I sat down to meditate one day and a thought of "look what you are doing to yourself" came up and I started breaking down crying wondering how I could be hurting myself so much for so long. Since that time, it's as if my mind just completely let go of the disorder and could never again pick it back up.

This brings me back to what I currently struggle with in regards to considering how I observe moderation in eating. I believe that eating only when I am trying to alleviate hunger would be the most clear-cut approach. Eating out of craving for a taste or experience, would not be moderation in eating, but indulgence in sense pleasure. But actively setting up the conditions for myself to experience prolonged hunger and intentionally not alleviating that hunger, causes me to recoil and there's something like a psychological block that is not allowing me to do this. I also see the cut off time as rather arbitrary and my desire to observe it as possibly an over attachment to a rule.

Then, there are also thoughts that arise around this like, "other people are able to fast but I can't because I'm too weak" or "I used to be better at going hungry, but now I can't therefore I'm not as good as I used to be" - these types of ego-driven thoughts are also reminiscent of my eating disorder and I do not want to be entertaining them or giving into them, all for the sake of checking a box and saying, "yes I can keep the 8 precepts."

I'm asking if it seems like there is something going on that I should be trying to see and work out by allowing myself to be hungry in the evening? Again, I see that it isn't purely the hunger that I am averse to because I can go hungry when there isn't food available and be okay with that. The aversion is coming from the act of denying myself food that is available when I feel hungry. I would appreciate your honest thoughts and suggestions.

I also apologize if this was not the most coherent and well organized post. I was trying to be concise and share what I think is important in working through this decision on how to move forward with my sense restraint/renunciation.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-09 08:41:09**

See MN 70, which gives the account of the Buddha introducing the rule of not eating after noon, and shows that the purpose of it is not solely to avoid burdening the laity. Eating only in one part of the day, which can involve putting up with some amount of hunger, does have to do with the training of the mind.

The disorder that you describe is something that used to involve your deliberate inten-

tion, so while certain thoughts and pressures might come up now as a result of those past actions, for as long as *now* you don't intentionally welcome those thought patterns, there is no problem. Consider them as flies that are buzzing around you looking for something suitable to feed on. If you don't give them anything, they will eventually leave.

But if you just ignore the issue and continue to make effort in other tangential directions, you will have turned away from the dimension of development that's truly important.

So I know it isn't the hunger that is triggering the aversion, rather it's the fact that I feel hungry, I have food available, but am not allowing myself to relieve that hunger. Everything in my mind tells me in that moment that what I'm doing is self-destructive and wrong.

The purpose of the rules is to expose the wild tendencies of your mind so that you can tame them. It doesn't really matter why or in what way that defiance manifests, and what reasoning is there to justify not keeping the rule; what matters is that there is resistance one way or another, which wouldn't be there for a mind that is pliable and workable (which is what *samādhi* is).

## Stepwise Training

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-09-08 12:35:51

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-08 14:56:45 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Actually being established in virtue and sense restraint would result in *sotāpatti* before it results in *jhānas*, so that should be the goal.

Prior to attaining Right View, even if one is perfectly virtuous and restrained, it's almost certain that one will misconceive what *Ānāpānasati* is about and fall into wrong *samādhi* (absorption/concentration), more so than with all the other approaches the Buddha taught.

He described *Ānāpānasati* as “the dwelling of a noble one” (*ariyavihāro*).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-08 18:40:11 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Fixed, thank you.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-09 08:57:30 (in reply to a comment not included)**

does absorption/concentration only happen to someone who does not have Right View? Is that in itself a sign that someone is not a stream enterer yet?

If someone values it and cultivates it with the idea that it's useful on the path to awakening, then yes, they are both far from and actively moving further away from the Right View (managing feelings instead of understanding how to uproot craving).

Can you please explain a little more what this means from the sutta you linked?

In essence, it means that right meditation is not about keeping your attention on something, but about the attitude your mind has while attending to whatever you are attending. When that attitude is purified from the five hindrances, *what* you attend to is completely irrelevant; hence, you wouldn't meditate in dependence of anything specific.

In contrast, wrong meditation is about keeping your attention on something that happens not to arouse the five hindrances. The *liability* to the five hindrances is not being addressed at all, which is why the mind needs to stay locked in that space indefinitely. It's like locking up a wild beast (your own mind) in a cage so it can't attack people, rather than domesticating it so it won't harm anyone even when roaming freely (which is how the Suttas actually describe *samādhī*).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-09 09:12:34 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Is this a purely intellectual "knowing" -always able to be explained verbally, or could it also be on the level of perceiving suffering in what one is engaging in, so automatically avoiding that thing, like the way one would just naturally move their body further away from a fire that they need to walk past when they are getting too close and feeling an intense burning?

It's both. If it's purely intellectual and has no bearing on your choices and mental states, then it's just information. If it's purely "intuitive" and you can't explain it, then it's not understanding; it's just aversion (though a degree of aversion to things that are contrary to the path is not necessarily bad).

**The axe-handle has finally worn out.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** knwp7 2024-09-06 13:55:16

The axe-handle has finally worn out.

# WHAT?

This is an attempt to summarize my journey. Knowing fully well that my axe-handle is truly worn out - by HH standards.

The first radical change in my view and being was in Feb/Mar 2022. The change cemented over subsequent months. Since then and until Sep '24 I had suspected streamentry but did not try to confirm it. I did not see a point because I have lost value for labels and achievements in my personal life. In any case, I figured, I have to continue on the path with my efforts anyway. Only thing that has nagged me until June '24 has been about how much to prioritize formal meditation - and whether it was really important - because, after all, I am a house-holder with precious-little me-time. I have contemplated and tried to practice HH teachings ever since I first came across them in beginning 2022 - I had no doubt that it was an important thing to do. Meditation - I have been doing regularly since 2020 COVID lockdowns - assuming that it too was an important thing to do. I had not been able to attribute my shift in view to contemplation (HH) or meditation, or in whatever proportion.. I had not been able to clearly discern the factors leading to my fruition.

#### # WHY?

In general I do not believe that I can learn from others' stories - because karma manifestations are unique to every individual. Even when reading Dhamma material, I always skip biographical parts - even, Siddharta Gautam's. Nevertheless, a minor reason for this post is to maybe help develop conviction in those who seek inspiration from others' lives; even if only to validate that HH approach works.

I am not looking for validation; I have conviction now in my fruit. HH community has helped me since 2022 - starting with essays and audio-recordings from Ajahn Nyanamoli on his website, Bhante Anigha's comments and essays, Sister Medhini's essays, yt channel of HH and Samanadipa, and the fellow beings part of this r/HH. I look forward to contemplating any points that arise in this post - like for any r/HH posts.

My parents are in their 70s - and I have always prodded them to read about Dhamma, practice meditation. They have intellectual interest and have been trying to meditate. I had been wanting to send them for Vipassana. While I had myself suspected to have attained the first fruit, I have not been sure about what made it click for me - and what is the most efficient way to get my parents there. As of Sep'24 I am clear about the way that I must help them. Their time is limited - and that is the sort of urgency that led me to validate my own path up until now - and crystallize what really needs to be done. There is no time to waste in formal meditations; it is about right contemplation. I know that now.

I do not hope to teach anyone - except my parents and kids. I am lazy about remembering exact things/facts; I cannot quote suttas if you ask me "where did I read that". I rely on my understanding and intuition developed thru contemplation. Even on r/HillsideHermitage I hesitate to post my response because I only have intuitive understanding - and defending my viewpoint is not my cup of tea. IRL I do not engage in deep Dharma discussions; I keep to my own; I have had faith in me and the teachings that I can do this on my own; that there is no other real option anyway! :)

I have held back from an urge to make this kind of a post in last many months - because I could not clarify my intention. "I am no teacher." I am not going to be able to really help out someone. "Will it not be mere chest-thumping?" I still have doubts regarding



my own practice.” There are 2-3 draft-posts that I never posted - and then later realized that it was good I did not post because I was proven wrong since writing them. The only journal I have maintained for last 2 years is that of my spiritual thoughts, contemplation, experiences; going forward I see little need for that.

(What about this post? will it end up in that journal without getting posted? I think not)

While reading and following discussions on r/HillsideHermitage have been rewarding, I have not had any questions to make a post-of around my lived-experience; I have had reasonable good clarity since 2022. Of course there are hypotheticals to ponder over - but I don't engage in them. So I have had nothing to contribute, really, to r/HH - but gained a lot of insights here. My gratitude to the folks here.

#### # BACKGROUND:

I am a house-holder with one kid in college and another in middle-school. I was an atheist until 2017 when a once-in-lifetime incident forced me to existential questions (WHY ME?) - and eventually led me to Dhamma in 2018. Since the event I have had many spiritual (touching) encounters with people, animals that convinced me of our inter-connectedness. Early 2018 I had my first real intro to Buddhism in a Tibetan-Mahayana retreat. I took the first 4 precepts on that first retreat. Since then I have read commentaries, suttas, prioritized all my me-time for “practice” and retreats. My life became only more peaceful and at-ease with time. I have not had a teacher, except for the (group) retreats. I moved to Theravada readings because they were a smaller set of texts than Mahayana. Being an Indian atheist, I have always distrusted prayer, worship, rituals, guru-devotion etc. That helped me move faster, cut thru the fluff of Buddhism, on the path.

#### # TIMELINE:

Early Mar '22 I experienced complete dis-enchantment from all media. I simply stopped taking any pleasure in movies, TV-shows, music, etc. I was never into social-media anyway. End-Feb '22, during regular sitting meditations, I had gone from access-concentration to “J1” - once. I tried to regain the experience but failed; but I was not that crazy for it. I was practicing some moment-to-moment concentration too, around that time. All this, while listening and reading sutta-commentaries and contemplating.

April-July of '22 - I was fortunate to find solitude and I spent time contemplating and meditating. It was not planned, but it just happened; away from family and friends.

Soon, I lost fear of death, sickness, old-age; fear of seeing loved-ones getting hurt. I lost longing for company, friends, money, possessions, travel, adventure. I became dispassionate but my life was more vibrant!

Oct '22 I fell ill with a combo of Dengue + Chikv infection - painful, nearly hospitalized; it took 4-6 months to get back on my feet, to go out for a walk in the park again; it took an year to recover my formal strength. But all through the illness and its after-effects, there was no mental suffering. The second-arrow had (has) completely vanished for me, along with FOMO and regrets.

The key thing I had understood in early Mar '22 was Karma and the 4NT (to some extent) -

that that is the ultimate truth, and hence the only thing that matters in life. This led me to break-free from all conceptual attachments and cravings. Since then I have had no trouble keeping precept #7 perpetually. In later 2022, I also stopped keeping my journal that I had kept for 25 years - because it felt meaningless to record stuff about myself; past does not matter. The backups also do not matter anymore - emails, photos, videos, memories. In the here-and-now, none of that matters!

#### # PRECEPTS:

I have kept the 5 precepts for many years now through my adulthood. Last offenses:

P1 2014 or 2015 when I drowned a captured rat. I have slapped mosquitoes to death until 2021 or so.

P2 Nothing from any person that I can remember. From my corporate employer - a \$100 item - in 2014

P3 Never

P4 Never, I think

P5 2014 - I was drunk on that last occasion and I vividly remember a very over-whelming sense of restraint for my words and actions while being drunk

P6 began as Intermittent Fasting (IF) in 2018 for health-reasons. Currently I generally eat only in a 4-5 hour window during the day. I do experience, and give-in to, food cravings - but I am aware of my actions. In social settings (though I avoid in general) I don't mind breaking fast. Also, I am not hung-up upon WHICH 4-5 hour-window in the day - we have a cook for the family and HER timings decide what hours I keep :) not the noon-sun. I consume non-veg now and then; I am mindful of my consumption (and not just about food)

P7 kept it since 2022 as noted above. The interest in media disappeared once I had a clear understanding of what to prioritize in my life, what was really important. This had happened earlier too - once I understood that, physically, the time-travel cannot happen backwards in time, I lost interest in all the movies with time-travel tropes! (The only kind possible is the one shown in Interstellar - IMO)

I was floored watching Dune-1 in theaters - but when Dune-2 came out, I had no interest in it. The fantasies and folklores have lost meaning (and my interest) - what does it matter? I have understood what the most important thing is there to be understood; the only thing that matters. Even concepts - rebirth, bardo, realms - what do they matter - if they are not manifest in the here and now - why bother?

I do watch shows/movies with kids; my Dharma-teachings to my kids are all based on the shows and movies that they watch. There are characters and situations to exemplify and teach about wholesomeness vs un-wholesomeness. Music - sometimes listen to Kabir bhajans or Sufi music that now bear very clear meaning; they are a good reminder to practice, and also, WHY do we practice.

I am not the socializing-type; no need to dress-up.

P8 I have been a green-minimalist since 2014. I do not have much money for luxuries - just enough for kids' education. I am content with simple-living.

Solitude - I have very few friends IRL. I have almost always enjoyed solitude.

#### # CELIBACY & VIPASSANA:

I was last intimate in early 2019. But still, Celibacy has been the toughest battle. Its the fap - purely mental indulgence; not breaking #3. The longest I have kept celibacy is 3 months. That happened right after my first Goenka Vipassana retreat in Sep '23. I was thrilled upon realizing that the thoughts had "vanished" because of Vipassana; that I was no longer susceptible! The illusion was broken in 3 months - HH was right and I am still liable to be over-powered by craving - esp this particular type. I have tried to explain away the reasons - like "not enough of my past karma has been washed away" and that "more scanning" will help :)

BTW, I had no trouble reaching full-body dissolution in my 1st Goenka retreat. Now I know its only because I have kept sila for a long time. I did not give much importance to experiences that arose - knowing well that I cannot get it on-demand. The lack of control over manifesting - is strongly tied to my understanding of Karma ca. 2022.

I went to my second Goenka retreat in March '24 - hungering for solitude. It brought immense peace, like last time. Good vibrations too :) But on the final night, after I had been relieved from the precepts - the fap happened. That put me in deeper self-doubt. If I were a stream-enterer (or nearly there), how come I dont have "good self-control", why do I "get angry" at times? Why can I not "keep mindfulness of body/breath 24x7"?

#### # JHANA:

June '24 I had some me-time and I started listening to Rob Burbea's Jhana instructions. I had achieved Kundalini-awakening in May '23 with those instructions. This time around, it was quite easy for me to get to J1 - or what I have discerned to be the 1st Jhana - I do not really care if it is "defined as" or "really is" J1 or not. I was/am able to get that feeling almost any time in any posture - let go of stress, mental-activity, and I breathe - and the spark is there. This is different from manifesting a pleasant state, its more like relaxing and letting-go; letting-go, not reaching-for.

As of late June my '24 sitting-meditation, vipassana etc. stopped altogether - because of no solitude in early-hours. I was curious of the "withdrawl symptoms". Keeping awareness of the 5 aggregates and contemplation have continued without break all the time - as I dont need me-time/solitude for that.

Finally I got curious again of my spiritual-state, started digging into Samandipa and HH videos and looking up the definition and progress thru the fetters. It made sense and this is the post about it.

#### # CURRENT STATUS:

I am ok. Nothing special to do except take on the challenges of a householder, one day at a time until the kids mature into adulthood. And then I will seek a formal teacher, solitude,

jhanas, etc.

Regardless, I just keep awareness of my 5 aggregates, sometimes contemplate; chop-wood-carry-water.

edit: formatting

edit: celibacy - last date early 2019

edit: current status: I am not looking to progress to/in jhanas or in vipassana. I don't have the time in my family life - as of now. It has been very hard to make 10 days of time for retreats in a nuclear-family with kids. The retreats have always been helpful to me - but they are not "it" - that's the realization I have tried to capture in my OP.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-06 17:11:35**

Since you mentioned you are open to contemplating replies to your post:

While I had myself suspected to have attained the first fruit, I have not been sure about what made it click for me

That's would simply not be possible if it actually were the fruit of stream entry. "Shifts of view" and "transformational insights" are just that, not stream entry, and the contemporary idea of "fruition" that's implied in the post is a misinterpretation of how the word *phala* is used in the Suttas.

People think that a "fruition experience" is what makes one a sotāpanna, which naturally leads to this "I know it, but I can't explain it" idea.

This flies in the face of the whole reasoning behind the simile of the axe handle: you can't not know what caused the axe handle to wear away if you actually wore it away, because it would've been you yourself, with your own hands, grabbing it and swinging it millions of times. In that timespan, there would be dozens of "shifts" and "insights" even more profound than what you describe, and none of them are *sotāpatti* yet.

But all through the illness and its after-effects, there was no mental suffering. The second-arrow had (has) completely vanished for me

That doesn't mean the second arrow has vanished. That's a common point of confusion. It simply means that, probably due to the mental fortitude and stability created by your virtue and restraint, and maybe some degree of innate toughness, *there was no arrow to begin with*. Freedom from the second arrow is way more profound than that: it's not being touched by *arisen* mental suffering, regardless of how intense it is.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-06 18:59:03 (in reply to a comment not included)**

use the information they learn from the HH channel to reinforce their existing misconceptions.

Indeed. When there's a will, there's a way to see past even the most cautious caveating and moving of goalposts, and to underestimate just how much further ahead of where you are the instruction is telling you to go. The depth of even "revolutionary" ideas like "Uprooting VS Management" can easily be underestimated, and thus, assumed as already understood.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-07 03:36:41 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I cannot put my finger on "the event" that was the turning point.

The point is that there isn't such a thing, and expecting to find it implies not just a theoretical misunderstanding, but an actively held *view*. There isn't one single swing of the axe, no matter how forceful, that can wear away the handle all by itself.

Since you seem to be relatively restrained in your behavior, it wouldn't be productive to look at the issue in terms of the overall "intensity" of suffering. Virtue and restraint puts a permanent and tangible cap on one's suffering for as long as that restraint is there, which, paired with some making sense of the teachings, can easily be mistaken for *sotāpatti* if there is a lack of self-honesty and patience.

Only with such self-honesty would you be able to realize that things that you most likely regard as acceptable actually partake in the first three fetters and the second arrow still.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-08 14:31:07 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

There is a loud crack that occurs just before a tree that's being cut falls to the ground. But that sound is not what felled the tree; it was the dozens of strikes with the axe that gradually brought it down. So no matter how successfully you reproduce that noise through other means, if you haven't been hacking away at the tree, it won't fall, and all you will have is the noise and no wood. On the other hand, if you focus on striking the tree with the axe, the tree will eventually fall, even if for some reason it does so in perfect silence.

Similarly, inasmuch as one can talk about a distinct "event" of stream-entry, it is due to the person's prior work, over a prolonged period of time, of clearing away the things in their own conduct that obstruct understanding, and weakening the fetters. It's a *result* of the practice done before, and it would never come suddenly or unexpectedly, nor would it magically cut through fetters that were firm and strong moments before.

The idea of a "turning point" used in the OP is of an event whose mere occurrence—even if you don't know how or why it came about—turns you into a *sotāpanna* regardless of the work you did (or not) before.

From that premise, you get many of the wrong views prevalent today about what enlightenment is (e.g., that it's a sudden and momentary "glimpse of Nibbāna", and that there are

ways to “accelerate” the occurrence of that fateful event ), whereas the Buddha said that penetration to knowledge is never abrupt and comes about only through gradual training.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-09 06:46:26 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

But is it not *because* of the appearance of the sun that the darkness is dispelled?

Yes, but the “sun”, the Dhamma-eye, is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, which means you would be 100% sure about what it is that you understood, how you understood it, and you’d also be able to explain it to others with full confidence and clarity. It wouldn’t be a mystical “experience” that you need to read into and interpret after the fact (which shows that in reality the “darkness”, i.e., doubt and lack of clarity, is still there).

And like anything else in life, you would’ve understood those truths because you’ve been actively trying to do so for a period of time (most likely years), and not all of a sudden on account of some totally unrelated effort, such as a meditation technique.

## **I Still Don’t Understand about Sotapanna**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Handsome\_God123 2024-09-05 08:29:19

Hi brothers and sisters in dhamma. Sometime ago another member of this subreddit made a post about the suffering of Sotapanna, I read the thread and I saw how Bhikkhu Anigha gave very interesting answer and it leads to me having more question.

So, **in comparison** to one’s *puthujjana* state (since you can only ever speak in relative terms; there is no unit of measurement for feelings), a *sotāpanna* feels effectively nothing, because that ever-present second arrow that was always 99% of all the suffering the *puthujjana* experienced is completely gone. The first arrow is nothing compared to that. And, as some Suttas say, Nibbāna is where nothing is felt, and *that* is pleasant.

.....

And yes, adding just “seven grains” to the experience of an Arahant is enough to be able to cry like Ānanda, and to be overwhelmed with sexual desire like Vaṅḡisa. Still, experientially speaking, although it might look the same externally, that is effectively nothing compared to the suffering of a *puthujjana*. Even in those absolute rock-bottom moments, it’s all just the first arrow.

Bhikkhu Anigha said this, but also, in different answer he said this.

That’s why many *sotāpannas* in the Suttas could become quite heedless, to the point that, on top of not ordaining, they would continue to lead a normal householder’s life and not be celibate.

I am wondering, if Sotpanna's 2nd arrow is 99 percent gone, how can they not be automatically celibate?? Doesn't the absence of second arrow means they wouldn't have the craving to "scratch the itch" in lots of types of pleasure, and also mean they should be automatically celibate??

I hope Bhikku Anigha can give answers, and you guys who are more experienced can also give me your opinion.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-05 17:51:09**

Doesn't the absence of second arrow means they wouldn't have the craving to "scratch the itch" in lots of types of pleasure, and also mean they should be automatically celibate??

It means that they're incapable of experiencing the "itch" in the way a puthujjana does, but it doesn't mean that they will never scratch it.

As the Arrow Sutta says, the puthujjana knows no other escape from pain than sensual pleasure—any pleasure that is bound with attachment and depends on circumstances, and that includes things like career, friends, hobbies, and also meditation for most people—which means that for him, scratching an arisen sensual itch is a matter of existential importance. Not doing so automatically means being crushed by his own mind. He might become skilled at *preventing the itch from arising* (which is what is commonly regarded as "meditation"), but if and when it arises, he's completely cornered.

A noble disciple, since he does understand the true escape from all suffering, would engage in sensuality simply out of habit and laziness. He would not be troubled if he had no access to sensual pleasure when the itch arises.

Because of that, that itch can never have the threatening, commanding quality that it has for the puthujjana, even if it gets quite intense at times and he gives in to it.

Also, owing to his understanding of all craving as suffering, a sotāpanna can't possibly hold the view that sensuality is somehow beneficial, acceptable, justified, or excusable, regardless of the circumstances. When he does give in to it, it's out of pure weakness.

But a puthujjana is able to—and most often will—hold the view that engaging in sensuality *can* be beneficial because he doesn't see the danger in it, let alone in *upādāna* generally.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-06 08:12:49 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

But isn't preventing the itch a good thing to do until you can finally be able to not be affected by the itch?

You should certainly try to tailor your environment so you're not constantly exposed to things that provoke the "itch." But even when you do that, it will inevitably arise on the

level of your thoughts, and that's where the training happens (enduring it and developing the right context in face of it). That's when you'll really start to feel it, in fact.

You will not wake up one day and somehow no longer be affected by it if your practice so far has revolved around preventing the itch.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-07 02:00:08 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is it because they don't see sensuality as a pit of burning embers yet?

They do. The Buddha talked about this explicitly:

Sensuality gives little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the woe in it is what's greater. Mahānāma, even though a noble disciple has seen this as it is with right understanding, as long as they do not achieve the joy and comfort that are apart from sensuality and detrimental phenomena, or something even more peaceful than that, they still might return to sensuality. [3] But when they do achieve that joy and comfort, or something more peaceful than that, then they do not return to sensuality. [4]

Before my awakening—when I was still unawakened but intent on awakening—I too clearly saw with right understanding that: 'Sensuality gives little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the woe in them is what's greater.' But so long as I didn't achieve the joy and comfort that are apart from sensuality and detrimental phenomena, or something even more peaceful than that, I didn't claim that I would not return to sensuality. But when I did achieve that joy and comfort, or something more peaceful than that, then I claimed that I would not return to sensuality.

So, even though they do know the escape, they may not have reached the point where it's pleasant to stick to it. Hence the whole distinction of pleasant vs unpleasant practice, which strictly speaking applies only to noble disciples given that the five faculties are mentioned.

**To what extent should "I" assume responsibility for phenomena arising in my experience?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** plucesiar 2024-09-03 20:09:58

When I can sense my mind in an unwholesome state (e.g., lust, anger, laziness, and so on), to what extent should I assume responsibility for causing to arise vs perceiving it as "un-ownable"? Or perhaps is responsibility for vs un-ownable different things, or is this altogether a wrong line of questioning?

For example, suppose lust arises in the mind. Even though I have been practicing/guarding my sense doors, its having arisen could be due to



1. just the natural remnants of an untrained mind becoming more tame,
2. I haven't been guarding my senses careful enough,
3. I still see value in sensuality, or
4. some other causal factor I haven't figured out yet.

It seems to me that option #1 should assumed only if all of the other options have not be thoroughly investigated and confirmed to not be the cause.

On a meta level, I'm also trying to reconcile “I am the owner of my actions” (kammassakomhi) with avoiding the wrong view of ownership over one's senses (more specifically, the contents of one's sensory experience). Apologies in advance if I have butchered the paraphrasing.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-04 13:07:55**

Whenever you intentionally break a precept or fail to exercise restraint, that in itself should be regarded as an act of taking ownership of your experience. The emphasis should be on preventing the transgression from recurring, not in trying to wriggle out of the remorse by re-framing it in light of the “Dhamma” of not-self, etc. The sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing is the precursor to wholesome states.

Although virtue alone is not the Dhamma, there cannot be Dhamma (non-ownership) apart from virtue.

But if you know that you have been restrained and keeping your precepts, you are alone in seclusion, and aren't doing anything unwholesome at the time, *then* you are in a position to try to understand what is left over as not yours.

## **Do we have control over “wanting of the wanting”?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** noobknoob 2024-08-27 15:29:42

[https://youtu.be/\\_ttVxzlzlj0?si=IoAf5KlD\\_GzN8V0N](https://youtu.be/_ttVxzlzlj0?si=IoAf5KlD_GzN8V0N)

In this video, Ajahn discusses the wanting of wanting of sensual objects.

If the wanting is there on it's own, out of my control, phenomena enduring there by itself, what is it that makes “wanting of the wanting” something different from that? Isn't that also a phenomena that I'm subject to/secondary to and is out of my control?

I have a similar question about upadana. Is upadana a phenomena (Dhamma)? What did the Buddha mean when he said “upadana is not in the five aggregates, nor is it apart from them.” As I currently understand, the five aggregates is the totality of my experience. If that's the case, how can upadana be apart from the aggregates/how can it not be a phenomena?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-28 04:16:56**

what is it that makes “wanting of the wanting” something different from that?

One of them is a mental state, the other is your volition in regard to that mental state. You can say that your volition is also a phenomenon, but if you say that it’s not in your control, you fall into denial of *kamma*, which is a textbook wrong view.

As I currently understand, the five aggregates is the totality of my experience. If that’s the case, how can upadana be apart from the aggregates/how can it not be a phenomena?

You can’t look at it from a purely theoretical point of view, as if you could describe your experience objectively. The ordinary person cannot see the totality of their experience even when they try to think about it, and thus, *upādāna*, even though technically it’s also a phenomenon within that experience, is not so **for them**. For them, since *upādāna* is not seen, it is “outside,” even though that’s technically impossible. That’s why it’s said that the defilements are gratuitous, and the mind itself is radiant, which doesn’t mean we’re “already enlightened” or similar; without a great deal of effort, defilements will remain indefinitely. The intrinsic “radiance” simply means that enlightenment is always *possible* to develop.

Once you do get to see the totality of your experience (which is what an unwavering commitment to virtue and sense restraint gradually achieves), and *upādāna* can be recognized as a phenomenon, it automatically ceases to be there. It’s something that can only operate in the dark, unseen.

Take an unlearned ordinary person who has not seen the noble ones, and is neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the noble ones. They’ve not seen true persons, and are neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the true persons.

They regard form [feeling, etc.] as self. But that regarding is an activity. [1] And what’s the foundation, origin, birthplace, and source of that activity? For an unlearned ordinary person, struck by feelings born of ignorance-contact, craving has arisen. That activity is born from that. So that activity is impermanent, determined, and dependently originated. [2] And that craving, that feeling, that contact, and that ignorance are also impermanent, determined, and dependently originated. For one who knows and sees in this way, bhikkhus, there is **immediate destruction of the influxes**.

—SN 22.81

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-07 02:25:00 (in reply to a comment not included)**

My current understanding is that the five aggregates are like the building blocks or fundamental elements of my subjective experience.

That's how they're generally understood, but that notion can be inaccurate depending on what the person understands by it.

Often times, the tacit assumption is that one has access to a standpoint that's somehow not within the five aggregates from which one can neatly chop the experience into pieces and investigate its nature, which means that the person ends up seeing as part of the aggregates and as not-self everything but what matters most: their own present intention and point of view, which is the part where the sense of self, greed, aversion, delusion, and everything unwholesome finds footing. MN 2 refers to this as "seeing not-self with self".

It's a form of *ayoniso manasikāra*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-09-09 05:00:08 (in reply to a comment not included)**

But I fail to grasp how attention itself can be composed of these aggregates, because it seems like a new fundamental building block itself.

Yes, that's the difficulty. The "attention itself", due to being less clearly defined than the things you attend to, will appear to be somehow separate from everything else. And the task is not to look closer at the attention itself, at which point it will cease to be attention, but to know its nature simultaneously but indirectly (which is what is meant with "peripheral awareness").

Attention to a sight is in itself just an intention that you would not be intending if you didn't have eyes, for example. Form and all the other aggregates are found at that background level too, not just at the foreground of the external sight (otherwise we would all respond exactly the same way to the same sense object).

## **Magga & Phala, Right View, Stream Entry and faith/dhamma followers - regarding recent events**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Benjifish69 2024-08-25 08:13:30

What if we take the interpretation that Right View is something different from Stream Entry? Hear my out here.

Often times in the suttas getting right view and stream entry seems to go hand in hand, mainly after certain individuals with the necessary preconditions heard a discourse from the Buddha.

Yet there is also this certain very elusive category of faith & dhamma followers, those on the path (magga) and striving for stream entry, but having not yet achieved the fruit (phala)(stream entry).

They seem to inhabit certain ariyan qualities which make them destined to achieve stream entry at their death, when they can no longer postpone the practice.

What if we say that this category has “Right View” but they haven’t reached stream entry yet. This would enable them to for example teach others, even reduce their suffering somewhat, without having “seen” the path for themselves.

An example of such an individual in the suttas might have been the heavy drinker Sarakāni, who due to his negligence in sense restraint could not attain stream entry but possessed enough confidence and wisdom to possess Right View. I have attached the sutta SN 55.24 at the bottom of this post. My theory is that most of *serious* practitioners are like Sarakāni, due to having been born in the current age of sense indulgence.

I am quite curious about what Bhikku Anigha and Keller Dellinger might think of this interpretation. Essentially this would mean that a number of us may be considered noble in the broadest sense of having the right view, but not in the strictest sense of having completed the path to stream entry through perfected virtue.

(One may not know themselves to be a faith/dhamma follower, hence why people came up to the Buddha and asked about it. Stream Entry in contrast is definitely noticeable, since your entire perspective gets turned upside down.)

I basically propose that the faith/dhamma followers have Right View but not the fruit of Stream entry, and that these terms are often used synonymously because they can happen in quick succession/simultaneously. Hence the confusion about such an elusive term.

The sutta reference: SN 55.24 Paṭhamasaraṇānisakkasutta: About Sarakāni (1st) (Translation by Bhikku Sujato)

At Kapilavatthu.

Now at that time Sarakāni the Sakyan had passed away. The Buddha declared that he was a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, bound for awakening.

At that, several Sakyans came together complaining, grumbling, and objecting, “Oh, how incredible, how amazing! Who can’t become a stream-enterer these days? For the Buddha even declared Sarakāni to be a stream-enterer after he passed away. Sarakāni was too weak for the training; he used to drink alcohol.”

Then Mahānāma the Sakyan went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and told him what had happened. The Buddha said:

“Mahānāma, when a lay follower has for a long time gone for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha, how could they go to the underworld? And if anyone should rightly be said to have for a long time gone for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha, it’s Sarakāni the Sakyan. Sarakāni the Sakyan has for a long time gone for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha. How could he go to the underworld?

Take a certain person who has experiential confidence in the Buddha ... the teaching ... the Saṅgha ... They have laughing wisdom and swift wisdom, and are endowed with freedom. They’ve realized the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life. And they live having realized it with their own insight due to the ending of defilements.

This person is exempt from hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. They're exempt from places of loss, bad places, the underworld.

Take another person who has experiential confidence in the Buddha ... the teaching ... the Saṅgha ... They have laughing wisdom and swift wisdom, but are not endowed with freedom. With the ending of the five lower fetters they're reborn spontaneously. They are extinguished there, and are not liable to return from that world. This person, too, is exempt from hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. They're exempt from places of loss, bad places, the underworld.

Take another person who has experiential confidence in the Buddha ... the teaching ... the Saṅgha ... But they don't have laughing wisdom or swift wisdom, nor are they endowed with freedom. With the ending of three fetters, and the weakening of greed, hate, and delusion, they're a once-returner. They come back to this world once only, then make an end of suffering. This person, too, is exempt from hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. They're exempt from places of loss, bad places, the underworld.

Take another person who has experiential confidence in the Buddha ... the teaching ... the Saṅgha ... But they don't have laughing wisdom or swift wisdom, nor are they endowed with freedom. With the ending of three fetters they're a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, bound for awakening. This person, too, is exempt from hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. They're exempt from places of loss, bad places, the underworld.

Take another person who doesn't have experiential confidence in the Buddha ... the teaching ... the Saṅgha ... They don't have laughing wisdom or swift wisdom, nor are they endowed with freedom. Still, they have these qualities: the faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, immersion, and wisdom. And they accept the teachings proclaimed by the Realized One after deliberating them with a degree of wisdom. This person, too, doesn't go to hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. They don't go to places of loss, bad places, the underworld.

Take another person who doesn't have experiential confidence in the Buddha ... the teaching ... the Saṅgha ... They don't have laughing wisdom or swift wisdom, nor are they endowed with freedom. Still, they have these qualities: the faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, immersion, and wisdom. And they have a degree of faith and love for the Buddha. This person, too, doesn't go to hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. They don't go to places of loss, bad places, the underworld.

If these great sal trees could understand what was well said and poorly said, I'd declare them to be stream-enterers. Why can't this apply to Sarakāṇi? Mahānāma, Sarakāṇi the Sakyan undertook the training at the time of his death."

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 11:45:02 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I merely wanted to broaden the scope a little and allow people to teach others (when their approach seems to match the suttas) even before eliminating the second arrow themselves

And how would they know that the second arrow isn't yet eliminated because they're on the path but haven't reached the fruit, and not because they aren't on the path to begin with, and still have wrong view?

In fact, faith followers and dhamma followers are also noble disciples, so what's said in the Arrow Sutta applies to them too. They have transcended the plane of puthujjanas (for some reason translated as "untrue person" here), and are guaranteed to realize stream entry in this life.

Just like the baby calf who had just been born, but, urged on by its mother's lowing, still managed to cross the Ganges to safety are the bhikkhus who are Dhamma-followers and faith-followers. They too, having breasted Māra's stream, will safely cross over to the far shore.

—MN 34

They haven't simply "made sense" of the Dhamma.

Besides, no matter what their individual views are, every Buddhist will have come across other Buddhists who, from that person's point of view, hold egregious views about the Dhamma and yet are convinced that it's all straight from the Suttas and that they're at least on the path to stream entry. From that alone, you can see that it's an awful criterion.

And the moment someone becomes a teacher, they've turned their backs on the possibility that their views may be wrong.

So this approach would be for the great harm of both the teacher and the students.

## **Another yoniso manisikara question...**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Chemical-Medium4316 2024-08-25 08:13:27

So it was thinking. What is the existential manifestation of yoniso manisikara? So I thought let's say I have the hinderance of remorse arise I have two smoke a cigarette or don't smoke and just endure it the way it's supposed to be endured (from the not personal point of view which can be bodily activity)... so sister medhini said in a video before that a non sensual thought is the thought of the danger of sensuality. As in the good thought is manifested negatively not as an object you can attend to.

So I was thinking yoniso may not be so different.

Back to the example. A hinderance has arisen, I know if I cover it up il I won't address

the issue I would just be putting my attention somewhere else( attending things unfit for attention) so instead I know the arisen hinderance and pressure to get rid of it I don't give in because I know this is not the escape. Then since trying to cover it up is not escape would restraint be the stepping outside while inside.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-26 04:40:47

A hinderance has arisen, I know if I cover it up il I won't address the issue I would just be putting my attention somewhere else( attending things unfit for attention) so instead I know the arisen hinderance and pressure to get rid of it I don't give in because I know this is not the escape.

Yes, that's right. It usually helps to make some effort to remind yourself about the danger in taking the bait, but at the end of the day, the "meat" of *yoniso manasikāra* is in the simple resolve not to perform the unwholesome action, while also not trying to remove the pressure if it has arisen. Hence, you're already practicing a degree of *yoniso manasikāra* if you really make sure to keep the precepts unbroken (without resorting to a calming technique), whereas figuring out all the details of how to practice it but not actually keeping the precepts would hardly bring you any closer.

## A Sotāpanna's Suffering

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Altruistic\_Guard\_251 2024-08-23 15:04:27

Hello everyone!

There was a certain passage in Keller's recent post that got me interested in writing this post. It is this one:

Bhante continued on to explain that this lack of suffering experienced by a sotāpanna is the exact same as that lack of suffering experienced by an arahant: that they **feel nothing**. Or, at least, that they feel nothing regarding any pressure coming from the first three fetters which, if we take the himalaya mountain/seven grains of sand analogy seriously, means they do truly feel effectively nothing.

I am wondering how the statement that a *sekha* feels nothing can be squared with the description of Ānanda's grieving on account of the Buddha's imminent passing in the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta, DN 16:

Then the Venerable Ānanda, entering the dwelling, leaned on the lintel and stood crying: 'And I am only a trainee, who still has his task (ahead), and there will be the final extinguishment of my teacher, who is one compassionate towards me.'

*atha kho āyasmā ānando vihāraṃ pavisitvā kapisīsaṃ ālambitvā rodamāno aṭṭhāsi — "ahañca vatamhi sekho sakaraṇīyo, satthu ca me parinibbānaṃ*

*bhavissati, yo mama anukampako”ti.*

Could someone who feels nothing become so visibly overcome with grief? Or should we interpret this as feeling nothing “regarding any pressure coming from the first three fetters”?

The analogy of “the seven stone fragments the size of mustard seeds” (*satta sāsapamattiyo pāsāṇasakkharā*, SN 56.59/60) compared to the Himālaya is actually about the *dukkha* of the seven more existences that remain for a *sotāpanna*, which the sutta explicitly states. That the term *sattakkattuparamatā* ‘the fact of seven times at most’ refers indeed to what is commonly called “rebirth” can perhaps best be seen from AN 3.88 and AN 9.12, referring to the (first type of) *sotāpanna*:

Through the wearing away of three fetters, he is one of seven times at most. Having run on, having wandered on seven times at most towards gods and humans he makes an end to suffering.

*so tiṇṇaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayā sattakkhattuparamo hoti. sattakkhattuparamaṃ deve ca manusse ca sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhassantaṃ karoti.*

Based on that, the simile is actually inadequate to be used for the suffering that still remains for a *sotāpanna* in their present existence.

Again, it is not my intention to be dismissive of anyone, or wanting to criticize for its own sake. Only I feel that these two points do not fully hold against the suttas.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-24 04:50:22**

Based on that simile alone, yes, it might seem like a *sotāpanna* experiences largely the same suffering as a puthujjana, just that the amount of it is limited to the remainder of seven lives.

But see the Arrow Sutta, particularly the following lines:

In the same way, a learned noble disciple, when struck by unpleasant feeling, doesn’t sorrow, wail, lament, beat their breast or become muddled. They feel one feeling: one bodily, and none pertaining to the *citta*.

...

If they feel a pleasant feeling, they feel it unyoked. If they feel an unpleasant feeling, they feel it unyoked. If they feel a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling, they feel it unyoked.

This is called a learned noble disciple who is **unyoked from birth, old age, and death, from sorrows, lamentations, pains, dissatisfactions, and tribulations; who is unyoked from suffering, I say.**

...

One who understands and is learned **does not feel a feeling of pleasure or unpleasure.**



This is the great distinction  
between the wise and skilled, and the ordinary person.

It's a grave but common mistake to think that a *puthujjana* can at times not experience the second arrow. The reality is that, as the Sutta says, whenever they experience displeasure, the second arrow is inevitably there.

So, **in comparison** to one's *puthujjana* state (since you can only ever speak in relative terms; there is no unit of measurement for feelings), a *sotāpanna* feels effectively nothing, because that ever-present second arrow that was always 99% of all the suffering the *puthujjana* experienced is completely gone. The first arrow is nothing compared to that. And, as some Suttas say, Nibbāna is where nothing is felt, and *that* is pleasant. A *sotāpanna* abides in Nibbāna to the degree that they have realized the third noble truth.

Of course, once you actually become a *sotāpanna*, the suffering that's left does feel excessive because now that's all you have, and that remainder would motivate you to strive further. But if you don't draw that clear distinction between the feelings of *puthujjana* and *sotāpanna*, you end up with the common case of a *puthujjana* who gained some special "insight" and now assumes himself to have the Right View, while in the end still being liable to the second arrow (though they may not notice it due to lack of self-transparency, and increased virtue, sense restraint, and commitment to Dhamma in general).

It can be compared to someone who still experiences minor lingering symptoms from a deadly illness that they were already cured of. The fact of the matter is, even if at times the symptoms they experience are *more* intense and physically painful than those of a person who's still ill and may die at any moment from the disease, they will never be felt the same way. The ill person's palpable symptoms may be less or even none, in fact, but the real pain they are perpetually subject to stems from the fact that they're trapped by and cannot escape that illness that will kill them sooner or later. The particular symptoms are just the cherry on the cake when they show up.

It's also important to clarify that "not feeling anything" doesn't mean what people usually understand by that. There's lots of *puthujjanas* who "don't not feel anything", but out of sheer indolence, dullness, and apathy, which is emphatically not what Nibbāna is. "Not feeling anything" in this right sense is a result of the absence of ignorance, and not of becoming a lifeless rock. On many occasions, the Buddha himself alluded to how he experienced not just physical pleasure and pain, but also mental happiness and mental discomfort.

And yes, adding just "seven grains" to the experience of an Arahant is enough to be able to cry like Ānanda, and to be overwhelmed with sexual desire like Vaṅḡisa. Still, experientially speaking, although it might look the same externally, that is effectively nothing compared to the suffering of a *puthujjana*. Even in those absolute rock-bottom moments, it's all just the first arrow.

That sounds confusing and somewhat paradoxical, but it's not supposed to make sense from a *puthujjana's* perspective. If it does, and you're still a *puthujjana*, you should be concerned. The Dhamma is "beyond reasoning" (*atakkāvacara*), and can only be experienced

by the wise for themselves.

So, whichever way we wish to interpret the simile of the seven grains of sand, it's not seven more existences of more or less the same feelings that you know now as a *puthujjana*. *Sotāpannas* have only seven existences left not because of a cosmic decree, but because *internally*, that's how little potential for being is left in them (and it may be even less, since it's not that every *sotāpanna* has to have 7 more existences). So *both* the limited amount of reappearances in the future and the limited amount of suffering in the present are byproducts of the same internal development that makes them, from a *puthujjana*'s point of view, be free from suffering.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-24 13:29:22 (in reply to a comment not included)**

or it is an over interpretation to consider that the whole sutta applies to a stream enterer.

You can take it that way, and risk the possibility that you will end up taking yourself as a stream-enterer when you actually aren't, thus automatically losing the chance to ever become one unless you change your mind. Or, you can assume that the Buddha actually meant what he said, and realize that your current understanding underestimates the depth of what a *sotāpanna* is. You have nothing to lose from the latter option.

The Buddha could've also been addressing this Sutta mainly at *puthujjanas*, in which case it is accurate to say that a *sotāpanna* has "gone beyond being". From the *puthujjana*'s point of view, he has. Nobody has a detached, third-person point of view from which they can neatly lay out and investigate the characteristics of each noble attainment, because whatever you think about and imagine is always conceived within the confines of your present state.

In order to become a *sotāpanna*, a *puthujjana* must be aiming at the complete cessation of being, and not at the amount of being that he imagines a *sotāpanna* still possesses. The latter is the surefire way to overestimation, while the former is what a heedful person who recognizes all being as perilous and all craving as suffering would be doing.

Having set their sights on that *complete* cessation of being, they would along the way pass through the milestone of stream-entry. If they don't aim at that, they're not on the right path to begin with.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-24 15:08:53 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Could we say it refers to having become able to endure the pressure of *any* type of presently persisting feeling indefinitely, neither giving in, nor denying it?

Technically yes, but it's easy for a well-instructed *puthujjana* to be convinced that he's already doing that, and thus it would not be the best description.

Another way of explaining it conceptually is that it's because a noble disciple is incapable of taking any *saṅkhāra* at all as permanent or pleasant, and any *dharmma* at all as self. To that extent they're no longer liable to ignorance, and where there isn't ignorance, there is no contact/pressure, and thus no possibility for feeling (referring here to the *paṭīcasamuppāda* cessation formula). Put another way, none of the feelings that arise *can* be "his" even if he wants them to (including the intense feelings that accompany sorrow and crying), and to that extent, they don't pressure *him*.

Despite their occasionally substantial "weight" and forcefulness, there is no sense of being confined or oppressed by those feelings, just as someone who finds himself in the worst of maximum security prisons, full of rapists and serial killers, while at the same time having the option to get out the second he wishes to. But he might've made good friends with *some* of the rapists and serial killers and be doing quite well overall, and so he may postpone his departure for quite a bit until something prompts him to finally leave. This is what the Arrow Sutta refers to with being "unyoked" or "unfettered" from feelings.

The Arahant, however, has completely left the prison, and cut all ties with anything and anyone within it, and is thus incapable of ever re-entering it. It could be said that for him, there is not even the first arrow.

Now, an important note to make is that a *puthujjana*, if he has a steady practice of virtue and sense restraint (based on a degree of *yoniso manasikāra* and not absorption/concentration), can also cease to be noticeably liable to the second arrow. But that's because those practices they have (rightly) become skilled in are able to keep the first arrow in check, in a semi-permanent manner (i.e., for as long as they don't become unvirtuous and unrestrained). In other words, they find themselves in a relatively agreeable prison, but at the end of the day, if they ever wanted to leave altogether, they can't.

A *sotāpanna* cannot ever be touched by feelings in the same way again even if he were to totally give up the practice, make no effort to remember any of what he's understood, and fill his mind with nothing but mundane preoccupations for the remaining decades of his life (or eons in heavenly realms). He would naturally incline to keep the five precepts without even thinking about it, but everything else he can just throw out the window. That's why many *sotāpannas* in the Suttas could become quite heedless, to the point that, on top of not ordaining, they would continue to lead a normal householder's life and not be celibate.

You're only truly free from the fetter of *sīlabbataparāmāsa* when you don't get affected by suffering any more even if you don't do any practice at all\*,\* not even restraining your senses, "enduring pressure on the right level", and not forgetting the context. Those are the right "*sīlabbata*", but their only purpose is to create the basis for right understanding and thereby liberation to take root. They are not liberation themselves.

That's also how only a *sotāpanna* can have an accurate sense of what an Arahant is: he

has a perfectly concrete, internal reference point for a liberation that is perfectly *unconditioned*, whereas any liberation that a *puthujjana* may know is conditioned by him having to **do** something, even if it's the right things. Seeing that for himself, he would know exactly in what direction to go.

A *sotāpanna* would continue to engage in the right practices only if he has interest in progressing further at the time, and if he doesn't do them, what he has developed cannot be undone. A (honest) *puthujjana* knows deep down that if he gives those (right) practices up for too long, he will eventually lose the temporary degree of peace that he gained.

To come back to the analogy, the prisoner who knows he's able to escape no matter what doesn't need to perform any sort of mental exercise or remind himself about some aspect of the internal situation of the prison in order to not feel confined. That sense of confinement simply cannot arise.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-24 16:25:49 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It's hard to know for sure as there is room for controversy on the topic.

There really isn't. On the whole, the Suttas present a clear standard to judge what stream-entry is, but only if one realizes that it's not about fulfilling *one* of the criteria. Instead, the actual stream-enterer is the one who checks *all* the boxes the Suttas provide\*: complete faith in the Triple Gem, the four noble truths, the five faculties, the 7 grains of sand left, the freedom from the lower realms, the freedom from the second arrow, knowledge of *yoniso manasikāra* and the sign of the mind, the inability to take anything as permanent, suffering, or self, the destruction of the first three fetters, seeing for himself all the things mentioned in MN 9, etc. There's basically no room for ambiguity or controversy when you look at it that way, since whoever isn't really a *sotāpanna* will have to fail in at least *one* of the criteria (if they're self-honest).

So there is a lot of work left and that is all I need to know.

The topic is still important because if someone has any semblance of an idea that they already have Right View when they don't, they will not be questioning their understanding of practices like abandoning the hindrances deeply enough. They will simply continue to develop in line with their present insufficient understanding, and there is nothing that can rectify that except acknowledging that the understanding was inaccurate and backtracking all the way back to the beginning. And one of the things that could prompt them to do so would be realizing that they're still ultimately as liable to suffering as they were before, no matter what profound insights or transformative "experiences" they've had.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 03:03:10 (in reply to a comment not included)**

How is this not a blatant contradiction?

There are many such “contradictions” in the Suttas, and what the presence of a contradiction indicates is that one’s understanding should be revised. You’re presented with several fingers, all of which are supposed to be pointing at the moon, even though they’re pointing in wildly different directions. Once you arrive at the moon, you realize that all the fingers *were* actually pointing to it, and if you had decided to trust only one and not the others, you would’ve ended up going in a wrong direction and never arrived at the goal.

In line with the Arrow Sutta, the noble disciple’s body weeps, not his mind. The only way to accurately understand what that means is to become a noble disciple oneself.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 03:16:46 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

How is that even possible? The way I understand it is that the first arrow are the feelings themselves - something we have no control over.

We have no direct control of them, but with the complete cessation of ignorance, there is the cessation of feelings, in line with *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Even the six-sense base, where the first arrow arises, is said to cease in an Arahant.

And yet, on many occasions, we see the Buddha implicitly or explicitly stating that an Arahant still has feelings, and he obviously still perceives sense objects. Again, if that doesn’t make sense, it means one’s understanding is deficient. One still hasn’t even seen the actual moon that all the fingers are pointing to.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 03:23:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

thus, ascribing this sutta to stream entry ends up redefining stream entry outside of what the buddha specifically teaches, and invalidating a number of other suttas, and damages the dispensation by spreading false dhamma.

No, it shows that what one currently thinks the dispensation is actually isn’t, and that those other Suttas that seem “invalidated” had in reality not been sufficiently understood. The Suttas get to decide what the dispensation is, not oneself.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 06:04:26 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The problem with such analogies is that they apply regardless of what is being talked about.

Of course, but the Suttas are the reference point. The “moon” they are pointing to is the only one that matters (and it *is* one and the same moon, although that can only be taken on faith initially until it’s seen for oneself).

The only way I can currently make sense of this, is to expand the notion of *body* to include *mano*. Thus, the *citta* is free, but the *body*, which includes *mano* still has those habits and pressures that were the result of past actions.

Yes, I suppose I should've clarified that explicitly. That's explained in more detail in the comments to my translation of the Arrow Sutta that I linked above.

The noble disciple being free from mental (*cetasika*) suffering doesn't mean he only feels the pain of physical sensations, as it's often interpreted. It applies to mental suffering in relation to *mano* as well, and *mano* is part of the body. MN 121 uses the phrase "this very six-sensed body dependent on life", but it's often mistranslated as "the six sense bases dependent on this body", presumably on the assumption that even though the Pāli is perfectly unambiguous, *mano* cannot be part of the body. A perfect example of taking one's views instead of the Suttas as the standard.

This ties in with the inability of one accomplished in view to take any phenomenon as self, for which I provided a reference above. That of course extends to *mano*.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 09:55:29 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The Buddha is on record for identifying Ānanda's weeping as an expression of sorrow and lamentation (*soka* and *parideva*) when he says, "*alam, ānanda, mā soci mā paridevi*", which the two quotes above clearly show as belonging to the *cetasikā vedanā* and not to *mano*, i.e. not to the *kāyikā vedanā*.

The Sutta does not say that all sorrow and lamentation must be *cetasika*. The starting point of everything that the Sutta talks about is that *an unpleasant feeling* has arisen, both for a *puthujjana* and for a noble disciple. It doesn't rule out the possibility that the arisen unpleasant feeling itself will be such that the noble disciple physically cries. It also explicitly says that the noble disciple *is* still "struck by an arrow", which would not be an accurate description for an Arahant.

The main point is that they lack that additional "layer" of suffering that the *puthujjana* has, and "weeping, beating one's breast, etc." is a common template expression used in other Suttas to describe that same existential type of suffering. If it were to be taken literally, anyone who—due to sheer grit and strength of character and not supramundane wisdom—never cries and keeps it together in the midst of great adversity would be free from the second arrow, which is of course nonsensical.

AN 5.48 is another Sutta that contrasts the *puthujjana* with the *ariyasāvaka*, and says that the latter has "pulled out the poisoned arrow of sorrow", and is "sorrowless, free of thorns" in the face of loss of someone who is dear, which to some people will sound like Arahant (and of course also contradicts the account of Ānanda crying if "sorrowing" is interpreted superficially). But then it goes on to say, he is one who "fully extinguishes himself" (*attānaṃyeva parinibbāpeti*), which means he *isn't* yet an Arahant.

Similarly, even though AN 4.184 states that someone who's free from doubt about the True

Dhamma would not fear death, SN 55.21 shows Mahānāma, who was a noble disciple, being concerned about where he would end up in his next life, clearly still being afraid of death—“sorrowing”, in a way—to the point where his mindfulness becomes muddled, just like Ven. Ānanda’s. That’s not because the Buddha overestimated Mahānāmas development, but because the first arrow is still there. Compared with the *puthujjana*, there’s no fear there. Compared with the Arahant, there is.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 10:57:44 (in reply to a comment not included)**

i have studied the pali suttas for decades (likely long before you were born)

This surely adds a lot of weight your points.

As has been the case on every occasion I can recall, you fail to realize the subtlety of the points being made, and proceed to refute a strawman, sprinkling in ad-hominems from time to time.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 13:46:01 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Doesn’t the formulation “if I would sorrow” show that they are still subject to these things, but have gained a perspective that can actually draw them out of them, or rather, by which they can pull them out?

You could put it like that. But the fact remains that when you have the master key for the entire prison, you can never feel trapped again, no matter what happens.

A *puthujjana* can find a way to reliably come out of the cell that works in every situation he encounters (often within his now unwittingly heavily controlled environment, and provided there is still access to a minimum degree of comfort and sensual pleasures) thus leading to the conviction that he’s a noble disciple. That’s how you can have Buddhist teachers who with the utmost confidence, not even trying to deceive, declare themselves to be free from the second arrow, and yet are later found to have been continually breaking the five precepts for years on end, hiding it to boot.

But even an ordinary person who’s become so skilled at avoiding suffering will unconsciously feel the uncertainty of not having truly understood the way out. Each time they come out of the cell, however often and quickly they manage to do so, it’s because somebody else (an impermanent condition within the aggregates/six senses) was kind enough to unlock the door for them. They would only realize the weight of that uncertainty once they’ve already dropped it, but they won’t be coming closer to doing so if they assume that what they currently know *is* the genuine escape.

From the noble disciple’s perspective, the fact that the escape is *guaranteed* and rooted in genuine right understanding of feelings means that, compared to what even the skilled

*puthujjana* feels, that displeasure cannot be threatening even if he wants it to. Hence the following statement:

“Mendicants, suppose a person was to place down on Sineru, the king of mountains, seven pebbles the size of mung beans.

What do you think, mendicants? Which is more: the seven pebbles the size of mung beans, or Sineru, the king of mountains?”

“Sir, Sineru, the king of mountains, is certainly more. The seven pebbles the size of mung beans are tiny. Compared to Sineru, it’s not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part.”

“In the same way, compared with the achievements of a noble disciple accomplished in view, the achievements of the ascetics, brahmins, and wanderers of other religions is not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part. So great is the achievement of the person accomplished in view, so great is their direct knowledge.”

—SN 13.11

That is why the Buddha describes it the way he does in the Arrow Sutta, instead of saying that the noble disciple “does” something and *then* is not hit by suffering. But when speaking to noble disciples, he didn’t fail to remind them that they still have work to do and that they should be diligent and continue practicing.

The Dhamma is *opanayika* and *ehipassika*: it’s meant to primarily push **you** onwards. Providing a cohesive system of intellectual principles is a secondary goal (which from my perspective it also achieves). For certain people, the latter can serve as a vehicle for the former, but for others, excessive concern with intellectual clarity gets in the way of the primary goal.

(P.S.: In line with this, the Arrow Sutta clearly describes the way that the Buddha wants a *puthujjana* to think about the noble disciple, while the instances of Ven. Ānanda crying and whatnot were mainly narration, not teachings. Thus, what the Arrow Sutta says should be the north star for one’s practice. Having arrived there, one can put oneself in Ānanda’s shoes, while at the same time seeing that the *sallasutta*’s description isn’t inaccurate or a “white lie”).

I’ve already laid out my stance in more than enough detail in this thread for anyone who is receptive to benefit from it.

If it still seems unacceptable to you, I would encourage you to simply put the question aside for the time being and revisit it later, after having sincerely dedicated yourself to the training that the Suttas do unambiguously describe. And, to repeat the same heuristic argument I’ve used elsewhere when the point fails to get across, one has nothing to gain and everything to lose from settling for a watered-down interpretation of the nature of a noble disciple. That decision has very concrete repercussions; it’s not just a theoretical matter.



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-26 04:06:58 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It's not that it occurs "at" *sotāpatti*, in the manner of a singular experience or event, nor is it that cessation takes time to come about. It's not like an object sliding on a surface, which needs time to come to a stop (the Dhamma is *akālika*).

Cessation is an *understanding* that a stream-enterer already partakes in (see MN 9 and MN 38), and the only way to comprehend the cessation of suffering, the third noble truth, is to comprehend the cessation of DO.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-26 04:17:42 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Insights, in the broadest sense. "Knowing and seeing things as they are".

Often people, after gaining some sort of groundbreaking insight, end up assuming that that's what the goal was, and that now they're *sotāpannas*. But a *puthujjana* will have many dozens of such transformative recognitions on the way to *sotāpatti*. Assuming he's practicing more or less rightly, on the basis of the Gradual Training and *yoniso manasikāra*, those insights are simply a sign that he might be going in the right direction.

You need to be able to directly know that the first three fetters have worn away, without reference to any other criterion—without needing to *infer* that because you have this new insight that seems so profound and sounds like stream-entry, the first three fetters are broken. Only then is it the real deal.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-26 05:00:10 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Does this align with the "opanayika" aspect of the Dhamma you reference above?

It mainly refers to instructions or descriptions themselves. An instruction is accurate if following it pushes a *puthujjana* to make right efforts in the direction of stream-entry, and a *sotāpanna* to keep striving for Arahantship. But an account of all the particular behaviors and mental tendencies that a *sotāpanna* or Arahant can or would tend to exhibit would be of little use in that regard, since all the practitioner can do with that is try to emulate the effect without getting any closer to the cause, or at least "undershoot" his striving for the cause.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-27 01:54:17 (in reply to a comment not included)**

In theory, the complacency part could also be interpreted as referring to a noble disciple. But it wouldn't make much sense, since even the most complacent *sotāpanna* doesn't

imagine sapwood to be heartwood—it's not like he's unaware that he's still not an Arahant. That can only really happen to a *puthujjana*, who is still able to deceive himself to a large degree.

Also, a *sotāpanna* can glorify himself and put others down, but not in relation to the Right View. It's inconceivable for the mind to exercise such coarse ownership while also recalling the right understanding of non-ownership it has gained.

The following Sutta (MN 30) might give the impression that the last item is about someone who gets the Right View but doesn't strive further to attain *jhānas* and formless attainments. Apart from the fact that those are not better than the Right View in themselves (SN 13.11), as seen from the question that prompted it, it's clear that the discourse is in the context of members of other sects. Those people, instead of needing to outright accept or deny the knowledge-and-vision they may have gained, would be forced to acknowledge that there is more to be done anyway. They would start practicing *jhāna* within the Buddha's framework and, at some point, realize how what they previously thought was wisdom was inadequate.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-27 02:17:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So what's the difference between an arahant and a *sotāpanna* then?

From the *puthujjana*'s perspective, not much (hence the Arrow Sutta). But from the *sotāpanna*'s perspective, the difference is very substantial. It's similar to how a 6-year-old wouldn't be able to fathom why a 50-year-old would call a 20-year-old a "kid," but the 20-year-old would have a very palpable sense that he still has a lot to learn.

the sutta you linked seems focused on the four knowledges in the context of the *āsavas*

There isn't any mention of the four knowledges there. It's quite clear that the Buddha is talking there about how an ordinary person would come to gain the *sotāpanna*'s understanding: the timeless principle by which *āsavas* immediately cease.

A *sotāpanna*'s practice is precisely about repeatedly bringing about the cessation and non-arising of the *āsavas*. That's in fact what *yoniso manasikāra* is about, as stated in MN 2. All the components listed in that Sutta after the first section are to be practiced with the understanding of the cessation of the *āsavas* that the *sotāpanna* has acquired. That the *sotāpanna*, by virtue of being one, understands the cessation of the *āsavas*—as well as the cessation of ignorance—is also stated in MN 9. SN 12.3 explains the right *practice* as the cessation of DO.

So, one way of explaining the distinction is that, for the Arahant, the *āsavas* are no longer liable to future arising.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2025-03-07 06:55:43 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The fact that Ven. Vaṅḡisa was a sotāpanna is quite evident from the other Suttas in that chapter, and the verse in SN 8.3 itself suggests that he already understood the Dhamma at that time.

I wasn't implying that the Sutta proves that a sotāpanna cannot glorify himself in relation to the Right View. I don't think there's explicit evidence in the texts for that claim. It was just an example of a sotāpanna glorifying himself on account of something else.

## Seeing the Mind

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** RighteousPistachio 2024-08-23 08:00:00

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-27 05:51:13 (in reply to a comment not included)**

May I enquire in what way do you distinguish *Cittanupassana*, from seeing the signs of the mind?

You can be contemplating the fact that there's a mind of aversion present, which, yes, is the *instruction* of *cittānupassanā*, but you can still be doing that with the wrong underlying motivation (of getting rid of displeasure, for example, and not seeing aversion on *that* level). Having and applying the right information about *cittānupassana* is not the same as succeeding in it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-27 06:18:30 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I'm not sure what difference you're seeing between what you're suggesting and the explanation in the video.

By the same token, the unskillful bhikkhu who might be meditating *otherwise* rightly (i.e., subduing greed and distress, etc.) still *is not rewarded* with a pleasant abiding, because he is **not picking up** the signs of the mind (he does not see the presence of defilements in the mind).

What does "otherwise rightly" mean here? The unskilled bhikkhu has subdued greed and distress *in regard to the world*, meaning he isn't having coarse sensual or averse thoughts. But, in a subtler sense, there are still defilements there (it clearly says "The defilements are not abandoned" in the unskilled bhikkhu), and thus he cannot be said to be meditating rightly. He's *trying* to do so, but he's not sufficiently clear about what "rightness" is, and he cannot be unless he picks up the sign of the mind.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-27 06:24:15 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Practically speaking, yes. In the beginning, you need to be questioning your intention behind even the “right” practices. Eventually, once you become skilled, trying to do the right thing will always result in doing the right thing.

## **Rebirth, Kamma, and what is even the point?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-08-23 01:29:54

Early on in my Buddhist practice, the teachings on non-self, rebirth, and kamma were something I easily accepted. Perhaps because I came from a non-religious background so did not have an opposing world view to counter those teachings.

But recently, the more I think about these things, it makes me wonder what is even the point of attaining enlightenment, and if enlightenment is even a reality. It’s my understanding that kamma is an energy that moves through samsara and we are all basically manifestations of that, but are not real beings with souls. So, are we individual “packages” of kamma, or are we even less of actual beings than that? It makes me wonder, if I will not remember this life, because I do not remember past lives, and I can not conceive of or see my future lives, then what is even the point of working towards enlightenment?

I hear teachings from some monks and they’re like, “do you really want to go through the pain of living and growing up and loss all over again?” - but this question does not really make sense because if I have a future life, it will seem then like it’s my first go around. Can someone please help put this all into perspective, because I’m feeling a little bit lost in my confidence in the Buddha’s teachings as of late. Especially over the last few days since coming to question my practice of meditation. I feel like that was a core part of my practice.

Also I’m watching this and it’s bringing up a lot of questions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=refhOylACb0>

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-23 03:52:52**

It’s my understanding that kamma is an energy that moves through samsara and we are all basically manifestations of that, but are not real beings with souls. So, are we individual “packages” of kamma, or are we even less of actual beings than that?

Most of the information you will find on rebirth and kamma doesn’t accord with the Suttas.

This sort of view is very common, and it gives people a sense that from their present position, with an untrained mind, they can already make sense of what the Buddha was

pointing to with the teaching of *anattā*. But there is no mention of such a doctrine, or anything that resembles it, anywhere in the Suttas. It's certainly influenced by the Abhidhammic analysis of experience as an ever-flowing sequence of mental events, each one conditioned by previous ones, because of which "there is no real being there".

In fact, whenever the Buddha would recount one of his previous lives, he would say "I myself was such and such at that time".

The Dhamma is something that "can only be seen by the wise for themselves", and so it cannot be accurately conveyed through such theoretical, explanatory views that a scientist would "agree" with and that don't require any practice to comprehend.

It makes me wonder, if I will not remember this life, because I do not remember past lives, and I can not conceive of or see my future lives, then what is even the point of working towards enlightenment?

If someone comes and tells you, "I'll beat you up tomorrow, and you'll forget what happened today as well as the beat-up itself, but you'll still have the bruises and broken bones the day after and beyond", is there any point in saying no? There is nothing more esoteric about going from one life to another than going from today to tomorrow. The only significant difference is the presence of memories of what came before, but as shown by the example I gave, the absence of memories doesn't allow you to pretend in good faith that what comes later is not your problem. The fruits of your actions will still have to be experienced, and they will still hurt just as much.

If there were no rebirth, then indeed there would be point in enlightenment. It would just be a sensual goal of getting more pleasure and avoiding pain, for no particular reason, given that you could just end it all right now without having to bother with any practice.

But if you realize that you can't possibly prove that there *isn't* rebirth, then, if you're concerned for your own welfare, the goal of liberating your mind from passion in this life does have a valid justification. If you don't do that, and you turn out to be wrong and there *is* rebirth, you're at the mercy of the workings of *kamma* that you can't even comprehend, and you may well not get another chance to rescue yourself for who knows how long. You can assume that you will lose all the experience and knowledge you gained in this life that allowed you to protect yourself from suffering to a great degree. So you can also safely assume that if this human world is anything to go by (and clearly it can be a lot worse if you look at animals), there's a high likelihood that it won't be a fun ride.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-23 08:07:58 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Do you really believe that there are no other alternatives in your wager except Buddhist rebirth?

I'm not really talking about "Buddhist rebirth". If we take what the average Buddhist understands by rebirth, it's not even what the Suttas are talking about, since a lot of the notions and descriptions surrounding it have come later. The Suttas make little to no

pronouncements on how rebirth “works”, and even say that speculation regarding that is futile.

What the Suttas do say is necessary to have is mundane right view, which simply boils down to acknowledging that there could be a next life, and that what you do in this life will have an effect on what you experience in the next, just as what you did yesterday affects your experience today. Rejecting *that* (which would also have to be based on faith and belief) is what is an obstacle to the practice. The proliferated notions of “reincarnation” and whatnot that people usually associate with rebirth *should* be put aside, and no effort should be put into defining how exactly rebirth “happens” (the Buddha himself refrained from that).

And the main reason why it’s important is not because “belief” does anything in itself, but that, as the Buddha said, someone who holds that this life is the only one is bound to engage in misconduct of body, speech, and mind. Sure, people can have worldly morals and restrain themselves to a reasonable degree, but there is no way that they will put anywhere near the amount of effort to go “against the grain” as is required to realize the Dhamma if they believe that they will no longer experience anything after death.

In the beginning, it can simply be regarded as a case of taking the worst case scenario for granted, which in turn is the only way that you will feel the necessary sense of urgency. If you then practice and develop your mind sufficiently, you will be free whether there is rebirth or not. But by that point you would have already seen for yourself what the Buddha meant by “renewal of existence” (“rebirth” doesn’t actually correspond to any term the Buddha actually used), and it would no longer be a matter of belief. You would see that it’s something that literally *cannot stop of its own accord*, for which you and your craving alone are responsible, and which needs to be brought to an end through effort and discernment. It’s not about some sort of collective cosmic process.

People’s notions of a collective saṃsāra that we are all traveling through together, and any other such fashionable ideas about rebirth they might have adopted, are *within* the here-and-now ongoing round of existence (*bhava*) that they’re not any closer to understanding.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-23 15:05:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Shouldn’t we then take that approach with all religious teachings on what happens after death?

No, because all other religious teachings rest on the assumption that something or somebody else will save you. When you free yourself from craving through your own diligence and effort and thus cannot suffer no matter what happens, divine powers become irrelevant, even if they exist.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-25 03:47:02 (in reply to a comment not included)**

*saṃsāra* is not an external place or condition that our five aggregates are “in”, in which case the question would arise regarding a self/soul that remains unchanged throughout *saṃsāra*.

Instead, *saṃsāra* is nothing other than these five aggregates changing-while-persisting, and the five aggregates cannot be rightly regarded as self because they cannot be ultimately controlled.

## Noting Meditation

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-08-20 13:11:34

Greetings everyone. Would the Mahasi Sayadaw’s meditation technique of mental noting experiences and phenomenon be considered a valid meditation within the framework of what the Buddha himself taught and said about meditation? If so, how? If not, why not?

I am looking for guidance from the suttas, not so much other people’s personal opinions or good or bad experiences with this particular method.

Another thing... I have been listening to talks put out by Hillside Hermitage regarding meditation. I have a rather consistent and solid meditation practice, but am now questioning the techniques and methods I use at times. What do the Noble Ones at Hillside Hermitage recommend as a way of meditation for lay people who keep 5 precepts and celibacy, sometimes all 8 precepts, and are focused on knowing intentions and restraining senses (at the level that sometimes I still mess up, but am constantly reflecting and trying to self correct)?

Thank you all for any input.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-21 04:29:55**

Any type of meditation that promises itself to be right while one is a puthujjana is intrinsically wrong, whether it’s noting, watching your breath, loving-kindness mantras, or even “choiceless awareness”, simply because it won’t push you to become aware of your intentions, which is where craving, the defilements, and everything you actually need to understand lies. Your mind is still subject to greed, aversion, and delusion not because you don’t spend enough time “noting” or because the noting hasn’t given rise to some special fruition experience, but because you don’t sufficiently recognize the degree to which your own intentions, including the intention to practice noting, as well as anything else you do, say, or think, is affected with those defilements.

“Sandha, meditate like a thoroughbred, not like a wild colt.

And how does a wild colt meditate? A wild colt, tied up by the feeding trough, meditates: ‘Fodder, fodder!’ Why is that? Because it doesn’t occur to the wild colt tied up by the feeding trough: ‘What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?’ Tied up by the feeding trough it just meditates: ‘Fodder, fodder!’

—AN 11.9

Instead, you need to operate with the assumption that your own intentions are hiding from you and are sabotaging your efforts for as long as you don’t see them fully (i.e., don’t yet have the Right View).

And how does a thoroughbred meditate? A fine thoroughbred, tied up by the feeding trough, doesn’t meditate: ‘Fodder, fodder!’ Why is that? Because it occurs to the fine thoroughbred tied up by the feeding trough: ‘What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?’ Tied up by the feeding trough they don’t meditate: ‘Fodder, fodder!’ For that fine thoroughbred regards the use of the goad as a debt, a bond, a loss, a misfortune.

When a desire arises to go somewhere, eat something, say something, imagine something, or to practice this or that technique, become aware of *that*, investigate whether it’s unskillful (which the last one always is if your goal is to see the four noble truths), don’t give in to it if it is, and remain on guard for anything else that might arise. If it’s not unskillful, not against the precepts, and doesn’t lead to the arising of further defilements internally, you can do it.

Whoever has purified their behavior has done it like this, and not through noting.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-21 11:06:37 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I don’t understand why the intention to practice a meditation technique is unskillful and goes against seeing the goal of seeing the four noble truths.

Because you understand the four noble truths by upgrading your very definitions of what skillfulness and unskillfulness are. Only a stream-enterer understands that correctly, which means that until then, the goal is to understand that very broad principle, and not to take something you *currently* think is wholesome and just go wherever it takes you.

The fact that greed and craving appear to be absent as you engage in these practices doesn’t mean they are. We start with insufficient criteria as to what the defilements even are, and there is no way to reach real freedom if you underestimate the degree to which you are actually fettered.

You should certainly dedicate time to contemplation of the Buddha’s teaching, but a “technique” is something quite different. It carries with it the implication that “I just need to do this, and understanding will somehow arise.”, which is complete wishful thinking. Some *type* of understanding would no doubt arise, but not the right one, since the entire en-



deavor is based on an unquestioned ignorance (i.e., lack of sufficient clarity of what is skillful and unskillful).

Doing a noting practice or any other technique is in a sense better than engaging in coarse unwholesome actions and thoughts, which is why it can feel calming for most people. But that doesn't mean it's *right* or that it's what the Buddha taught. And you most certainly don't need a technique to restrain your own mind. Quite the opposite: that crutch will actively prevent you from understanding the nature of intention, taking responsibility for it, and learning what proper restraint is.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-21 15:09:43 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

We actually see the defilements in and during the practice and we note the defilements when they arise as we note everything else that arises (and ceases).

That's exactly the issue. It carries the assumption that trying to see the defilements is enough to actually see them, which, again, is not the case unless you're a sotāpanna. It doesn't matter how hard an amateur tries to watch every bird that he encounters. Even if he gets to grab every single bird with his own hand and observes it up close, the fact that his knowledge is insufficient means he won't be able to classify them reliably. So if he goes through his entire life just doing that instead of questioning the very criteria he uses to recognize the birds, he will never become an actual expert. All he will have accomplished is making thousands of inaccurate judgments.

Another question I have is in regards to the claim that meditation is unskillful or inappropriate for someone before stream entry. Where exactly is that laid out in the suttas?

In many places, among them the following:

“There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: ‘Misconduct of body, speech, or thought has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.’ Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.

And what, bhikkhus, is the power of development [*bhāvana*, the word usually translated as “meditation”? In this context, the power of development is **the power of the trainees** [*sekha*, which means sotāpanna or higher]. For relying on the power of a trainee, one gives up passion, aversion, and muddledness. Having given up passion, aversion, and muddledness [for which it's necessary to have understood them to begin with], one does not do anything unskillful; one does not engage in anything harmful. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers.”

—AN 2.11 [the next sutta defines the “power of development” as the seven awakening factors, and SN 47.30 mentions that these are *acquired* by the stream-enterer; they are absent before that]

“This mind, bhikkhus, is radiant. \* But it is blemished by adventitious defilements. The unlearned ordinary person does not understand this as it is. Therefore I say that for the unlearned ordinary person, **there is no development of the mind.**

“This mind, bhikkhus, is radiant. And it is freed from adventitious defilements. A learned noble disciple understands this as it is. Therefore I say that for the learned noble disciple, there is development of the mind.”

—AN 1.51-52

“Well then, mendicant, you should purify the starting point of skillful qualities. What is the starting point of skillful qualities? Well purified virtue, **and correct view.** [a stream-enterer is called “*ditṭhisampanna*”, one endowed with (right) view] When your virtue is well purified and your view is correct, you should develop the four kinds of mindfulness meditation in three ways, depending on and grounded on virtue.

—SN 47.3

The Noble Eightfold Path, which of course includes “meditation” (right effort, right mindfulness, and right samādhī) is available only to a stream-enterer:

Sāriputta, they speak of ‘a stream-enterer’. What is a stream-enterer?”

“Bhante, anyone who possesses this noble eightfold path is called a stream-enterer, the venerable of such and such name and clan.”

—SN 55.5

And isn’t it the case that meditation can be a helpful aid on the path leading to stream entry?

That’s an agreeable modern view, but nowhere in the Suttas is that stated. You can’t cultivate or develop (the literal meaning of *bhāvana*) something further unless you have it in the first place. In this case, right effort and right mindfulness, both of which are absent unless there is right view.

Also, the Buddha is simply never seen teaching mindfulness and meditation to beginner laypeople in the Suttas, as is contemporarily done. Not even to newly ordained monks, it seems (AN 5.114). He is only seen teaching it to noble ones, lay or ordained, and in some rare cases, to people who were already very developed in virtue, renunciation, and restraint. In fact, many Suttas state that sense restraint is the *precursor* to meditation (SN 46.6 is one of the most explicit examples), so if anything, the meditation part is what’s optional, and the sense restraint is what’s not negotiable.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-21 15:20:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

If this is the case, does that mean everything someone engages in before stream entry is unskillful?

From the ultimate point of view, everything they do will be affected with craving and ignorance. But of course, things will be less so than others. For example, keeping the precepts is less ignorant and unskillful than not keeping them. Being sense restrained is less ignorant and unskillful than not being so. Working their way “from the inside out” in that way (the “Gradual Training”) a *puthujjana* would eventually get to understand skillfulness and gain the ability to develop it further, thereby no longer being a *puthujjana*.

Are mundane activities like cleaning the house, going to work, etc unskillful if someone is not seeing their intention behind doing these things correctly?

It depends on the intention. But whenever someone isn’t aware of their intentions, as a rule of thumb the action will be unskillful. All it takes for unwholesome tendencies to set in is to let your guard down. You’ll quickly find yourself doing things for which there isn’t even a real practical purpose out of a craving for pleasure or distraction.

But the main concern initially should be to become permanently established in the eight precepts. There may be subtler unwholesome actions that can be filtered out later, but if you’re trying to restrain yourself from cleaning the house but still from time to time indulge in music, video games, and sexual intercourse, that’s like trying to filter out sand before you’ve filtered out large rocks.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-21 16:40:26 (in reply to a comment not included)**

the techniques are just skillful means of developing certain conditions in the mind that are more favorable for insight.

Assuming, again, that one can trust one’s initial understanding of what skillfulness is. However far back you may want to take it, the adherence to *any* pre-defined technique or method, regardless of its specifics (including our “method”, in fact, if the person assumes that they’re already practicing it properly) means that a certain foundational assumptions and notions are not being questioned, and it is only by questioning *that* foundation someone would have a chance of attaining the Right View. Not doing so entails an underestimation of just how profound ignorance is.

I invite the Venerables to be a bit more cognizant of this fact so that they can be more charitable in their criticisms.

I know very well that we often over-simplify these methods when we discuss them. But that’s not because we’re not familiar with the specifics. It’s because it’s not the specifics that matter, but rather the very general picture. It doesn’t matter what Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw or anybody else makes their method or technique about, and there is no amount

of adding or taking away from the particular instructions that would make them correct. The fact is that they're (implicitly) encouraging complacency with certain parts of your present understanding that fall within wrong view, e.g., the assumption that the conditions that an absorption-style practice create are in any way favorable for insight, and the assumption that mindfulness is about observing things more closely.

Perhaps in near-ideal conditions, such as physically renouncing the world and such (like the Venerables), this is great advice (and even so, I wouldn't definitely rule out the usefulness of techniques), but for the vast majority of people life is just too chaotic.

Laypeople need to make their life less chaotic first (i.e., start keeping the five precepts and be celibate at least, and reduce their involvement with unsuitable environments, activities, and people as much as possible) before they can even hope to start practicing meditation. That's why the Buddha didn't teach meditation to laypeople unless they were noble disciples already.

Lay life has its own "gradual training"

The defilements don't know whether you wear robes or jeans, so this is very inaccurate. There is also no mention of such a thing in the Suttas. Laypeople, unless they were celibate, were those who had decided that they would not fulfill the Gradual Training in this life, and not those for whom a different training had been prescribed.

Most important is that, as stated before, techniques and the like are not incompatible with the teachings of the Venerables. To the contrary, they might very well be appropriate (and even necessary in a lay setting), if you understand that they won't magically enlighten you, but that they will teach the mind certain skills that are useful for further development.

Our teaching boils down to questioning what one assumes to be useful and not useful until one's view is actually correct, and only then worrying about "developing" things (and this is what the Suttas also say, as I've written in one of the replies below).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-21 18:18:08 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

That's still grasping at straws, in the end. The point is, there's still the assumption that your criteria and views are already accurate enough to discriminate what is what, and that whatever you're noting is really what you need to be aware of, and not something else that's also in your experience there and then.

That's actually another highly gratuitous but unnoticed assumption that's implied. The idea that you can reduce your present experience to one clearly defined thing that can be accurately described by a single label, which is not the case. By putting the emphasis on what's being noted, which by definition won't be what really matters, everything else gets overlooked. Like the wild colt in AN 11.9 which I quoted above.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-22 02:19:32 (in reply to a comment not included)**

But if the practice is not taken up at all, then how can one hope to ever improve?

You do have to try to improve in the skill of reigning the bad habits of your own mind. But that doesn't happen through a meditation technique, but through the Gradual Training, of which meditation proper (sitting down in solitude having made mindfulness one's priority) is found at a very late stage only.

Keeping the precepts and restraining your senses will bring you immeasurably closer to learning how to relate to your mind in the right way than any modern technique, and that's what the Buddha always taught. In fact, right samādhi is born out of sense restraint, so while it may not seem like it due to the accumulation of modern assumptions about what meditation is, practicing sense restraint is practicing meditation, while a meditation technique is a *failure* of sense restraint. You get engrossed in the details of specific sense objects, because of which you overlook other aspects of your experience.

Even the contemplation of intentions would not be accurate and precise at first, but through effort and practice, improvement will be made. Why would you say that contemplating intentions and meditation practice can not be developed in tandem, but rather that one needs to be mastered to a certain level before beginning the next?

Developing both in tandem would imply a view that, on some level, meditation is about something other than seeing and restraining your intentions. It would imply that you see it more as two separate exercises rather than the same exercise performed at a higher difficulty, which is how the Buddha saw it.

Would you be able to recommend some other practice I can undertake daily that would aid me to get further on the path?

You can strive to become accomplished in all the steps of the Gradual Training that lead up to meditation. Each of them, starting with the 8 precepts, must become a matter of permanent lifestyle, and not of occasional greater striving. That's what will uncover and familiarize you with your own defilements, not an observation technique.

Another thing that my mind considers is that IF meditation has been helpful to me (which I could list ways in which it has) - then how is it skillful to abandon something that has benefited me?

In the same way as lying and killing living beings could've been very helpful for one previously, but upon taking on the precepts, one would give up any benefit that came from it, in exchange for a much more profound type of benefit that may not be immediately tangible.

When it comes to meditation, your mind and life changed for the better probably because you gave up certain unskillful things *as a side effect of the meditation*, as happens for many

people. So just give up the meditation technique itself, but don't return to the unskillful things you used to do when you didn't meditate. Then focus on finding other, more subtle unskillful things that you still do, strive to restrain those without the crutch of a technique, and your mind and life will change for the better even more eventually, even if at the time it doesn't feel good.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-22 02:54:16 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I am suggesting the possibility of using a technique and at the same time keep questioning assumptions and notions.

You can question *some* assumptions, but not all of them and not *from the ground up*, for as long as you keep using the technique. I can be paying careful attention to the process of baking a cake, making sure to question all my assumptions about what a good cake is supposed to be like, and yet I won't be questioning whether I should be baking a cake at all, whether I should even be cooking, or whether I should even go to whatever event the cake is intended for.

the techniques are just a part of the whole system.

Yes, and the whole system is predicated on unsound premises (most of the time stemming from the Commentaries and Abhidhamma) from scratch. So again, the technique itself could be something completely different; that's not what really matters. It's the assumptions behind it, i.e., the system itself.

So are you saying that a mind that has practiced concentration (nose tip-style), for example, 2hrs a day, for a year, is not in any conceivable way better equipped for insight?

Not on account of the concentration practice, no, and not the right type of insight. If they have stopped engaging in unskillful actions by body, speech, and mind and begun to practice sense restraint, they are better equipped *to that degree alone*. But it's unlikely that they would not have entrenched views and expectations that will be an obstacle if they're engaging in the technique, so even if their lust and aversion have reduced circumstantially somewhat, their delusion and ignorance have increased.

Ignorance and wrong view are the entry point to the wrong path, culminating in wrong liberation, so it would actually be better for someone not to have gained those circumstantial cognitive and behavioral improvements if that means they won't have acquired more wrong views than they started with.

So in the mean time why don't consider some techniques that will help to start deconditioning the mind from lifelong habits?

The answer to this is the same. The lifelong habit that's at the core of all others is ignorance and wrong view, and that one is being strengthened at the expense of all the others. If the Buddha's teaching were extinct and the only two options were either a completely

ordinary life or a life devoted to meditation techniques, the latter would be better. But that isn't the case yet.

Just as an example consider the attention span (which in the near future might well be non-existent). Consider the degree in which people today are detached from their bodies.

This is a good example of unquestioned assumptions that are only fed further by the practice of a technique. A short attention span is a very tangential symptom of defilements, and doesn't need to be addressed directly. Being able to concentrate on one thing for a long period of time does not imply a pure and tamed mind. A sniper can focus on his target for days on end, and yet his mind is more defiled than that of the most scatterbrained person with ADHD who doesn't break the precepts.

Consider the amount of mental illnesses, traumas and conditions that were just unthinkable 100 years ago (let alone 2600).

All of that is due to the decrease in people's general virtue and the degeneration of values, not because of the decrease in attention span—a side effect that is way down the hierarchy of importance compared to many others. So the solution is still to take on the precepts and sense restraint, and to stop giving in to and proliferating one's desires like an animal. Not a meditation technique.

Don't you think that these conditions are considerably more complex, so that certain compromises for skillful use of certain techniques are appropriate in the "lay path"?

Practicing the Dhamma is harder now than it was before, yes. But the solution is to try harder to bring oneself to where it is, being even more careful about making compromises than laypeople back in the day were, rather than watering down the Dhamma so that one can access it without having to make significant changes to one's life first.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-22 05:12:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

How can I ever manage to stick with that intention knowing how much pain it's going to cause?

By clarifying your liability to suffering, fostering a sense of urgency, and getting your mind to recognize that the pain that comes from not doing it—not necessarily in the near future, but when sickness, aging, loss, and death come—will be much worse. A drug addict needs to feel sufficiently dissatisfied with his current state and where it's leading him in order to be able to endure the pains of withdrawal.

And that's one of the many shortcomings of contemporary meditation approaches. They're generally not rooted in the sense of urgency that the Suttas so often emphasize is indispensable. People who are content with them rarely if ever regard stream entry as a matter of life and death, not even realizing the precarious situation that they find

themselves in, as victims to the inevitability of the loss of everything that's dear to them due to their proliferated attachments.

That's why it's not uncommon for the practice to become compartmentalized from the other aspects of their daily life, which happen to be precisely where they make their minds even wilder and less capable of enduring loss and disappointment. In many cases, the goal of the meditation is simply to "minimize" suffering and increase happiness as much as possible, but you don't need a fully awakened Buddha and his Dhamma to achieve that. That's already the goal of every mundane pursuit, sensual ones in particular.

Do you have any advice on how to determine what is gradual vs going too quickly or slowly when it comes to sense restraint?

You just make sure that you follow the Gradual Training in the order that the Buddha prescribed it. Get your mind used to keeping the 8 precepts first and foremost (or the first five if you still break them sometimes), unbroken and *unconditionally*, not just when you feel inspired. Don't force yourself to sit in an empty room for 6 hours a day and give in to no unwholesome intentions whatsoever straight off the bat (you won't succeed because you don't even see your intentions clearly).

And... do I need to sort out my intentions first in order to be successful with this kind of practice?

The Gradual Training follows the sequence that it does precisely because it's about becoming aware of your intentions on subsequently more refined levels. Right now, you may not be fully clear about the full subtlety of what thoughts are rooted in craving and what thoughts aren't, but you know for sure that breaking a precept by body or speech involves more craving than not doing so. So you restrain your craving on that level, and once you become proficient, you are ready to move on to the next stage of sense restraint, which already starts to reign in some of the coarsest unwholesome mental actions.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-23 14:58:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yes, I'm aware of that Sutta. It's quite possible for a puthujjana to reach a point where they've dialed in the previous aspects of the Gradual Training (at least as far as they can tell) and yet still don't have the Right View. At that stage, they can take on the *satipaṭṭhānas* as a practice, but the person teaching would have to judge where the listener currently stands. If they have the usual tendency most of us start with today, of assuming that their practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* starts out being already correct, then it would be counterproductive to approve of that.

But if they have the attitude of, as it says there, practicing that *so that they can get to understand the body as it is* (which implies the authentic admission that they still don't), it would be beneficial provided they've reined in all the other things that cloud the mind through virtue and restraint. Provided they keep questioning their understanding at the root level



and don't just take it for granted, they would gain the Right View once they rightly understand the *satipaṭṭhānas*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-30 19:24:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

the noting technique is helping me to see more clearly than if I weren't using it at all

Nobody can deny that. The problem is that the sort of intention you really need to see to get the Right View—the “root” passion, aversion, and delusion acting as a foundation for everything else—is in the very act of trusting in and performing the technique. Whatever the technique reveals to you will not be able to override the fact that all of it is born out of a more general unwholesome intention of delusion.

## Essay: Developing Stream Entry

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-08-19 10:26:28

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-19 15:07:44 (in reply to a comment not included)**

For those who might have developed *yoniso manasikaro* as outlined in this and other essays,

To be clear, that's a matter of years, not weeks or months.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-20 11:28:11 (in reply to a comment not included)**

are indicative of the understanding of a noble disciple, who is endowed with *ariyakanta-sīla*. Could we perhaps take this passage as referring to someone who is on the path towards stream entry, but has still not accomplished ethical discipline fully?

The *dhammanusāri* and *saddhānusāri* are also noble disciples, irreversibly established in the path to Nibbāna, and also possessing the five faculties including wisdom, but they haven't yet fulfilled the four factors of stream-entry and abandoned the first three fetters completely. That's what some Suttas refer to as “the sure path in regard to beneficial qualities”.

Case in point is Sarakāni, the noble disciple who was an alcoholic.

Now of course, the caveat is that anyone can say “I have great faith in the Dhamma or” “I have a good intellectual grasp of it”, but that doesn't at all mean that what they have faith or

an intellectual grasp of is correct, especially nowadays that there are so many mutually contradictory teachings, all which get to pass as “Dhamma”. And even if they do have good faith/reasoning of the “right” Dhamma externally, it doesn’t mean that internally they interpret it properly.

In other words, *sotāpattimagga* is already an extraordinary achievement that only a limited minority of people would get to, even if all the Dhamma instruction in the world was perfectly in line with the Buddha’s.

Edit: Also, the expression “of bad virtue” (*dussīla*) could be referring to an actual *sotāpanna* who doesn’t break the five precepts, but still engages in sensuality externally and isn’t celibate. That would actually fit better with the context of AN 10.75, which explicitly mentions celibacy.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-20 18:10:18 (in reply to a comment not included)**

How can I know that a certain teacher is not simply - although perhaps very eloquently and intelligently - deluding themselves and hence others?

If they claim to be teaching the Buddhadhamma, then the first criterion would of course be that their ideas must be in line with the Suttas. But in order to use that criterion properly, one must keep in mind that one’s interpretation of the Suttas can and often will be inaccurate, and so it’s only the broad strokes that you’ll be able to ascertain for sure. For example, whether they teach, at least implicitly, that it’s remotely possible to have *samādhi* or *jhānas* without a lifestyle of permanent virtue and sense restraint. Even if “virtue” here means only five precepts (though it’s actually 8, or at least 5 with celibacy), this criterion already disqualifies the majority of modern teachers, even in the Early Buddhism scene.

Also, do they need to bend the Suttas in order to support their narrative, and implement “patchwork” ideas that the Suttas never even mention (the concept of mind-moments and experience consisting of a “flux” of events, the idea that someone can meet with road-blocks in their practice due to “energy blockages”, past *kamma*, or lack of familiarity with a methodical technique, and not because their act out of craving in their daily life, etc.)? True Dhamma must be free from patchwork, and must not require the use of mental gymnastics and carry the implication that the Buddha forgot to mention things that were actually very important. This means operating with the basic premise that the Buddha was the unsurpassed teacher, and if something was in any way relevant, he already said it with the degree of detail that was necessary.

In the rare event that somebody passes that test, they may be someone whose teaching *is* in line with the Dhamma at least as far as you can currently tell, but who may be overestimating themselves and setting the bar for what constitutes liberation too low (which happened even in the Buddha’s timewhen there wasn’t any counterfeit Dhamma, so of course it can happen now). But at the very least, in following that teaching you wouldn’t be completely wasting your time, since it would emphasize the right things and lead to *some* taming of the mind.

The next filter would be to scrutinize them personally to see whether any passion, aversion, or delusion is found in them, as described in MN 95. For that, you'd ideally need to visit them and get to know them. Someone who sees the Dhamma wouldn't just be able to explain it very well, but they would also personally free from any qualities that go against it.

And if two teachers seem to be teaching largely the same thing but one of them lives in remote forest dwellings while the other one doesn't, the former is the safer bet.

And the final criteria would be, if both teachers are forest dwellers, whose teaching is subtler, more profound, and requires more dedication, time, perseverance, and effort to realize, and which appears to be more accessible, more lenient, easier to understand, and more compatible with things that are not in line with the Dhamma. The former would be the way to go in every case. Out of any two paths, the one that is subtler, harder to comprehend, and goes more "against the grain" will always be closer to the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha didn't even feel inclined towards revealing it initially, being sure that nobody else in this world could possibly understand such a profound teaching.

But, at the end of the day, especially now that there are *undeniably* counterfeits (if you get 10 USD bills with 10 different colors, and meanwhile all real bills are supposed to have one and only one color, either all of them are fake, or only one of them is genuine) and the Saṅgha is already as fragmented as it can be, there is no foolproof way to tell. You can at most decrease your chances of going wrong, albeit by an immense margin. But again, if a teacher at least emphasizes what the Suttas emphasize (virtue, restraint, renunciation, and not meditation techniques, contrived mystical or new-age concepts, or poetic ideas) you won't be completely wasting your time.

which, as the suttas indicate, and you and Ajahn Ñāṇamoli constantly emphasize, implies unbroken *sīla* and sense restraint.

Not necessarily sense restraint, though. That's part of the indispensable *training* for *sotāpatti* and for any attainment higher than that.

A *sotāpanna* would keep at least the five precepts, but they can end up living more laxly than is required to make significant further progress, like basically all incelibate noble disciples in the Suttas, including devas.

## When is it Upekkha and when is it laziness?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** StriderLF 2024-08-19 01:05:32

I've been trying to develop Upekkha, but very often remaining equanimous to certain things has a flavor of just being lazy or of the "it's going to be fine anyway" wrong view. How can I tell the difference between Upekkha and just wishful thinking that everything will be fine?

Thank you all!

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-19 03:57:37**

How can I tell the difference between Upekkha and just wishful thinking that everything will be fine?

By not trying to “do” what you now think upekkha is, and instead focusing on developing virtue, sense restraint, awareness of your intentions, and becoming a sotāpanna first. That may be a more disquieting endeavor compared to your current idea of equanimity, but is in reality much closer to upekkha.

Any equanimity you have not based on those prerequisites will be wishful thinking. It will be the equanimity based on the household life and not on renunciation, as the Buddha says in MN 137.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-20 04:37:57 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The key is that, in all three cases, he abides “unflooded” (*anavassuta*), which means his mind isn’t touched by any of those arisen feelings.

But yes, any intellectual understanding of that (the cessation of contact) will be a misconceiving to some extent. It needs to be realized.

**Restraint and discipline is tiring me?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** jaredun 2024-08-15 15:45:38

I’ve since forever felt this resistance to restraint in my daily life. No matter what it is, “something” starts to feel bad after I’ve restrained myself for a while. Sometimes, it’s to the point that I’ve felt that I’ll die of a heart attack or something.

For example, I’m studying or working on something, and for this, I need to sit on a chair for long hours, with full attentiveness. Let’s say at least for four or five hours. I’ll naturally start getting restless after half an hour, feeling anxious, etc., so I might have to get up and “walk it off”. This clearly sucks because it’s taking me away from deep work, not to mention trapping me with a bad habit of giving in to pressure.

Let’s not even talk about other escapes like sexuality, social media, etc. I might be able to ward off for a while, but then I start getting tired from this. Finally, after a point of time, they can easily overpower me.

So starting today, what I can do to improve? How can I stand against the pull of ANY distraction, no matter how tired I feel, which I will invariably face again tomorrow?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-16 04:28:10**

You shouldn't be worrying about something as minute as an intention to get up and walk if you still break the 8 precepts from time to time. If you do, it's almost guaranteed that you'll be acting from a place of adhering to an arbitrary observance (which is basically what self-mortification is), instead of actually seeing an unwholesome intention and restraining it. That's why the Buddha instructed people to train gradually instead of trying to restrain every single unskillful intention right off the bat, which is not possible because you start being able to see only the very coarsest ones, and the subtler ones will be a complete hit-or-miss.

So what you can do starting today to improve is determine to dial in the very first step: never breaking the 8 precepts again (and that might take a while). Do your best with all the rest, but don't expect it to be anywhere near perfect before you are accomplished in basic virtue.

**Enduring the pressure correctly**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** wisecameron 2024-08-15 07:31:38

Let's say, as a really simple example, that I am sitting down and not engaging with anything else on an external level. Just sitting still, that's it. And then, I have a really strong urge to stand up. I'm using this example because it's so simple, this could equally apply to more coarse situations like an urge to smoke cigarettes.

In this situation, I am guaranteed to be experiencing an unpleasant SENSATION of pressure. I am also probably going to have thoughts ringing out that are trying to push me towards action in one direction or another. Now, this all kind of reminds me of an example I read on here recently, where Venerable Nanavira was speaking about his experience quitting cigarettes. He mentions how, after quitting, he quickly found himself thinking "I know I can stick to my resolve not to smoke again, but I really need to smoke another cigarette to be sure this is the right way to go." Similarly, I often find myself in a situation like this, where a pressure is occurring, I know that I just need to not follow the obvious direction it is trying to take me, and that's all that I need to be *doing*. Hence, if I just keep sitting down and that's my only external action, in the case where the urge is to stand up, then I can kind of rest easy knowing that I'm legitimately enduring the pressure correctly.

Now here's where it gets confusing to me. Sometimes, I experience a more ambiguous type of pressure, it doesn't have clear directionality, but it's just saying that I need to do something\*. There are two questions that I have about this:

1. Is it true to say that the perceived directionality is because of thinking and pondering related to the pressure? As in, I am connecting two unconnected domains, and believing that the thoughts related to the pressure are actually related to it, when they actually aren't? For instance, if you have an itch, your natural inclination is to scratch it. But what if your natural inclination was to jump up and down, thinking that was the best solution – you'd never even thought of scratching in the first place,

just jumping. It's the same itch, but "acting out" or going with the grain seems to take two different forms depending on your perception of it, which is formed by thought.

2. Experientially, is it true that I should just remain aware of the whole experience, not even just the pressure, but certainly not without the pressure I know is there, and not do anything else? It seems like that is ultimately the best thing I can do when I'm under pressure to act out of unwholesome. I keep finding myself feeling so overwhelmed because I'm not sure whether I'm just implicitly acting out by having xyz thoughts, or what even directly constitutes acting out at all. This is especially difficult when I consider point 1, which posits that there may be no real directionality at all, so "acting out" would simply mean doing anything with the intention to distract yourself from the pressure.
3. One thing I have contemplated for a while is that, given that the entire body(1) (and hence, my body(2) experience as a whole – using the terminology bhante Anigha used in his Yoniso Manasikhara essay, where body(1) is the more fundamental object in the world) is subject to death and thus directly unownable, it is possible that no thinking and pondering, no sensations, nothing on that body(2) level can actually be my action on an immediate level, my action is something that comes *after* that. But does it have to be volitional? On what level do I *choose* to make this or that action, what is the threshold? So is it just that assumption or ayoniso attention that turns natural thinking and pondering into the *act* of thinking and pondering? Or is it that, since you implicitly can say no to thoughts, can turn your direction elsewhere, you are acting simply by experiencing them? Without understanding the line of action more clearly, I'm having a lot of trouble enduring the hindrances, even though I see how terrible and often unbearable the pressure of sensuality actually is. It really is exactly like racketeering, it's honestly very horrific because pretty much every single thing I habitually "want" to do has this exact same dynamic, this exact same pressure underlying it. It's like my world is made of sharp stones.

To rephrase what I said above - when I'm met with an unpleasant abiding, I know that it's wrong to act towards ignoring it or trying to get rid of it. What happens is that since I don't understand the line between acting and not acting with enough clarity, my ability to endure without actually acting chips away as the perception that I am implicitly acting out due to the arising of phenomena grows stronger. If I had to guess, I would say that perhaps I just need to endure that too, and I'm still not acting out until I make a conscious choice. But I could easily be wrong.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-16 04:03:13**

It sounds like you're severely overthinking things and are not realizing that you've already gone down the rabbit hole of restlessness and doubt. Even if the ideas you arrive at are theoretically correct, they won't be so *internally* because they're coming through a mind of doubt.

What you should do is not try to stop feeling the pressure or stop thinking, but see the whole barrage of doubts, uncertainties, and questions that present themselves as being of the utmost importance as *one thing* that's trying to bait you away from the right context, and then let that pressure endure for as long as it wants without going out to welcome it *or* fight with it at any point. Like a tortoise that draws its limbs into its shell when the jackal comes to eat it.

This talk goes into this in more detail. "The Island of Safety" is also very connected.

## Logic behind restraint and non-restraint

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-08-06 16:42:41

I've heard multiple times that giving into craving further perpetuates it. Why is that the case? I understand that intuitively through empirical observations, but there's still a sense of doubt with regards to it. Also, is abstinence supposed to naturally ward off the craving? Similarly, why?

Say there's a pleasant prospect present, the recognition of that prospect is felt unpleasantly and there is resistance towards it naturally; i.e., there is a sense of "I want to go towards that thing" either physically or mentally. What is right endurance here? What makes that endurance "right" as opposed to other kinds of endurances?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-07 13:36:44

Also, is abstinence supposed to naturally ward off the craving? Similarly, why?

Not in itself, because in the end abstinence always pertains only to specific things. You can move your craving away from specific things simply by abstaining from them, but that's not the Dhamma yet, that's just virtue, and craving would still linger on a deeper level that may not be blatantly reflected by your actions.

What abstinence does is "contain" craving, which is the stepping stone for discerning it, and only once you discern it can you truly destroy it. If you live perfectly restrained but assume that's all you need to do, you won't be looking further for the actual *root* of those things that you abstain from.

Say there's a pleasant prospect present, the recognition of that prospect is felt unpleasantly and there is resistance towards it naturally; i.e., there is a sense of "I want to go towards that thing" either physically or mentally. What is right endurance here? What makes that endurance "right" as opposed to other kinds of endurances?

Endurance becomes "right" when it's done from the understanding that the way you feel is not the issue, but rather the impulse to *act* out of the way you feel. The rightness or wrongness is not determined by what you do.

So for example, the severe fasting some ascetics in the Buddha's time did is not in itself wrong. The problem is that more often than not the view behind it is that you've developed your mind when you no longer perceive the hunger and discomfort anymore, almost like some sort of soldier.

But the person practicing right endurance sees the problem as the fact that their mind is affected by (= wants to act out of) the physical and emotional unpleasantness of abstinence, as opposed to whether the abstinence itself is unpleasant. So if someone is abstaining from some unwholesome action and is in terrible emotional distress on account of it, there is no problem at all for as long as they're not doing anything by body, speech, or mind to alleviate that discomfort (which includes telling themselves to "endure it" with the hope that it will subside).

And that's the type of endurance that develops your mind so that nothing can ever overpower it, without needing to manage the way you feel about anything. In other words, it's not about *not being challenged* by things, but about not craving no matter how intense the challenge is. The former can be achieved through sheer willpower, the latter can only ever arise from wisdom.

"Suppose, friend, there was a stone pillar eight meters long. Four meters would be below ground and four meters above ground. If a violent rainstorm should then arrive from the east, it would not shake it or make it quake, wobble, and tremble; if a violent rainstorm should then arrive from the west ... from the north ... from the south, it would not shake it or make it quake, wobble, and tremble. For what reason? Because the stone pillar is deep in the ground and is securely planted. So too, friend, when a bhikkhu is thus perfectly liberated in mind, even if powerful forms cognizable by the eye come into range of the eye ... Even if powerful phenomena cognizable by the mind come into range of the mind, they do not obsess his mind; his mind is not at all affected. It remains steady, attained to imperturbability, and he recognizes its vanishing."

—AN 9.26

[Note the subtle difference from "no powerful forms, etc. come into range", which is what people tend to subconsciously expect].

And that's also how the Dhamma is "timeless" (*akālika*): you need time to change the way you feel, whereas right endurance is always presently achievable no matter how you feel.

## Am I practicing the right way?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** DaNiEl880099 2024-08-06 08:36:11

My practice is to be relaxed and at ease with the right attitude and awareness of what is happening. The attitude I am talking about is the one that allows me to tolerate what is occurring in the present moment without any aversion to it or strong desire. I try to develop this type of awareness constantly. I also develop this awareness by asking questions.



I have noticed that developing this awareness allows me to let go of sensuality more (for example, I have noticed less interest in sexuality). I have also noticed that in situations where I have contact with other people I behave better. For example, quite recently I had a situation when I was talking to a family member who said something that upset me and I noticed this growing aversion. I did not react with aggression to this stimulus, but I behaved in a calm way.

Is it worth continuing this practice if there are results in improving morality and peace?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-07 12:49:28**

My practice is to be relaxed and at ease with the right attitude and awareness of what is happening. The attitude I am talking about is the one that allows me to tolerate what is occurring in the present moment without any aversion to it or strong desire.

If that attitude automatically makes you keep the precepts and not act on sensual, averse, or distracting intentions, then it could be along the right lines. But if you are able to maintain that type of awareness while also acting in such ways in your day-to-day life, it's for that very reason not the right type of awareness. The Buddha taught "awareness" and meditation with restrained conduct as a non-negotiable prerequisite.

Ultimately, however, the goal should be to refine and improve your definition of what the "right attitude" is, and not assume that you already have it. That's how you progress towards the Right View.

## **The Four Noble Truths are One Insight (SN 56.30)**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-08-03 09:02:08

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-09 15:11:54 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Given how the Four Noble Truths are presented in the Suttas, the burden of proof lies on those who would like to argue *against* what Ven. Gavampati says here.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-08-13 03:41:55 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Quite often, the Buddha said that one who understands the five aggregates/six senses as suffering becomes fully liberated, i.e., one who sees the first truth also realizes all others at least to the necessary degree.

The Pāli Suttas ultimately summarize the first noble truth as the five assumed aggregates. If the first truth is taken in a more superficial sense, along the lines of "we are subject to

loss, pain, and misfortune”, then one could argue that won’t automatically lead to seeing the others. But then it’d be a stretch to call it a *noble* truth, as many people see that even without the Dhamma.

It is interesting how He had to explain each truth **separately** and they were set forth separately.

The fact that they can be separated in *explanation* (which is why they were made into four) doesn’t mean that one can understand suffering as it really is without also understanding its cessation, and vice versa. The explanation of each individual one sheds light on all the others.

I wonder, is it possible that both ideas (*immediate vs gradual understanding*) are both true in different circumstances?

It’s not a question of immediate vs gradual. It’s the fact that to the degree that a person sees any of the truths (which can and usually would take a long time) they also see all the others. Most people will end up needing more explanation than just one truth, but that’s because they don’t fully see what the explanation was pointing to right away.

## Step by step?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sallekha 2024-07-25 21:17:11

As I currently understand what you are teaching about the gradual training, it is necessary to go step by step in the correct order so as not to unconsciously engage in dukkha management. What I am having trouble understanding is how moderation in eating comes after sense restraint, since isn’t immoderate eating (with sensuality at least) tainted with “grasping at the signs and features”? Or is this stage mainly to purify the other unskillful motives for eating (bulking up, beautification)? Also, if lack of accomplishment in virtue basically includes acting on *\*any\** unskillful motives through body or speech, wouldn’t improper eating already be filtered out through that? Or if not then, through sense restraint? What am I missing?

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-26 06:10:37

The entire gradual training should be understood as a refinement of the same principle of being able to see unwholesome impulses and not acting out of them.

In the case of moderation in eating, how to eat with the right attitude would become apparent if you’re already skilled in sense restraint, because by then you would have learned that the problem is not the signs and features themselves (in this case the pleasant tastes and experiences related to food) but the “grasping” at those. You can make sense of that in theory, but before sense restraint has been developed, there would be a subconscious tendency to deny the signs and features instead of simply not grasping at them, failing to see where the danger actually lies, and that safety has to be found amidst that which is dangerous (the simile of the deer herd in MN 25).

Regarding the second question, in theory yes, but in practice no. Someone who's advanced would be able to see the whole sequence of stages as a unity and would no longer think of them individually, but a person who's just starting out with virtue won't be able to see the subsequent aspects with sufficient accuracy to purify them reliably. They can surely try, but it's likely that they'll end up denying things most of the time. Hence the need to go step by step.

So one should think of "purity" in relative terms, in relation to which stage they're at. For a person who's at the stage of virtue, their body and speech being restrained, to whichever extent they are aware of that, counts as "purity". Once that becomes the norm, they can begin to look for the subtler impurities that are still found within that, which would be lack of sense restraint, and at point they will see clearly for themselves how to address that as opposed to just blindly following an external instruction to do this instead of that.

You are able to work at any of the "stages" only when you see that the unwholesome intentions on that respective level cannot arise by accident, and that it's always you who lets them in. Whenever you try to work beyond where you're presently at, it will tend to feel like you're fighting against something that imposes itself over you outside your control because you still can't see your own intentions on that deeper level, and so even if you're precisely following the right instruction on paper, it will devolve into a mechanical management method done without real understanding. The widespread misconception that the hindrances are particular thoughts that come to you against your will and require absorption on a meditation object for dispelling is based on an insufficient development of the prerequisites for abandoning the hindrances.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-27 06:23:02 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

is the measure for completion is one's own mind's response to that? I.e. being able to abide in non-remorse,

Yes, you are no longer *liable* to remorse at least to that extent, because now you're clear as to where the faults and transgressions come from, and that it's fully on you and your intentions, not on the specifics of an external standard (which you start with, but the goal is to see deeper than that).

Because it seems like the actual specifics of one's precepts will have to vary based on what strata of society one finds oneself in and what is considered proper or improper based on the standards of the society,

The specifics of one's external precepts will vary, but greed, aversion, and delusion are the same for everyone, and they arise internally. So, whether a layperson or a monk, the internal situation must be the same: that they have discerned how to ensure that no present action is accompanied by an unwholesome mental state, regardless of their different circumstances (sexual activity cannot be wholesome, however). Sometimes, either of them will have to exceed their prescribed standard in order to accomplish that, sometimes not. But again, they would no longer be thinking in terms of external guidelines and instead

in terms of their own intentions. That's how the Saṅgha operated without any rules for many years.

At the end of sense restraint description too, the suttas describe one feeling blameless happiness. And similarly with completion of the five hindrances stage. So then is the whole of the GT is just a successive surmounting of the previous stage using the same principle you mentioned above (being able to see unwholesome without acting on it) even through the four jhānas and beyond, with the standard of completion being internal in each case as opposed to an external authority?

Yes, it's the same principle of blameless happiness that extends all the way to Arahantship as well. Realizing that suffering and defilement cannot possibly come to you by accident, due to some external condition, or because something in your mind happened "too fast for you to catch it".

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-28 15:17:59 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

If you relate to things wrongly, you might be mentally valuing the wrong things (such as needing to please one's elders, reading the whole Tripitaka, having perfect korwat, having to master meditation techniques, or even later stages of the GT that you aren't ready for—or in lay life climbing a corporate ladder, getting likes on Facebook, getting good grades) and thus blocking a sense of accomplishment with even very early levels of the path, even though one might be objectively doing well on those early levels.

It's more likely that a person who still puts the emphasis on those things still has a ways to go before actually becoming accomplished in virtue (i.e., having the necessary degree of discernment of their own intentions and of how they determine the character of their actions) even if they keep the rules impeccably. *That's why* they would still be mistakenly seeing those things as relevant to the practice, and not by accident.

## Questions on Jhāna

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sallekha 2024-07-25 21:15:52

Is it not theoretically possible that one could attain jhāna without having gone through the gradual training (e.g. Prince Siddhartha as a young boy, or various devatas)? As such would it be legitimately jhāna but (not being rooted in the complete gradual training and achieved, say, through meditation techniques) simply more dependent on certain conditions (birth in heaven, being on a meditation retreat) and therefore less useful for total release. Or in your view is anyone who attains such a state not truly secluded from unwholesome states and therefore not in jhāna even though they might think they are? In other words, is it possible that using the gradual training as the basis for samādhi is not

the only way to reach jhāna but simply the way the Buddha taught it for the sake of permanent freedom? Thank for taking the time.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-26 05:56:18**

It's possible to attain jhāna without being permanently established in renunciation and the gradual training. But the nature of the jhāna itself would be no different, and so it can never be achieved through a meditation technique, which by definition goes in the opposite direction.

Somebody can be doing the right things for a while without fully understanding why they're right, i.e. not breaking the precepts, living restrained, seeing sensuality as unsatisfactory, and regarding their experience through a broader context in the right way without denying it or absorbing themselves into some separate object. Because of all this, their minds would be to an extent "separating" from sense objects, and they could have a one-off experience of jhāna. But one experience of jhāna doesn't magically do anything in itself; jhānas are just pleasant abidings here and now as the Buddha said.

*Proficiency* in jhāna or being able to attain it repeatedly is what reveals that a person sees the signs of their mind and comprehends the nature of wholesome and unwholesome to a great degree. Consequently, they would need very little instruction to get the right view, which is nothing other than that same understanding being fully cemented in all its implications. The Bodhisatta had jhāna as a child once, and it's clear that he didn't fully understand how to get it again.

No absorption practice can ever develop that, and if you look closely, they always depend on a wrong assumption about what the problem is: "These *objects* are the cause of my sensuality, aversion, etc., and therefore I must replace them until they no longer arise". There is a wrong view about what craving and the three poisons are right off the bat, and the culmination of wrong view is wrong samadhi (AN 10.105). So it actively takes you away from the middle way.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-27 05:45:41 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So in those cases like the Bodhisatta it's fair to say that at that time due to past kamma and (at the very least) lack of unwholesome input from present kamma *secluded* them from Wrong View, sensuality and the rest of the unwholesome domain.

Yes, but past kamma in the sense of his mind not being as defiled and immersed in unwholesome states, and not in the sense of "meditation skills" that have nothing to do with the defilements carrying over from a past life. And it cannot have been an accident; he *needs* to have been practicing sense restraint correctly, and seeing the danger in sensuality for jhāna to come about. Jhāna is when the senses have been temporarily tamed, and that doesn't just happen out of the blue.

But without having necessarily “fulfilled” Right View and perhaps other pre-requisites, their experiences however genuine the jhāna might be, don’t count as having “fulfilled” Right Samādhi?

Correct. At that time, he didn’t understand that he was practicing in line with the middle way, and how and why that path led to the complete end of suffering.

Whereas those who practice an absorption meditation technique wouldn’t even count as secluded from Wrong View?

Someone who enters jhāna doesn’t necessarily have right view to the full extent. But they do have enough discernment of what is wholesome and what is unwholesome as far as the hindrances go to have engaged in right effort for a period of time. An absorption technique attempts to bypass that need for discernment, and assumes that keeping your mind fixed on the object is intrinsically wholesome when it very much isn’t. It’s actually a lack of sense restraint: getting immersed in the details and particularities of an object.

## How difficult is it for a sotapanna to reach sakadagami or anagami?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-07-22 16:37:33

[deleted]

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-23 03:41:49

sotapanna may be likely to be attainable within a few months

If it’s the real deal, it will take much longer for a monk, let alone a layperson.

How long it takes depends on 1) how much “dust” the person has in their eyes (accumulation of defilements and wrong views) and 2) the quality, not just the intensity, of effort they put in to not act out of those defilements, and to leave no stone unturned when questioning their wrong views. For most of us today, both of these metrics aren’t very good, and for a layperson, the second one will almost always be less than optimal.

An “experience” you get after practicing intensively for months is not what makes you a *sotāpanna*. Having sufficiently trained yourself to stop overlooking the sign of your mind/your intentions, having abandoned *all* of your wrong views, and having developed unshakable faith in the Triple Gem and spotless virtue that is not clung to is what does (the four aspects of *sotāpatti* often listed in the Suttas). The fruit of stream entry is the result of *you* having done that work beforehand, for as long as it had to be done depending on your starting point (that you wouldn’t be able to gauge except in hindsight), as opposed to “The Experience” being what “transforms” you.

The same applies for higher attainments.

“Mendicants, a farmer has three urgent duties. What three? A farmer swiftly makes sure the field is well ploughed and tilled. Next they swiftly plant seeds in season. When the time is right, they swiftly irrigate or drain the field. These are the three urgent duties of a farmer. That farmer has no special power or ability to say: ‘Let the crops germinate today! Let them flower tomorrow! Let them ripen the day after!’ But there comes a time when that farmer’s crops germinate, flower, and ripen as the seasons change.

In the same way, a mendicant has three urgent duties. What three? Undertaking the training in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom. These are the three urgent duties of a mendicant. That mendicant has no special power or ability to say: ‘Let my mind be freed from defilements by not grasping today! Or tomorrow! Or the day after!’ But there comes a time—as that mendicant trains in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom—that their mind is freed from defilements by not grasping.

So you should train like this: ‘We will have keen enthusiasm for undertaking the training in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom.’ That’s how you should train.”

—AN 3.92

Suppose there was a hen with eight or ten or twelve eggs. And she properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated. Even if that hen doesn’t wish: ‘If only my chicks could break out of the eggshell with their claws and beak and hatch safely!’ Still they can break out and hatch safely. Why is that? Because that chicken with eight or ten or twelve eggs properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated.

In the same way, even though a bhikkhu who is committed to development might not wish: ‘If only my mind was liberated from the influxes through non-assumption!’ Even so, his mind is liberated from the influxes through non-assumption. Why is that? You should say: ‘Because of development’. Development in what? Development in the four establishments of recollection, the four right efforts, the four bases of spiritual ability, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven awakening factors, and the noble eightfold path.

Suppose a carpenter or his apprentice sees the marks of his fingers and thumb on the handle of his adze. He doesn’t know how much of the handle was worn away today, how much yesterday, and how much previously. He just knows ‘it’s worn away’ once it’s already worn away.

—SN 22.101

## What does “self” mean?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** LeUne1 2024-07-22 07:24:38

The average secular or atheistic westerner understands that we're made of components, and that the body regulates itself, they know and agree that we're a bunch of chemicals that can be altered with drugs as many take antidepressants, yet they still believe in a self. So what does self actually mean, both in the real world and suttas?

Does self in the suttas mean having *absolute control*? Because I think most don't think we have absolute control over our bodies/mind, hence people talk about intrusive thoughts, or getting dementia, or some other condition where control is lost.

Does it mean having *partial control*? I think most people believe in this, that if we eat the right foods we can prevent diseases, so we have a partial control over our bodies. But does no-self mean believing we don't have partial control?

Or is it more nuanced? Control over that process which selects and acts on thoughts which are deemed non-intrusive, aka intentions. I.e. intrusive thoughts are not me, but that process that accepts thoughts and turns them into action, is me.

Maybe it specifically has to do with control over feelings? Perhaps self means control over mental suffering and feelings? That if one indulges in something pleasant, bad feelings which are “mine” can be eliminated, and good feelings which are “mine” can be arisen. I.e. “I am” feeling bored, therefore if I eat a snack, I will feel pleasant, and no longer bored. So this is a level of confidence of control over feelings, and eliminating suffering like boredom.

Then again, self cannot mean control because the dhamma is about removing suffering, so we do have control, or is no-self simply control without a label “self”, in which case what does “self” mean then?

Is there anything else that demonstrates a self? What does self really mean?

My clearest most rational definition is that I don't choose to suffer, therefore suffering is no-self. Anything that I choose that doesn't increase suffering can be self/no-self doesn't matter how you define it, but suffering is **always** no-self, as I never wish for it. Therefore to me, suffering is no-self. Hence dukkha *in* anicca, anatta *in* dukkha.

So if someone insists that they have a self, all I have to ask is “do you get bored? Do you suffer?”, if they say yes then I ask them “why do you choose to suffer?”

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-22 13:43:03

Maybe it specifically has to do with control over feelings? Perhaps self means control over mental suffering and feelings? That if one indulges in something pleasant, bad feelings which are “mine” can be eliminated, and good feelings which are “mine” can be arisen. I.e. “I am” feeling bored, therefore if I eat a



snack, I will feel pleasant, and no longer bored. So this is a level of confidence of control over feelings, and eliminating suffering like boredom.

Yes, the assumption is most acutely reflected in the attitude towards feelings. Acts of sensuality are the coarsest manifestations of that, but it doesn't end there. Even if you're not specifically doing anything at all, there will still be the tacit assumption that you *could* exert ultimate control over the aggregates if you tried. So that's why sitting down, stopping all activity, and pretending you have no control over your experience doesn't really fix the issue. You first remove the clearly unwholesome activities, not everything at once.

The state of affairs is more like the aggregates present you with options, and you can only choose one among those. You can't choose an option that wasn't already available. You can walk because your legs are functional, but you can no longer do so if your legs are amputated. Likewise, you can think and imagine because you have a functional mind that depends on physical factors. So there *is* control, but it's secondary, and secondary control is insufficient to justify a sense of self and ownership.

Then again, self cannot mean control because the dhamma is about removing suffering, so we do have control, or is no-self simply control without a label "self", in which case what does "self" mean then?

Removing suffering doesn't mean removing unpleasant feeling, which would require control. You remove Suffering (Dukkha with capital D) by recognizing the assumption of control as just that—an assumption. And then the aggregates remain as they were, but you no longer Suffer amidst their inherent unpleasantness and unreliability. And that safety is reliable because it doesn't depend on the aggregates doing what you want them to do, as any other safety does, nor does it require you to "slip out" of the aggregates (which is impossible). Like the deer who learn how not to take the bait even though they still live in the hunting ground.

My clearest most rational definition is that I don't choose to suffer, therefore suffering is no-self.

Yes, but you can't approach it from an impersonal perspective like that. You have to see that if you are suffering, it's because you are unwittingly taking something as self (as in *paṭiccasamuppāda*, if there is sorrow, lamentation, etc., it *has* to be because there is ignorance at the root ). The statement that suffering is not-self only becomes experientially true when you're no longer affected by it, i.e., displeasure is no longer suffering even though it's still there.

## **New site for suttas + epubS for Ven. Akincano's and Bhante Anigha's writings**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** abuddhistview 2024-07-21 23:17:31

I've been working on a new site to read the read the suttas that I thought I'd share here. It started out just as a place where I could read translations from both Bhikkhu Bodhi and

Thanissaro, who were my preferred translators at the time, but since then Bhante Anigha started sharing his excellent translations, so I've them as well.

I'm also making it a place for resources, so I've compiled all of Venerable Akincano's articles from path press and all of Bhante Anigha's articles from the HH website, and turned them both into ebooks that you can download or read directly on the site with a built in e-reader.

Still a work in progress with a lot more to come, but I figured I'd share it here since others might find the ebooks or suttas useful.

The main site is: <https://abuddhistview.com/>  
and the books can be found at: <https://abuddhistview.com/books>

Let me know if there's anything specific you'd find helpful. I'll be adding quite a few more books in the near future - audio and ebook

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-22 13:08:03**

Nice work. It looks like you're not pulling my translations directly from the GitHub repo? I notice some Suttas contain typos and translations of terms that I've edited recently.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-22 14:41:40 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

You would also need the HTML file for text structure, and the root file if you want to add Pāli. The available\_suttas.json file lists the file paths of all these for each individual Sutta.

## **Satipatthana - internal, external, both internal and external.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Napoletano\_Azzurro 2024-07-19 17:52:06

Friends,

I first read about the Satipatthana Sutta in the seminal work of Ven. Analayo "Satipatthana - The Direct Path to Realization". As for every element of the sutta, Analayo dissects the *internal/external/both* component of the refrain over several pages, and with plenty of references and footnotes. Below is a quick summary:

First, he refers to the Abhidhamma and the commentaries:

According to the Abhidhamma and the commentarial interpretation, "internal" and "external" satipatthāna encompasses phenomena arising in oneself and in others.

[...]

in the Satipatthāna Saṃyutta the Buddha introduced these three modes of attention – internal, external, and both – separately as a “threefold way of developing satipatthāna” [...] a discourse in the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta points out that both internal and external sati can act as an awakening factor.

Then into specific Suttas:

In the Sāmagāma Sutta, for example, the same two terms are used when countering various unwholesome qualities and unskillful forms of behaviour, whether these occur in oneself (ajjhata) or in others (bahiddhā).

[...] And [...]

in the Janavasabha Sutta, in a context directly related to satipatthāna, “external” explicitly refers to the bodies, feelings, etc. of others. This passage carries considerable weight in relation to the present discussion, since it is the only discourse to provide additional information on the nature of “external” satipatthāna.

After an overview of other, more modern interpretations, he concludes:

In summary, although alternative ways of understanding internal and external satipatthāna have their practical value, to understand “internal” as referring to oneself and “external” as referring to others offers a practicable form of contemplation which can moreover claim support from the discourses, the Abhidhamma, and the commentaries.

In one of the few posts when this Sutta was discussed in this subreddit (yes, I have read all the posts !!), u/Bhikkhu\_Anigha writes the following about the topic (here):

[...] it's not, as generally interpreted, about contemplating external things like people as opposed to internal ones, which I've seen leads some to think that reflecting on worldly phenomena contributes to enlightenment.

Obviously, I am very keen to find out what Bhikkhu Anigha's interpretation is - unfortunately, he does not elaborate in that post, and I could not find any elsewhere (of course, I might have missed it.)

Also - why the “both internal and external”, as expressed multiple times in the refrain? I mean, one can contemplate “internally”, or “externally” (whatever their definition), but why add the “both” as a separate method in and all of itself? As it is often pointed out, the fact that some phrases or words are repeated multiple times in a sutta, it is an indication of the importance the Buddha placed on those instructions, and, as a natural implication, they should be understood.

As always, I am very grateful for any elucidation, May you all be well.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-20 05:29:54

I hadn't considered the passage in DN18. However, it doesn't actually say that one is mindful externally as a *practice*. It says that one gives rise to knowledge and vision of the body, feelings, etc. of others externally as a result of practice.

The more useful way of interpreting it is that *ajjhataṃ* means "implicitly", *bahiddhā* means "explicitly". Or, "peripheral" and "actual".

So, at certain times, you need to be making effort to explicitly think about the body, feelings, etc.; at other times the recollection is "behind" your direct thinking and attention, by itself. This internal aspect becomes most palpable in *samādhi* (and becoming established in virtue is the most basic form of it), and it's why prior to jhānas the Suttas so often state that the mind becomes established, settled and composed internally (this was the central point of my most recent post). It's also how an Arahant is always mindful effortlessly, despite it being as impossible as before to keep their attention fixed on a particular object forever.

And sometimes, when the recollection is already implicit in your experience whether you think about it or not, you do make further effort to think about it. You are mindful internally and externally.

The *ajjhataṃ* aspect can be regarded as your internal sense bases (six-sensed body) being in themselves mindful regarding whatever arises for them. Everything manifests already within the context. *Bahiddhā* corresponds to how you'd be paying attention to a specific thought or idea, which is always external. But in the right way, of course: you're thinking of the body within the body (or body concurrently with the body), i.e., the body as a context, and not as an ordinary sense object.

Also, meditation methods and techniques in this sense remain perpetually "external" (thus always revolving around observation of specific things), but the relief and usefulness of *sammāsamadhi* or temporary liberation is precisely in how the external aspect no longer requires maintenance, thus giving one a glimpse of the way permanent liberation works.

### A Note on Etymology (and Semantics, I guess)

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Altruistic\_Guard\_251 2024-07-19 11:27:10

I like to take a few comments in the other thread as an occasion of saying something about the place of etymology, word-derivation, and semantics in understanding the meaning of (Pāli) words.

There is a growing trend to misapply etymology in order to justify idiosyncratic readings and understandings of Pāli terms and even to construct far reaching doctrinal arguments based on it, which is hazardous. Bhante Anīgha's foreword to his *sutta* adaptations may serve as an example:

On this site, Bhikkhu Sujato's copyright-free translations have been adapted to create **a work that rigorously aims to convey the meaning of significant Pāli terms drawing solely on their etymology—which is generally unambiguous**—and eschewing commentarial and later baggage that is often present even in most Pāli dictionaries. [...] This approach aims to maintain a clear distinction between translation and interpretation, which is often blurred.

Needless to say, this post is not directed in anyway against Bhante or wants to discredit his adaptations, but simply wants to clarify the proper place of etymology when it comes to interpret Pāli words.

It is sometimes believed, normally only by beginners and amateurs of Pāli, that the etymology of a Pāli word is the direct path to its true and original meaning. This is a misconception. Originally, granted, that is what etymology wanted to be, resting on a general human belief that what is older and original must by that also be more true and genuine, and that what comes later tends to be degenerate and false. This is why arguments referring to etymology appear superficially impressive and convincing to non-experts.

However, referring to etymology in order to provide the 'true meaning' of a word is a fallacy arising mainly from not knowing what etymology actually is and does today, how it is done properly, and what its necessary limitations are. The misconception also arises from not understanding correctly how meaning in general is constructed within languages. Etymology also more often than not doesn't tell us much about the synchronic meaning and usage of a word. Take the etymology of the word 'understand' in English, for example. Or, to take a Pāli example, how much does the root of the Pāli word *dhamma* (S. *dharman*), *dhṛ* 'hold', tell us about the manifold senses, shades, nuances and usages of that term?

Today, etymology is the study of the origin and evolution of a word's semantic meaning across history. It comprises fields such as word formation, diachronic development of form, and diachronic and synchronic meaning, i.e. how word meaning changes over time and what a word means at a specific time or time period. It is thus mainly about how the sense of a word changes over time. Etymology is historical and because of that more often than not speculative and tentative and necessarily ever more limited the further we go back in history, simply due to the limitations of textual sources. It does have a place in learning what a word means, yes, but that place is only advisory and never decisive.

What determines the meaning of a word at a certain point in time, i.e. its synchronic meaning, is that word's position in a context, its usage, and that context is always interpreted by the translator. That context is hierarchically structured according to phrase, sentence, passage, text, textual corpus and eventually the whole socio-cultural historical environment in which that textual corpus was produced and stood. When it comes to an ancient language, even one as well attested to as Pāli, we run into obvious necessary limitations in reconstructing that context.

Taking that into account shows the absurdity of apodictic pronouncements about the meaning of Pāli words solely based on their etymology. The line between translation

and interpretation cannot be blurred, because it doesn't exist. Every translation of a text is an interpretation and hence there cannot be "one right translation".

Bhante writes:

Terms and expressions of doctrinal and practical significance found in the early Suttas are sometimes misrepresented in existing translations.

Yes, indeed. Only the attempt to rely solely on etymology in order to rectify this state of affairs is unsound and far to simplistic.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 12:46:18**

There certainly is room for different renderings of many Pāli words. I wouldn't take great issue with someone rendering the word *dosa* as either aversion, resistance, or ill will. Translating *saṅkhāra* as fabrication, volitional formation, activity, concoction, etc., or *pīti* as rapture, joy, gladness, bliss, etc., could all be reasonably justified, even though some of them may not fit my personal preference.

Etymology certainly does not give us one and only one option in most cases, and I often find myself making changes. Moments ago I replaced "spiritual colleague" with "fellow renunciate" for *sabrahmacāri*. I also still haven't found a satisfactory rendering for very elementary terms like *kusala*, and have changed my mind several times.

What etymology gives us is a rough fence that the translation of a word should not end up outside of. I am not claiming to have found the one and only right spot within the fence, and I don't think there *can* be such a thing simply because English and Pāli are two completely different languages, and I am certainly biasing certain options within the fence based on what I think is best.

But what I do claim is that things like "love" for *adosa* lie way outside the fence to be acceptable. Translating *teneva pītipāmojjena vihātabbaṃ ahorattānusikkhinā kusalesu dhammesu* as "Then they should *meditate* with rapture and joy, training day and night in skillful qualities" gives a significantly different impression than "Then they should dwell/live/abide..." which all do fall within the range of *viharati*. Just to give some examples.

I haven't yet found a collection of translations by a single author where such stark deviations do not occur at least sometimes, and that gap is what I hope to fill. I also wouldn't be opposed to changing any of my chosen English renderings if someone were to prove to me that it does not fit either the Pāli word itself well, or its usage in other Suttas I may not have considered.

I am also well aware that in many cases, a Pāli passage alone does not enforce a particular interpretation, but taking not only etymology but also many different Suttas on the same topic into account certainly shaves off a whole lot of potential misinterpretations that the vast majority of modern teachings heavily rely on. Once those are off the table, it's up to the individual to judge the positive assertions I make about what the right interpretation is, but the space is a lot more narrow than is generally thought if we take as many Suttas into

account as possible, and make sure not to casually assume that the Buddha said things he didn't mean, or meant things he didn't ever say.

This approach aims to maintain a clear distinction between translation and interpretation, which is often blurred.

I can acknowledge that this is poorly worded, and sounds as if I'm claiming that I am not interpreting the texts *at all*.

(Edit: It's also possible that I've been using the term "etymology" wrong, in which case I'm happy to be corrected. What I consider when translating is a word's root, what that root is said to mean in an compendium of roots such as this, what Pāli and Sanskrit dictionaries as well as other translators say, and last but certainly not least, the various occurrences of the word/phrase in different contexts across the Vinaya and Nikāyas, which in rare cases does not immediately follow from its derivation, e.g. *nirodha*. This alone leaves me with a list of possible renderings that are very semantically close almost every time, from which I then pick what I think fits best, though I may change my mind to one of the other options later on.)

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-20 13:38:01 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

With "dead" or historic languages we obviously can't rely on that and apart from context and usage we can only take into account retrospective reconstruction.

I agree, and with the other points too.

Although, again, I would argue that, not always but in many important cases, translators overstep the boundaries of what even that ultimately approximate retrospective reconstruction allows for, and there often doesn't seem to be any objective argument behind it, but more just a tacit assumption that the Suttas should fit the conceptual framework they personally approach the Dhamma with, and not the other way around. To quote Ven. Ñāṇavīra's maxim, which I've always adhered to both for personal practice and translation work:

It was, and is, my attitude towards the Suttas that, if I find anything in them that is against my own view, ***they are right, and I am wrong***\*\*. I have no reason to regret having adopted this attitude.

Or, as MN 70 puts it:

'Monks, a faithful disciple, who proceeds having plunged into the Teacher's advice, does so in accordance with this: "The Blessed One is the teacher, I am the disciple. The Blessed One knows. I do not know."'

Not having this attitude automatically means the translator will unwittingly allow themselves to interpret the text way beyond the theoretical minimum in order to accommodate their personal interpretation, subconsciously overlooking or diminishing the importance

of passages that contradict it. Even if they can find a justification for it after the fact, through linguistics, the commentaries, or what it seems to them that other Suttas are saying, still they aren't treating the text with due respect from the outset, and this inevitably affects the final result. Since this is the case most of the time, I doubt we even have a "vanilla" set of English translations that is, or at least attempts to be, uncompromisingly faithful to the retrospective knowledge of Pāli that we do have, putting aside whether that knowledge is entirely correct or not. Bhikkhu Bodhi's come close, but they're not freely accessible, and he does tend to resort to the commentarial gloss sometimes even though the Sutta perfectly speaks for itself.

On the other hand, having that mindset makes translation work a lot more personal and demanding of courage and self-honesty. But making it personal in that way is, if done properly, the closest one can get to taking oneself out of the picture, ironically (that doesn't mean scholars will have any interest in the final product of course). It's just that it's not pleasant at all to perpetually acknowledge that there is nothing you can take for granted about your understanding, and to be ready to *completely* revise your views from the bottom up at a moment's notice, no matter how much sense they made before. But it's the only way to gain supramundane benefit from the Suttas and, I dare say, to gain even a mostly accurate mundane overview of their message. This faith and radical humility is indispensable for the utterance of another to be able to cut through the mass of ignorance and wrong views that impedes not only attainments, but also an accurate intellectual grasp of the Suttas.

I should perhaps also clarify that when I make "apodictic" statements about what the Suttas are actually saying, those are not meant to have any scholarly or objective value. Those are directed at people who are already at least somewhat receptive to the points I make and are willing to look at their own experience in that light. They're not meant to persuade academics who keep the Dhamma at arms length, practitioners who are already fully convinced that their chosen interpretation or tradition aligns with the early texts, or people who don't care much about that in the first place, and more about feeling calm and peaceful in the short term by whichever means or combination of means happen to work for them (which is fine as long as they're honest with themselves).

## Kusala Citta vs. Sukha Vedana

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** upasakatraine 2024-07-18 05:51:40

As Ajahn often instructs, the overarching mood that one is under the influence of, is a close approximation to what the citta is at the time. In what way does one then distinguish a 'gladdened mind' or an 'elated mind' ; from a pleasant feeling.

Since both *Citta* as well as *Vedana* are peripheral, and structurally precede dhammas, is it possible to tell them apart, and/or is it even necessary; since the *working principle* of the practice is to restrain from acting on the basis of *either one* (regardless of being able to tell them apart).



Thank you.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 06:19:08**

The most important difference would be that you can have a pleasant feeling accompanied by an unwholesome *citta*, since there can be a context or mood of valuing sensuality accompanying that feeling. Similarly, there can be unpleasant feeling with a wholesome *citta* that values renunciation (the pain of renunciation, as it's called in some Suttas).

So, basically, *citta* would be along the lines of what you are valuing and inclining towards, aside from the way you currently happen to feel.

## **Asking for help**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** onthepath98 2024-07-17 19:34:24

Hello everyone,

I'm in my mid 20s with a stable job and low income. I'm considering advancing my career. The existential pressure I am currently feeling is hard to handle as I also maintain a consideration that I could just up and leave to go to a monastery. My attachments are preventing me from doing so currently. I take the 5 precepts and want to be celibate, but struggle to commit to the decision. I feel overwhelmed due to my mind going back and forth on and on in trying to make a decision about developing my career by undertaking further studying (as I'm unable to commit to renunciation fully) or just to make further effort to go to a monastery.

Leaving to go to a monastery could just be a cop out for putting effort to ensure I can look after myself in the world and fend for myself (I currently live with my mum and step dad.)

I have this constant background noise regarding decision this every day and have had it for a while. Does anyone have any advice?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 06:07:53**

Leaving to go to a monastery could just be a cop out for putting effort to ensure I can look after myself in the world and fend for myself (I currently live with my mum and step dad.)

It could, but that doesn't mean staying at home and continuing to pursue a career is better automatically. You could improve the context that you're approaching monastery life with, and realize that it's actually going to be harder than anything you might try in lay life, but infinitely more fruitful if you use it wisely. Then it will no longer present itself as a cop out, and if you truly value freedom from suffering, you would see it as the ideal choice.

And then even if you stay at home, you would be tailoring your life to fit those values as much as possible, instead of thinking you're justified in maintaining conditions that are not conducive to taming the mind because you won't ordain after all.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-21 04:58:44 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It's not a necessity per se. It's possible that you'd be able to keep the precepts in the more tailored environment of the monastery better than at home. Even though that would indicate a less than ideal degree of self-sufficiency and determination initially, it doesn't inherently block you from developing your mind to the same extent in the end.

## On Withstanding the Defilements

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Altruistic\_Guard\_251 2024-07-17 13:19:53

Hello everyone,

I've been engaging with the teachings of Ajahn Nyanamoli and HH on and off for the past years, finding them sometimes more, sometimes less convincing and useful.

The recent upload on YouTube, "Withstanding the Defilements" got me interested in writing this post.

I take a summary of the talk that was approved by the channel in the comments as a starting point:

"Phenomena arise on their own. You can not stop that. If annoyance arises within me, the unpleasant feeling of annoyance itself is not the problem. The problem is if I start dwelling on that arisen feeling. If I start getting worked up about it. The problem is if I lash out at someone next to me due to my aversion to that arisen annoyance." - ToKiniAndy

Phenomena here includes the defilements, "some form of greed, hatred and delusion", as mentioned in the quote of a question to Ajahn Chah at the beginning. So, the way to properly deal with arisen defilements of greed, hatred and delusion (or however one wants to render *rāga*, *dosa*, *moha*) is to fortify the mind through virtue and sense restraint and not act out of or based on those arisen defilements in any way, simply letting them endure as the arisen phenomena they always already were. This is safety, this is the "island that no flood can overwhelm". If you don't go towards the waves, you don't wet yourself.

However, it seems that the teaching of "enduring arisen defilements" is contradicted by several passages in the suttas. Take, e.g., the following section of MN 2 on "detriments to be gotten rid of through dispelling" (*āsava vinodanā pahātabbā*):

... Here, monks, reflecting properly, a monk **does not endure (*nādhivāseti*)** an arisen thought of sensuality, **he gets rid of it, dispells it, makes an end to it**

**(byantīkaroti), eradicates it (anabhāvaṃ gameti, lit. causes it do go to non-existence).** A monk **does not endure (nādhivāseti)** an arisen thought of ill-will ... an arisen thought of cruelty ... variously arisen bad, unwholesome things, **he gets rid of them, dispells them, makes an end to them (byantīkaroti), eradicates them (anabhāvaṃ gameti, lit. causes it do go to non-existence).**

“Detriments to be gotten rid of through enduring”, *āsavā adhivāsanā pahātabbā*, are mentioned earlier on. Defilements are not listed here, but various painful bodily experiences.

Consider also the following (SN 38.3):

Those for whom, friend, greed ... hatred ... delusion ... is gotten rid of, with it's root cut, made like the site of a (previous) palm tree, **made non-existent (anabhāvaṃ-kato), not liable to arise (again) in the future (āyatiṃ anuppādadhammo)**, they are blessed (*sugatā*) in the world.

This is about the arahant. If the Buddha had meant that defilements are to be endured or withstood infinitely without acting out of them, he could have simply said so. Terms like *adhivāsanā*, *adhivāseti*, *khanti*, *khamo*, *khamati* are definitely used in the texts in senses of ‘(patiently) enduring, (fore-)bearing etc.’, but they seem not to be employed positively when it comes to defilements. After all, *dukkhanirodha*, the third noble truth, is called the “**remainderless fading away and cessation** of craving” (*taṇhāya asesavirāga-nirodho*, cp. SN 56.11), not simply the non-acting out of it.

What are your thoughts on this? If I should have misrepresented Ajahn Nyanamoli's teachings here, I would be glad to be corrected.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-18 04:51:21

The confusion stems from conflating unwholesome thoughts (*vitakka*) and the perceptions and feelings that accompany them. Saying that you should “endure” the former would be like saying you should endure breaking the precepts, which is silly. But trying to “obliterate” the latter is also silly, because they're not in your control to begin with, and by trying to get rid of them you'll be acting out of craving there and then. It's like smashing all bottles of alcohol you encounter so as to not break the fifth precept.

Instead, you “starve” the craving by enduring the perceptions and feelings, and enduring them means you won't be doing unwholesome actions by body, speech, or thought.

**“remainderless fading away and cessation** of craving

And that's what leads to this, whereas if you're only concerned with suppressing and avoiding the entire picture and not just the part you're responsible for (the intentional thoughts), you're not addressing craving at its root, but merely concealing the triggers for it.

And the Suttas do speak about “enduring” in this way. See SN 35.228, SN 35.247, MN 4, Thag 1.21, Thag 2.36, and the first line of the Ovāda Pātimokkha for a few examples.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 04:56:17 (in reply to a comment not included)**

doesn't this directly implicate the use of a technique like loving kindness mindfulness to remove thoughts of aversion?

Quite the opposite. You remove thoughts of aversion in the same way you drop something with your hand, because they are *choices*. A thought of aversion is a choice to *do* something on the mental level in response to displeasure that arose. The displeasure is not unwholesome in itself, which is why we clearly see the Buddha being displeased with certain people on many occasions. Loving kindness techniques operate through the view that displeasure itself is the problem, and so they're not actually training the mind so that it can have *limitless* mettā, i.e. that friendliness remains no matter how unpleasantly a certain person or experience is felt. They help you not react by removing the challenging stimulus altogether.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 05:27:08 (in reply to a comment not included)**

When you speak of "intentional thoughts", do you mean something different from the thoughts Ajahn is speaking about above?

No, we're saying the same thing in different words. You can clearly see the unwholesome thoughts he's referring to are things that arise on their own and you're not responsible for. That's what I'm referring to when mentioning perceptions and feelings that exert pressure over you on their own, and that when *vitakka* (i.e., intentional giving in to those) is there, you should immediately "obliterate" it. This is what he refers to when he writes "you're responsible for your acceptance of them, for delighting and acting out of them". So if you use his description, when you read the Buddha talking about obliterating unwholesome thoughts in the Suttas, it would be "obliterate your acceptance of/delight in them".

The thing is, if we are responsible for the arising of unwholesome thoughts (which you say, Bhante, although Ajahn Nyanamoli seems to say the opposite) - i.e., if they arise simultaneously with unpleasant feelings and perceptions - ending the thought effectively ends the accompanying pressuring feeling as well.

No. If it feels like that, you're probably overshooting the mark in your definition of what a "thought" is, and are suppressing the entire perception and experience instead of just your defiled volition (your "acceptance of the thought" in AN's way of describing it).

In this regard, let's also consider the following *sutta* (SN 35.96):

The term *saṅkappa* makes it quite clear that it's talking about an intentional engagement. AN 6.63 talks about how sensuality is not the agreeable objects of the five senses, but one's passionate intention (*saṅkapparāga*) in relation to them. So you can have objects that *would* arouse sensual intentions present in your experience, still being felt pleasantly as

before, but without a passionate intention. And this is exactly how the Buddha describes the first jhāna.

The way I'm describing it is meant to be more strictly in line with the Suttas, but it might be causing more confusion, so just stick to Ajahn Nyanamoli's description. Think of it like not accepting a gift that someone presents to you. You don't need to destroy the gift, you just need to not accept it even if it's left there for years. And nothing bad or unwholesome can possibly take place for as long as your hands stay off the gift.

This talk might also be helpful.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 05:47:28 (in reply to a comment not included)**

They are about restraint. However, these are not references to *enduring unwholesome thoughts or withstanding defilements*. The *dharmā* spoken of here are on the same level as agreeable/disagreeable sights, sounds etc., and are not a problem in themselves.

Correct. Ajahn Nyanamoli uses phrases like “withstanding defilements” precisely because people generally have a wrong understanding of what *dhammas* are, for example. Saying it that way pushes people to consider that part of what they regard as an unwholesome thought is actually part of the *dhamma* itself, such as the pressure it exerts. Hence the Buddha's comparison with withstanding a tide.

The downside is that for some who have a tendency to get caught up in semantics, it sounds to them like they should “endure” things that they're fully responsible for, and that's not what is meant.

I mentioned SN 35.247 because it describes tying down the six sense bases *while they continue to pull*. It doesn't say that you stop them from pulling.

Regarding Thg 1.21, that one simply reads:

I read “*nāhaṃ bhayassa bhāyāmi*” as “I am not afraid of fear”, which fits better with the third line. Point being, you are truly beyond fear when you can withstand the tide and pressure of fear that comes on its own, not when you suppress it or manage it.

Here patience seems indeed to mean bearing and not acting out of one's angry thoughts when it comes to living with others.

Sure, you can take it that way, but still the principle is the same. You can't prevent yourself from being displeased by what others do, and the Buddha himself clearly was on many occasions. But if you think destroying unwholesome thoughts means not feeling that displeasure anymore, your peaceful mind will be depending on something that's actually not in your control, i.e. your own feelings. If instead you see that the unwholesomeness is in your action, even mental, in relation to what you feel, then you can develop true imperturbability. That's what's described by the simile of the mountain in AN 6.55, where

even mental phenomena can be forceful and intense, but the mind of an Arahant does not tremble in face of even that which is so close and “internal”.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-20 10:54:10 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So, phrasings like “withstanding defilements” or “enduring unwholesome thoughts” are rather meant didactically

Yes, and in fact there are cases where the Suttas themselves border on that. There’s the example of AN 3.121, which is actually more explicit than all the other ones I mentioned above, where purity of mind (*mano*) is defined as knowing that the hindrances are present while they are present, and this is synonymous with withstanding them. This is analogous to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta’s instruction of knowing passionate mind as passionate mind, etc.

The right type of “knowing” (*yoniso manasikāra*) in itself closes off the possibility of tolerating unwholesome things, since that can only happen when you lose perspective and become tunnel-visioned, as it were.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-24 07:54:20 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Understanding the practice as intentionally not welcoming thoughts that we understood as dangerous, makes it more clear why Buddha spoke in terms of “manly effort”, “heedfulness”, “striving”, and “achieving the unachieved.”

Indeed. If it were about the arising of thoughts in itself, you could break free from sensuality accidentally or circumstantially. In the same way, you could get trapped by it again accidentally even though you were perfectly diligent in your practice.

**My circumstances, and ordination. Gratefully asking for advice.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** serculis 2024-07-16 14:26:43

I am a psychology graduate living in the UK. Have gone through abuse most of my life and only gotten my freedom 2.5 years ago. Originally wanted to go into a career of mental health. Had an on-off secular meditation practice of 7 years. Used to be nostril-watcher but changed as I had to cultivate better behaviours to overcome trauma.

I stumbled upon HH a year ago by accident. I was starting to get into buddhism due to an ego death experience on mushrooms and curiosity into the concept of nibbana and the spiritual life. I was planning to join the army as an unconventional route into the mental

health field (developing leadership skills, tolerating high amounts of stress, cultivating and teaching emotional intelligence to soldiers etc.).

As I started watching HH videos, I started to gain knowledge in buddhism and was considering becoming a monk after 5 years into the army. Then I watched more videos and recognised that pursuing the spiritual path is the most important thing I can do in my life. My background, purpose, everything, this is exactly what I want and need to do.

I contacted my therapist who helped me overcome lots of my trauma and told her about my decision. What then started was a strange but unique arrangement, I started talking to her again, paying for her time to start watching HH videos so I could practise my learning by teaching her the concepts and finding holes in my knowledge whereby she would ask questions I couldn't answer. Over time she started to understand buddhism more and its implications, understands my urge to ordain and the sheer weighted difference between the dhamma and psychotherapy. I have tried to talk about the dhamma to friends but even the slightest claim that circumstances might not be the cause of suffering has severely upset them, so I have nobody else to talk to who is not psychologically minded besides my trusted therapist, who, thankfully is starting to understand the 'context' of suffering vs the content. She is providing me with that middle ground - not an uninstructed person with no knowledge of the mind where I have to start from scratch, but western-orientated enough to push me to properly understand the concepts enough to teach. I have yet to find any other mental health professional who grasps not-self mundanely. She comments that despite being a beginner in learning she gets that the stuff we discuss are things most people could not comprehend, whether monk or layperson, and would be terrified to explore.

My learning arrangement might be strange but it works for now as I try to organise myself.

I plan to ordain, roughly in the first few months of next year. I've read previous posts but I'm still lost...

The advantages of my situation is that upon telling my family they were incredibly supportive. I am indeed half thai so my mother is already obsessed with turning my ordination into an extravaganza purely for thai culture. I have lots of money in savings so can afford to quit my job at the start of next year for more seclusion in my laylife, and need not worry about emergency funds.

Problem is, with my mother being so toxic and me being a survivor of filial piety, I feel like her support is going to be simultaneously a major help and obstruction. She already wants to sort out my visa, but I'm worried she will try to push me to go to a crap monastery.

I understand that picking out monasteries in general is picking the least worse out of the bunch, and my post is asking about whether my heritage will help me or whether I should consider Sri Lanka. I'm wondering whether I should quit my job early so I can have enough free time to obtain the right view. I'm wondering whether if I go to a thai monastery where they confiscate my phone, would I be allowed to bring physical books and even printed papers of HH video transcripts (if I'm that desperate)? Do the bad monasteries allow you to study any material or do you literally just chant and polish floors?

My brother thinks I should ordain in a UK monastery as he knows how awful thai ones can be. Was wondering if anyone has experience with english monasteries or heard of what they are like?

Some people have recommended a partially renounced lay lifestyle before considering ordination but I'm not sure why that it is and would appreciate everyone's perspective on this.

Thank you for reading, sorry for the long post, I appreciate any comments or pointers in the right direction.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-17 05:16:50**

My brother thinks I should ordain in a UK monastery as he knows how awful thai ones can be.

That may not work. Apparently, you can get in trouble at English Ajahn Chah monasteries to the point of being denied ordination simply due to expressing interest in HH, even if you're polite and well-behaved.

The sheer amount of monasteries in Thailand means that at least a few should be good enough, even if most of them are inadequate for various reasons. All you really need is a place where the Vinaya is kept, you have some free time in seclusion and are not overburdened with duties and activities, and you won't get punished just for having a different view than the seniors as long as you're otherwise a good monk. It's not a dealbreaker if you lose internet access for as long as you don't get in trouble for using the "wrong" Dhamma resources.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-17 15:40:45 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I want to show gratitude, but I don't want to create a tense situation out of having to say thank you.

You can just do that without explicitly mentioning HH, which, depending on who exactly it is, might make them just become cold and avoidant for no good reason. If you really want to, you could just mention that you've begun to take the Suttas more seriously, since that's literally all there is to it.

Even the smallest of structures has to be intolerant to some extent.

Sure, but there are levels to it. Guests with different views who visit Samaṇadīpa are still treated amicably like everybody else. If there are disagreements, they're discussed without reserve, and it's not made personal or spiteful, even though there is certainly no sugarcoating. But if you mention liking HH in one of these monasteries, you'll probably start receiving cold shoulders (at least from what I've heard; I haven't been there).



And once you are in, it seems much harder to stay open to radically different approaches to thing.

Yes, unfortunately it seems to be quite cult-like. From what I've been told by various sources, you can get asked to disrobe, or to forget about returning, if you ever want to move to a place that's not officially part of the tradition. And even if you get permission, you might get asked to return from time to time to provide "proof" of your loyalty.

And yes, I'm sure a good portion of the monks there are great people. But I imagine most of them eventually end up believing the outright false rumors they hear about the things Ajahn Nyanamoli and others who've "deserted" supposedly did while they were there (I heard some myself back in Sri Lanka), and so become biased against his teachings on an unfounded basis. Because, sure, no matter how reasonable someone's arguments sound, you'd be right to be skeptical of their teachings if they also were known to act in unwholesome ways,

I suppose there might also be a track record of obnoxious HH "followers" and "Ñāṇavīrists" who visit these places and *do* go around displaying arrogance, spite, and foolish recalcitrance.

a life in a Western Ajahn Chah monastery is still a much superior choice to any regular lay life

I'd say it largely depends on which monastery. Even putting aside the whole subject of views, at some of them you may find yourself spending more time in company than as a layperson but now having genuinely no say in it, owing to meaningless but mandatory activities. And not that much more withdrawn from sensuality, the opposite sex, and worldly affairs, either.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-19 06:01:10 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Not sure if it's "widely known", but it definitely would be in UK monasteries because Ajahn Nyanamoli ordained there.

## **Path Press recommended reading**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** anansi1\_ 2024-07-16 13:16:09

I'm interested in reading the writings of Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero, but I've heard 'Meanings,' in particular, can be quite challenging. Is this true? If so, are there any other books on the Path Press Publications website that can help me understand 'Meanings' or any of his other books better?

I already have some context from the YouTube videos, I just wanted something in book format.

Thanks in advance for any recommendations! I really appreciate the help.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-16 15:36:43**

You'll be much closer to understanding Meanings the way it's supposed to be understood—as descriptions of the way out of suffering that are directly applicable to your own experience—if you've been earnestly putting into practice what is said in Dhamma Within Reach, The Only Way to Jhāna, the Dhamma talks, and of course the Suttas. Limited intelligence is not the real obstacle.

The more rigorous style of Clearing the Path by Ven. Ñāṇavīra can help point out how various fashionable doctrines and notions are actually not canonical, so it can be useful for those with prior experience with Buddhist teachings and somewhat of an intellectual bent. For those who are totally new, it's probably not strictly essential.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-16 17:00:55 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I also had gotten interested in his writings early on since he's renowned as a Sutta expert, but was disappointed to find that he's basically just reading the Mahāyānist (and Commentarial Theravādin) views—of “Ultimate Non-Conceptual Reality” hidden behind the illusory conventional reality, and that language and concepts induce ignorance—into the Suttas in often roundabout and long-winded ways. He also taught Mahāsi-style noting meditation and “bare awareness” as the means to see through the supposed illusion.

Perhaps it can be useful if you take it as a brief exercise in pinpointing where the fallacies in his views lie, and why they're not what the Buddha taught (SN 22.94).

**Some assistance with understanding the “extent” of defilements?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Akalika\_Username 2024-07-14 17:34:16

It is my understanding that defilements are maintained by ignorance, so understanding them – their “extent” or entire domain – results in their abandonment right there and then. We cannot understand something and be ignorant of it at the same time. The mind infected with greed is actively maintaining its infection through ignorance of that activity. Seeing the sign of the mind infected with greed means recognizing that greediness is a detrimental overlay, something inflicted on experience by the assumed ownership of the untamed citta's inclination toward a sense object. The Right View includes the recognition of how defilements cannot defile the mind without the false belief that they can. Until the full extent of defilements is recognized, any recognition of a defilement will disguise the defilement that underlies that recognition as its background and context. For example, even our attempt to peripherally apprehend the mind of greed may be done with aversion because we cannot discern what is simultaneously present.

Am I misunderstanding anything? Because it isn't clear to me why a sotapanna cannot be

defiled by the defilements. Does that mean that the way they relate to their underlying tendencies is fundamentally different from how a worldling regards the defilements? Or is there such a thing as lapses in the Right View based on those tendencies?

Thanks in advance to anyone who takes the time to reply.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-15 05:01:22**

Until the full extent of defilements is recognized, any recognition of a defilement will disguise the defilement that underlies that recognition as its background and context. For example, even our attempt to peripherally apprehend the mind of greed may be done with aversion because we cannot discern what is simultaneously present.

It's true that initially one cannot see the full extent of defilements, but it's not like you then get to see it by trying extra hard to do so. You simply train according to what you can presently recognize; the Gradual Training is the refinement of restraining defilements, and that's why it follows a certain order. Diligence in not yielding to the unwholesome tendencies that are now discernible (which initially would be the obvious breaking of the precepts) *on its own* broadens the mind so that less blatant aspects are gradually uncovered. You can't manually “dig up” the defilements, but what you can do is renounce the acts that covered them up.

Does that mean that the way they relate to their underlying tendencies is fundamentally different from how a worldling regards the defilements?

Yes. It means that they *will* become aware of the underlying tendencies if they try. They will not overlook them if they don't want to. On the other hand, a *puthujjana* has a high likelihood of unwittingly covering up their own greed, aversion, and delusion through secondary alibis such as their views, tradition, textual authority, devotion to a method or a teacher, sense of duty, etc. (even if they're theoretically well-founded) because they lack self-honesty and don't sufficiently see their own mind, nor the fact that that's where all wholesome or unwholesome takes place and the rest is secondary. A *puthujjana* will tend to put their views and preferred observances/practices first and the need to see the present defilements second, tacitly assuming that these will somehow take care of their defilements by themselves (a salient characteristic of meditation techniques). In contrast, for a *sotāpanna* the priority has been flipped: the Right View is precisely *about* prioritizing the craving that is concretely seen at any given time, and no external crutches, psychologizing, or uncertainty of any kind are involved, which is why their practice would remain even after their memory is completely wiped in a new life.

Or is there such a thing as lapses in the Right View based on those tendencies?

The diligence informed by the Right View can lapse, but not the Right View itself. And again, there is a difference in that if and when the *sotāpanna* is diligent, even if it's only once in a blue moon, they are unquestionably moving in the right direction, whereas a *puthujjana* can be diligent 24/7 in a way that creates more harm than good because of

their wrong view. Hence, “sotāpanna” literally means one who has entered the stream (the Noble Eightfold Path) that now “carries” them to Nibbāna.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-16 17:33:15 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is that a fair way to describe their situation?

In essence, yes. Intentional or careless lapsing is rooted in the same for puthujjana and sotāpanna: not wanting to go against the grain. But for a sotāpanna the lapsing has of course much less dire consequences.

A puthujjana has an additional type of lapsing that sotāpanna hasn’t, which is falling back into wrong views and expectations that they had temporarily overcome, and the likelihood of that occurring shoots up each time they act unwholesomely. Defilements nourish ignorance, and ignorance nourishes defilements.

## On “Thinking about Jhāna” by Ven. Thanissaro

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-07-13 19:01:31

I discovered this recent writing by Ven. Ṭhānissaro that attempts to disprove some of the points I made in my essay about the jhānas (not sure if deliberately), and so I decided to address the main remarks made there because it serves as an opportunity to better articulate and expand upon the essence of what I originally wrote. It’s not necessary to be familiar with the original essay to comprehend the following.

The longstanding habit of translating jhāna as “absorption” has been called into question, largely because the verb jhāyati is often translated in a more generic way as “meditate.” From this, it’s been argued that, because the verb has a generic meaning, the noun should, too.

But even if we ignore the argument’s weak logic, we can note that its starting point—the persistent habit of translating jhāyati as “meditate”—is itself questionable. There’s nothing in the suttas to indicate that jhāyati, used in a positive sense in the context of meditation, means anything other than specifically, “do jhāna.”

A number of instances indicate that it does have a generic meaning. In the account of MN 36 of the bodhisatta’s period of austerities, it’s said that he thought to himself at one point: “*yannūnāhaṃ appāṇakaṃ jhānaṃ jhāyeyyaṃ*”. This expression uses both the noun *jhāna* and the verb *jhāyati* in a context that most certainly does not refer to the standard four jhānas, since at that time he had not yet acknowledged those states as the way to enlightenment. “Appāṇaka jhāna” cannot refer to the fourth jhāna, also evidenced by how he had clearly not reached the genuine cessation of breathing, but was rather holding his breath as a form of austerity. Similarly, in DN 19, the brahmin Mahāgovinda thinks:

“*yannūnāhaṃ karuṇaṃ jhānaṃ jhāyeyyaṃ*”, and we know from the Suttas that even though the four brahmavihāras are a form of *samādhi* that can fulfill the same purpose as the four jhānas, they’re not the same.

In AN 11.9, *jhāyati* is used in a generic sense throughout, and there it certainly does not refer to the jhānas only, since the formless dimensions are mentioned (which are not jhānas; they’re misclassified as such by the Commentaries, not the Suttas). Similarly, MN 108 states that the Buddha “did not praise all *jhāna*”, which there is no reason to interpret as meaning that he does not approve of some “types” of the four jhānas (a concept that, as we shall see, is unfounded). It means he does not approve of all types of meditation, for the lack of a better word.

Second, even though the suttas do devote a lot of space to the practice of using thought to abandon unskillful qualities and to develop skillful qualities, that doesn’t mean that such a practice should be called jhāna. The actual fact of the matter, as we will see, is that the suttas describe this practice as a step prior to jhāna (DN 2; AN 10:99), and not as jhāna itself.

There is some truth to this. We see in MN 19 that the Buddha had to go a step further than mere wholesome thinking in order to enter the first jhāna, and we see the exact same situation implied in AN 3.121. There is a point where only wholesome thoughts are left, but the mind is not yet fully appeased. However, “composing the mind internally” does not mean becoming absorbed or immersed, but the complete opposite. Demonstrating this is the main purpose of this writing.

Fourth, and most graphically, the fact that doing jhāna would involve, not thinking, but actual absorption in physical and mental sensations, is shown in the similes we’ve quoted above: The meditator is said to pervade the body with feelings of pleasure to the point where, in the third jhāna, nothing in the body is unpervaded, and then moving on to a state in which the body is filled with a pure bright awareness. It’s hard to interpret this simply as a process of thinking, and not to see it as a state of full-body absorption in bodily and mental sensations.

Pervading the body with the pleasure of jhāna is indeed not a matter of ordinary thinking, but it’s a stretch to assume that it therefore must be the result of immersion in physical sensations. It’s neither.

Firstly, any sensation at all (which should not be confused with feeling or *vedanā*), no matter how internal it is, has to fall within the external sense field of tactile phenomena (i.e., the fifth string of sensuality). This is evidenced by how the Buddha chose to describe the 6 internal sense bases as “void, empty, and hollow”, comparing them to an empty village that gets attacked by bandits (the six external sense bases). If the 5th internal sense base could be outlined by certain sensations, it would have a specific substance defining it, and thus it wouldn’t be “void”.

The designation “whole body” in the jhāna similes of the bathman, etc., should not be interpreted as primarily spatial, in which case the instruction to pervade the whole body

will be misunderstood as some sort of body scan exercise, as it often is. The body is a phenomenological totality that can only be approached as a unity, so even if one suffuses every single pore and internal point where sensations of touch are felt with pleasant energies, that's still not the whole body. The sum of its parts does not equal the whole. That totality is also what one becomes increasingly separated from in the jhāna progression, which is why one gets to relate to it more and more equanimously, culminating in the fourth jhāna where the mind has separated itself from the most foundational aspect of the body, which is breathing. The totality of the body is not in itself spatial; it is that because of which the world, including space, is there to begin with.

Now, in the case of the first jhāna which is the most pivotal, we need only look at the standard description of the practice that precedes it to see what *pītisukha* is supposed to result from: the relief of no longer being liable to the mental burden of the five hindrances. The mind disentangles and becomes separated from the pull of unwholesome states once they've been sufficiently seen as troublesome and unwanted, and it's even said that the joy arises when one *considers* their absence—a mental, reflective affair—and not that the pleasure arises at the bodily level first. And, as the same description says further on, which occurs over fifty times in the Nikāyas, it's when the mind is already joyous that the body calms down. Not the other way around.

One who has not clearly seen with right understanding the unsatisfactoriness and peril of sensuality is said to be incapable of entering the first jhāna (AN 6.73), as this is the tool for giving rise to *pītisukha*. If the origin of *pītisukha* were bodily, we would expect the Buddha to say that one can't attain the first jhāna if one doesn't know how to work with bodily sensations, and there is nothing in the texts to indicate this. Pervading the body with rapture and pleasure comes *after* the attainment of jhāna, not before.

We should also note that being “not of the flesh” (*nirāmisa*) is one of the five characteristics of *sammāsamādhi* (AN 5.27). There certainly is physical rapture in the jhānas, but, again, it is a *symptom* of the mind having successfully transcended the hindrances. Bodily pleasure is a palpable proxy for a mind properly detached from unwholesome states; it's not beneficial in and of itself, and it's unjustified to assume that because certain pleasant physical sensations in a meditative state don't arise based on outside objects or people, they automatically cannot fall within the five cords of sensual pleasure, and that delight in them is thus not unskillful. Unskillfulness depends solely on one's attitude, and not on the characteristics of a given experience.

The pleasure of jhāna arises and intensifies *because* one is cultivating a dispassionate and disinterested attitude in regard to the entire domain of the body. The suffering and burden of craving that was there before has been lifted (hence the Buddha's comparison with relief from debt, illness, etc.), and this relief has an acute and substantial physical counterpart. If gaining more pleasure becomes the main goal, the dispassion that was the source the relief is no longer the priority, and you've fallen back to the five hindrances, or never surmounted them.

The simile of the bathman kneading the bath powder to the perfect moisture points to the fact that if you begin to internally *relish* the pleasure of the first jhāna, it's too wet.

If the pleasure is not there, it’s too dry, and it shows that mentally you’re not sustaining the perspective that keeps the mind detached from the hindrances. The middle point is where the mind is indifferent to the pleasure, and yet it’s doing everything right for it to manifest, i.e., regarding desire for any bodily experience as the taking on a burdensome debt.

Consider also how in AN 6.63, sensuality is defined as passionate intention (*saṅkapparāga*) for the likeable and agreeable objects of the five senses: the pleasant bodily sensations (“touches cognizable by the body”) that do factually arise in jhāna are not magically exempted from this, and if the mind is thirsting after those, it’s not withdrawn from sensuality. Conversely, to reiterate, it also means that the presence of agreeable bodily sensations in jhāna does not *intrinsically* make it sensual, because if it is true jhāna, the mind will not be passionately inclining towards them.

This is why it wasn’t immediately obvious to the Buddha that the pleasure of jhāna should not be feared. He would’ve been apprehensive of the physical pleasure in and of itself, overlooking the fact that the attitude of the mind towards it is different from that of any other pleasure (i.e., thirsting for more). Those who enter the first jhāna are already said to be “hungerless, extinguished, crossed over, and gone beyond in that respect” (*nicchāta nibbutā tiṇṇā pāraṅgatā tadaṅgena*, AN 9.33. See also AN 9.47 and other repetitions in that chapter that compare all of the jhānas to Nibbāna). The notion that there can be hungering after the pleasure of the first jhāna—where all such unskillful resolves have already ceased *without remainder* as per MN 78—and that it can even become tiresome eventually, blatantly contradicts the Suttas.

What’s more, the suttas frequently describe the fourth jhāna as the basis for developing such psychic powers as the ability to read minds and to recollect past lifetimes. This would be impossible if the fourth jhāna were simply a thinking process of abandoning unskillful qualities and developing skillful ones. But it would be entirely possible that these psychic powers could develop from a still, full-body awareness.

It’s much less reasonable to expect absorption to result in psychic powers. Zooming *out* of experience, which is what *sammāsamādhi* is about, rather than zooming further and further *into* it, is what allows the mind to wield power over what it’s now fully detached from, and to no longer be limited by concerns of the present to the point where it can remember previous lives. It also guarantees that those aren’t hallucinations, which easily result from absorption.

So given that the one-pointed oblivious definition of jhāna requires that the Buddha was either devious or incompetent in his teachings—using “body” to mean not-body, and “thinking” to mean not-thinking—we have to reject that definition of what jhāna entails.

This is correct. But the distinction between absorption in one fine point and in whole-body pleasure is not at all fundamental. There is no reason to assume the latter is any more conducive to the right kind of knowledge and vision than the former, and, as we’ve already seen, the latter can easily fall within the scope of sensuality, while the former

drifts more into the domain of delusion.

In other words, we have to assume that *vitakka* and *vicāra* have the same meaning both in the first *jhāna* and in the stage prior to it. This means that the difference between the first *jhāna* and the stage prior to it is not a matter of thinking and not thinking. As we'll see, it's more a matter of what you're thinking about and why.

In the second stage, the first *jhāna*, you engage in enough *vitakka* and *vicāra* focused on the theme of your concentration to maximize the pleasure and rapture you can gain from staying with that theme and to spread that pleasure and rapture throughout the body.

The implication here seems to be that even though *vitakka* and *vicāra* are the same, in *jhāna* they are limited to a specific topic, and this is not the case. It is said in AN 4.77 that the “range of one in *jhāna*” (*jhāyissa jhānavisayo*) is one of the four inconceivables. This refers to the fact that even in the first *jhāna* there are no constraints as to the specifics of where the mind moves (in this case through *vitakkavicāra*). The mind has achieved the first stage of *limitlessness*. There is no fixed answer to the question “What is someone in the first *jhāna* thinking about?”, and yet the mind is undoubtedly unified and undistracted *within* what used to distract it.

We even see from the Buddha's own account that changing postures during *jhāna* practice poses no difficulty. AN 4.12 explains why this is the case, showing also that the body can be calm and undisturbed even during movement. As already explained, this is because this physical calm is a byproduct of the right mental attitude that's been cultivated long enough. It's stated as well that one who cannot bear all of the five senses, not just the tactile faculty, would not be able to enter upon right *samādhi* (AN 5.113). If we look carefully, we find that most approaches to meditation revolve around cocooning the mind away from the five senses well beyond what the Suttas say is necessary, which is physical seclusion with virtue established beforehand. It's only the degree of the cocooning, what's happening within it, and the narrative behind it that can vary. Whether you enclose the mind in a tiny vial or in a larger gallon-sized jug, you are still *limiting* it, and this is the opposite of what the Buddha encourages:

“Sandha, meditate like a thoroughbred, not like a wild colt.

And how does a wild colt meditate? A wild colt, tied up by the feeding trough, meditates: ‘Fodder, fodder!’ Why is that? Because it doesn't occur to the wild colt tied up by the feeding trough: ‘What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?’ Tied up by the feeding trough it meditates: ‘Fodder, fodder!’

In the same way, take a certain untrained person who has gone to the forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut... They meditate relying on earth, water, fire, and air. They meditate relying on the extent of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or neither-perception-nor-non-perception. *They meditate relying on this world or the other world. They meditate relying on what is*



*seen, heard, thought, cognized, attained, sought, or explored by the mental faculty.* That’s how an untrained person meditates.

And how does a thoroughbred meditate? *A fine thoroughbred, tied up by the feeding trough, doesn’t meditate: ‘Fodder, fodder!’* Why is that? Because it occurs to the fine thoroughbred tied up by the feeding trough: ‘What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?’ >Tied up by the feeding trough they don’t meditate: ‘Fodder, fodder!’ For that fine thoroughbred regards the use of the goad as a debt, a bond, a loss, a misfortune.

In the same way, take a certain fine thoroughbred person who has gone to the forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut ...They don’t meditate relying on earth, water, fire, and air. They don’t meditate relying on the extent of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or neither-perception-nor-non-perception. They don’t meditate relying on this world or the other world. They don’t meditate relying on what is seen, heard, thought, cognized, attained, sought, or explored by the mental faculty. Yet they do meditate.

When a fine thoroughbred meditates like this, the gods together with Indra, Brahmā, and the Progenitor worship them from afar:

‘Homage to you, O thoroughbred! Homage to you, supreme among men! We don’t understand what your meditation relies on.’ —AN 11.9

Bhikkhus, being judicious and recollected, develop limitless *samādhi*. —AN 5.27

When he sees a sight with the eye, if it’s agreeable he doesn’t harbor passion for it, if it’s disagreeable he’s not averse to it. He lives with recollection of the body established and with a limitless mind. And he understands as it is the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding where those bad, detrimental qualities cease without remainder. —MN 38

To shed more light on this matter, let’s take a closer look at MN 19. There’s one subtle and often overlooked qualification that occurs there regarding the type of thinking the Buddha used to discern the danger in unwholesome states, and which he concluded would bar his mind from fully calming down:

“Still, thinking and pondering along with it (*anuvitakkayato anuvicārayato*) for too long would tire my body. And when the body is tired, the mind is bothered. And when the mind is bothered, it’s far from composure. So I established, settled, unified, and composed my mind internally. Why is that? So that my mind would not be bothered.”

The *anu-* prefix, added to both *vitakka* and *vicāra*, means “along with”. What this indicates is that even though those thoughts were skillful, they were still a form of the mind going “with the grain”—the five hindrances were still subtly in control. That striving was not something he could’ve skipped, however, but now that it has served its purpose, he goes on to “compose his mind internally”. It’s easy to assume that this means he simply shrunk

the scope of *vitakkavicāra* and went on to limit it to something more specific such as the breath or thoughts of a particular subject. But this is not what the Sutta itself goes on to describe:

“Suppose it’s the last month of summer, when all the crops have been gathered within a village, and a cowherd must take care of the cattle. While at the root of a tree or in the open, he need only remember that the cattle are there. *In the same way, I needed only to remember that those phenomena were there.* My effort was roused up and steadfast, my recollection was established and lucid, my body was calm and unperturbed, and my mind was composed and collected. Quite disjoined from sensuality, disjoined from detrimental phenomena, with thinking and with pondering, with joy and comfort born of separation, I abided having entered upon the first jhāna.”

Note the comparison with the cattle being left to roam around and the cowherd no longer needing to constantly control them like before. The Buddha chose his similes carefully. This alludes to how, once coarse unskillful states have been reined in through active effort of contemplation, *vitakkavicāra* can now be left to roam freely as long as one is able to maintain recollection (*sati*) over those phenomena. This is how *vitakkavicāra* in the first jhāna is not constricted within any singular subject even though the mind is definitely unified. When mindfulness becomes imperturbable, the content of thoughts no longer matters, since it was not their content that induced the hindrances, but rather the lack of separation (*viveka*) from that content, and that separation is precisely what mindfulness creates—a vantage point, as it were. This is spelled out more explicitly in Madhyama Āgama 102, the Chinese parallel to MN 19, where the following description comes in place of the first jhāna:

Let me rather keep my mind in check within, continuously dwelling in inner tranquility, unified, having attained concentration, so that my mind will not be troubled. Thereafter I kept my mind in check within, continuously dwelling in inner tranquility, unified, having attained concentration, and my mind was no longer troubled. [If] a thought without sensual desire (ill will ... cruelty ...) arose in me, I further [allowed] thoughts to arise that were inclined toward the Dharma and in accordance with the Dharma. Why was that? [Because] I did not see that countless evil and unwholesome states would arise because of [such thoughts]. It is as in the last month of autumn, when the entire harvest has been collected, a cowherd boy sets the cows free in the uncultivated fields and is mindful of them, thinking, “My cows are there in the herd.” Why is that? Because the cowherd boy does not see that he would be scolded, beaten, or imprisoned for any trespassing. For this reason he is mindful of them thus, “My cows are there in the herd.”

The general nature of all thinking—the recognition that a thought is always a *dhamma* regardless of its content—is the place of unification of mind (*cittakaggatā*). To bring up AN 5.27 again, this is the other essential quality of proper *samādhi* that is not fulfilled by absorption: nothing needs to be held back, excluded, or controlled, and instead everything has been unified within the same overarching theme.

Furthermore, absorption of any kind by definition cannot qualify as “composing the mind internally”, since anything that one can absorb oneself in will be a sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, or mental image, and these are all *external* (the six external sense fields). And if we carefully consider what *sati* is even in ordinary situations, we will see that in a sense it is already not bound to any specific sense object, and *samādhi* is of course nothing but a solid and imperturbable mindfulness:

Imagine you’re driving and are about to enter a highway that has speed limit, and you want to be mindful not to exceed it. How do you go about this? Where is the quality of mindfulness there? Is it in intently paying attention to every muscle in your leg lengthening and contracting as you operate the pedals, implying that if you stop doing that, you will exceed the speed limit? Or is it a broader awareness at the back of your mind that would remain even when you’re focused on something else, such as talking with the passenger or listening to the radio? Sure enough, you may from time to time focus your attention on the speed meter and adjust your pressure on the gas pedal or hit the brakes, but all of this would be a *result* of being mindful not to exceed the speed limit. And you can’t pin this mindfulness down to some specific sense object because, even when your focus is taken by something else, it’s still there. And it will remain there, at the back of your mind without needing to actively refresh it, for as long as you don’t get overly captivated by any particular thing, mental or physical, within the field of experience. If we also consider the nature of what a memory (another translation for *sati*) is, we’ll see that it’s something that *contextualizes* something else that we directly perceive with our senses.

Similarly, when the Buddha says that upon composing his mind internally he needed only to be mindful that those phenomena were there, it means that he simply needed to *not* allow his attention to become narrowed by anything in particular, like the cowherd doesn’t need to chase after any individual cow anymore and can instead leisurely sit at the root of a tree, keeping sight of the whole herd from afar without forgetting about it altogether. Not by coincidence, this is also the principle of sense restraint, which is said to give rise to joy (SN 35.94, SN 35.97).

The reason why even though he had purified his mind from coarse unskillful thoughts it was still not at peace is that disturbance is due to “taking up” (*upadhi*), and particular unwholesome thoughts are only a secondary byproduct of this. So, even if you stop all deliberate defiled acts of body, speech, and thought and volitionally think only skillful thoughts, the taking up of some aspects of your experience will still be there, and this can only be remedied by a sufficient degree of mindfulness (in the proper sense explained here: a background recognition that expands the mind beyond particularities). Thus it is said that the first jhāna is born out of being detached (*viveka*) from *upadhi* or taking up.

As seen from AN 9.34, the pleasure of each jhāna is determined by the extent of affliction that it respectively transcends. The relief is determined by the old burden, which previously used to be “everything”. From the previous point of view, it can be said that nothing is felt because the mind now abides disconnected, looking down from above at what *used* to be everything, and *that* is pleasant. It’s not a new pleasure generated from scratch that steals the show from what was there before, and in this Sutta this is said to be the principle behind the pleasure of Nibbāna. In the same way as not feeling the burden

of the five aggregates and not being confined by them while the five aggregates are there is the pleasure of Nibbāna for an Arahant, no longer feeling the burden of lust for the five cords of sensual pleasure and not being confined by them while they're still perceived is the pleasure of the first jhāna (ditto for the others) and this is why even this can be sufficient to attain Arahantship if there is sufficient wisdom. Mindfulness in the proper sense is what enables all of this.

‘Sensual pleasures in the present and in the future, sensual perceptions in the present and in the future; both of these are Māra’s domain, Māra’s realm, and Māra’s territory. They conduce to bad, unskillful qualities such as longing, ill will, and impulsivity. And they create an obstacle for a noble disciple training here. Why don’t I abide with an *abundant, expanded mind, having surmounted the world and stabilized the mind*? Then I will have no more bad, unskillful qualities such as longing, ill will, and impulsivity. And by giving them up my mind will be *boundless, limitless, and well developed*.’ —MN 106

(...)

From that, it’s been further argued that because the suttas devote more space to the practice of using thought to abandon unskillful qualities and to develop skillful qualities than it does to absorptive practices like mindfulness of breathing, that kind of thought most deserves to be called right concentration.

There are no “absorptive practices” in the Suttas, and Ānāpānasati is no exception. This becomes clear enough if we, having put aside all the baggage of modern interpretations, carefully consider what *sati* is to begin with as above, and why the Buddha might have chosen that term instead of something more in line with the idea of absorption.

The breath serves as particularly suitable anchor that *prevents* absorption, since it perpetually and inevitably underlies every moment of our experience. No matter how captivated you become in an object of your attention, whether physical or mental, all you need to restore the overview of the totality of your present experience is remember that you’re breathing—that sits “at the bottom” of everything else. At the basic level, this enables the mind to regain perspective over the ongoing movements of *vitakkavicāra*; it doesn’t *replace* them. It allows for discernment of *paṭiccasamuppāda* or simultaneous inter-dependence too, which is said to be the cornerstone of the Dhamma: it becomes clear that you can only have even the most personal and dear of thoughts and perceptions because you continue to breathe, which is in itself not a guarantee.

If, however, you turn the breath into a preoccupation of its own to focus on, the entire purpose of it is lost. You are no longer mindful in the right sense, and your mind is now constricted again, by something else. The point is to achieve balance, where neither the breath nor particular thoughts and sense objects are allowed to take the mind’s full focus, and this is what keeps it expanded. This aligns with the general principle of mindfulness of the body, which is said to be like a strong post that keeps any of the six senses from dragging all of the others into their respective domains, while also making the mind limitless. Similarly, the final result of *ānāpānasati* is that the six senses “sit down” and no longer pull towards or away from disagreeable objects **which are still there**, and not that

some or all of the senses fall asleep. Mindfulness of breathing is therefore something that one can maintain one’s whole waking life if one is diligent, as instructed in SN 47.20. If it has been fully developed, it would effortlessly remain up until one’s last breath. If the breath were meant to be an object of focus, this would be unrealistic, and would seriously hamper one’s ability to function.

There are several other tangible examples in the Suttas that illustrate the general nature of *sati*, and how no absorption or concentration involved or associated with it. Among them are AN 6.19 and AN 6.26, and both of these tie in with AN 11.9 quoted above, where right meditation is said to be the opposite direction of intent observation and mechanical repetition. AN 6.26 even contains the same phrase found at the beginning of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and it is clear that none of those recollections are things that one can fixate one’s attention on in the way the *satipaṭṭhānas* are typically practiced. In SN 3.13, it’s not hard to see that for the king practicing mindfulness meant keeping a broader perspective while eating.

The sensible, unbiased conclusion is not that the Buddha taught a different type of mindfulness that is so different from the general standard that it deserves a different name altogether, but that absorptive practices are simply a misinterpretation enabled by the ambiguity of the texts, a failure even by respected scholars to take the entire canon into account and try to extract a single, internally coherent message from it—which ought to be possible according to the Buddha himself—and perhaps most strongly by people’s natural tendency to lose perspective of what matters whenever something happens to feel good.

Moreover, increased powers of observation and focus, which is what absorptive practices develop, is not what allows for full understanding of the five aggregates. In fact, whenever you become absorbed in anything, you *forget* the form, feeling, perceptions, intentions, and consciousness that are the basis of that experience you are now immersed in, and that unseen basis is where the sense of self finds footing, not in what you observe in front of you. For example, if you allow yourself to become fixated on what you’re seeing, that automatically feeds into the tacit assumption that you *are* your eyes, i.e. form. If, on the other hand, you don’t focus too much on anything specific while sights are there, it becomes possible to consider how your eyes are also objects in the world, and that there is nothing ultimately preventing those eyes from deteriorating to the point where you’d lose your eyesight. The same applies of course for all the other sense bases.

This is how impermanence and the grave error of taking things as “mine” becomes revealed at the fundamental level. This will not happen through any perceptions, no matter how detailed, extraordinary, or refined, that are gleaned through direct observation (which, knowingly or not, only further maintains the tacit assumption of a separate “observer” behind the observation). And, in line with the above points, it is this same sense of being the center of experience that generates the burden of the five hindrances, so it’s wrong to think that observation is inadequate only in the context of *vipassanā* and not *samatha*.

We can thus begin to see how exactly the jhānas support understanding and intrinsically

slant the mind towards Nibbāna and letting go in a much more profound way than soothing it through almost arbitrary means: the more one abides in the mere first jhāna, the more one is familiarizing the mind from a way of regarding things in which it is no longer the agent behind the senses. No matter the strength of one's willpower to renounce sensual pleasures, until one is able to gain that separation from the senses and becomes used to it to the point where it becomes much more pleasant than wallowing in sensual preoccupations, one is liable to succumb to the pull of the five cords of sensuality. This is the true meaning of this famous statement.

Finally, a few remarks on the so called “Jhāna Wars” that are prevalent these days:

One of the major culprits of this debate is that people assume that almost any pleasant meditative experience can be called jhāna, and this is taking things the wrong way round. Jhāna is the most refined aspect of the Middle Way, to the point that all the previous seven factors of the path are said to be its requisites (MN 117). Any given meditative state is either in line with that Middle Way, in which case it deserves to be called jhāna, or not, in which case it's wrong samādhi. One of the most representative explanations of this middle way is found in MN 134 (and is said there to be fundamental to the spiritual life): one does not nurture longing for any item of the five aggregates that hasn't yet arisen, nor does one become complacent with those that are present. As SN 1.1 puts it: you don't push forward, but you don't stand still either.

If you're trying to get the pleasure of jhāna to arise and the current discomfort to cease (e.g., by focusing on something more pleasant like the breath), justifying that as a “whole-some craving”, you are longing for the future. If, on the other hand, you throw your hands up with the view that there is nothing to attain, don't strive to free the mind from hindrances, and let your mind go wherever it wants in choiceless awareness, you allow yourself to be dragged along by presently arisen phenomena. This means that there is by definition only one “real” set of jhānas forming the 8th factor of the Noble Path, and only one way to achieve them: neither pushing forward, nor standing still, completely and to the full extent. This is why every true jhāna is always categorically wholesome.

What every approach to jhāna that gets compared in the ongoing debate does is arbitrarily justify some forms of pushing forward and some forms of standing still, meaning that craving is still there even if only subtly. The attained pleasure is not born of the temporary cessation of craving and appropriation, making it a temporary liberation of mind, and a way of “touching the deathless element with the body”, but simply a way of successfully gratifying one's craving with something comparatively less detrimental than external pleasures. It is also not in line with the first factor of the path, right view, which recognizes that what you feel (*vedanā*, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) at any given time is not the problem, but rather the simultaneously present craving to change what you feel in one way or the other.

How, then, do you then go by the middle? Mindfulness: you establish your mind in a broader context that will prevent you from being carried away by what is present, but, at the same time, since it exists in a different plane than thoughts and perceptions of the five senses, does not require replacing or interfering with them. Establishing and protecting

that context requires effort, so it’s not a matter of total letting go to the point of negligence, but it’s not a strained effort either because any kind of strain only comes when you try to control the specifics of your present experience instead of your context towards it.

The right, balanced practice is not something you get to subjectively decide; it is pre-determined by the nature and workings of experience itself. This is why the Buddha said the Dhamma is an ancient path that he discovered; he didn’t create or devise his own idiosyncratic Middle Way, and neither can anybody else.

The fact that the practice of jhāna is fundamentally about aligning oneself with the unchanging principle of the middle path and of right mindfulness, and not about the pleasure that secondarily results from it, can be seen from the otherwise inexplicable statements in this chapter of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. There it’s said that any form of contextualizing one’s experience taught by the Buddha, many having nothing directly to do with jhāna, would make one “not devoid of jhāna” if practiced even for a fingersnap, and the pleasure of jhāna will obviously not come in a fingersnap for anyone initially. The statement only holds if any of these practices is done properly, i.e., with the right mindfulness that contextualizes things instead of pushing them away and replacing them.

From what’s been said so far, it can also become clear why in the Buddha’s outline of the training (MN 107), jhāna comes up only at a late stage, and the first task is always virtue to develop virtue. He even said that for one who lacks virtue, the vital condition for samādhi is destroyed (AN 5.24).

Proper virtue is the most rudimentary application of the Middle Way. It’s not only about keeping the training rules externally unbroken, but also, paradoxically at first glance, about not clinging to them (MN 48). In other words, the attitude with which one keeps the precepts also needs to be rightly tuned: consistently saying “no” to all forms of misconduct without thereby saying “yes” to one’s saying no. You will inevitably have to cling to your virtue at first to make it spotless. But the goal is to be able to keep it perfectly without clinging to it. Otherwise, as the Suttas explicitly say, it won’t be the kind of virtue that can evolve into *samādhi*.

Lastly, it must be emphasized that the actual Sutta jhānas are not “lite jhānas”. They are much more profound and transcendental, but in a different sense, than the most intensely fixed states of absorption regarded as jhāna today. Their profundity is owing to the subtlety, nuance, and quasi-paradoxical nature of the Middle Way: how, in the midst of ample movement, the mind can be still. In the midst of mundanity, the mind is established in the supramundane, and this is why they inevitably carry over to one’s normal life even if one doesn’t want them to.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-15 14:37:38**

This except from an old talk, in light of what was said here, serves to illustrate how the jhānas are *already* “an island that no flood can overwhelm” (temporarily of course), which is why they’re said to be the way to “touch the deathless element with the body” (AN 6.46).

“Bhikkhus, the uninstructed worldling speaks of ‘the ocean, the ocean.’ But that is not the ocean in the Noble One’s Discipline; that is only a great mass of water, a great expanse of water.

“The eye, bhikkhus, is the ocean for a person; its tide consists of forms. One who withstands that tide consisting of forms is said to have crossed the ocean of the eye with its waves, whirlpools, sharks, and demons. Crossed over, gone beyond, the brahmin stands on high ground.

“The ear, bhikkhus, is the ocean for a person.... The mind is the ocean for a person; its tide consists of mental phenomena. One who withstands that tide consisting of mental phenomena is said to have crossed the ocean of the mind with its waves, whirlpools, sharks, and demons. Crossed over, gone beyond, the brahmin stands on high ground.”

—SN 35.228

As pleasant as it may be, a state where the tides disappear from view is of no help in understanding how to properly withstand them.

But it is perfectly self-explanatory why it is beneficial to frequently abide in a state where not being affected by the tides *is* what’s pleasant.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-16 15:45:20 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Outside of samādhi, the body does feel the pull of agreeable and disagreeable sense objects, but for one who fully understands the deathless with the mind (not a mystical state outside of the aggregates, but rather the ever-present possibility to not crave amidst what incites craving, i.e., “withstand the tide”), that’s a non-issue, because the mind is where the whole mass of suffering exists. An agitated body is just an insignificant nuisance in comparison, and that’s why an Arahant doesn’t *need* to protect their samādhi anymore (MN 107, SN 16.5, SN 17.30).

For a noble one, who knows how direct their mind to the deathless or “cessation” with the mind, the body eventually follows along, i.e. jhānas (AN 9.33). The body itself (the six senses as a unitary whole, not a collection of sensations) ceases to experience the pull of the things that used to pull it while they’re still present (SN 35.247, SN 35.97), and that relief results in a very physical joy, ease, “rapture”, etc., which is just a byproduct and a further substantiation of the same mental understanding. This is always temporary, but abiding in it repeatedly is how a noble disciple’s understanding of the deathless eventually reaches fulfillment, and samādhi becomes just a nice-to-have.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-16 04:54:32 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

am I correct that these views have fallen out of favor in recent years?



Yes, and not just recently but for well over a millenium. The Buddha said the true Dhamma would disappear from the mainstream several hundred years after his passing. Even if you refrain from taking a stance, the fact that there is such stark divergence of views as to what the right practice is even within “Buddhism” shows that something must have gone very wrong.

maybe the Suttas should be read in a way where you forget anything that has come after, so when we see “Jhana”, not to fill it with preconceived notions, but to look at what is actually being described within the Suttas.

It’s inevitable to have *some* amount of “preconceived notions”, since otherwise you wouldn’t be able to interpret the texts at all, and would only see characters on a screen/paper. But none would lose anything of value by not assuming that the texts mean what contemporary Buddhist discourse suggests, most especially when it comes to meditation.

perhaps we should read them as wisdom encoded mythology, like most ancient religious texts, rather than literal teachings of a historic person.

That would be going a bit too far. It’s not a dealbreaker to feel some uncertainty about the more outlandish parts that have no direct impact on your practice (e.g., about the Buddha’s ability to speak with gods and so on). But you certainly won’t reach the fruits they describe (jhāna being one of them) if you think, for example, that the Suttas’ frequent insistence on renunciation and giving up sensuality is just a byproduct of the culture of the times, or some sort of mythological/symbolic element, and thus it’s not necessary to follow it strictly.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-11-17 06:07:06 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

is full enlightenment only an ideal, not anything that anyone has done?

None of what you wrote after this accurately represents what the Buddha taught in the Suttas, and is based on misconceptions that have unfortunately become the norm.

This to me helps explain the absurd idea that the goal is to never return, because going, “poof” would be the ultimate ideal but an illogical goal. The logic doesn’t track for me as an “end to suffering” because non-existence is just not a feasible aim.

The sequence is not “cease to exist” -> “abandon suffering” (which the Buddha would’ve denounced as annihilationism), but precisely the other way around. The reason why you exist now and why you will continue to do so in the future is the same reason that you suffer, i.e. craving. So if you simply focus on abandoning craving because you see your own liability to suffering as undesirable here and now, the whole issue of existence will take care of itself even if you don’t think about it. Hence the Buddha focused on suffering and its cessation (the Four Noble Truths) most of the time, and didn’t talk about “ending existence” as the goal in and of itself.

There is also the paradox throughout Buddhism as “you” experience no-self, void, emptiness or even saying “you” no longer return, etc.

The Buddha didn't say that you become enlightened by “experiencing” no-self, and that's a popular wrong view. What he taught is that one must understand that nothing is worth *appropriating* (i.e., taking as self or “mine”) because nothing is ultimately dependable enough to be able to say that it's truly yours, and thus appropriation makes you liable to inevitable loss and suffering: it's a *mistake*. He wasn't making postulates about the existence or non-existence of self because that has nothing to do with the goal (the cessation of appropriation, AKA Nibbāna), which is something that you have to *train for*, not just “agree” with.

## Citta “being-in-relation-to” phenomena

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** upasakatraine 2024-07-07 06:50:26

Dear Bhante Anigha,

I was reading your recent essay “Unyoked from biology” and I had a question on footnote #11, regarding Citta

And this is why the *citta*, despite this special status, cannot rightly be considered a “soul”, a “self”, or “mine”. In order to be so, it would need to be able to stand on its own feet and not be liable to change, but its very defining trait is that of “being-in-relation-to” other phenomena that are inherently impermanent and bound for destruction, after which there could not be a *citta* in relation to them.

How should this be understood in reference to ‘Mano pubbangama dhamma’. Since the mind is the forerunner of all phenomena, does this not imply that it is the phenomena that are ‘in-relation-to’ the Citta rather than the other way ?

Also, wouldn't ‘Citto pubbangama dhamma’ be a more accurate phrase to describe the relationship? Or is this verse just an example of where mano and citta are used synonymously.

Thanks in advance for your clarification ☺

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-07 11:58:39

Or is this verse just an example of where mano and citta are used synonymously.

It is. The verse refers to the fact that taking an external point of view to your own experience is impossible; every phenomenon you can conceivably cognize has to exist with your mano as basis, both as a mere sense base (as you wouldn't be able to see sights without your eyes) and also in the sense of citta (there cannot *not* be an attitude of greed or non-greed, aversion or non-aversion, and delusion or non-delusion in relation to every phe-

nomenon, and that attitude also precedes them and is more general than them). There is no “outside” to this, not even in the farthest corners of the universe.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-08 04:20:52 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So in that sense, the attitude ‘precedes’ the phenomena; but not in a temporal sense.

Yes, I didn’t mean it temporally. And which determines which depends on which point of view you take. So if you’re looking at an arisen thing, the attitude towards it is the counterpart that it cannot not exist without. But if then you start regarding that background attitude as some sort of higher privileged entity, you see that there could be no background attitude without something to harbor an attitude in regard to. So neither of the two can rightly be called the master of the other one, and that’s the point of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

## Is Painful Practice Avoidable?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-06-29 03:31:44

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-02 18:49:01 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

In simple terms, the more you’ve been wanting things to be a certain particular way, the more there’ll be displeasure on account of how things actually are.

It’s like the displeasure of withdrawal from an addiction. If you were used to 100mg of caffeine per day, quitting will not be as unpleasant as for someone who was taking 1000mg (and equally, you will realize the extent of your addiction *only when you try to quit*; before that point, you will always tend to underestimate it).

But ultimately yes, the whole point of the Dhamma is that displeasure is not suffering in itself, so the fact that you might experience that pain is an issue only to the extent that you don’t see the Dhamma.

And it doesn’t say that unpleasant practice = slow practice; they are two separate variables. If your faculties—with faith being the basis of all the others—allow you to steadily keep and further develop the context that displeasure is not suffering, you can still reach liberation just as quickly, or even more so, than someone whose addiction was not as strong. You’re not “atoning for your past sins” through renunciation, which was the view of the Jains.

## For Ven. Anigha. What is Pali/Sanskrit term for “Context”?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** VitakkaVicara 2024-06-21 22:16:32

Venerable Anigha, (or anyone who knows).

I am not 100% certain that I get all the subtleties of the frequently used teaching of a “context” in HH videos and teachings.

Is there a pali or sanskrit word? Is there such a concept in the suttas, Abhidhamma, *Abhidharma-kośa*, or commentaries (*translated to English*)?

Is it *avijñaptirūpa*? If “context” isn’t a conscious mental state, is it *citta-viprayukta-saṃskāra*? Is “context” a specific *prāpti* of *Sabhāgatā* of specific concept of context?

Thank you!

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-22 04:00:14

There’s more than one word that semantically corresponds to it, although it isn’t a literal rendering of any particular word.

All the derivatives of *anu* + *pass* (*anupassī* as in *satipaṭṭhāna*; *samanupassanā*; *samanupassati*) are the first that come to mind. A lot of the time that’s interpreted as “observation”, but you cannot “observe” the 4 Noble Truths in *satipaṭṭhāna* as the Buddha instructs in the way you would observe a chair. They are contexts.

“Context” would also correspond to *saññā* in some cases where it’s not being strictly used as one of the aggregates. When the Buddha uses terms like *pahānasaññā*, *virāgasaññā* and *sabbaloke anabhiratasaññā*, he’s talking about contexts, just as when he says *anicce dukkha*, *anattasaññā*, etc.

## Can someone define the word “context” as used in the HH videos?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** kidfromdeliverance 2024-06-21 19:51:28

It seems as if the term is referring to a specific parameter of “context”, phenomenological, ethical, dhammic, etc., but each time I think I understand, I encounter a video that seems to have a different nuance to it. Any clarification will be appreciated.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-22 05:08:56

When you’re in the supermarket and there’s a knowledge floating “at the back of your mind” that you’re supposed to be back home by a certain time, that’s a context.

When we refer to context, we refer to that overall “direction” of experience, not to something specific within that direction. And the reason why it’s important is because it’s that

same direction—on a subtler but simultaneous plane to less fundamental contexts like the one above—that craving and all wholesome and unwholesome states are found. They are never found at the plane of, say, your visual perceptions of shapes and colors at the cleaning aisle of the supermarket.

It sounds awfully trivial, but most people overlook that to one degree or another in the way they practice.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-22 08:38:37 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Venerable. So the context could be a general sense of stress, and more wider to that, a mental image of this or that person you remember doing this or that, or the mental image of an unpaid bill?

No, as soon as you start specifying and describing, it's not the context anymore. It becomes a mental sense object at the foreground, and now another context is behind that (a desire to figure out what the context is, for example).

The context is what it is only for as long as you're not trying to “look” at it or describe it. Hence it's about learning to be peripherally aware of it without having to turn your attention to it.

In recognizing that context, one could then stand still in regard to it, and recollect the origin, the body, as that which comes first before any sense of self, and that it is subject to old age, disease and death.

Even though this *sounds* right on paper, those thoughts about the body would still be foreground sense objects. The actual origin/context, the actual body, is peripheral to that and remains overlooked.

The difficulty lies in that there are no alarms telling you that you're trying to attend to the context directly and thereby overlooking the actual context, so it's extremely easy to fall off the wagon while still thinking you're doing it properly. Hence the need to not take anything for granted and operate from the basic premise that mistakes could be occurring at any given time.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-23 05:36:38 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

If I come to realize that negative feeling is present in the midst of acting out (mental or external) - is this not the moment to cease acting out by speech or body, and to endure not taking the bait of engaging further with the “inner” speech/monologue? To recognize unskillful thoughts and not give them the fuel of further engagement? And then simultaneously endure whatever feeling is left for as long as it is present without trying to think my way out of that general negative mood and negative feeling.

I'm not sure if you mean to say you're using the negative feeling as a criterion for whether you're acting out or not. If that's the case, that's not the way to tell. You could be having a negative feeling on account of a skillful attitude. If anything, that's most often going to be the case for as long as the mind is not cured from sensual addiction and the first three fetters because you're going against the grain.

Secondly, I assume you mean you stop the "inner" speech that's unskillful, not that you stop *all* inner speech as if that were the issue. Inner speech is just vitakkavicāra; it's unskillful when the inner speech is driven by an attitude of passion or aversion. But that attitude endures on a completely separate, peripheral, and simultaneous domain to the content of the inner speech (like the above example of the enduring context while walking around in the supermarket), so you can't tell whether there is unskillfulness by looking at the latter, just as as you can't tell whether someone else has ill will or any other state internally purely from the way they act and talk. There is some overlap of course, but it's *far* from total.

As I understand it, this is "finding the gateway" and then maintaining/guarding my recognition of presently enduring feeling.

You find the gateway when you clearly see that simultaneous peripheral attitude that has nothing to do with the content of the inner dialogue itself. If there's still a faint unnoticed assumption that the gateway is guarded at the level of specific thoughts, then that's not really the gateway.

If you simply recognize the presence of, say, a depressed mood enduring simultaneously with depressed thoughts, and don't do try to do anything else but keep the recognition of "with this, this is", that would be closer to guarding the gateway. Proper *simultaneous* recognition of an enduring mood (body, etc.)—not a *replacement* of the previous thoughts with thoughts about the mood—would defuse the actual root of the unwholesomeness (ignorance/assumption, not seeing the principle of simultaneity) without any need to neither continue NOR stop the thoughts that were there. That's the Middle Way.

In recognizing this, I recognize non-self.

Not necessarily, unless things are actually being seen as above. As I wrote, it's very easy to be implementing exactly the same ideas on paper on two different occasions, and yet the actual body, mood, etc., is being overlooked on one of them and some subtle form of management is inadvertently taking place (without any "alarm" informing you), and you wouldn't be able to tell if you assumed that just by implementing those theoretically correct ideas you're implementing not-self. So it's better to always assume that you're most likely not recognizing not-self. You lose nothing by assuming that; it'll just help prevent complacency. When you actually recognize it, it won't matter at all whether you tell yourself that you recognize it.

Going back to the body from my earlier example...

Ditto for all that follows.

## Clarification regarding HH descriptions of MN10

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** wisecameron 2024-06-21 18:38:26

Note: I am posting this on request from Venerable Anigha, who will post his response at some point soon. The perspective I outlined here is, after reading his response, obviously derived from more contemporary perspectives of anapanasati. I think it's pretty easy to see how I built up this perspective regarding what Ajahn Nyanamoli is talking about, and Venerable Anigha does a great job of explaining why it is incorrect. From my own experience, what I've outlined here more or less feels like juggling – he brought up the simile of the mountain cow, and its relevance is quite obvious. My perspective was obviously wrong somewhere, but without giving up the idea of “moving” from point A to B to C, etc, I don't think I would have ever come around to what is actually meant. I think that this post – and his response – will be very useful for clearing up wrong notions about the practice of anapanasati, especially since I've dove pretty deep into the wrong pond. With all that said, feel free to contribute your own thoughts about anything I've said, the only goal here is to learn and hopefully help others to connect the dots as well - I'm sure the perspective I've outlined here will be shared by some readers to varying extents (and to many, be obviously incorrect, in which case your input is especially encouraged).

In MN10, the sutta states: He trains like this: 'I'll breathe in calming the bodily activity.' He trains like this: 'I'll breathe out calming the bodily activity.'

Now, in this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI0GVhw0bgs&list=PLUPMn2PfEqIwuLnCiCoXvgcD89ZQj9TKi&index=2> [Recollectedness of Breathing | Revisiting Anapanasati Meditation Practice]

Ajahn seems to describe this as being recollected of the presence of calm in your present experience.

In this essay: <https://www.hillsidehermitage.org/notes-on-meditation/>

It seems to be described more along the lines of – while I know that I am breathing, I maintain an intention (through recollection) to calm the body through breathing.

In this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwRqWW79kFg&list=PLUPMn2PfEqIwuLnCiCoXvgcD89ZQj9TKi&index=6> [How to calm your mind]

It seems to center around calming of your aversion to enduring the experience that arises within your recollected state of mind.

To me, the last point would be: as I know I am breathing, and phenomena are arising in the middle space between the breathing body and my abstract sense of self, seen in this way, they endure as they are, rather than becoming the center, or totality of your present awareness. And in this way, you endure these things as they have presented themselves, even if that is unpleasant. More or less, the act of turning away or ignoring does have some level of effect on your experience of a particular sense object or phenomena, and by not engaging with that, you are kind of tackling something you are averse to in its full-form, which is naturally unpleasant. So in the last video, he is talking about how to

make THAT experience calm, it's not the same as the line "he trains... tranquilizing bodily formations."

So with all of this in mind, my interpretation of the sutta, in terms of the proper way to actually establish the recollection of calming (and make your body calm) would be this way, structurally:

- As you are aware of the totality of the situation
- And your primary point of recollection is that you must endure, not try to change that which arises
- You are aware of the phenomena of the breathing body enduring on its own, and you understand its significance as the basis of your experience from prior contemplation
- You establish the intention to calm your body with each breath.

So the full weight of your intentionality, which is the (only?) direct way we can control the body, is leaning the experience of breathing towards calming the body. That which arises within the experience as phenomena follow with the bodily response to calm, even if it doesn't necessarily feel "right." More or less, establishing and maintaining this recollection (in the structure I described) is the ultimate way to calm your body. In terms of our control, there is nothing more that can be done. And hence, your best bet is to maintain this recollection and keep at it, if you want to calm your physical body.

Is my interpretation accurate? I would say that it still kind of clashes with my understanding of what is described in [Recollectedness of Breathing | Revisiting Anapanasati Meditation Practice], but is the most concordant with my own experiences. Because we really do have a direct level of control, the point is just that the particulars of our experience MUST be arising due to more primary physical processes. Hence, "breath-watching," despite being legitimately the most refined type of sensuality (and so in a mundane sense, for the average worldly person, being quite a good and even elevated thing) is really just hiding from and maintaining your own liability to acting out of / appropriating disagreeable, on a more fundamental level. That type of practice essentially says "the problem is in the objects" when the problem is really craving and one's continued liability to it. For somebody with no interest in going beyond, the problem more or less is in the objects, since they don't want to face them or endure them, it's just all about feeling good right now and forever, all the time.

So this practice of calming the body is really just the healthiest way to establish the mind in terms of letting your body relax, it's more effective for calming than absorption (it has to be, if you can't go further than your intention) and doesn't require your direct sense of control in the domain of particular sense objects (another reason why it would have greater efficacy). Perhaps what was meant in the first video is that, as you are aware of calming, you are aware of calm as a phenomena. But the explanation seemed to be closer to: you attend to the calm, and disregard the not-calm. But I don't think this is what was meant.

So overall, it seems like we have two categories of "calming" 1) The sutta description, which refers to calming the body and its events - might also include attending to the pres-



ence of calm in the body, which I would take to mean being recollected of the fact that as you have this or that unpleasant experience arise, you simultaneously know that the majority of your body is totally calm, kind of putting the discomfort into a greater perspective. 2) Calming of endurance, which is a mental calming, not a bodily calming.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-22 03:36:19**

If you're keen on approaching the right view by trying to understand how APS is properly practiced, I would strongly advise sticking to the instructions on the topic found in Ajahn Nyanamoli's two books. If they seem overly terse or somehow inadequate, it's only because they haven't been sufficiently understood, not because anything was omitted.

The knowledge of breathing in and out doesn't require any special effort.

The bottom line is that none of the 16 different possibilities of ānāpānasati practice should be regarded as fundamentally distinct or separate from the others. If you are doing the core of it properly, "recollected he breathes in; recollected he breathes out", you are doing all of them implicitly. In this case, simply enduring the hindrances properly on a mental level, making no direct effort to calm your body (which is always treading on thin ice for someone without the right view) is sufficient for all the bodily calm you really need, factually: the calm of your six senses ceasing to pull towards and away from their objects as in the simile of the six animals, which is exactly the same as you would get from any other form of sati whatsoever (and that is basically the first jhāna). Only once you truly have that (by which point you would've already gotten the right view long ago) can you go further and start emphasizing and "training" in any one of the sixteen aspects.

So if there's a sense that you need to do "more" and then you act out of that, then right then and there the basic recollection of breathing is not properly established, for if it were it would prevent you from acting out of hindrances. It's like the simile of the mountain cow who falls between the two rocks because she didn't properly set her foot on the first and hastily went for the second one.

If you were actually settled in the "basic" anapanasati, you would already be abiding in immaculate contentment free from hindrances, and you would take it further not because your mind *wants* you to like before, but because you rationally understand that it'll take you closer to Arahantship (and at that point you would see for yourself what that means, i.e. be at least a sotāpanna).

See your breath as something happening underneath whatever else is going on. "Underneath" because it will feel so from the point of view of whatever you are occupied with. "Underneath" because, although at the same time, it is "before", it is more primordial and closer to the body.

Be peripherally aware of breathing taking place "underneath" the desire to calm your body down, or anything else that wants you to get mentally engaged in one way or another, and simply sustain that no matter where your 5 senses and mind move. See that and the breath as two completely unconnected, simultaneously enduring domains.\* There is no

“...and then I go to step two”.

\* i.e., the knowledge that breathing is happening (which has nothing to do with sensations in your nostrils or anywhere else; you would still be able to know you’re breathing even if all the tactile input was somehow cut off because it’s an *action*) is present “underneath” bodily movements and vitakkavicāra about this or that; it should not be a *replacement* for that to any extent, in which case it automatically ceases to be *sati*. That’s one of the main aspects where mainstream practices go astray.

## Why does HH and it’s followers seem to be anti-meditation?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-06-19 14:57:39

I am trying to understand if they are just critical of some types of meditation, or are against meditation practice as a whole.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-20 04:27:20

It’s not that we discourage “meditation” (if we define that as the practice of calming the mind) categorically before stream-entry. The point that in order to have any real chance of leading to the right view, such efforts need to be an *attempt to understand* what meditation is, whereas for most teachers and traditions meditation involves taking for granted one’s current understanding of what the defilements are, how they need to be abandoned, and what the goal even is, and that’s a big mistake. Therefore, no matter how many years of diligent effort and resulting insights and skills one acquires, one’s *fundamental view* has remained mostly unchanged, and that means one has hardly “moved” along the path at all. Attempting to practice meditation with the context that one still doesn’t understand what meditation is what nobody wants to do—nobody wants to put in the work to really dial in their running form before they actually start packing on miles—but at the end of the day it’s not optional unless you want to get injured (fall into wrong samādhi, wrong knowledge, and wrong liberation). A stream-enterer is one who knows how to meditate properly (and has *acquired* the seven enlightenment factors and the Noble Eightfold Path).

The second element is that the Suttas always present meditation (abiding in seclusion in an attempt to abandon the five hindrances) as a very late stage for which certain prerequisites need to be fulfilled, and that’s because it’s simply a more refined and subtle development of the *same principle* as all the previous steps of the Gradual Training. So our point that people shouldn’t even try to practice meditation unless they’ve fulfilled those previous steps is akin to saying that you shouldn’t try to lift 100 pounds if you can’t even lift 20 with good technique, and should instead focus on mastering 10, then 20, etc. (unless, again, you want to injure yourself).

Even though many teachers do place emphasis on virtue and sense restraint, it’s almost always as an *aid* to meditation, and in the final analysis the “meat” of the practice they teach is something that goes in a different direction altogether than the practice of restraint “off the cushion”, no matter how much they may emphasize it. The fact that one

could even *theoretically* succeed in such practices without being developed in the 8 precepts and sense restraint means it's not in line with what's taught in the Suttas. It means it's a type of mental development that can coexist with the five hindrances, and at least from the Buddha's point of view such a thing cannot rightly be called meditation. In the same vein, meditation and the pursuit of sensual pleasures are in most traditions more like "north and west", whereas according to the Suttas they're north and south, meaning they're mutually incompatible.

Lastly, sometimes people think the critique is directed only at "pure samatha" practices, but such a thing does not even exist (Dhp 372, AN 6.73), and the belief that it *could* in itself shows that one's view of meditation is off even if one personally doesn't practice in that way.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-20 18:17:41 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

It seems like you're trying to rebut the point, but the Sutta you quote actually supports it further.

We all agree that purity of virtue is not the end goal. The point is that if someone rides the first chariot only halfway or 75% the way, whatever they hopped onto after that was not the second chariot they were actually meant to ride. And that's how it's regarded today generally: "just do your best with your virtue; at the end of the day the second and further chariots are available to you regardless".

(Edit: Added quotes).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-22 08:08:47 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

(although this is also the description of the wakefulness/watchfulness step).

Yes, that's what comes next. They would be having coarser manifestations of the five hindrances arising, e.g. *active* proliferation of thoughts about sensual pleasures and annoyances. So the task would be to not grasp those signs and features while they're presenting themselves, as described here.

Once you become skilled at enduring those now mental signs and features without leaping on to them, i.e. you still have a hint of those images at the back of your mind but you're not "grabbing" them, just as you wouldn't grab something with your hand *while it's being offered to you*, and you have pervaded every moment of your day with that kind of attitude, then you're in a position to address the five hindrances at their source.

As AN 8.63 puts it: "When your mind is steady and well settled internally, and *arisen* bad, unskillful states don't endure with a grip on your mind, then you should train like this: 'I will develop the liberation of mind through friendliness. I'll cultivate it, make it my

vehicle and my basis, keep it up, consolidate it, and properly implement it.’ That’s how you should train.” (replace mettā with anything else from the Suttas).

Guarding the senses is so much of the path that it can be hard to differentiate it from the other steps, and this makes it all seem much less gradual.

That’s actually the very reason why it’s a refinement of the same principle from beginning to end. At no point do you start doing “something else”. Right sense restraint is the source of peace.

## Precepts

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-06-18 19:16:40

[deleted]

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-19 09:38:00

Am I still making progress/merit by living this way? Is it possible to obtain right view without perfection of the precepts?

You would make some progress and merit by taking on even one precept compared to none, but whether it’s enough for the right view is a different question that cannot be answered except in hindsight, just like nobody can tell in advance whether cutting corners here and there in the construction of a building will still allow it to survive a future earthquake. All that can be said is that there are guidelines for proper construction laid down by experts, and that any deviation from that entails a gamble.

Based on what you say, the main reason is not wanting to upset those around you, but it could be that that itself becomes an obstruction to stream entry although it’s not as coarse as doing those acts out of pure individual desire (assuming you truly have 0 interest and passion for them internally, which is not a given). Even then, it would still very much partake in the five hindrances, and they are precisely what obstructs the realization of the Dhamma, perpetuating the wrong tacit assumption that unpleasant feeling (e.g., of others being upset with you owing to your practice) is suffering in itself.

## Questions on the yoniso manasikāra essay

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** meshinthesky 2024-06-16 05:37:27

The puthujjana lacks even the correct understanding of what yoniso manasikāra is - ayoniso manasikāra is the very reason for his self-view.

Before that [attaining the right view], the effort is to learn what yoniso manasikāra is, and keep taking one’s present understanding of it with a pinch of salt.

The goal of yoniso attention is to see that whole \_this\_, one's entire world, as within, as being fully dependent on, secondary to, simultaneously originated from (paṭiccasamuppanna) another \*this\*. This will automatically prevent you from assuming yourself as the origin, the owner, the master of this experience - of this attention. It will truly prevent assuming as yours anything that you can attend to.

I have read the essay several times. Yet, I am not sure I have understood it properly...

- A) Can the practical instructions for the development of right mindfulness and attention given in the essays peripheral awareness and yoniso manasikaara be resumed as follows: *The anchor (as presented in the peripheral awareness essay) is the pivot post use to keep attention at the proper distance in order to see simultaneously the anchor, the experience, and the womb of the experience (those three elements remain ungrasped, not over attended, and so kind of unfocused)?*
- B) In terms of the essays yoniso manasikaara and peripheral awareness, if the anchor were the breath and the womb the body: how one should understand and develop "sampajañña"?
- C) When one has overattended an object, due to begin interested in it, then one has stepped into ayoniso attention. Once this is realized, should one trace back the sequence of attentions and experiences that led into this overattention, or just regain the yoniso attention and keep going?
- D) As I understood, there are different layers and elements of one's experience, and thus different layers of wombs, some more general (that include all the experience), some more concrete (like a womb of one mental object of the whole experience).

Now, the question arises: what exactly is that broader phenomenon that one must discern in regard to one's attention, so that attention itself will be seen as "not mine".

The four satipaṭṭhānas are four general aspects that can be interchangeably discerned as the "womb" (yonī) or "container" of this experience as a whole, so that I can no longer assume that experience as within me. The most practical example would be in terms of the body.

In order to practice and develop yoniso, is it better to stick for long to one of the most general wombs - the body - as a fixed context, or is it convenient to attend to a wider range of general-and-concrete wombs depending on what experience is going on?

pd: the footnote 11 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5\\_57craC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5_57craC)) is incorrect link

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-17 09:54:26

- A) Can the practical instructions for the development of right mindfulness and attention given in the essays peripheral awareness and yoniso manasikaara be resumed as follows: *The anchor (as presented in the peripheral*

*awareness essay) is the pivot post use to keep attention at the proper distance in order to see simultaneously the anchor, the experience, and the womb of the experience (those three elements remain ungrasped, not over attended, and so kind of unfocused)?*

You're not trying to see three things simultaneously, nor even two. It's more like peripheral awareness allows you to see the full picture of your *one* present experience, and without it you would immediately become immersed in particular sense objects and preoccupations, and being immersed (*avijjā*) is the root of passion and aversion.

- B) In terms of the essays *yoniso manasikaara* and peripheral awareness, if the anchor were the breath and the womb the body: how one should understand and develop “*sampajañña*”?

“The anchor” and “the womb” are not two different things.

- C) When one has overattended an object, due to begin interested in it, then one has stepped into *ayoniso* attention. Once this is realized, should one trace back the sequence of attentions and experiences that led into this overattention, or just regain the *yoniso* attention and keep going?

Unequivocally the latter. You can't “trace back the sequence of attentions” accurately even if you try because experience is not a sequence to begin with, and by such attempts you would be severely misconceiving it.

It sounds like you're over-complicating and over-rationalizing it. Think about it like this:

The whole reason why the metaphor of an “anchor” is used is because you're not supposed to be constantly attending to it. A fisherman isn't holding the anchor *and* the fishing rod at the same time.

When you initially go into seclusion, you think for a moment about whichever context you feel inclined to use that day. Let's say you choose to be mindful of your posture. So you have to actually *attend* to the fact that you're walking and clearly recognize that that is the background of your experience for this duration of time whether or not you think about it. That's setting up the anchor. Then you let your mind think about whatever—the fisherman forgets about the anchor, but obviously the anchor is still there. No matter how deeply you go into your thoughts, you have at least a tiny 1% of the recognition that you *are* walking while you're thinking, and that recognition doesn't require active maintenance. You *have* to stop actively holding on to the anchor for it to actually do its job.

At some point however, you will all of a sudden realize that you completely forgot about the fact that you were walking and lost even that 1% recognition, the anchor. **Then** you set it up again, and let it drift into the background once more ... until at some point the same thing happens. That's all.

And there's a reason why virtue and withdrawal from sensuality need to be established as your default state *before* you even try to practice this. That will ensure that you can actually let your mind roam around within the anchor for a while without it instantaneously jumping back to sensuality and ill will, as it otherwise would. That's why the *satipaṭṭhāna*

stock passage always says “[he practices like this] **having subdued** longing and upset in regard to the world”. Suttas like AN 8.63 and SN 46.6 point out that your mind needs to be “steadied internally” (as a result of virtue and sense restraint) *before* you engage in any mindfulness practice, not the other way around as people usually take it (which is where “concentration” comes in—a contrived artifice to work around the prerequisites not being met).

Another way of looking at it that would be more palpably connected to the abandoning of defilements what’s described in SN 35.246, but the principle is exactly same. The caretaker beats the ox *when it wanders into the crops*, not constantly.

Edit: (And just to repeat, forget about trying to “catch” the moment when you lost the anchor. It simply doesn’t work like that; the realization that you lost it will always come out of the blue, and you won’t be able to remember how long you’ve been unmindful for. That would require you to have a point of view that exists outside of your five aggregates, and that’s impossible even for an Arahant).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-18 04:59:30 (in reply to a comment not included)**

In itself it wouldn’t be of much significance: right mindfulness does not exist without right view. But by attempting to practice such recollections (having covered the necessary prerequisites) while also making an effort to understand why they’re wholesome and lead to the ending of craving—which requires admitting to oneself that one still doesn’t understand—one could get closer to the right view.

Nevertheless, even in completely mundane terms, peripheral awareness is what *sati* is, and that’s why some people innately possess that faculty more than others (who operate almost like animals, entirely taken by whatever they’re attending to at any given time). But what would in the example I gave be regarded as *sati* by Buddhists nowadays—intense observation of the minute sensations of walking—is an entirely artificial construct, and nobody would do it unless they were told to.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-20 04:42:58 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So! - Would checking on the intentions behind one’s actions (“Why am I doing this?” ) actually be just another way of SETTING UP the anchor (establishing the context of the currently enduring mood/feeling) and then letting it fade into the background ... until you check again?

Indeed. An intention would only be known as wholesome or unwholesome due to its relation with the present mood/feeling, and intentions can never be exerted by accident. So all you need to do in order not to act out of a feeling is to be peripherally aware of it “on the right level”. Conversely, not acting out of it for a while makes it even more effortless to not lose sight of it, and it becomes a virtuous circle. And that’s essentially

what samādhī is: peripheral awareness of the enduring feeling being so effortless and ingrained that acting “out” of it—literally, assuming that you can get “outside” of it—is entirely inconceivable, and thus any suffering or discomfort born of assuming you *could* get outside is gone. Hence the relinquishing of a debt or burden as the Suttas describe it.

2. So overall, it’s about getting the right “tune” over and over again, no? When it’s too tight (self mortification, one is trying to get RID of the enduring feeling or pressure), you stop making it too tight. When it’s too loose (acting out), you stop that. But if it’s neither, you don’t have to do anything (like one doesn’t have to beat the ox just for the sake of it?)

Yes.

## Extent of precepts leading to sense restraint

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** fe\_feron 2024-06-15 09:35:54

In the comments on a recent post, u/Bhikkhu\_Anigha wrote:

Unless you see no further work to do in regard to the 8 precepts, you shouldn’t be worrying about sense restraint to begin with.

Can you clarify what the extent of the 8 precepts that needs to be fulfilled is that would “make it worthwhile” to think about how to and apply sense restraint.

Does that extent include bodily and verbal domains? Or is being unable to refrain from engaging with any sensual thought (“finding myself” thinking/fantasizing but not to the point of considering bodily acts) without fail a breach of the precepts? As I understand, this is the point where the welcoming, delighting etc. could be recognized and while not thinking I am doing it rightly at least be able to try to find the balance between accepting the pull/aversion and trying to deny/remove it.

SN 35.98:

And how, bhikkhus, is there restraint? There are, bhikkhus, forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, tantalizing. If a bhikkhu does not seek delight in them, does not welcome them, and does not remain holding to them, he should understand this thus: ‘I am not declining away from wholesome states. For this has been called non-decline by the Blessed One.’

Or does understanding “I am not declining away from wholesome” imply that one needs right view to be able to apply (or try to understand) any of this?

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-15 14:33:49

Can you clarify what the extent of the 8 precepts that needs to be fulfilled is that would “make it worthwhile” to think about how to and apply sense restraint.



Simply that occasions where you break them are exceptions rather than the norm, and you no longer feel like you're constantly on the verge of succumbing to the pull on the bodily and verbal level as you would have initially.

As I mentioned in another post as well, in the beginning there's no problem with "blindly" avoiding seeing or hearing things if it helps you keep the precepts. It's just that one shouldn't fall into a view that that alone is sense restraint, which does require understanding (awareness of the present mental state and how what you choose to deliberately attend to or engage with will influence it).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-17 10:22:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

and seeing this activity as something relaxing that I "need" after a lot of work.

You probably need to check what attitudes you're cultivating and what sort of environment you find yourself in while you're working. It sounds like your mind has already been inclining in the direction of the unwholesome during that time, and so you end up with a runaway train by the end of it. The pull towards unwholesome actions can only be that strong if you've already been doing other unwholesome actions beforehand, even mentally.

## Signs and features & hints of the mind

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-06-14 10:39:31

Hello, could you help me shed some light on this please: are the "signs and features" and "hints/signs of the mind" totally different things that should not be put in the same bag or are they two sides of the same coin?

As I understand it, the "signs and features" are associated with perception:

The signs and features of a thing are not just the particular sensory perceptions of it (shape, color, texture, etc.), but also the entire "world" of significances, feelings, memories, associations, ideas, and intentions associated with it

– Restraining the senses (from Bhikkhu Anigha)

But I understand the "hints/signs of the mind" as rather associated with the state of mind, as what is giving away the current state of mind: a certain inclination towards certain types of thought, the speed and flow of these thoughts, even certain types of perceptions/feelings that are usually connected with a certain state of mind, the type of pressure and towards what it is pressuring me, ..

But I also think that the definition of the former, namely [the signs and features are] also the entire "world" of significances, feelings, memories, associations,

ideas, and intentions associated with it could be used in regard to the state of mind, in the sense that with a certain state of mind enduring there will be a certain feeling that will be more often present than another, certain memories/associations/ideas/intentions that will be more proeminent than others; or in other words: with a certain state of mind enduring, the mind as the tendency to grasp at certain signs and features rather than others.

How should it be understood?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-14 14:18:40**

They're the same in principle, just that one grasping of signs has to stop and the other has to begin (and the stopping of the former is what allows the starting of the latter).

When an unrestrained person perceives something they have strong lust or aversion for, their experience is overtaken by the significances and further characteristics and features related to that thing (what they would like to do with it, fantasies, etc.) Conversely, when someone tries to put their finger on what their mind actually is in the present experience—i.e., concretely and not in theory—there is either a total barrenness and lack of clarity, or abstract ideas that totally miss the mark. There are no “tokens” or characteristics they're aware of by which they could confidently and without doubt say “this is how my mind is disposed at this moment”. Or, when they think they're seeing the characteristics of their mind they actually aren't, and are instead looking at secondary thoughts and sense objects.

And these are the ways the mind can be disposed—it's as simple as that. Any more detailed or intricate theoretical explanations would correspond to sense objects and ideas, not to the mind that is present “behind” them there and then. “Grasping” those signs means knowing the indirect characteristics that would define a mind as passionate, averse, etc., and no longer mistakenly relying on the particular content of experience to determine that.

For example, whoever doesn't see the signs of their mind would tacitly assume that the presence of disagreeability and negative thoughts is what a hateful mind is. The actual hateful mind is something much subtler that is *peripheral to that* and endures simultaneously, which is why the starting point must be to not act out of aversion, and endure the lingering displeasure without suppressing it with “loving-kindness” mantras and so on.

## **question about withdrawal from sensuality**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** DrugstoreCowboy22 2024-06-11 16:59:06

So let me get this straight, when I try my best to avoid welcoming sensuality, and certain perceptions come and torment me, that is not some “energy” that is building up and that I need to release in some way, but rather the extent of infestation of my own addiction to

sensuality, right? Sort of like the tide going away and revealing all the things that were underneath, the depravations, the strange beliefs, the neurotic compulsions. All the things that lived rent-free because of my addiction and gratifying of sensuality that made me unaware to them, numb to them. Am I on the right track here?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-12 09:48:45**

Right, and it's also important to realize that the "addiction" to sensuality is not a purely bodily affair, unlike a drug addiction. The problem is not limited to the mere arising of sensual bodily urges, for otherwise getting old (or even just living in a remote forest for the rest of one's life) would automatically diminish the addiction.

The core of sensuality is *mentally valuing* the pleasure that is offered to your senses, which means that once you get old and the "weight" of sensual pleasure ceases to even be cognized, it actually becomes much harder, not easier, to train your mind to overcome the addiction properly. It's much easier to ignore your liability to it and pretend like you're more equanimous just because the triggers of sensual craving no longer arise as intensely.

But the good news is that mentally valuing sensual pleasure is completely up to you, and it's a choice that you can learn to refrain from making on sequentially more refined levels (which is what the Gradual Training is about).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-13 11:34:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

is that better than not practicing at all? Or are you wasting your time?

It's impossible for restraint and renunciation to be a waste of time, even if one does not reach enlightenment nor hope to do so. It's like a fire: not being able to put it out completely still doesn't justify intentionally giving it more fuel.

Still, even such a person could theoretically understand the Dhamma if they make enough effort. The fact that they would still be very happy to have their sight back is not in itself a problem (it could be considered a fetter subtler than that of sensuality and aversion). But if they crave to have their old *indulgences* back, don't even see that attitude as a defilement, and blindly welcome it, then that person is not really "practicing" (and with that mindset they would surely be finding their new share of sensual gratification elsewhere anyway).

Abstinence only counts as virtue when one has the ability to indulge but willingly refrains from doing so (even delighting by mind). That person would still have the ability to indulge in sense pleasures with the other five senses, and restraint there is what would count towards their virtue and taming of mind.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-19 10:00:40 (in reply to a comment not included)**

because the world and it's countless buddies in the entertainment industry

From here onward I would change it to “because we don’t experientially see the excrement buried within the chocolate even when we’ve been told and/or rationally come to the conclusion that it’s there”. That’s why even though a lot of people and philosophers recognize the folly of sensual pursuits, in the end it usually makes little to no difference to their concrete actions. And you get to “see it” (since it was always already there) by repeatedly curbing your bodily, verbal, and mental actions using your faith and reasoning that the excrement is there: remembering and restraining.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-21 03:35:36 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So in other words, our very perception is rigged?

Right, but it’s not like it’s hopeless. As I wrote, giving up the actions that the perverted perception is inclining you towards (even by mind) is what gradually beings to allow for correcting the mistake of perception. If the leper stops scratching and cauterizing the scabs of his wounds, he at least stands a chance of undermining his wrong perception of that pain as pleasant.

## Is Craving a Dhamma?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** noobknoob 2024-06-08 10:47:44

Trying to understand what ‘Dhamma’ (when translated as ‘phenomena’) actually means. What’s the necessary condition for something to be called a Dhamma?

Is Craving (Tanha) a Dhamma? What about Ignorance (avijja)? Are the five aggregates five different Dhammas? What about clinging with respect to the aggregates? Is that a Dhamma too? Or are there five different clinging Dhammas, one for each aggregate?

Thanks.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-09 04:43:26**

What’s the necessary condition for something to be called a Dhamma?

The ability to be called *something* (i.e., the fact that it is manifest in any shape or form). In other words, saying that something cannot be called a Dhamma is a contradiction in terms: you are then and there designating it in that way, which means the thing is manifest in your experience to that extent.

Having said that, it's true that people's definition or conception of what dhammas or phenomena are is generally quite deficient. The natural tendency is to think in terms of *sense objects*, and whatever cannot be directly observed in that way would tend to be dismissed and regarded as not real, or as abstract at the very least (and that often serves as a shortcut towards *anattā*: the self is supposedly “not real” just because it cannot be seen the way a chair can).

But things like craving, ignorance, and the five aggregates are most certainly not sense objects, and yet they're also perfectly concrete and presently knowable if one learns to see them for what they are, in their “indirectness”, which is the only way they can arise. Making them “more palpable” through direct attention makes them cease to be what they were.

To use one of Ajahn Nyanamoli's similes, it's like stars on a clear night sky that you can only see when you're looking at *other* stars. Once you try to look at them directly, they disappear. You wouldn't say that those stars that can only be seen with your peripheral vision “don't exist”; they are dhammas that manifest *as peripheral*.

This talk is quite relevant to this topic.

## “Rebirth by choice”?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** craveminerals 2024-06-05 18:34:07

I'm curious if you have given any thought to aspiring to “this or that” rebirth? I know other traditions emphasize this more but I'd like to hear what this sub thinks about it.

Speaking for myself, I have so far figured that it doesn't really matter what realm I aspire towards — in other words, I'll just let my kamma take me wherever it “has to” take me. While trusting that keeping a solid morality will have good results.

But then I came across the sutta below, which made me think that perhaps I should give this more thought. I may not reach Nibbana in this life, so maybe it's wise to think about where I would prefer to go next. (Though I'm not very familiar with all these strange realms the suttas speak of!)

What about you, do you have any thoughts on this?

Best wishes,

•

Excerpt from “Rebirth by Choice”, MN 120 translated by Bhikkhu Sujato ;

”At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, “Mendicants!”

“Venerable sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“I shall teach you rebirth by choice. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.”

“Yes, sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“Take a mendicant who has faith, ethics, learning, generosity, and wisdom. They think: ‘If only, when my body breaks up, after death, I would be reborn in the company of well-to-do aristocrats!’ They settle on that thought, stabilize it and develop it. Those choices and meditations of theirs, developed and cultivated like this, lead to rebirth there. This is the path and the practice that leads to rebirth there.

Furthermore, take a mendicant who has faith, ethics, learning, generosity, and wisdom. They think: ‘If only, when my body breaks up, after death, I would be reborn in the company of well-to-do brahmins ... well-to-do householders.’ They settle on that thought, stabilize it and develop it. Those choices and meditations of theirs, developed and cultivated like this, lead to rebirth there. This is the path and the practice that leads to rebirth there.

Furthermore, take a mendicant who has faith, ethics, learning, generosity, and wisdom. And they’ve heard: ‘The Gods of the Four Great Kings are long-lived, beautiful, and very happy.’ They think: ‘If only, when my body breaks up, after death, I would be reborn in the company of the Gods of the Four Great Kings!’ They settle on that thought, stabilize it and develop it. Those choices and meditations of theirs, developed and cultivated like this, lead to rebirth there. This is the path and the practice that leads to rebirth there.”

.... then it goes on like this through the rest of the Brahma realms, and all the way to Nibbana.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-07 02:51:06

Firstly, it should be noted that “choices”, “thought”, and “meditation” here are misleading translations. The first is *saṅkhāra*, which is more like intention or even “inclination” in this context. The second is *citta*, which is something that arises of its own accord and you cannot directly fabricate unlike a thought (*vitakka*), and the third is *vihāra*, which simply means “abiding”, not “meditation”. Also, the phrasing “They think: ‘If only...’” makes it sound like it’s something he’s intentionally choosing to bring to mind, but the Pāli is “tassa evaṃ hoti”, which simply means “For him there is thus:”.

Paired with the statement, that faith, virtue, learning, generosity (or more like relinquishment, *cāga*, since it’s a bhikkhu), and especially understanding are necessary, this changes the picture significantly. It means that one must develop one’s mind (*citta*) to the point where it would factually on its own incline in that direction and possess the characteristics defining that rebirth, and *then* cultivate further resolve and determination towards that (“taṃ cittaṃ dahati, taṃ cittaṃ adhiṭṭhāti, taṃ cittaṃ bhāveti”).

Furthermore, one will most likely never reach the necessary level of these wholesome qualities if from the start one delights in rebirth. MN 16 states:

When a bhikkhu has not given up these five obstinacies and cut off these five shackles of mind, **it’s not possible for him to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching and discipline.**

...

He leads the renunciate life for the sake of a certain heavenly existence, thinking: ‘By this precept or observance or fervent austerity or renunciate life, may I become one of the gods!’ This being so, his mind doesn’t incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the fifth shackle of mind he hasn’t cut off. These are the five shackles of mind he hasn’t cut off.

So the scenario being described here is not that of an ordinary beginner who simply decides they want to be reborn in such and such realm and magically ends up realizing that aspiration. It’s someone who got to the point where they are at (sotāpatti) by *not* delighting in being and pleasure of any kind and cultivating dispassion, but for one reason or another did not make it all the way to Arahantship, and by cultivating such determinations they would ensure that they, so to speak, reap no less than what they sowed (which could happen). It won’t magically lead to results that they hadn’t already earned.

And even in the case of householders in the Suttas who managed to reach such a level of development, it was *through* dispassion and relinquishment. It’s only afterwards that they often became complacent with that they had attained.

- (1) Then the Buddha taught the householder Upāli step by step, with a talk on generosity, virtue, and heaven. (2) **He explained the woe, inferiority, and defilement of sensuality, and the benefit of renunciation.** (i.e. dispassion towards even the lofty realms)

- (2) And when he knew that Upāli’s mind was ready, pliable, rid of hindrances, elated, and confident he explained the special teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Just as a clean cloth rid of stains would properly absorb dye, in that very seat the stainless, immaculate eye of the Dhamma arose in Upāli: “Whatever has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing.” Then Upāli saw, attained, understood, and fathomed the Dhamma. He went beyond doubt, got rid of indecision, and became self-assured and independent of others regarding the Teacher’s instructions.

“Well, Bhante, now I must go. I have many duties, and much to do.”

—MN 56

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-08 05:38:59 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Ideally, but not necessarily. A monk who becomes satisfied with his current attainments and is looking forward to a certain rebirth would recognize that he has far greater chances of actually getting there if he remains a monk. So even if pleasure is one’s ultimate goal, the more renunciation in this life one can do, the better (see Udāna 3.2). Any benefit lay life and material pursuits may provide is totally transient and limited to this life, and thus

hardly a true benefit in the grand scheme of things.

But, again, holding such aspirations and progressing further on the path are mutually exclusive. As shown in that Sutta, Venerable Nanda was able to really take on the practice only when he gave up that wish out of a sense of shame.

## Why is the joy of relief absent?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** CleanExtension7796 2024-06-05 17:07:37

I've been keeping the precepts, practicing contentment with little, not delighting in company, dwelling alone the majority of the time. There aren't many actions anymore either, by body or speech, as I've seen so many are rooted in unwholesome intentions or distraction. I've been reading and rereading suttas and the essays and they are straightforward, directly applicable to me.

But I feel something is *off*. I'm sleeping more, no doubt because of having little to *do*. I wonder if this is more of a depression, a nagging doubt fuelled by those I do see wondering why I'm not engaging in idle conversation anymore or sensual activities. It's like there is no interest in a vast amount of what previously occupied my day. So I'm just here with this pressure and discerning more and more subtle ways in which I'm ignoring it or trying to get rid of it, and it honestly feels like dying. Is this the practice? Do I just keep enduring this?

And this may sound strange, but have I somehow obscured the place where the joy of renunciation *is*? There is clearly a sense of self that is maintained in the suttas, of mind, whatever you want to call it, a place that becomes free, experiences the relief of cessation, but I don't *know* it? This is quite a bizarre predicament I find myself in. Everything is just very unevolving, I guess you could describe it, but it's not pleasant - and that's why there is this doubt I can't shake and I've made this post.

Thank you in advance to anyone who makes a comment. This may be something one can only figure out for oneself directly, but perhaps there are others who have known something similar and can help.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-07 03:08:44

It's hard to judge solely based on what you wrote, but it could simply be that your very expectation that there should be pleasure is the reason why you're uneasy. The "relief" that you refer to is the relief of the absence of craving, and if you're looking forward to "something else" apart from what you have present, it means you're resisting the present feeling, and that's exactly what craving is.

Of course, I'm not here endorsing the whole new-age "just be with the moment and give up all expectations" mumbo jumbo. What I'm saying is that once you have developed yourself in virtue and restraint, you need to start realizing that the suffering that's left there is due to your own out-of-tune attitude towards your own thoughts and mental states,



that is either too lax (too indulgent and careless) or too tight (overly denying), and that's when you start overcoming the five hindrances correctly (which includes anticipation and expectation of any kind).

If you try to give up these (at the time) subtler things *before* you're established in wholesome behavior, however, you will be disposing of the very drive that's meant to get you to where you need to be. Once you're there, though, you need to start distinguishing those (now) coarser, initially beneficial pressures as something that you shouldn't give in to, *without* allowing that to take you all the way back into indulgence and non-restraint.

When To Stop Practising

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-08 19:05:52 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

It's also important to see that any expectation of pleasure whatsoever falls within the first hindrance. Any pleasure that is actually wholesome and in line with the noble truths would come from ceasing to care about the fact that there is no pleasure (and this is compared to paying off a debt in the Suttas, the debt being of course created and maintained by one's own present passion towards *anything*, not just coarse sensual objects externally).

If it's a pleasure that can be sought or produced directly, it will be sensual whether one likes it or not. It will be the pleasure of creating a new feeling however subtly, not the pleasure of abandoning craving, thus going with the grain of the same old ignorance about what the cause of all uneasiness actually is.

The five hindrances really are on the level of being

And that's why it's such a mistake to underestimate their sheer scope.

This talk may also be helpful.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-10 04:33:41 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Dispassion in regard to *all*... including whatever can be cognised? ...

So if you seek the pleasure of nibbana, you mistakenly construe it like everything else, and you'll never encounter it?

Basically, yes. You still strive towards Nibbāna one way or another, but seeking it in the form of *pleasure* means falling away from the very attitude that defines Nibbāna: dispassion.

In general, any pleasure that requires you to compromise the recognition of the extent of the All (yoniso manasikāra) and non-delight in that is necessarily unwholesome, even if it seems "harmless" in comparison with external sensuality. Passion, aversion, and distraction are there exactly to the extent that there is *avijjā*—lack of clarity, you could say—and those 3 things *are* what harm is.

So it's not like you can put aside the aspect of phenomenological clarity in order to develop joy, and then "return" to wisdom later, as it's often assumed. Falling off of phenomenological clarity means falling off right view and the Dhamma altogether, and the fruits of that cannot magically feed into the eightfold path which is fully predicated on right view. Hence it's said that there is no jhāna without understanding, and vice versa (Dhp 372).

Unless you understand nibbana as what wells up naturally, non-dependently... and that's why it can't be however you construe it to be? And that's why it's a true refuge?

It doesn't "well up naturally"; totally mundane experiences that people would tend to aggrandize can also do that, and with little to no renunciation and understanding/right view developed beforehand.

Nibbāna is the perpetually present structural possibility for dispassion that needs to be *understood*. And it's available because craving can never possibly be *in* your feelings and experiences; rather, it's there exactly to the extent that you don't understand it's redundancy, no more and no less. Nibbāna is a true refuge because it depends 0% on *what* feelings and experiences have arisen and does not require you to manage or interfere with that domain (a task that always risks failure). It only requires you to have become established in restraint beforehand to create the opening to discern it, but proper restraint is the opposite of management.

The scope seems huge when you say *anything* but if anything is dependent on this one thing - the body - then I can see the way for dispassion to have equal scope.

Yes, that's one way of putting it. It doesn't matter how vast the "size" of passion or the pressure towards it gets, the possibility of dispassion always remains structurally present because the body will always be the foundation for whatever arises, and seeing that dependence rightly is enough for the mind to stay fully disconnected from passion.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-15 14:10:06 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Would it also be fair to say then that by extension, wanting to get rid of ANY displeasure AT ALL counts as within the hindrance of ill will (wanting to get rid of the pressure/discomfort/displeasure of arisen regret/anger/boredom)?

In the final analysis, yes. Any intention that resists the arisen feeling is an intention with craving. But initially, wanting to get rid of displeasure is what motivates you to take on the practice in the first place (not seeing that displeasure and suffering are actually two different things, you inevitably think destroying the latter requires eliminating the former). As understanding develops, you begin to realize that the desire to "resolve" *any displeasure whatsoever* is actually precisely the reason you suffer, and *then* you begin striving to abandon that. That's what's meant in the Suttas when it's said that craving is necessary to set you on the path to abandoning craving (it doesn't mean you abandon craving "with"

craving as people would sometimes think: what that really is is feeding one hindrance while starving another).

I don't really understand what is meant by the 5 hindrances being on the level of "being"...

It means that it's impossible to overcome them through any kind of practice that is "selective" (e.g. focusing on the breath, arousing pleasant thoughts, or even mechanically contemplating things actually found in the Suttas), leaving the other parts or your experience out or taking them for granted (background intentions especially), because *that* will automatically become the "place" where the hindrances "move" to— just as darkness is automatically at whatever spot you're not pointing a flashlight to. You don't need to consciously "put" the darkness anywhere; all that's required is the absence of light (and that's why the Buddha always compared *avijjā* with darkness).

## Pressure, craving, acting out of mind

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-06-05 07:53:04

To the question:

Does that mean that when there is the sense of ownership, phassa entails cravings by default?

Bhante Anigha answered:

Yes. If there *were* no craving to *act* out of the pressure, you couldn't call it "pressure" or even "contact" anymore. In order for it to qualify as "pressure" in the first place, there needs to be craving in response to it, on account of a misguided ownership of things that arise on their own (ignorance).

So it goes both ways, pressure is determined as what it is by craving (which is always *already there*, 24/7; it doesn't "arise" at some mysterious point), and conversely, craving could never be there if there were no pressure.

Does that mean that if someone is pressured but is capable of never acting out on the level of body or speech, he is nevertheless still acting out on the level of the mind, grasping at signs and features of perceptions that are connected to unwholesome states, and if he wasn't there wouldn't be any pressure with phassa/contact? (Or there wouldn't even be contact anymore?)

Or is acting out on the level of the mind something else?

I understand it as an intermediate stage that a trainee needs to go through, after being firmly established in virtue, in order to purify even the acting out on the level of the mind by essentially "keeping the guard post" as the simile goes, making the effort to not grasp at signs that are connected to unwholesome states and making the effort to attend to different signs connected to wholesome states when one find itself already doing the former.

And because of that, by stopping to fuel the craving, and also by establishing a more and more persistent non-ignorant context that the problem isn't the feeling but the 'wanting more/less' of this feeling (that the feeling is a structural part of the experience where the 'wanting more/less' is added on top of it, unnecessary and above all, the source of these troubles), pressure will eventually not arise anymore.

Is this understanding correct?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-06 05:48:32**

Does that mean that if someone is pressured but is capable of never acting out on the level of body or speech, he is nevertheless still acting out on the level of the mind, grasping at signs and features of perceptions that are connected to unwholesome states, and if he wasn't there wouldn't be any pressure with phassa/contact?

No, craving is not the same as grasping at signs and features (mental action). Actions rooted in passion, aversion, and distraction (hindrances) are what *fuels* craving (i.e., the pressure to perform more of such actions).

You can successfully stop acting unwholesomely on all three levels at any given moment if you understand how to do so (which requires yoniso manasikāra, and of course prior development in virtue), but craving—which is a broad phenomenon, much more general than this or that thing you desire or hate—would only dissipate (temporarily even, as in samādhi) as a result of *sustaining* that restraint on all three levels of action long enough.

## **Help me understand the phenomenology of wanting unpleasant feelings (contains self-harming)**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** serculis 2024-06-01 15:50:55

From my understanding, if something is unpleasant, there is always a wanting to get rid of it. If something is pleasant, there is always a wanting to obtain it. Even if you have someone who says “no, I like being depressed, I feel comfortable in this emotion, it's all I've ever known” then *that* right there is a pleasant feeling that is wanted, or rather, the idea of being content provokes a feeling of uncertainty which is unpleasant and there is craving to get away from it. So from what I understand, unpleasant feeling exists on a scale, and less-unpleasant feelings are deemed desirable, or 'pleasant', and if one does not know this properly, you can easily get confused thinking you sometimes want unpleasant feeling which can only be a contradiction.

So something awfully bad happened to me the other night and I ended up self-harming. I haven't done this in 3 years, had no urge or interest in it that entire time, but due to a severe lack of sleep + unfortunate life event, I hit my threshold and to my utter surprise cut myself. I remember when I did it historically, it was very pleasant, and I was actually annoyed that the urge to do it vanished. I've woken up today completely tilted because I

don't have the urge to self-harm, I'm annoyed it was a one-off. I seem to want the unpleasant feeling but I know this can't be the case...

What I can say is that in the past, I only self-harmed when things were incredibly bad, that made self-harming 'worth' it. It had to be serious enough. SH used to trigger feelings of comfort, self-care, validation, sense of control, a reliable escape. However, I could not, and cannot SH over something little or even mid, now THAT would be unpleasant. It would NOT cause feelings of comfort, self-care, validation and so on. If I were to do it now for no good reason, I would actually feel deflated, icky, stupid, ridiculous, silly, kind of like 'bruh wtf am I doing this for'.

So the only thing I can think of, is that historically I still very much delighted in the prospect of SHing, which means the unpleasant feeling was there, but because my mood was nowhere near bad enough, I know I couldn't do it without it causing feelings of shame. There seems to be a value judgement - I feel low and want to SH, but the idea of SHing whilst simply feeling low would make me feel even worse and I don't want that. In the past, there was a 'hope' of even worse things happening to me so I had an 'excuse' to have the urge to SH, which makes me believe the urge was already there from the start, just incredibly subtle... and me welcoming bad life events was the delighting in freedom from that unpleasant urge.

So ultimately what I believe is "me wanting unpleasant feelings" is actually just another case of me not wanting higher degrees of unpleasant feeling.

In the video "Why did the buddha say sensuality to be an assumption" Nyanamoli Thero mentioned how the idea of getting your desires met to avoid the future pain of not having them met, can only ever be done on the basis of already being subjected to the desire first. So from my understanding I cannot 'want' the 'wanting' to SH unless I subtly already want to SH in the first place.

And I just want to repeat that in those 3 years of not doing it, the "wanting of the wanting to SH" vanished, and I simply didn't think about it the whole time. From my understanding there was therefore truly no interest in doing it.

(I'm fine btw)

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-02 05:37:17**

So ultimately what I believe is "me wanting unpleasant feelings" is actually just another case of me not wanting higher degrees of unpleasant feeling.

Yes, it doesn't really matter that from a "public" point of view, self-harm should actually be unpleasant. What matters is that it does (or can) arise as pleasant *for you*. So it's not necessary to look at it in the context of *what* specifically your mind wants you to do in response to displeasure; what must be overcome is the common thread of inclining towards whatever actions give rise to pleasure *for you* in hopes of replacing or subduing the displeasure of things that are unpleasant *for you*. Phenomenologically speaking (which

is all that matters in the context of the Dhamma), *why* something is pleasant or pleasant is irrelevant.

In the same way, bhikkhus, an unlearned ordinary person, when struck by unpleasant feeling, sorrows, wails, laments, beats their breast and becomes muddled. They feel two feelings: one bodily and one pertaining to the *citta*.

Struck by that same unpleasant feeling, they resist it. Thus, the underlying tendency to resistance against unpleasant feeling underlies them.

Struck by unpleasant feeling, they delight in the pleasure of sensuality. Why is that? Because, bhikkhus, an unlearned ordinary person doesn't understand any escape from unpleasant feeling apart from the pleasure of sensuality. Since they delight in the pleasure of sensuality, the underlying tendency to passion for pleasant feeling underlies them.

—SN 36.6

You can overcome this tendency for self-harm by “managing” it (e.g., psychotherapy and so on), but what will actually destroy it at its root it is to train yourself in the precepts and restraining all the *other* unwholesome actions by body and speech rooted in seeking that same kind of escape (and which a mental health professional wouldn't normally regard as a problem even though they're perpetuating the exact same “illness”).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-03 06:10:49 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

that my experience of “wanting” an unpleasant urge so I can use self-harming to escape it, is only possible if I already have the subtle urge to SH in the first place?

Yes, it would mean that at that moment you're already feeling displeasure and are delighting in the prospect of escaping it, but it's just not unpleasant enough. The arisen displeasure is always what defines the magnitude of relief that one gets from sensual pleasure, and if there were no displeasure, indulgence would become redundant. And even though in the case of the “traditional” sensual pleasures the objects in the world remain as pleasant as they have always been—that was never the root of sensuality.

So more generally than this specific urge, you can look at the fact that you're already experiencing subtle displeasure and there is the craving to escape it through external means. Craving is never particular; it by definition can latch on to anything and still remain fundamentally the same craving (it “delights here and there” as said in the Suttas). So whether the offered escape is self harm or anything else is secondary to the presence of craving, i.e., resistance to displeasure.

## What is wakefulness ?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-05-30 15:43:55

Often in sutta we encounter the adjective “wakeful” and I wondered how we should understand it since sampajanna covers awareness (reflexive attitude) and sati recollectedness ? Is it an incentive to not be lethargic or to not oversleep or is it pointing at a deeper meaning. ?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-31 03:15:14**

The Pāli word being translated as “wakefulness” is *jāgariya*, and it doesn’t just mean being awake but also being vigilant or on guard.

So yes, not being lethargic and lazy (which is an optional mental choice no matter how physically tired you are) would be part of it, but it also means not neglecting the task of keeping your mind free of unwholesome states in general. Unwholesome states never exist on their own or by accident; they can arise only when they’re allowed to pass through the gateway of volition (i.e., welcoming and entertaining arisen inclinations) and thus one should remain guarding that gateway vigilantly day and night.

## The Digha difference

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Print-Remarkable 2024-05-29 15:55:43

Been spending some time in the Digha recently and besides the obvious difference in length I’ve noticed a few other things. How are the descriptions of previous Buddhas and the markings of a Buddha significant in realizing right view? We don’t seem to touch upon these things in the Hillside community or very rarely.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-31 12:28:04**

It’s not that those parts are significant in realizing right view, but that being able to fit those paradigms that already existed in society probably was probably useful in getting a lot of people to pay more attention to the message.

Now, that’s not on the same level as when the Suttas talk about rebirth, recollecting one’s own past lives, and the existence of beings in other realms. It’s not necessary to place emphasis on that in the beginning to gain the right view, but it cannot be dismissed as mere literary embellishment.

## Question : Unyoked from biology

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Difficult-Strain-580 2024-05-29 14:28:31

I have a question about Bhikkhu Anigha's latest post titled "Unyoked from biology" on the HH website.

Venerable Anigha, would you mind explaining in other words or in more detail the part where you say that seeing rebirth is about discerning that our choices are not the same as the body? Isn't this capacity to choose the same as the aggregate of Sankhara?

Even though we experience it (citta/sankhara) as being separate from things appearing or manifesting, how can we be so sure it must predate this body? Maybe both are possible? It appeared in this life but we are not fettered by it for as long as we live?

Also looking at the citta in this way, doesn't it sound like it is that citta that "roams around and experiences the result of good and bad actions"? Precisely what the Bhikkhu Sati believed? Just replacing the word consciousness with citta? Citta is often used as a synonym for consciousness in many modern theravada circles.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-30 15:31:32**

Isn't this capacity to choose the same as the aggregate of Sankhara?

Yes and no. The citta is the reflexive or "second-order" aspect of experience. It's the perceptions in regard to what is perceived, the feeling in regard to what is felt (of which there is always only one at any given time), intentions in regard to intentions—and of course a second layer of consciousness that cognizes this second layer of *nāmarūpa*. But the essay focuses on the aspect of intentions which is arguably the most central.

To illustrate with a very crude example, a mug arises on its own as either "for drinking" or "for storing pens", and these are first-order saṅkhāras. The second-order saṅkhāra there would be the intentional choice to use the up for one purpose and not the other. And it's on that first layer that you find what I refer to throughout the essay as "biological drives" (the intention of "for eating" in relation to food arises more strongly the hungrier you are). But no amount of intentions in the first layer can induce an act of volition, which is the domain of the citta and where individual responsibility lies.

Even though we experience it (citta/sankhara) as being separate from things appearing or manifesting, how can we be so sure it must predate this body? Maybe both are possible? It appeared in this life but we are not fettered by it for as long as we live?

It wasn't stated that the citta "predates" the body, since that would assume it to be a positive entity that can stand on its own independently of experiences, which the Suttas repeatedly state is a wrong view (a similar statement but with the feeling aspect of the citta appears in MN 146). The point is that the citta/consciousness cannot have had its first point at the moment of *conception* (or, even more nonsensically, at some specific instant where the brain became sufficiently developed), which might sound the same but isn't.

The reason for that is that the conception and growth of an embryo are physical processes, and if we have accepted that the mind is not material/solely produced by matter (which we



cannot coherently deny if we regard choice and action as real, as explained in the essay), there would be a contradiction. It would imply that “something else” unrelated to the physical developmental process played a part in the manifestation of the citta (otherwise it would be fully material).

Now, we are not intrinsically forced into one possibility of what that “something else” is—one could assume it to be God or some cosmic force. But that would mean that we’re not responsible for the state of our citta, that something or somebody else made it as it is. So if we assume that we *are* responsible for our ignorance and craving and thus are able to liberate ourselves through our own effort, the only logical conclusion is that we’d been making choices before our conception too.

Of course, if someone is not already inclined to accept certain premises, they’d still be able to reject the whole argument, which is why it’s not a “proof” of rebirth. But it does show why both the validity of action and the possibility of “another world” are part of the mundane right view. They’re not culturally conditioned ideas that occur together by mere chance.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-31 03:34:33 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Roughly put, yes. But it’s not like the citta somehow “enters” one body, then stays there for a while, then “leaves”, and then “enters” a new body. The entire time, *nāmarūpa* must be there in order for consciousness to exist in any shape or form. So it’s more like the aggregates just change in their content from one life to the next, but that “second layer” of views, habits, and assumptions persists, exactly as it does within this very life. Hence the Buddha said that when remembering past lives, all one can remember is the five aggregates or one among them (SN 22.79).

But, again, without *some* kind of first layer of experience being given, that second layer would be totally inconceivable, which means it cannot rightly be taken as “my self”, nor as what’s primary or fundamental. In order to be a self, it would need to be independent.

Also, there will always be a limit to how much you can describe “rebirth”. It’s inconceivable to even imagine or describe your point of view “from outside”, because your point of view would shift onto that which is imagining the process of rebirth right then and there.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-04 05:57:54 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Sure, the second order sankhara of intending the arisen intention MAY be accompanied by positive phenomena (the thought: “No, I’m not going to eat ice cream again today” or “I’ll have it just one more time”), BUT the actual “jumping on” that possibility/1st order intention (or abstaining from it) seems to be something that cannot be pinpointed, isn’t it?

It cannot be pinpointed on the level of specificity that people are generally used to, yes. But one for whom the signs of the mind start to be revealed (through training in virtue and restraint) would be able to recognize that “taking up” of intentions that initially felt “invisible” or even “automatic”, and they would come to see that all which they initially thought was restraint of unwholesome intentions was actually just another way of taking them up (although it’s certainly much more wholesome than full-on bodily and verbal indulgence, so it’s not that it’s “wrong”; it’s just that it still needed further refinement).

Edit: just to expand...if we were to take someone who is sense restrained....in terms of positive phenomena, BEFORE and AFTER they decided to ABSTAIN from eating the ice cream would look exactly the same, wouldn't it?

When the possibility of eating ice cream arises as a thought, versus when the person has decided not to act on that thought ... in terms of positive phenomena, it's exactly the same: a thought of ice cream persisting. It's just that in the latter, the decision not to act on the thought has been made (which is not visible as a phenomenon).

Yes, you could put it that way. What would “look” different is if they either decided to proliferate the thoughts of ice cream with desire (let alone if they ended up physically acting), or if they tried to deny the ice cream forcefully and thereby stir up new thoughts now driven by aversion.\* Both of these are failure in sense restraint (not grasping at signs and features that arouse longing or aversion).

A negative phenomenon is *still* a phenomenon, and that's quite important to recognize so as to not fall into mystification (“it’s hidden and indescribable”), which would be the opposite extreme from assuming that the citta can be pinned down in specific thoughts or other positive manifestations.

\*And when the Suttas talk about sati and all the different themes and ways for establishing it, the purpose of that is also on that “negative” level, not in replacing how the experience “looks” (or feels). You do have to attend to them at the positive level for a brief moment in order to establish them (if it's clear that they were absent), but the goal is for them to linger in the background “coloring” the negative rightly. They are second-order perceptions. Note also that it's the *same contexts* that both the person who overly denies things and the one who goes by the middle way would be using; the difference is in whether they understand the negative or not (the simile of the cook).

## **Sense restraint, how hard to push, what about when I mess up?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-05-29 03:12:42

Lately my Buddhist practice has evolved from very meditation-centric, to now including other aspects of the path. For example, I have been practicing more generosity, kindness, metta, dhana at the monastery, and... sense restraint. I find that I'm very critical of myself

when it comes to practicing sense restraint, because in my way of thinking, it's a practice of NOT doing certain things. Whereas, metta, dhana, being kind to others and that sort of thing is a practice of remembering to do things, and even if I just do a little bit I reflect on the goodness of it and that makes me feel good. But when it comes to sense restraint, I feel like I'm constantly second guessing my resolve. I determine to refrain from things, the pressure of boredom or craving gets too strong to bare, and I give in sometimes. Then I feel pretty terrible. I feel like I'm now caught in a pattern similar to addiction, and I don't think my approach has been very healthy or helpful to me. Can someone please take the time to explain to me an example of a gradual training in sense restraint?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-29 05:39:53**

Unless you see no further work to do in regard to the 8 precepts, you shouldn't be worrying about sense restraint to begin with:

*When the bhikkhu is virtuous*, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, guard your sense doors.

If that's covered, then you want to realize that beating yourself up is itself a failure in sense restraint (grasping at signs and features that induce states of longing and upset), and also recognize that by the time you end up with an intense pressure to do something unwholesome, you have already been failing to guard your senses properly for a good while, probably by doing things and dwelling on thoughts that you take for granted as justified or appropriate. The pressure never builds up in one instant.

These two talks might be useful: Why you keep losing sense restraint?, The Unlapsing of Your Self Restraint.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-30 05:36:25 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I referred to the reason in Restraining the Senses:

If you have not—as a prerequisite, not even as a guarantee—indefinitely abandoned the possibility to break these precepts in the future and any openness to acting unskillfully by body and speech<sup>(15)</sup>(<https://www.hillsidehermitage.org/restraining-the-senses/#5784f14f-3600-4f3e-8e7a-c9202dc77d14>), you *will* be grasping at the signs and features of things that induce unwholesome states on some level, whether you realize it or not. Your intentions for the future, as in the actions that you are at least *open* to doing at some undefined point later on, influence every moment of your present, no matter if you're not planning or dwelling on them at all.

That's why in all Gradual Training expositions, the two are always in that order. And in DN 10, the precepts are within the aggregate of virtue, while sense restraint is placed in the aggregate of *samādhī*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-30 05:48:07 (in reply to a comment not included)**

You could regard them as closely related, but technically sense restraint pertains to a subtler level of subduing unwholesome states (see the reply to u/craveminerals below).

It's not that sense restraint prevents you from breaking the precepts. You choosing not to break the precepts despite the pressure prevents you from breaking the precepts. And on the basis of that, you can then learn to guard your sense doors

Taking it the other way around implies the view of management: that you need to do something, in this case sense restraint, to diminish the pressure first in order to not give in to it, thereby absolving you of responsibility to a degree.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-31 03:02:39 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Are you saying that the 8 precepts can be upheld through will power and determination alone, and do not require a level of sense restraint mastery for one to uphold them at all times?

Yes, although not exclusively through will power. Reflection is the one factor that plays a part in every stage of the Gradual Training, including the establishment of virtue. But still, the purpose of reflection is not to diminish the amount of pressure you have to endure when keeping the precepts, but to *remind* yourself of why you should stand your ground no matter how tempting it is to give in. It won't absolve you of responsibility or do the restraint for you.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-02 04:37:26 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Sometimes, you can't rely on your own determination alone, and you need to tailor your environment. So you could try to find ways to ensure you only have access to the internet during specific periods where you need it for practical purposes (if at all). There is hardly a justification for ever switching the TV on if you're aiming for the 8 precepts though.

There are applications for PCs and mobile phones that allow you to block access to certain or all applications on a scheduled basis.

**How to contemplate dullness and drowsiness without falling sleep**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** meshinthesky 2024-05-28 07:33:00

Compared to the other four hindrances, I'm having hard time with drowsiness. I'm talking in general, not just in the context of sitting meditation, which I do with opened eyes.

Ven. Anigha put it simple what we should do

“Knowing it” means you are aware of it's presence to the extent that neither succumb to it, nor do you overshoot it and act as if you're entitled to control the arising of pressure (SN 1.1)

With the other four hindrances, or other obstacles like self-identity, once I've identified them, it follows the realization of “such thing is not mine, not my doing, etc” (without having to think about it). Most of the times that's enough to not get dragged further. I keep contemplating the mind, and the hindrances tend to cease quite fast. If they persist long, I work as suggested in MN 20 until they are gone.

With drowsiness... I know it, yet I am likely to succumb to it. The MN 20 approach doesn't help me that much. Unless other hindrances, trying to trace back its origin gives me little insight - apart from the fact I'm lacking of energy, determination, and maybe faith with the practice. Most of the times I am not able to arouse the energy to get out of drowsiness, or if I do, it's only temporally, and after some minutes drowsiness came back stronger. Sometimes I try to contemplate the fact of dead, the fact that this change of being human and in touch with the dhamma is so rare, to develop a sense of urgency to get out of samsara... but they tend to become just a dull contemplation and I keep being dragged by drowsiness.

So, eventually I jump into the methods suggested in AN 7.61. The mechanical advice of taking a nap or washing the face with cold water and then walk for twenty minutes are the only solutions that work in most occasions - cutting the dullness for some hours. Yet, this falls into the “management” method.

Any suggestion to address this topic? I have read quite a bunch of material on this hindrance, but nothing that worked.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-29 05:15:24

I keep contemplating the mind, and **the hindrances tend to cease quite fast**.  
If they persist long, I work as suggested in MN 20 until they are gone.

This suggests that you're still operating under a misunderstanding of what the hindrances are. They are not specific objects that “cease” in that straightforward manner. As others have pointed out, that's management of sense objects, not uprooting of hindrances.

And what is the fuel for the arising of unarisen indolence-and-lethargy, or for the increase and growth of arisen indolence-and-lethargy? There is discontent, tiredness, yawning, sleepiness after eating, and mental sluggishness. Frequent attention not through the origin (*ayoniso manasikāra*) **in relation to that** is the fuel for the arising of unarisen indolence-and-lethargy, or for the increase and growth of arisen indolence-and-lethargy.

—SN 46.51

What this is saying is that the drowsiness itself is not the hindrance; it's your lack of perspective in regard to it that is. So what you need to do is stop indulging in the sleepiness without then wanting to not be sleepy, which is the opposite extreme. You do that by maintaining a simultaneous perspective of a subtler aspect of your present experience while the sleepiness is there, such as your bodily posture or the unpleasant feeling that's present (4 satipaṭṭhānas). And you sustain that perspective only to the extent that you don't get absorbed in the sleepiness, not more than that, and you certainly don't cultivate an expectation for it to ever go away.

The steadier you are in that perspective, the less the drowsiness will be problem or a hindrance, and the more the mind will be dispassionate and at ease within the same situation.

And it's the same principle for all the other hindrances, which means you weren't really abandoning them. You were just suppressing that which *triggers* the hindrances, and now you encountered the one trigger that's not in your control.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-30 05:22:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

What I meant is “once I’ve identified a mental-object (feeling or thought) related to/powered by a hindrance [...] I keep contemplating the mind, and such mental-object tend to cease quite fast”.

Still, you seem to think that their ceasing matters, which it doesn't. In fact, you could say that if they cease, you have no criterion to tell whether your mind is actually calm and composed or not. So getting them to cease is even counterproductive.

Management means “acting out of the mental objects” and uprooting/endurance means “contemplate the mental objects without being affected by them”, right?

Not necessarily. You could be “contemplating the mental objects without being affected by them” still with an implicit view that the *objects* carry any amount of blame for the unwholesome states, and that would still be management even if not as crudely.

Uprooting of craving as opposed to management means recognizing that none of those arisen things are the issue; *ayoniso manasikāra* and not enduring them rightly is the issue.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-30 16:29:18 (in reply to a comment not included)**

the unwholesome state come from my inability to remain equanimous and keep the right view in regard of such objects, which means that I react - even

without noticing it. It is this reaction the one creating the unwholesome state and the *issue to be cared of*. Is that right?

Essentially, yes. And the “reaction” is already the view and context that you carry, even if you don’t explicitly choose to do this or that.

Well, what mattered is that while contemplating without (being aware of) acting out of them I didn’t get dragged further, as opposed to drowsiness.

Yes, you didn’t get “dragged further”, but for the wrong reason (i.e., because you got rid of the pull, not because you anchored yourself well enough to not be dragged in face of the pull). If it was the right type of equanimity, it would’ve worked in the case of drowsiness too, since there is nothing fundamental setting it apart from the others. They’re all equally bodily phenomena that the mind/context is either unaffected by not (which is the sole factor determining whether they’re hindrances or not). And from that point of view, “fast” or “slow” simply do not apply, because being affected is measured by a *choice* you make in regard to whatever has arisen, and ceasing to make a choice does not take time whatsoever.

So whether it’s restlessness or drowsiness, what you need to do is take what has arisen as a given, and simply make sure you don’t lose perspective for as long as it lasts, even if it’s for 10 years. It won’t matter how long it lasts if you establish the right attitude, because the right peace and samādhi come from the absence of craving, not from getting certain experiences and avoiding others (and quick movements of mind and drowsiness are not craving in themselves). And that’s why *this* type of samādhi frees you from all suffering in regard to anything that could conceivably come your way, no matter how extreme or unexpected.

This talk might be helpful.

(Note also that this right attitude needs to be sustained for a prolonged period of time for the mind to calm down; it’s not that the second you get it right you’ll feel peaceful. That’s why faith is essential; without it, you won’t be able to “stay” in that middle ground but will fall into either indulgence or management of the arisen states).

## The dangers and compromises of the crowded and dusty household life

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** like\_a\_raft 2024-05-25 07:55:59

Greetings,

I’m an engaged father existentially torn by the compromise that I’m accepting by choosing a busy householder lifestyle.

What follows is a narration of the events from the last few years that lead to this situation, accompanied by some considerations and questions.

I would be very interested in reading the perspectives and advice of this community, both on my personal situation and on the general topic of practice and close family relationships.

Discussing personal circumstances and choices of a stranger on the internet could be perceived as a delicate matter so I would like to give green light to frank or even stern comments, if deemed helpful. I assume the responsibility for receiving the feedback skillfully.

Before getting to the story, I would also like to express my gratitude to all the contributors of this supportive and insightful community.

### **A short history of the last few years**

I'm 33, European living abroad in another European country, in an intimate relationship, father of a 2,5 years old boy. My journey with Buddhism started in 2016 in a period of existential crisis, depression and anxiety with the books of Ajahn Sumedho. Buddhism played a central role in helping me recover my mental health. Not so much through meditation but by showing me that the anguish over the fundamental lack of control on my health, mind and ultimately life was not the sign of a pathology but the natural consequence of starting to see life as rooted in apprehension and ignorance. Easier said than done though, I had to spiral down all the way to the bottom, my attempts at management and control of the mental space swept away, so that I had no choice but to face the extent of my vulnerability and ignorance. That forced surrender might have felt like dying but life went on. I slowly came out of that dark period with increased confidence and I gradually nurtured enough energy and courage to leave my country and to travel in order to "find myself" and to find a place where to settle and start a new life.

I landed in my current country at the end of 2019 and just three weeks later I met the woman that is to this day my partner. On October 2021 she gave birth to our son. With the demands of having and raising a child together our relationship was put to a test. Our true characters and entrenched views and values emerged. On my side Buddhism started to re-emerge and worldly engagement to diminish. On my partner side the physical exhaustion and a rough return to work solidified a situation of depression. As a couple we lacked the common ground and communication skills to navigate the tough situation we found ourselves in. We were swamped.

### **Notable recent events**

The crisis lasted for months and reached a turning point last November, when we decided to take a one-week break. After that we resumed with renewed energy and commitment to try better. The first half of December was a period of cautious optimism after two years of struggle.

In the second half of December I spent one week in a sort of retreat as a lay supporter: one monk (currently residing in Samanadīpa) spent two months in a winter refuge supported by a rotation of 2 to 5 lay people. This event turned out to be unexpectedly impactful on me. The monk shared with me his monastic experience and the transition toward HH/Samanadīpa. I recall telling him that a few months earlier I came across a video from Ñāṇamoli and proceeded to read a bit of his latest book. While I was intrigued by



the clarity and power of his exposition I put it down because it sounded too self-assured, a level of confidence that I was not used to within Buddhist contexts. I assumed that something had to be off considering that the most respected monks of the Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah were all adopting a more cautious approach. The monk suggested me to consider giving it a second try, all while maintaining my alertness and critical sense.

In a table in the corner of the main room there was a printed copy of the essay from Venerable Anīgha “Sīla is samādhi”. To call it eye-opening is an understatement. I felt like I found the answers to the deepest questions I had about Buddhism and meditation since the beginning of my search. I felt an intense trust in the concepts and the practice explained in the essay, I could not detect any “red flags” or weak points to anchor my general tendency to skepticism. I use the word *feeling* since *understanding* as a puthujjana is an elusive concept. This said I knew in which direction to strive after coming home from the retreat: first, with new-found clarity on the role of virtue, examining and improving my conduct with regard to precepts. Parallel to this, investigating further the teachings of Ñāṇamoli, Anīgha and the other Hillside Hermitage monks.

Along with this, with time for reflection during the retreat, it became clear to me that the option of a second child was off the table.

But...Samsara stroke back and just a week after my return we found out that my partner was pregnant. The result of recklessness in that short peaceful period at the beginning of the month. We had multiple factors pointing to a very low risk of pregnancy (also based on the experience with the first one). Yet low is not zero.

This said it would be simplistic to consider it just recklessness, we both had a shared nebulous aspiration to have a second child and the awareness that the biological clock was running. Considering the already difficult situation we had we knew that it would have been extremely distressing for everyone involved for a few years. But we also imagined it to be a preferable long term scenario for the kids to have siblings, and for the family to be bigger, especially in case the parents would separate. If this doesn’t make full sense it’s because these were instinctual considerations for the most part.

Not taking precautions was a sort of semi-conscious yet intentional distraction from the burden of a choice with complex implications. Eluding the responsibility of choosing between actively trying to have children or carefully refraining from risking. During the retreat I had some space to listen to myself, to see this dynamic from a distance and to resolve to put a stop to it. But it was already too late. Few things in life remind us of the extent to which we are heirs to our actions as sex. A few minutes of pleasure leading to a new life coming to this world and multiple lives getting further entangled in the wheel.

The first trimester of pregnancy was, as it’s often the case, very hectic. For my partner nausea and emotional ups and downs. As for me, I was determined in pushing us to face our relationship issues and at the same time I was restraining sex as much as I could, and similarly reducing my social life, entertainment and distractions. It sounds like the recipe for a (mundane) disaster, and indeed it was. With the increased pressure the relationship with my partner steadily deteriorated. At the end of March we broke up, with the awareness that it would only be a partial and ambiguous separation due to the children.

During this phase I was reading Ñāṇamoli books, most of the essays and many threads in here, the Youtube videos became a daily Dhamma talk, and I got much pondering on sensuality, relationships, sex and how to conduct myself as a partner and father. The struggles I was facing were actually confirming the validity of the practice, as I could see that all the worldly pressure that we were experiencing could not be solved by worldly solutions or meditation. Those domains could either temporarily mitigate the suffering or suggest a new arrangement with slightly less suffering. Projecting this over the years or the decades I found it unsatisfying, simply put I couldn't believe in this approach. Other insights came from the stricter virtue that I was upholding and that heralded a crisis of sex. With the crisis of sex the myth of romantic love showed all of its fragility. Without the cover-up of unrestrained sensuality the problems could press with all their weight and could hardly be avoided. We realized how different our values and aspirations had become and our hope for a future together reached its minimum point.

Going to back to the break-up and its fuzzy nature. On one hand it's very easy for it to be just a nominal thing, since we are committed to being parents together and with physical proximity and the fluctuation of feelings, we are basically guaranteed to "fall" again for each other (as it's been partially happening in the last days). On the other hand after two months of break, despite the stronger cravings for sensuality and the intoxication that accompanies them, I'm stable in the conviction that, as far as the two of us are concerned, we would be better off separating our lives completely. She could find a more aligned partner. I could pursue a lifestyle more suitable to training.

### **The predicament**

The matter of fact is that as there are father and mother, there are son and (in three months) daughter. The bonds and needs of these four people become stronger and more complex than those of just a man and a woman. Juggling such a situation is already challenging in a conventional scenario, stark differences in values and desired lifestyle among the partners make it prohibitively hard. This is the crux of my conundrum. Not that it is unique to me, it's actually a common situation that millions have faced before and that millions face today. The romantic relationship becomes the easy part to figure out compared to the implications on two human beings that are not self sufficient. All of this distress and struggle ultimately coming from ignorance and liability to the craving for procreation.

If I were to ask for advice for my predicament, the most simple way to phrase it would be: "what should I do?" To which the clean, unadulterated, answer seems to me to be: give all you have to your family, leave everything and go forth. Or at the very least sculpt a lifestyle that would allow to live as similarly to a renunciate as possible. If one could commit to that decision with unremitting determination, that would be it, given that the kids and the mother will not risk their lives.

I can see a few problems with that. First of all I would not do that *fully* for the right reasons. More or less consciously there would be the intention to dodge the burden of responsibility and of the many duties. In my puthujjana view that would make the action unwholesome, rooted in the desire to not reap the fruits of my unwholesome actions. On

top of that I don't see myself as able to sustain a fully renunciate lifestyle while enduring the sting of remorse for abandoning my family. I can see that avoiding remorse is not a good reason to choose the householder life. I decide it to be such out of aversion for the displeasure of remorse and the pressure of societal norms and morality. Yet I can't deny the right-in-front-of-me reality of this suffering, I can't reason it away and I think that I wouldn't be able to endure it in the long term.

I would phrase my question like this: what is the best among the inferior alternatives that one has to choose from when deciding to remain a father householder? How to minimize suffering for the all parts involved considering the limitations in my virtue, wisdom or faith in the Dhamma?

You can stop reading here if you want, this is already quite long. Below are some notes of mine, attempts at tackling the thorny situation. Plus a couple of very recent developments.

### **Some considerations that I made in the past weeks**

These are more explorations of different scenarios, to investigate my inclination and reactions, rather than thought-out solutions.

I don't have much doubt regarding the first months of the newborn, I'll be there and do my part. The doubts arise when thinking about the vague "mid-long term".

I could try to keep a clear distance, be available when needed, but not on a daily basis as an "engaged" father. Or having a schedule with days for family and days for seclusion. Is that sustainable? Is it imaginable that my partner would accept to carry this uneven burden? If I saw them struggling and I had the desire to help more, should I refrain from doing so?

As a more extreme variation of the above I could move away from family, keep sustaining them financially and only occasionally visit them, provided that my partner would be willing to see me. This seems just a strictly worse alternative to becoming an anagarika, as I would keep the family/relationship door half-open while not taking steps toward the renunciate life.

I could commit to continue as a father until the newborn is past the critical phase of the first 1-2 years and then detach. But commitments for the future don't truly exist, you can only commit in the present. In the future it will be a new decision. And likely not any easier than now. Is there truly a better moment for kids to lose the constant presence of the father? These are for the most part mundane considerations that would in any case openly oppose the idea of the father disengaging from the life of their children.

The only option that I see having the potential to support my practice goes in the opposite direction of what I mentioned so far.

Since I have a good amount of savings I could provide for myself and my family (my partner is also earning a solid salary) for quite some time without working. I could resign from work and dedicate my time to either practice or family. If I can't fully choose between family and practice, I can then choose to not pursue other things outside of these

two. This could help in a few ways:

- more time, of course. Although it's all to be seen whether I will manage to spend this time wisely.
- pressure on myself, financial and societal.

I've always been a conscientious person, saving, restraining my expenses in gratification and status. The main reason for this was the famous safety net, preparing for the worst, but also giving myself more options for future decisions, without having money as a constraint. The flip side of this is that it favors an orientation toward the future and attachment toward savings, nurturing a misplaced sense of safety. Seeing the finances that I accumulated going down will induce stress and anxiety, possibly a good subject of contemplation.

When it comes to work, my conditioning and the societal consensus would agree that not to work is reproachable, a choice that denotes a lazy or immature person. In the case of a man or a father it would acquire an even stronger connotation, of failure, of going against the way things are, including the word of the Christian god that still influences us all. Going against this particular grain of the world would be a remarkable source of pressure and as such a further dimension of training.

- pressure on the couple: this is quite evident. If sex is one of the pillars of worldly love, a mutually advantageous financial and status arrangement is another. Many women don't need a man to earn as much as possible in absolute terms, but they would definitely want for their man to earn as much as *he can* without sacrificing family. I'm not judging here, but money plays an important role in the level of reassurance and trust that most women feel towards men, thus leading to attraction and attachment. Willingly renouncing a salary is throwing a wrench into the mundane happiness and stability of a couple, possibly even more than abstaining from sex. Another source of pressure, one that could accelerate the couple toward its destiny. Another subject for contemplation.

What is clear to me is that regardless of how the specific family/relationship situation will look like, I should make the establishment of the Eight Precepts my main aspiration in the practice. More on this in a minute.

### **Latest developments**

I wrote the first draft of this post few weeks ago. In the meantime two things happened:

- I had a couple of conversations with my partner. I made it clear that I don't want to "get back together" as a "traditional couple". At the same time I'm of the opinion that if sex is in the picture, then it doesn't really matter how you call the relationship. We both know that we are in a partnership for the kids. From my side it feels like a tender friendship that becomes unstable and unclear in its nature due to the pull of sexuality. It's surprising how little remains about romantic love once you imagine to remove sex from the picture. Striving toward and sustaining celibacy is going to be a hard endeavor for me, but I see that as a necessity if I want to make progress.

Celibacy seems unattainable with the current situation and my level of development. At the same time I can't accept not striving toward it. How to approach this situation? Any insight on this subject is particularly welcome.

- Just few days ago we signed a rental agreement for a house in the suburbs, a much calmer area compared to the city. The kids needed a bigger place, this has to be done regardless. But the practical implication is that I go back to fully living with my partner and I can only assume that this will bring complications alongside the practical advantages. The upside is that the new environment is quieter, slower and less proliferated in sensuality compared to the city.

It's time to put down the pencil, one last comment connecting with the initial paragraph: I would not share such a personal and sensitive topic in 99% of communities, including Buddhist ones. I would be basically assured to come across as either socially maladjusted or thoroughly misled on what the Buddha said ("you are a lay person so feel free to enjoy responsible sex with your partner"). Yet even in this community I got to see that the topic of family and detachment remains a delicate one. I appreciate the different perspectives on the subject. And once again I would like to clear the way for forthright comments if any comes to mind.

Thank you for your attention and insights, may you all progress steadily in the Path.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-26 09:47:33**

What's most important is that you hammer in—not only once, but on a daily basis—the recognition that every bit of effort you may put into these worldly affairs is effort that you're not putting into the Dhamma (the Dhamma that truly matters: "the relinquishment of all appropriations, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna"). The worst possible outcome of all would be if you allow yourself to ignore that and think you're developing both opposite goals at once, which is what most "practicing" lay Buddhists do so as to get an easy way out of the mental dissonance that would be otherwise (rightly) be there. Naturally, that is the least *unpleasant* outcome, but how things make us feel is by no means a criterion for their rightness.

The Buddha did not regard it as automatically wrong for a father to abandon his children (Ud 1.8), and he himself did so when he went forth. That's not to say that doing so is inherently skillful, of course. If you try to cover up the burden of guilt, and there is that sense of *escaping* from your responsibility, then it will be an unwholesome decision. If leaving it all behind feels like a *relief* rather than the taking on of a much greater burden, then that's a red flag (though not necessarily any worse than continuing to nurture passion and lust that will be even harder to undo later, so that still doesn't mean it's better to stay).

The points made in this video apply almost verbatim to this scenario too (and perhaps it's useful to consider that, unlike parents, the Buddha never made wife and children a potential obstacle to ordination, even though the complaints and accusations leveled at the Saṅgha were surely not few).

Now, if that's too much to handle for the time being, the next best thing (which would still be a compromise but not an insurmountable one) is to take on the 8 precepts as a layperson, and make sure that you don't make further decisions that will interfere with that or make it more difficult than it has to be. So, living together with your partner would be very ill-advised from that point of view, even if the intended purpose is to support the children.

The least difficult thing to do in your situation that would still provide a realistic opportunity to gain the Right View would be to live apart from your children and provide financial support from afar, perhaps seeing them from time to time, but it's not a guarantee that split parenthood would result in a better situation for the kids in the emotional dimension than if you were not there at all. It can just result in more conflict and confusion, and on top of that you would hardly be anything but a bore for them to be with if you're committed to sense restraint. It will also force you to keep working, which takes up a gigantic chunk of time that is, from the point of view of Dhamma, mostly going down the drain. So you would end up doing two things mediocrally instead of one of the two properly.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-27 05:10:33 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Of course it's a crucial consideration, and that's why I made sure to emphasize that it's not a decision to take lightly. My aim is not to tell OP what to do, but simply to make him clearly understand that if he does choose to *truly* prioritize the welfare of his children—which he is free to do, but it would require him to live with his partner and make that relationship work out at all costs—he cannot realistically hope to realize the Dhamma (that is taught in the Suttas at least) for many years or even decades to come, if ever.

Any age deemed “appropriate” to leave one's children would ultimately be arbitrary and objectionable, and there is no reason why one wouldn't get carried away well past that point and then decide that it's still too early (or too late) to step away. Passion and attachment will grow; they won't stay static. On the other hand, I doubt that a child who realizes their father stayed only the minimum amount of time to fulfill an external obligation and then left would feel less hurt than one who doesn't even remember their father.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-28 05:49:06 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Maybe I can keep it grounded with this question: toward the end of the thread I mentioned the possibility of not working or working half-time, since I could support myself and my family for some time using my savings. What would be your perspective on this?

That would improve the outlook very little unless you would be celibate and probably limit your role almost solely to financial support. Practically speaking, according to what you've written, it's unlikely that you would succeed in that unless you live separately. Fur-

thermore, living with them will inevitably be impeding your mental clarity and biasing whatever decision you make. So it would be advisable to step out for a prolonged period of time (for the next three months at minimum might be a good start) if you want the choice to be “yours” to the greatest possible degree, whatever that choice ends up being.

It’s also not just a matter of what will obstruct your practice *right now*, but how the attachment will inevitably grow if you succumb to the amount of it that’s already there. Despite how difficult it may feel to disentangle yourself now, you can’t expect there to come a point where the bond is any weaker (unless unexpected events *forcefully* disentangle you, but that’s obviously neither desirable nor a safe bet).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-28 05:59:45 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

If I genuinely think that going forth is too much for me now and I decide to do my absolute best as a layman *as a way to prepare myself for going forth in the future*: could there be some wisdom there or is just a rationalization to not deal with pain and regret now?

Depends on what you mean with as “as a layman”. Continuing to live and engage emotionally with your family would be the opposite of preparation for renunciation, and you could only take it as such by gaslighting yourself and ignoring what’s actually happening to your mind.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-30 05:06:55 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

In the second paragraph the comment is “so you would end up doing two things mediocrely instead of one of the two properly.” I’m not sure how to reconcile the two.

The point was that taking your kids as a reason to stay a layperson but still caring about the practice enough to do what it takes to succeed in it will prevent you from doing either of them to the best of your ability. Either way, in terms of Dhamma, the compromise is not insurmountable, as I said.

The “not making further decisions” includes not seeing the children more frequently than “from time to time”, correct?

I wrote “further decisions” mainly in relation to committing to live with your partner and allowing the bond to grow; that’s the main categorical impediment to progress. With the kids it’s not set in stone as much. It would depend more on your intention behind spending more time with them. If it’s something practical that you had little to no say in and it’s not you *seeking* it out of passion, then it wouldn’t necessarily be an obstacle.

The thing is that 8 precepts + not seeing the children + “social” seclusion (because any contact outside of strict necessities would be “company” and thus

breaking the 7th precept) + not having any mentor/noble friend to keep an eye on me seems not only brutal but possibly dangerous.

You don't have to take on everything at once. If you're able to remain celibate and sever romantic ties, and tailor your environment to support that decision, you can regard that as a success for the time being. Over time you can refine it. But failing that, nothing else you do afterwards can make up for it.

Here with "step out" it's meant keeping a significant distance (living separately, helping only with strictly needed things) or complete separation?

At least living separately and meeting only when there's a true need. That would allow for more mental clarity than you have now.

I'm trying to understand precisely where is the threshold for having some progress and where is the maximum that I can give as of now. If the distance for this is too big, at least where is the threshold for \*not regressing\*.

Of the options you gave, option (c) would probably be the maximum realistically speaking, and it would still allow you to reevaluate later on. If you really want to avoid getting caught in quicksand, however, you'll need to have nerves of steel, and during those three months regard yourself as a hired worker who's there exclusively to fulfill practical duties and nothing more (and it would help if you made that clear to her in advance). That would be the context you'd need to protect like your life depends on it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-06-02 14:31:43 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I'm anguished. Since your first reply last Sunday, it feels like grief. Moments of denials, bargaining, depression. And it seems that it started to *really* burn just from Friday. My words were carriers of a lot of pain and tension, like many times before in the last few months. The physical tension going to her body, the belly hurting, knowing that this is not good for the child. It's hard to not feel like you are actively hurting not another human being, but two of them, the two most vulnerable categories. The words of Thaniyo Thero about harming people that depend on you coming to mind.

Just to re-clarify, you don't *have* to do this. There's no external authority or moral code that's going to punish you for choosing to maintain the status quo.

Should I be there for her if she has a crisis? Whether she needs to talk or she needs help with the child. I'm going to help with the moving in around a week. Can I be kind to her like I could be to a friend? That would probably be confusing for both of us. Once she will give birth, can I hug her and tell her something nice?

I can't be fully certain from my perspective, but your hesitation suggests that you might not be entirely sure about this decision. You should be sure that if you choose this path,



it's because you know clearly that you value the liberation of your own mind above all else. This way, you won't second-guess yourself in the future, or at least you'll have a stronger foundation when doubts and regrets inevitably arise.

This doesn't mean you're justified in doubling down on your investment in your family because you're not sure, but just that you probably shouldn't make permanent decisions just yet. If you choose renunciation, ideally, you should have the internal confidence and certainty to stay committed to that path even when things get tough, without relying on something or someone else to motivate you. You don't want to end up in a position where you realize somewhere down the line that your renunciation was propelled by a temporary inspiration.

Regardless, just to reiterate, make sure you don't deceive yourself into thinking that at some undefined point in the future renunciation will be any easier than it is now, or that you'll be able to "have your cake and eat it too" (i.e., reach significant milestones in the Dhamma *while* valuing and pursuing sensuality).

The first consideration is: can "staying as an engaged father" be *ever* the right answer? Is there a world, outside of risk for survival, where it could be the correct decision? It seems not.

Depends on what you mean with "correct". If you mean aiding or at least not hindering progress on the path, then no, it's never correct. But again, it's not a sacred commandment that you *have* to progress on the path. It's up to you.

The second consideration is about how to deal with my current status in terms of talking/writing with other people. Making it clear that ideally I shouldn't look at others to help me carry the weight of this.

Yes, "ideally". But this situation is already far from ideal, so if you end up going through with the decision and use the support of other people as a temporary crutch you know you need to give up eventually, it's still a net win.

And now I get to the main question. How should I regard writing as a tool? Both to myself, personal notes like the ~30 I wrote in the past couple of days. And comments here in this forum. Is it skillful? Is it simply a thing that I can accept although not ideal?

Same applies to this.

## Dhamma Essay: Unyoked from Biology

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-05-24 06:04:48

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-24 13:32:08

There was one paragraph which for some reason got misplaced ("The points here established also serve to highlight why the approach taken towards..."). It's fixed now.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-24 15:47:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

A good number of exchanges with you on this sub have shown that you're set on your interpretation of the Dhamma and will stand by it even when shown Sutta passages that, if not outright disproving it, at least challenge it (as present throughout this essay too).

Given this, I suggest we spare each other the time and effort and simply agree to disagree.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-25 03:40:41 (in reply to a comment not included)**

What you're referring to as "decision making" is a phenomenon far more elaborate than what is called "intention" in the Suttas. Intention proper (*cetanā* or *saṅkhāra*) operates on the level of things that ordinary people would regard as "involuntary" although they're not, such as breathing and thinking, and ultimately the defilements.

So yes, an Arahant's ability to make intelligent decisions in the world might get impaired by a brain injury, but that cannot possibly force them to have a wrong attitude in relation to the phenomena they experience, and because of that, none of those decisions would involve craving or unskillful motivations.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-25 06:20:48 (in reply to a comment not included)**

if i had misrepresented the suttas, i would hope that someone would bring this to my attention rapidly.

Hours have been devoted to this both by me and others, with copious Sutta references, and somehow we keep coming back to square one every single time, which is why I at least have given up.

The main problem is that you fail to understand even the meaning of the points we make accurately, regardless of whether you agree with them or not, and you never seem to make an effort to rectify that. Therefore, almost all of the arguments you present believing they're valid rebuttals are basically straw-men or red herrings. The fact that you're unable to grasp the ideas being offered at least theoretically, let alone recognize that you don't understand them, suggests that you hold to your view(s) much more tightly than you are perhaps aware.

there is no need for anyone to get upset or antagonised at my words - **they are not my words; they are the buddha's words**

And then you make statements like these while often attempting to present yourself as a humble figure. Anyone with whom discussion is worthwhile would be at least willing to acknowledge that what they're putting forward is an *interpretation* of the Buddha's words, even if theirs factually happens to be the right one.

I'm sure there's hundreds of people who have come across this sub, familiarized themselves with the teaching, and chosen to disagree with it, without going out of their way to push their views, regarding themselves as an emissary of the Buddha with the task of protecting (what they believe to be) the True Dhamma.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-26 05:09:52 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Our attitude towards phenomena has no biophysical underpinnings?

If you step back “peripherally” enough to determine what that attitude towards phenomena is, then no. That's why ignorance comes first in *paṭiccasamuppāda*; it has no underpinnings other than itself. If it were not so, freedom would not be possible, or at least would be a matter of circumstance (and thus not permanent).

ignorance is the state of being pressured by biology. Our biology pressures the mind to volitionally choose actions that causes harm which it accepts because of it's own ignorance. The mind of an arahant has fully understood the danger of those actions so the mind would never incline towards those things. It's not that the arahant is a metaphysical entity that has free will which chooses things in a vacuum but that the mind itself does not incline towards that direction through right understanding.

So that freedom is a negative freedom in that it is the absence of the pressure from biology. It is unconditioned because craving, ill will, and delusion no longer arise not because the arahant is somehow free from biology.

Yes, that's it. And, as said in the essay, one has to start at the level of bodily and verbal actions (virtue), but ultimately it extends all the way to the five hindrances, craving, and all these things that people generally would think just “occur” to them. They are also very subtle activities that exist due to the mistaken “taking up” of biology, thus the very first link in *paṭiccasamuppāda* goes: “With ignorance as support, activities are there”.

And that's also why the Suttas add the qualifier “anupādā” to Nibbāna: it always comes through “non-grasping” or “non-assumption”, and not by altering or manipulating your experience. And that non-grasping needs to be sequentially developed and understood through the Gradual Training; you can't just start “practicing non-grasping” one evening.

where is the line drawn, in the mental domain, towards things caused by the biophysical and that which is not. Reaching my hand towards my phone **with the intention to distract myself** and the acceptance of that intention beforehand, where is there something that is not caused by biological processes?

It's in the highlighted part. The state of dullness or lethargy due to a lack of stimuli was just biophysical, but your choice to grab the phone was *not* part of the biophysical state; otherwise, there would be no way for you to avoid doing it, just as you couldn't have avoided the state itself. But you *can* avoid doing it, the only problem is it results in displeasure and dissonance that the mind is not able to calmly endure.

In the same way, bhikkhus, an unlearned ordinary person, when struck by unpleasant feeling, sorrows, wails, laments, beats their breast and becomes muddled. They feel two feelings: one bodily and one pertaining to the *citta*.

Struck by that same unpleasant feeling, they resist it. Thus, the underlying tendency to resistance against unpleasant feeling underlies them.

Struck by unpleasant feeling, they delight in the pleasure of sensuality. Why is that? Because, bhikkhus, an unlearned ordinary person doesn't understand any escape from unpleasant feeling apart from the pleasure of sensuality.

—SN 36.6

Now, if an Arahant performs the same action (or any other) externally, it would also need to have a biophysical impetus, but the difference is that the mind would have remained absolutely unbothered even if they didn't do it (despite the potential pressure). Thus, they are perfectly free to either do it or not; neither would involve passion, aversion, or distraction. \*

The caveat is that most people unwittingly have (and practice according to) the view that this equanimity comes from suppressing the biophysical pressure to do things (the "first arrow" in the Sutta above). But as said in the essay, that's counterfeit liberation, which is why it's often available for much cheaper (sans steadfast virtue and renunciation).

\* And any action that contradicts the precepts, including incelibacy, is always performed *because* the mind would've been too disturbed by just enduring the biophysical pressure. Such things cannot be done with a truly equanimous mind, no matter how one rationalizes them. That's why an Arahant is completely beyond them.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-27 06:20:51 (in reply to a comment not included)**

A wise person is conditioned by his wisdom and understanding. When one becomes a student of the Buddha then one becomes conditioned by the path. One's very being becomes the path so all actions stem from path factors and therefore no longer goes against the path. So the path would be the foremost of all conditioned things.

Yes, the path is conditioned, as stated in the Suttas.

I guess at a certain point, one transcends even the path itself and one is no longer conditioned by either wisdom or ignorance. Actions are no longer necessary, whether wholesome or unwholesome.

That would be the case for an Arahant; they don't need to be intentionally be heedful anymore. But at the same time, that doesn't mean that they would return to breaking the precepts. Those actions can only be done on the basis of your mind not only being conditioned, but by the wrong things to boot.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-28 12:44:17 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Does this mean that fear response can't be triggered in him, or that he simply doesn't act out of it?

If there is not just no present action, but also no impulse towards action in any conceivable form, including mentally, then can it still be called "fear" even though the same sense of being under threat remains?

(Same for any other unwholesome state).

Complete freedom from fear does not mean the perception of a threat as a threat would not arise (which most people would tacitly assume is the problem and then try to mitigate and cover up). That significance and its pressure are in and of themselves not craving (see the quote from AN 6.55 given in the essay).

To know and see this clearly for oneself, one must acquire the Right View of a sotāpanna. It's the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, and it's precisely why only a sotāpanna understands what an Arahant is and how to become one.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-29 04:30:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

If he has completely let go of ownership of all assets (body and mental aspects), shouldn't that mean that he won't experience any threat even if his limbs are being cut off?

The "assets" he has let go of are the five aggregates, which includes things like the perception of threat. And it's precisely due to that perception that he would be able to, for instance, refrain from casually putting his hand on a fire, walking into a precipice, or putting other people's lives in danger. The lack of fear is measured not by his being a robot that only experiences "bare" sense perceptions, but by how there would be no internal anguish when he realizes that he's be unable to avoid a threat (and unpleasant feeling in general). That's where the lack of ownership manifests. Thus, yes, he *experiences* no threat, but that doesn't mean the threat is not "there" at all (same as when the Suttas state that in Nibbāna nothing is felt; that doesn't mean an Arahant has no aggregate of feeling).

Or are you saying that his body would still trigger a threat/fear response, but his citta would be completely unmoved because it does not see that fear response as "mine"?

You could say it that way (although you wouldn't call it "fear" if the citta is truly not moved), but it's important not to think that the intellectual understanding you may come to factually represents what an Arahant is. Without the Right View, that understanding will either assume that the Arahant still experiences things the way normal people do, which is certainly not true, *or* that Arahantship is measured by the aggregates being a certain way, which is equally not true. These are the two extremes that need to be transcended.

Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from form, the Tathagata dwells with an unrestricted mind (citta). Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from feeling... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from perception... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from activities... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from consciousness... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from birth... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from aging... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from death... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from suffering... Broken away, unyoked, and liberated from defilements, the Tathagata dwells with unrestricted mind.

Just as a red, blue, or white lotus born in the water and growing in the water, rises up above the water and **stands with no water adhering to it**, in the same way the Tathagata—broken away, unyoked, and liberated from these ten things—dwells with unrestricted mind.

—AN 10.81

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**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-05-20 19:54:23

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**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-21 01:15:10**

In such situations it's almost always best to avoid proselytizing. A person can only heed admonition or advice if they're already willing to admit that they're making a mistake, and you can't ultimately force someone else into that admission. It has to come from their end.

What you do have make sure, if you value the practice and developing your mind, is that you don't end up letting their behavior derail *your* determination to be virtuous, even if that ends up impairing the relationship.

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**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-05-20 19:16:32

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**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-21 01:47:25**

The issue might be that you're trying to understand and practice the Middle Way on the very acute level of thoughts without having sufficiently developed the necessary prerequisites. That's the main reason why people are not able to help but fall into either indul-

gence or denial in their attitude towards their experience even if they have all the right information.

So the way to make sure that you don't end up with a coping mechanism would be to focus on whichever stage of the Gradual Training you haven't fully completed instead of directly trying to approach these much subtler aspects of freedom from craving, and just stop worrying about those for the time being.

It's not uncommon for people to be virtuous, restrained, and withdrawn from unwholesome things *because* of their intense craving to become enlightened that they're hardly aware of (that's the driving force behind most of those temporary meditation retreats people do), and for as long as that *other* desire is what's keeping your actions in check, you won't actually be able to become enlightened (not in the way that matters at least). You need to get to the point where virtue and restraint have become your default *regardless* of your craving to understand the Dhamma in order for any attempts to see it to be fruitful.

Then you will have a basis that is actually "clean", and it becomes a matter of dealing with the residues and subtler defilements, instead of your practice top-to-bottom still being driven by passion as it is for most people. That is why the training has to be step-by-step: each next step can only be properly developed once the previous one is effortless and doesn't require craving and ambition to sustain anymore. Each "layer" becomes an "aggregate", i.e. something that's been built up beforehand and is now there on its own.

## A post worthy of revisiting ft Bhikkhu Anigha

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** ComprehensivePin6440 2024-05-19 18:23:48

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-20 03:27:28

Probably too abstruse and long-winded to be that useful even though the content is not wrong.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-22 05:03:55 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

Isn't Citta part of the All? I understand (maybe wrongly) that the training is about taming Citta in regards to the All, but if this is the All, it must encompass Citta, right? and then taming Citta would be looking for a particular setting of the All.

From the ultimate point of view, yes, of course, nothing can be outside of the All. But you never tame the citta by *trying* to make it calm down directly; that will always entail aversion to a feeling that has arisen on its own and will give rise to the calm of *management*. Instead, you tame it properly by completely abandoning any resistance against the presently arisen states as they are, any tendency to either accept them or interfere with

them. And that definitely does give rise to peace (a feeling, which of course has to be within the All) that wasn't there before, but it's not a peace from *replacing and obscuring* what was bothering you, which is how it usually goes. It exists in its own domain simultaneously with the disturbances (AN 9.42: "opening amidst confinement"). Sometimes the Buddha would use the metaphor of water drops sliding off a lotus. They cannot "stick".

- 2) I can find myself troubled by the same state of the famous example from Ajahn Nyanamoli, namely thinking "Did he mean this?" after someone said or did something. And when aware of that state I'm trying to control it and stop it "I shouldn't worry or doubt like that, the mind shouldn't proliferate like that".

When already engaged in proliferation, instead of trying to gain control over the situation, should one rather just observe the phenomena happening while knowing they are there because there is a body/mind there making it possible for them to be there, and enduring this context while the phenomena continues? I find that it is helping putting some distance with what is happening closely but I guess at times I'm doing it in the hope that I can get an unified mind back and that's probably where the issue lies.

Yes, what you should do is make the effort to recognize that you're suffering because you have this vague need to act with or against the doubt in *some way*, and that's your craving in relation to a feeling that arose on its own. So you remind yourself that the displeasure you feel there is not the issue, but rather the ignorance and lack of perspective that makes you blame it for your suffering. Recollecting the body as the simultaneous, necessary foundation of that unpleasant experience would be one way to keep yourself from acting both out of it and against it.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-23 11:53:09 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

My bad you probable meant taking them as "me, mine, myself" instead of accepting they are there and that it is fine as it is

"Not accepting" an arisen state simply means not doing what your craving inclines towards: indulging in it when it's pleasant, resisting it when it's unpleasant, and distracting yourself when it's neither.

## **Mind is the maker of all things ?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-05-14 15:59:53

After watching this short video about the first Dhammapada verse from HH, it got me wondering.

Indeed my whole experience, my whole world, is nested in the mind, requires the mind and is experienced through the mind. In this way we could say mind comes first. Yet,



HH also insists (and this is also found everywhere in the suttas) on the fact that the body comes first, that we need to discern this right order.

Both assertions makes sense to me. I experience this whole world in my mind, thanks to my mind and I'm subjected to it. But my mind is seated in a body (the contained one) that I can only experience thanks to a body (the container one) which is already there and that I can only infer. So in that way, the body as a container/peripheral definitely comes first and the mind comes second, and the experience of the body that I am familiar with (the one I perceive thanks to my senses), occurs in truth solely in my mind. Would that be a correct understanding ?

In fewer words :

“that body because of which” > Mind (mano/citta/6sb?) > the world and the perceived body

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-15 02:39:49**

But my mind is seated in a body (the contained one) that I can only experience thanks to a body (the container one) which is already there and that I can only infer. So in that way, the body as a container/peripheral definitely comes first and the mind comes second, and the experience of the body that I am familiar with (the one I perceive thanks to my senses), occurs in truth solely in my mind. Would that be a correct understanding ?

Not quite. Through this you would be conceiving “the body because of which”, the one that doesn't appear to your senses, as something that exists independently “out there” (the assumption of the outside world that is inherent to self view). It does appear to your sixth sense, no matter how vaguely, otherwise you couldn't talk about it.

Your mind is not “in” your body. Rather, the mind is that because of which you are able to hold any views, right or wrong, about where the mind is. It cannot be located in space.

Ultimately, you cannot build a neat theoretical framework that establishes either of the two as more primordial (in which case you could take that one as self), and that's fine because that's never the purpose of the Dhamma, which is easy to overlook in the process of trying to understand it.

The purpose of the Dhamma is to uproot passion and appropriation: if you incline towards taking your body as yours, you realize that it's impossible to have even the faintest recognition of that body if there were not a mind (that cannot be contained within it) allowing you to think about it. If you incline towards taking the mind as yours, you realize that without a body, there would be no mind. Even if that mind is not strictly “in” the body, it certainly cannot exist without it. Because, how would you be able to talk about “a mind” unless sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas are somehow involved? All of these, including ideas, are fundamentally bodily.

See SN 12.62 and SN 12.67.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-15 06:11:24 (in reply to a comment not included)**

In this particular instance can we call this relationship between mind and body as paticcasamuppada ?

Indeed. It's named as such in the two Suttas I referenced.

Why “*cannot*” be contained within it ? I mean, no brain, no mind, isn't it ? I think I miss a logical step here.

The mind is not the brain, otherwise freedom from craving, and even freedom of choice, would not be possible. I've just finished writing an essay on this which should be published soon.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-17 02:58:23 (in reply to a comment not included)**

“Bodily” (or, more accurately, bound up with the body) is not the same as “material”, which is an important distinction to make, and it's why the sixth sense base is also part of the body (SN2.26: the whole world is within this fathom-long carcass endowed with perception and mind). For us in this realm, the body is physical, and we have to start with what we have, which is a physical body that depends on coarse physical food. Only by understanding that and abandoning passion towards it would it become concretely apparent how there can be types of body that are not as coarse as what we're used to (this is implied in the Sutta you mention).

Even in the subtler realms you refer to, there has to be a “body” in the sense of something that is there, arisen on it's own, upon which consciousness stands and upon which it makes kamma, even if its purely perceptions and feelings. The relationship between “body” and “mind” (which are loose terms and not the way they're used in the Suttas) is the relationship between *namarūpa* and *viññāṇa*, said to be like two sticks standing upon each other in SN 12.67.

## **Withdrawal of Life Support equivalent to killing?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-05-05 16:15:41

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**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-06 03:15:10**

Sorry to hear about the situation.

Yes. Although not as weighty as violent murder, of course, intentionally withdrawing life support would be killing. The bottom-line is that it's entirely unjustified to assume that a

living being is in more pain when they're in a critical condition than when they're undergoing the final process of death. When the Buddha wanted to emphasize the severity of a certain feeling, he always used the expression “*dukkha* like that of dying”.

Even the most acutely painful *sensations* that you can conceivably experience with your still-functional nervous system cannot compare with the mental anguish of undergoing the actual breakup of the body and aggregates (which could last a long time). People who commit suicide invariably end up regretting it, because they realize death is not as quick and simple of an affair as they assumed it to be.

So you absolutely never want your volition to be directly responsible for another living being having to undergo that experience sooner rather than later. But people, as usual, have a tendency to act out of how *they* feel on an immediate level on account of seeing their loved one in pain, and have a hard time enduring that and maintaining a broader perspective.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-09 03:40:53 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

It's either he doesn't go on at all, or stays on until the end, (or the doctors remove him without my consent).

In terms of your kamma, neither of them would involve killing. Of course, if you had a realistic and feasible opportunity to save someone's life and deliberately chose to abstain, that could still be unwholesome kamma, but at worst it would count as an act of severe negligence, not outright taking of a life.

In this case, from what you say, there seems to be somewhat of a grey area when it comes to your responsibility. But the fact that you already know in advance that the doctors might be the ones playing god out of a legal obligation if you take that route would be one point in favor of not choosing it.

## **MN20 and management**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-05-05 12:36:15

Hello,

are the 5 ways of making detrimental thoughts subside presented in MN20 considered 'management', or are they 'seeing and applying the middle way'?

Is 'management' as presented by HH only talking about management of perceptions, or is this type of 'mind inclinations/proliferation management' included in it?

Edit: not sure why this HH picture is displayed here

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-06 02:45:07**

Management is not solely determined by *what* you do but also by *how* and *why* you do it. Anything, even an attempt to “endure” instead of “manage”, can become management based on one factor: are you trying to change what you’re feeling?

Being clear about when such an intention arises (which could be at any time, even though the contemplation has not changed) is how you would indirectly notice the tendency to “manage”, not by simply asking yourself whether you’re “managing” or not (because at first glance you will always think you aren’t, so that’s not a reliable criterion).

The purpose of these five strategies is to help you abandon the thoughts (i.e., mental *actions*) that are rooted in craving in regard to what you feel and perceive, not to replace what you feel and perceive altogether. That’s why after each instruction it says the mind becomes “settled, unified, and composed *internally*”, i.e., it has become dispassionate towards the *same* feelings and perceptions that it previously could not help but to take personally. The lack of disturbance didn’t come from conjuring up different feelings and perceptions that you happen not to be bothered by (which would be management).

And, again, that is why right development of mind *cannot* take place without unbroken virtue established beforehand. For a mind that cannot help but to act by body and speech when presented with acute pleasure and displeasure, the only way to be at peace is to not have that pleasure and displeasure arise *at all* anymore, so the underlying tendency for management (which will never be obvious to them; that’s precisely why they remain a victim to it) would be inescapable, even if the person does their absolute best to adhere to all of what I just wrote.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-07 03:54:04 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

And so, in a way, one is acting out of feelings and perceptions because one first have to recognize these feelings and perceptions (signs of the mind) and then have to want to stop them

No, you don’t need to think of it as “stopping” feelings and perceptions. Think of it simply as stopping your wrong *attitude* in regard to feelings and perceptions, undermining your passionate, averse, or distracted involvement with them while they remain.

In *cittānupassanā*, knowing a passionate mind as passionate mind, averse mind as averse mind, etc., is the “solution”, by which one abides “disengaged, not taking up anything in the world”. There’s no second step of “dealing” with it once you know it properly.

These 5 strategies are for exactly the same purpose, because it’s always your unwholesome thinking within the state of mind that’s the core issue; the state of mind itself is not in your control and will calm down on its own if you just endure it and stop acting out of it. But you don’t put the emphasis on the hope that it calms down (in which case you’ll be trying to manage it), but rather in the knowledge that even if it endures for a thousand years, you are doing all that needs to be done by simply not indulging and not resisting either.

Only then, when you are not giving in to it *nor* do you really care whether it calms down or not, will it actually calm down in the right way (because *you* gave up the craving that was nourishing it completely).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-07 08:46:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So, a passionate mind will by default always have the tendency to grasp to the signs and features related to passion, overly attend to them instead of just keeping them at the peripheral of the perception, that is what is pointed to by the term “unwholesome thinking”, right? And one recognizing this pattern correct this grasping by applying these 5 strategies?

The passionate mind will be *trying* to coerce you to grasp the signs and features conducive to more passion by actively taking them up with your thoughts, but you can always refrain from accepting because it involves your volition, and that’s all that matters.

It basically comes down to distinguishing a *vitakka* or “thought” (the operative word in the Sutta) which refers to your active, intentional engagement, and a *dhmma* or phenomenon, which is what has arisen on its own (mental state, pressure, feeling, and even specific images, memories, concepts, ideas, etc.). These five strategies are to dispel the former, not the latter.

Now you mentioned that knowing a passionate mind is the solution for not having to deal with it, does that mean that one have to apply these 5 strategies only when already overly attending to signs and features, but one who recognized the state of mind before overly attending to those, or even after having successfully disengaged this attitude, doesn’t need to “deal with it” anymore because he will not allow the grasping to occur in the first place?

Broadly speaking yes, as the Sutta says, you implement the strategies when you recognize that *thoughts/vitakka* of desire, aversion, and distraction are starting to take over (i.e., *you* are mentally acting out of what has arisen). If you succeed in abandoning those thoughts, then what you’re left with is simply knowing passionate mind as passionate mind, averse mind as averse mind, etc. There will still be thoughts about this, that, and the other, but the difference is they will no longer be *rooted in* the pressure of the mental state that’s still there.

Then you just stay with that and make sure not to “overdo” it (try to get rid of the mental state) nor “underdo” it (lose the restraint and start thinking unwholesome thoughts again), and at some point even that mental state will calm down.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-08 05:44:38 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Once one is able to properly recognize the state of mind and also to properly not grasp at the signs and features, without underdoing it or overdoing it, will the remaining work be clear and known without instructions?

No. “Properly” is always relative, and you have no way to know in advance how long you have to keep working and adjusting until you reach the necessary degree of “properly”.

## Jhana

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** VoliZivot 2024-05-02 21:51:27

Siddhartha prior to buddhahood trained all the way up to neither perception nor non perception. Still not being freed from suffering he went the way of the astatic. It's my understanding that to enter jhana one would have been freed from sensual desire since abandonment of sense desire and seclusion is what jhana is. If this is case, why did he go the astatic route if he had already surmounted sense desire? What am I missing here?

Grateful to anyone who takes the time to reply, and am very grateful for hermatige making the teachings public.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-03 04:29:07**

It's my understanding that to enter jhana one would have been freed from sensual desire since abandonment of sense desire and seclusion is what jhana is.

You don't have to be permanently free from sensual desire in order to enter jhāna.

The requirement is that the perception of danger in sensuality be solidified to the point where, *at that time* at least, your mind has no interest whatsoever in sensual pleasures of the past, present, or future (while you're still perfectly aware of the five senses and have not repressed your thinking; otherwise it doesn't count).

If this is case, why did he go the astatic route if he had already surmounted sense desire?

Without wisdom and external instruction, if you didn't clearly understand how vital the bodily and mental withdrawal from sensuality was to get you to that point, you might not prioritize that sufficiently from then onwards, and might think that the “experience” of jhāna arose due to something else (and that could happen even if you've received instruction, let alone if you haven't). Hence you wouldn't get it again.

Of course, he did eventually become an ascetic and even then he wasn't getting jhāna, and that's because external renunciation is only a prerequisite: the Middle Way is subtle and

very easy to overlook; it's not as easy as focusing on an object or engaging in a repetitive contemplation until a pleasant sensation suddenly arises.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-28 07:59:34 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

There is no way to know in advance because the defilements are not things that can be measured (simile of the adze handle). If the defilements were to be in the *way* sense objects arise for you, as it's often thought, then they would be measurable.

It's not even necessary to get to a certain jhāna; even the first one is enough, as shown by many Suttas. You would know you have practiced it sufficiently when despite having no samādhi, your mind is incapable of intentionally welcoming sensuality no matter how strongly it suggests itself—the understanding of its gratification, danger, and escape has been irreversibly cemented. Just like a man would refuse any attempt to be thrown into a charcoal pit, as the simile goes, you wouldn't even need to tell your mind to not delight in sense pleasures.

## **Right Disgust - why disgust can be practiced directly as an antidote and Metta cannot?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** aaimnr 2024-05-01 23:10:01

While watching the recent Right Disgust video I couldn't help wondering why Ajahn recommends using Asubha as a direct practice to counter lust, but many times advised against treating Metta as anything other than lack of aversion (so something purely negative). Also, contrary to statements made in the video on Asubha being practiced concurrently with desire being present, Bhikkhu Anigha made the following point in "Pervading the World with Friendliness":

"The Buddha therefore instructs that one should practice mettā only after the mind is already not overcome by ill will."

It would be consistent to treat Metta the same way - as an antidote to Dosa, just as Asubha is practiced as an antidote to Lobha.

Edit: Also, in more practical terms - just like a specific perception was discussed to counter lust towards the food, what would be an analogous perception to counter aversion, eg to specific people?

Thank you.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-02 05:10:50**

It would be consistent to treat Metta the same way - as an antidote to Dosa, just as Asubha is practiced as an antidote to Lobha.

At no point did he say nor imply that asubha is an “antidote”. Throughout the video, he makes sure to emphasize that the perception of disgust must not be misconceived as a tool to get rid of the pressure and significance of the beautiful things, which is what we tend to call “replacing” or “antidoting”.

Mettā should be practiced in exactly the same way: you’re not in any way trying to remove the unpleasant pressure of annoyance that has arisen in regard to someone—that can go on forever if it wants because it’s not the issue. You simply maintain a context of non-hate *despite* that displeasure.

In contrast to this, the typical way of practicing mettā goes overboard and tries to make that displeasure disappear altogether (implying a wrong view that that’s what ill will is), in the same way as asubha would be misused to *replace* the significance of beauty. That’s what an “antidote” is, and it’s not the Middle Way.

Bhikkhu Anigha made the following point in “Pervading the World with Friendliness”:

“The Buddha therefore instructs that one should practice mettā only after the mind is already not overcome by ill will.”

See the line that comes right afterwards:

The mind first needs to be able to remain steady all by itself **when encountering things that challenge it**, instead of needing to use mettā or any other form of meditation as an aid to ameliorate such things.

The point is exactly the same as the one made in the Right Disgust video. You need to be able to have the pressure present without your mind impulsively needing to *do* something about it right away, including “antidote” it (which is why the practice never starts with meditation, be it asubha or mettā, but with virtue and sense restraint; otherwise, everything you do will be superficial management). That’s why I wrote “**not overcome** by ill will” and not “**free from** ill will”.

Also, in more practical terms - just like a specific perception was discussed to counter lust towards the food, what would be an analogous perception to counter aversion, eg to specific people?

Well, firstly the example of the food was figurative. It was said with reference to pleasant sense objects in general, not in the sense that you should literally imagine someone spat on your food in order to give up lust for it (that would become a quintessential form of misguided management, and soon enough would become ineffective).

A perception that “counters” aversion could just be a simple recognition that not everything about the person your mind hates is bad. But, again, the caveat is you must not be trying to override the pressure and annoyance that arose, thinking that mettā is about *liking* the person. It’s not; it’s about not hating people even when they cause you immense displeasure (inasmuch as asubha is not about hating pleasant things).

And that’s why *any* perception would indirectly develop mettā, such as the context of the



body enduring behind that experience of anger, or even taking the mood of anger itself as the context. Basically anything that prevents you from “taking up” the possibility of anger while it endures, even if its not the direct opposite of it (and the same applies with asubha). Otherwise, the Buddha would’ve said that you can only abandon lust and aversion by cultivating asubha and mettā respectively.

Safety is found by making the mind completely immovable, not by dealing with the forces that attempt to move it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-02 07:33:22 (in reply to a comment not included)**

And I’m not sure why that would be bad, if rather than compulsively it would be made to provide the correct perception, to course-correct wrong view noticed in regards to some specific food.

Because it would be totally fabricated, and it would imply that the lust was somehow “in” the food.

An example of right perception in regard to food would be the simile of the child’s flesh, which the Buddha himself suggested. With that, you wouldn’t be trying to alter the perception of the food itself, but the whole context and motivation behind eating.

You could also contemplate how the food will ultimately end up when you eat it, but again, that would be on the level of the broader context of eating, not directed *at the loaf of bread* or whatever.

## Additional Training Rules

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sfimirat 2024-04-30 20:26:17

Hi everyone,

About twelve years ago I experimented with the Bodhicari precepts of the Kendall Buddhist group. In essence, these were additional training rules meant to help deepen one’s practice.

I have added some of these to the eight precepts and come up with the following fourteen precepts. (See below).

My question is this: do you believe this will be helpful?

Do you think it will actually be a hindrance?

1)Pāṇātipātā veramaṇīṃsikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living beings.

2)Adinnādānā veramaṇīṃsikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.

3)Abrahmacariyā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual activity.

4)Musāvādā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from false and incorrect speech.

5)Pisuṇāvācā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmiI undertake the Precept to refrain from backbiting.

6)Pharusāyavācā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the Precept to refrain from using harsh or abusive speech.

7)Samphappalāpā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the Precept to refrain from useless or meaningless conversation

8)Surāṃmerayaṃmajjaṃpamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drink and drug.

9)Vikālaṃbhojanā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from eating at the wrong time.

10)Naccaṃgītaṃvāditaṃvisūkaṃdassanaṃmālāṃgandhaṃvilepanaṃdhāraṇaṃmaṇḍanaṃvibhūsanatṭhānaṃ veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics.

11)Uccāṃsayanaṃmahāṃsayanā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi I undertake the precept to refrain from sitting or lying on high and luxurious seats and beds. 12)Micchājivā veramaṇīṣikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmiI undertake the Precept to refrain from wrong means of livelihood

13)Yāvajivam aham ratanattayam na niggahissāmi tatheva tam samādarena garukaram karissāmiṭi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. I undertake the Precept not to revile the Three Treasures [the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha] but to cherish and uphold them.

14)Karunupāya kosalla pariggahitānam dasapāraminam paripurana sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmiI undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-01 08:22:01**

The precepts on speech and livelihood should certainly be taken along with the standard 8 always. In particular, the abstinence from frivolous speech is one that deserves a lot of attention, since it's one that would train you to become very aware of the intentions behind your actions on the domain that's most proximate to the mind (speech) and is thus easier to overlook, while all the others apply to more obvious bodily intentions (or are easy to superficially emulate without any discernment of the underlying motivation, e.g., by always speaking with a tender tone, “non-violent communication”, etc.).

14) Karunupāya kosalla pariggahitānam dasapāraminam paripurana sikkhā-padaṃ samādiyāmiI undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill.

This one however should not be made into a “precept” as such, since the 10 perfections (if we just take each of them individually based on their connotations in the Suttas and not later traditions) are things that are entirely dependent on your discernment, and they cannot just be “performed” by anyone in a straightforward manner like the actual precepts can (not properly, at least). There’s no rigid standard by which adherence to them can be judged, and that’s why such things never come under the heading of virtue and precepts in the Suttas.

Virtue is not about the things you *do*, but the things you *don’t* do.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-02 03:47:02 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Sure, but there is a big difference between someone who does those “positive” actions *through* the context of permanently and completely abstaining from their opposites (which is the most important part), and someone who emphasizes doing the positive ones more than the abstinence. The latter may make you merit, but it doesn’t develop your mind (which is the point of virtue first and foremost; helping the world is secondary), and there’s a natural tendency in people to want to “compensate” for the occasional negative action with more positive actions, which is not how it works.

The virtuous person who has put the abstinence first wouldn’t feel a need to do the “good” things out of pressure and lack of confidence, so they would do them only in scenarios where they are genuinely wholesome (as opposed to only meritorious, which is not the same).

Also, the last two contain a slight but significant distortion. The Pāli doesn’t say he *only* speaks words that are conducive to concord, and *only* speaks gently. This is explained in MN 58.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-02 05:35:11 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Could you say what an undistorted translation would be, Bhante?

Basically just remove the “only”. Point being, one should adhere to that type of speech as the default. And even when you do speak in a way that *could* divide others or may be perceived as harsh, it should never be because you *want* to cause division and offend people, but because there is a greater purpose related to Dhamma that otherwise is likely to not be achieved (which is why you find the Buddha both turning people away from their former teachers and using not-so-gentle language at times)

(And if malicious intentions to divide others or to offend do arise internally, one should reconsider whether one has sufficiently understood the Dhamma one is promulgating).

## What about the so called “arupa jhanas”?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Belozersky 2024-04-29 19:14:34

I’m talking about the dimension of infinite consciousness, of nothingness, of neither perception nor not perception etc. What is HH stance on these things? I’m asking because it seems that these things are very important according to some suttas, and, at the same time, I personally wasn’t able to find any talk about the “arupas”.

I’m also wandering if they are connected with modern meditation techniques. For example, Ajahn Brahm teaches a kind of meditation where a practitioner loses the perception of the body, 5 senses (he excludes the 6 sense for some reason) etc., which sounds similar to the two latter “arupa jhanas”.

Thanks.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-30 03:42:18

I personally wasn’t able to find any talk about the “arupas”.

There’s a few talks that briefly touch upon the subject (such as this one), but it’s not emphasized because for nearly all viewers it will only amount to abstract information that they’re in no position yet to apply.

I’m also wandering if they are connected with modern meditation techniques. For example, Ajahn Brahm teaches a kind of meditation where a practitioner loses the perception of the body, 5 senses (he excludes the 6 sense for some reason) etc., which sounds similar to the two latter “arupa jhanas”.

Most definitely not. The ārupa attainments (they’re not “jhānas”) come about through developing the same principle as the 4 jhānas but on an even subtler plane (where, indeed, you wouldn’t be perceiving objects of the five senses, but for the complete opposite reason of being “absorbed” or “concentrated”; instead, you *widened* your perspective and context way past that domain). Hence it’s even more impossible for a person to attain any of those states “accidentally” or through a meditation technique, and they will remain completely out of reach just like the jhānas if one hasn’t fulfilled the previous steps of the Gradual Training to a T. As shown by MN 106, it all invariably starts with the abandonment of sensuality and the world.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-14 18:13:32 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

it seems that you are describing jhanas and arupa attainments as something progressive and connected

They're not "progressive" in nature. The formless attainments can be had without passing through the jhānas, as shown in Suttas like MN 121.

How would you explain the memory of the Buddha's jhana attainment in the childhood? He didn't resort to remembering his practice of arupa attainments, memories of which certainly were way more vivid. What's so liberative in jhanas but not in arupa attainments if they both use the same principle? Thanks.

One significant reason would be that the formless attainments do not involve pleasure. It was therefore possible for the bodhisatta to maintain his old view that all pleasure is unwholesome, even though technically his mind was developed in subtlety even beyond the jhānas. Developing one's mind is a precondition for purification of one's views, but it's not automatic.

But he did have enough discernment by that point to realize that the pleasure he experienced as a child from the first jhāna was not in fact unwholesome, and that brought him to recognize the Middle Way, i.e., change his view, and then basically start working his way up from the right starting point.

## Pabhasara Sutta

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** According\_Clerk2745 2024-04-28 14:50:27

AN 1.51–60: Accharāsaṅghātavagga—Thanissaro Bhikkhu (suttacentral.net)

” “Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is defiled by incoming defilements.”

How much of this is to be understood as it says above? There are various discussions regarding this sutta and I'm curious to know how the Bhikkhu's of HH will interpret this sutta.

Is the mind really Luminous originally or primordially? With right view and sila do we make it from Un-luminous to luminous again?

Or it's always been full of defilements and when we practice right view and sila we make it luminous as we go?

Would love to see how HH Bhikku's view this even if it's an explanation in brief.

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-29 04:36:41

The most practical implication of this Sutta is that whatever practices revolve around “fabricating” wholesome states (as mettā tends to be practiced) are inherently misguided. You would only do that if you don't understand that the wholesome states are being *obstructed* by the defilements (because you fundamentally don't understand what the defilements are) and all you need to do is uncover them by removing the defilements.

Hence the same Sutta says:

The uninstructed ordinary person doesn't discern that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that—for the uninstructed ordinary person—**there is no development of the mind.**"

It's like if there's some external dirt covering a light bulb and making it dimmer than it should be, and instead of just cleaning up the dirt, you try to turn up the voltage to make the light brighter. No matter how much you do that, it will never shine like a clean bulb would (with much less strain). And that's why there can be no right meditation without the right view.

Now, that doesn't mean that we're "already enlightened" and so on. It takes years of thorough virtue, restraint, seclusion, and constant questioning and upgrading of one's views to recognize how to actually wipe the dirt off the light bulb (=become a sotāpanna), and there is no way to bypass those prerequisites.

This talk also addresses this Sutta.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-30 05:56:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

"Friend Sāriputta, what is difficult to do in this Dhamma and Discipline?"

**"Going forth**, friend, is difficult to do in this Dhamma and Discipline."

"What, friend, is difficult to do **by one who has gone forth?**

...

See also:

"But what things must be developed and cultivated in order to fulfill the four foundations of mindfulness?"

"The three kinds of good conduct."

"But what things must be developed and cultivated in order to fulfill the three kinds of good conduct?"

"Sense restraint.

—SN 46.6

and:

I say that ignorance is fueled by something, it's not unfueled. And what is the fuel for ignorance? You should say: 'The five hindrances.' I say that the five hindrances are fueled by something, they're not unfueled. And what is the fuel for the five hindrances? You should say: **"The three kinds of misconduct." I say that the three kinds of misconduct are fueled by something, they're not**

**unfueled. And what is the fuel for the three kinds of misconduct? You should say: ‘Lack of sense restraint.’**

—AN 10.61

## Wrong Speech and Therapy

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sfimirat 2024-04-28 12:44:00

Hi everyone,

I have been having disagreements with my wife for some time. During the course of the marriage we have had counseling separately and individually as well as having spoken to our friends about our issues.

It now occurs to me that most of the talking in these settings were forms of grievance and expressions of resentment. It seems that talk therapy is uniquely conducive to speaking out of ignorance, desire and aversion. So much so that I am contemplating never participating in it again. It also seems to me that workshopping relationship problems with friends odd equally unskillful.

My question is this: is there ever a time when one wouldn't be engaging in wrong speech by speaking with a therapist or friend about one's relationship problems?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-29 05:06:13

is there ever a time when one wouldn't be engaging in wrong speech by speaking with a therapist or friend about one's relationship problems?

It would depend on why you're trying to repair the relationship. If it's for some purely practical purpose, then you could regard the unwholesome states you're facing as not inevitable—as something that you could abandon internally while you still participate in the therapy.

But if it's not out of practical considerations, and deep down you're doing it because you still want a good relationship with your wife *as wife* (at least emotionally), then there's nothing you can do internally to override the fact that you're *already* acting out of hindrances from the outset. The aversion and resentment you're experiencing are things that are already there, waiting to pounce, the very second pleasure of any kind becomes your motivation to act. That's one not-so-subtle form of “Trojan horse”.

## 8 Precepts

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sfimirat 2024-04-27 11:49:16

Hello all,

I have been trying to perfect my practice of the eight precepts but I have some questions I would like to pose to the community.

Due to my schedule it can be hard to get my eating in before solar noon. Provided I am limiting my eating to a certain time period (e.g. 11am to 7pm) would that be considered in keeping with the precept or should I train myself further until I can stop eating after noon?

In terms of deodorants and cologne, how strict should I be? I don't want to come to work smelling badly but I kind of feel that I'm definitely not following the spirit of the precept.

I have relatively little problem with the other precepts (although I have found myself singing along with my seven year old at times).

I think I already know the answers to my questions but I would appreciate your comments.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-27 13:16:15**

Due to my schedule it can be hard to get my eating in before solar noon. Provided I am limiting my eating to a certain time period (e.g. 11am to 7pm) would that be considered in keeping with the precept or should I train myself further until I can stop eating after noon?

The precept on not eating after noon is basically the only one that does not *necessarily* have to involve craving when you break it (quite a while certainly passed before the Buddhainstituted that rule for the monks; eating after noon is not one of the things an Arahant is incapable of). But practically speaking, for a mind that is not free from sensual craving, it will be much easier to practice moderation in eating (i.e. the right context of the mere intention to survive and stay healthy instead of enjoyment) if you limit your intake to one meal, or perhaps two, and within a certain period of the day.

If for practical reasons you can't accomplish that before noon, it's fine. It's not like 12p.m. is a magical number; it probably had more to do with how meals would be prepared at people's houses in ancient India, the lack of refrigerators, etc.

As for deodorants, even of the scented kind if nothing else is available, I wouldn't consider that a breach of the 7th precept if the intention behind it is simply to not smell bad as opposed to smelling good. Same with laundry detergents and so on.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-28 02:27:44 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Until you're at least anāgāmi, it's much more important that you focus your effort on disregarding other people's expectations and social conventions when it comes to sensual, aversive, and distracting things (i.e., not just the actions against the 8 precepts but also pointless company, frivolous speech, etc.).



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-28 19:30:45 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Although the Arahants may be capable of eating after noon, surely there would be some reason they would choose to abstain from it for life?

Yes, but that's referring specifically to Arahants who were living at that time. They would abstain from it for life because the Buddha made the rule, and furthermore, since no Arahants are householders, the whole alms round situation means that eating at night would have a strong *correlation* with caring too much about food: you were willing to go through the trouble of walking around in a dark jungle, and let several hours of your day be spent on eating. Because eating at night would always have meant having *two completely separate meals* for them, not one.

Eating in the morning is also just where things would naturally slant for someone who isn't overly concerned neither with food nor with other things that would make them need to uphold a specific schedule. Get it done as soon as possible and then forget about food (which you see more as a hassle than a source of pleasure) for the rest of the day.

Would a sick arahant with an illness requiring food in the evening for strength simply abstain out of respect for the rule?

Most likely yes, though it would also depend on the individual and the overall situation. Even if they could do it without any defilement, it's not worth setting a precedent of disregarding rules for others that might look up to them just to prevent some discomfort, or even death. Others may then be inclined to think it's OK to break rules when it's "necessary", and the criterion for "necessity" would sooner rather than later start to be arbitrarily decided, inevitably influenced by the ignorance and craving of the undeveloped mind.

surely that doesn't mean that the pleasant feeling (or any feeling) associated with an evening meal is by default unwholesome?

No, but in their situation it probably was, because of what I mentioned above. And according to MN 66, the finest meals would be prepared at night, not during the day.

And it's not saying that food entering your mouth during the night is inherently unwholesome regardless of the context surrounding it. It's that unwholesome qualities would tend to increase *as a result* of engaging with that pleasant feeling. Like spending most of your day in company instead of in seclusion.

## Vitakkasaṅṭhānasutta

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sfimirat 2024-04-26 12:51:06

Hi everyone,

My apologies if this has been covered already but I'm unable to find it in the search. I

am of the impression that Right Endurance/Effort means that we don't reject by moving towards or away from sense contacts but am still unsure of how that fits in with the advice given in the Vitakkasaṇṭhānasutta.

What is meant by the simile of the peg? Of crushing with awareness? How are these not managing pressure already arisen?

Thank you all in advance.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-27 04:23:57

How are these not managing pressure already arisen?

The main thing that must not be overlooked is the way that the Sutta starts:

“Bhikkhus, **a bhikkhu committed to the higher mind** should attend to five signs from time to time.

The Buddha never told people to even attempt to practice the higher mind *before* they were established in the higher virtue, which is why all discourses on meditation the Buddha gave are addressed to monks, and a very scant few to *noble* lay disciples like Anāthapiṇḍika.

Trying to purify unwholesome thoughts while there is still a willingness to break the 8 precepts is like meticulously guarding the gateway of a property that lacks an entire section of the surrounding fence. Even if your approach to guarding the gateway happens to be correct in its own right (i.e., you are not engaging in a meditation technique but are trying to follow what the Suttas say), the thieves already infiltrated the property a long time ago, and thus whatever you do at the gateway, no matter how skillful it is, is inevitably secondary and tangential (i.e., *management*).

Or, to use the Buddha's own simile, it's like putting gold ore—with stone, soil, gravel and all—directly into the crucible for melting, skipping the previous steps.

You don't even need to have “plans” to break the precepts at any concrete point in time to have a defiled mind. Let's say you're too old to be interested in sensual pleasures so there's no real chance that you'd be seeking them: if you *could* be willing to engage if you were to suddenly regain your youth, that right there is the hindrance of sensual desire at full volume, so anything you do without addressing that (including the five strategies in this Sutta) is irrelevant to the root issue. It's an obvious indication that the danger in sensuality has not been understood.

So *that's* the “thought of sensuality” that a person should be trying to get rid of first and foremost for all the rest to not be management. And you will know that you're actually “uprooting” instead of managing and covering up due to the uneasiness that would probably arise, and the fact that the mind does not want to even look in that direction.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-27 13:35:56 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Since it seems you're already keeping the 8 precepts, there's another point that may be useful:

As the sense restraint formula says, its purpose is to prevent states of longing and aversion from "flowing in". As in, it's supposed to prevent you from ending up in the position where you would have to "apply" any of the 5 strategies in the first place. However, everyone will of course be making mistakes from time to time, and the coarse unwholesome thoughts will end up arising, which is why the Buddha gave the discourse.

But it's important not to just stop at dealing with the thoughts (even if rightly), and to also reflect on *why* you ended up having to deal with them in the first place: recall the points in the recent past where you yourself ended up "opening the door" for such things to infiltrate your mind, through little careless choices that at the time presented themselves as harmless (because they were not against the precepts for example), but were already subtly rooted in losing the context and grasping at unwholesome signs and features (even if not strictly for sensual reasons, it could be out of restlessness, distraction, indolence, irrational doubt, etc.)

Those are the "Trojan horses" you would consciously allow free passage, which then make you end up having to deal with such intensified pressures to begin with.

## **New Essay: Restraining the Senses**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-04-24 04:58:26

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-25 10:14:08 (in reply to a comment not included)**

then your mind will still be liable to come to proliferate to the point of having the intention to lie at one point?

No, it's more subtle than that.

A better example would be celibacy, since sense restraint is primarily about lust and aversion. If you are not 100% sure that you will *never* engage in sexual activity no matter what, anything that you do when you encounter the signs and features that would incite those intentions (not just physically but mentally as well) would have to fall either onto the extreme of indulgence, or the extreme of management, such as doing asubha, watching your breath, contemplating the danger in sensuality, trying to "let go", etc., to *abolish* the enticing signs and features instead of simply *not grasping* at them. And that suppression equally entails a failure in sense restraint.

The prerequisite for right samādhi is to be able to withstand the pressure of sense objects without managing them ([1] [2]), and doing that without firmly established virtue will re-

sult in your bodily and verbal restraint crumbling. It doesn't count as a "firm establishment" if you still entertain even an ambiguous possibility of ever interrupting it, because nothing stops that possibility from actualizing when the pressure intensifies past a certain point, as it will.

When the wild elephant stands and sits when the trainer says, following instructions, the trainer sets the task called imperturbability. He fastens a large plank to its trunk; a lancer sits on its neck; other lancers surround it on all sides; and the trainer himself stands in front with a long lance. While practicing this task, it doesn't budge its fore-feet or hind-feet, its fore-quarters or hind-quarters, its head, ears, tusks, tail, or trunk. The wild bull elephant endures being struck by spears, swords, arrows, and axes; it endures the thunder of the drums, kettledrums, horns, and cymbals. Rid of all crooks and flaws, and purged of defects, it is worthy of a king, fit to serve a king, and considered a factor of kingship.

—MN 125

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-25 13:17:51 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

If it's so subtle, how can you ever reach the point of absolute 100% certainty? Especially with more subtle restraint breaking, like emotional eating or as suggested, telling a lie.

I wasn't saying that the intention to break the restraint is subtle; it isn't. What I was referring to as subtle is the reasoning behind why a person must give up all possibilities of breaking the precepts in the future (assuming they want to achieve the joy and samādhī the Suttas actually talk about), and not just decide on a case-to-case basis or during a temporary retreat.

With "100% sure" I didn't mean having no doubt you will never do it again (which would only be the case for an Arahant) but that you are at least 100% *determined* not to do it under any circumstances, as opposed to leaving it a tiny bit up in the air.

(Incidentally, that's why it would be much better to take on the five precepts *forever* and with no exceptions whatsoever, than to take the 8 precepts 5 days a week and none on the other 2. It still wouldn't be enough for the first jhāna which is the pleasure of renunciation, but it would actually force the mind to grow instead of just being an empty observance or willpower exercise.)

Edit: I also don't see how keeping the 8 precepts is so different from sense restraint. You feel a pinch from a mosquito bite and restrain your hand from lashing out and restrain your intent to kill in the same way you see an attractive person coming in the distance and restrain your eye from looking and restrain your intent to look. Should I just as well look at attractive people coming in the distance, since my precepts aren't perfect?

No, it doesn't mean that. What it means is that you should do basically all it takes to prevent yourself from breaking the precept or coming close to it, even if it means trying to get rid of the signs and features that you perceive (as opposed to just "not grasping" at them) by closing your eyes, pretending the person doesn't exist, focusing on your breath, or whatever. But you keep in perspective that that's *just virtue*; you're not developing anything more than that.

If you keep that up consistently and long enough, even though it's not perfect in terms of the subtler planes of development, you'll eventually be able to impeccably keep all the precepts and you won't really feel the pressure to break them anymore. But you will still be *mentally* delighting in the sight of the attractive person more than you should, or denying it more than you should, and that's when you start worrying about sense restraint as such.

A lot of people (even renunciates of other religions) do reach that point, but they typically fail to realize that that was just the *first step*, and they think it's just a matter of *continuing* to close their eyes, pretend things don't exist, focus on their breath, etc., twice as hard, and liberation will eventually "happen".

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-29 03:50:40 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

If I give the precept on harsh speech as an example and take that to mean not speaking out of anger (as opposed to simply not using curse words or coarse types of language) - how would I ever be able to know when I am keeping the precepts "impeccably", before becoming a Sotapanna and knowing unwholesome as it really is, and thus knowing exactly what wholesome behaviour would be?

There is certainly further purification to be accomplished once you simply keep the rules, but that's not what I meant with "impeccably". If you take it in that ultimate sense, then yes, only a sotāpanna or higher can keep the precepts perfectly.

there will still be somewhat of a gray zone concerning where simply speaking WHILE feeling unpleasant becomes speaking out of aversion to an unpleasant experience? Where unpleasant feeling becomes irritation?.

That's true, but you would never get to discern those subtler things if your effort hasn't graduated beyond the coarse keeping of the rules, which you do have to start with because anything more will be abstract initially. But it is a good point to keep in mind: the further stages of the Gradual Training, all the way to jhāna, are about cementing further what began with the precepts, not about building up something else as it's often thought.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-29 04:05:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

How would I know that the lack of pressure is due to my virtue, and not due to my environment?

Until your mind is actually free from the things that would make you break the virtue, the lack of pressure is inevitably due to your environment at least partially. Even for a householder, it will be because they encounter more or less the same things on a daily basis, so if suddenly they were to experience something extraordinary, the pressure would arise.

That doesn't mean that the virtue is wrong, since virtue by itself (i.e. mere adherence to the rules) won't take you further than that. But it does mean that you shouldn't rest content with that lack of pressure even though it does count as progress, precisely because it's always somewhat circumstantial.

## Feelings, Emotions, and Sensations ☒

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** RighteousPistachio 2024-04-19 08:03:54

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-26 08:04:45 (in reply to a comment not included)**

sensation

*phoṭṭhabba*, which literally means “a touchable”.

kāyaṇca paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca uppajjati kāyaviññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā

In dependence on the body and touchables, body-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is pressure; with pressure as support, there is feeling.

There is feeling (*vedanā*) in regard to “sensations”, just as there is feeling in regard to sights and sounds.

emotions

For this there isn't one specific term, but mainly lists where various (unwholesome) emotions are mentioned, such as here.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-27 04:36:41 (in reply to a comment not included)**

As I think there are some french people at Samanadipa, do you know which word they are using for vedana in french ?

The French monk here mentioned that he still hasn't been able to find a word that fits.

But since I know understand it to be wrong I thought of “ressenti” or “sentiment” as alternatives.

I'll ask him about these two.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-28 07:44:42 (in reply to a comment not included)**

He says he hadn't found “ressenti” before and it's definitely better than the alternatives, and that “sentiment” could be too romantic/sentimental.

## **comment on nanavira and the relevance of 'flux' to the buddha's path**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** foowfoowfoow 2024-04-19 03:14:18

thank you to u/Additional\_Fix8417 for your comments in another post and pointing me to the below link by nanavira:

<https://nanavira.org/index.php/letters/post-sotapatti/1964/119-1-06-4-march-1964>

in this letter, nanavira argues against the notion of 'flux' as being relevant to the buddha's teachings. he comments:

Perhaps you will be wondering why it is that I am so anxious to destroy the notion of flux—or at least to eliminate it from the context of the Dhamma

the below is a critique of that letter.

in summary, i believe nanavira's analysis confuses the knowability of the external sense object (or as i suggest, it's unknowability), and over-states the permanence of physicality, mind, and mental concepts. he accordingly incorrectly concludes that the notion of continuous change (flux) is irrelevant to the dhamma.

i have written this critique as a direct response to nanavira - if anyone wishes to follow, i'd recommend they read his letter first, or at least read it in parallel to the below.

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you take issue with the notion of flux. i note that you take physical objects as your initial point of analysis, and i suspect that part of your issue with 'flux' lies with this initial point of departure. if on the other hand, we take the mind as that initial point of departure, we see that flux (change) persists continually, constantly, ceaselessly.

indeed, the buddha himself recognised this when he commented that the mind is far more changeable than the material aspects of the body to the extent that if one were to take aspects of being to be oneself, it would be more sensible to take the physical rather than the mental as the physical has at least the appearance of endurance and persistence.

*It would be better, bhikkhus, for the uninstructed worldling to take as self this body composed of the four great elements rather than the mind.*

*For what reason? Because this body composed of the four great elements is seen standing for one year, for two years, for three, four, five, or ten years, for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, for a hundred years, or even longer.*

*But that which is called 'mind' and 'mentality' and 'consciousness' arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night.*

*Just as a monkey roaming through a forest grabs hold of one branch, lets that go and grabs another, then lets that go and grabs still another, so too that which is called 'mind' and 'mentality' and 'consciousness' arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night.*

<https://suttacentral.net/sn12.61/en/bodhi>

indeed, in light of the buddha's words above i do not think your charge of the inappropriateness of flux in the dhamma holds firm.

you state that the idea of continuous change is not a matter of direct observation, and yet, would not the buddha's teaching of insight in vipassana be the very essence of direct observation of change?

even at the most surface of levels with dependent origination in the context of the five aggregates, one can directly see the arising and passing away of mental phenomena: contact and consciousness of a sense object, perception, and intentional mental actions. indeed, there is no mental phenomena that remain or endures in one's experience. from this perspective, i think your charge that continuous change is not a matter of observation does not hold true either.

i see that the reason you come to this view is that your origin is consideration of external form. taking the most extreme example, a diamond could be gazed at for a person's entire lifetime and no change whatsoever be seen. in this context you are correct that human (natural eye) observation cannot encompass all the change of the universe.

however, when we address these ideas through the buddha's teachings, it becomes clear that constant flux is actually present - just perhaps not in the way you have considered it.

within the buddha's theory there is the external sense object. there is contact with the sense base. sense consciousness arises - knowing of the contact. sensation with hedonic tone arises; perception; mental intentional action. as a result of this, the physical form is conditionally impacted as well.

a concrete example - a person walks into our view: there is contact of the visual sight with the eye; eye consciousness arises, and we know we have seen something; sensation (pleasant if there is a pleasing aspect to the sight) arises and we perceive / know the object (as perhaps a well-loved friend), from which intentional mental action arises. this process in turn conditions the body - perhaps pupillary dilation, or heart rate increase.

this process is clearly one that is constant change. we know this from our daily experience that this kind of flux of mental and physical aggregates is immediate, constant, and



unceasing. this is just as the buddha states in the quote above.

in contrast, you are focusing on the knowability of the external sense object. within the buddha's thesis, this, to some extent is illusory. i'm in agreement that we can't truly know the instantaneous changes that are taking place in an external object. indeed, even science can't know that due to the delay between measurement and knowing of that measurement.

however, this isn't the buddha's concern.

your argument regarding the statement 'this has changed' as implying sameness (this) and not-sameness (has changed) is an argument of conventional language, not of absolute truth. certainly, even the buddha used 'i' to denote his existence in the past. conventionally, we are referring to a constancy of process of change, and not necessarily that something remains the same.

i find your analysis of external sense objects lacking in this regard. when you speak of 'this leaf' or 'this tree', or 'mango', you are referring to linguistic concepts. at the language level, a mango is not a 'mango' to a culture that has never encountered them - it may perhaps be considered an odd sort of peach, or say in some theoretical civilisation that has no fruit trees, a 'stone'. 'mango' is a cultural-linguistic concept, and not a truly existent thing. so much for language and the linguistic modifiers we use to signify or conceptualise phenomena.

you say "consider a leaf that changes colour—first it is green, then when it dies it becomes brown, but it is still the same leaf". is it though? in what way is there any permanence to that leaf over its lifetime. just because there is a verbal signifier 'that leaf', in what way is there any sameness? you say sameness of shape but actually there is no leaf that retains 'sameness of shape' at all (especially given their emergence from embryonic form of seed or bud). perhaps this is just a poor example you have chosen to make a point.

your example of the perception of a spoon is likewise troubled:

I fix my attention on the bowl of the spoon and see the handle less distinctly out at one side; then I fix my attention on the handle and see the bowl less distinctly out at the other side. The spoon, as a whole, remains unchanged—in both cases it is exactly the same spoon.

you are confusing the external sense object and the internal perception of that sense object. the spoon itself is unknowable in the true sense - we can never know the true quality or nature of the spoon. our knowledge of it is necessarily mediated through our sense-base and mental aggregates, and our past experience with such 'spoons'. and these are, as noted above, in constant flux - one moment, we think we are looking at a spoon; then next we consider it's just a very detailed drawing of a spoon; then our perception shifts and we suddenly realise it's not a spoon at all but an adeptly placed small metal mug. this is the process of perception - constant flux and updating of information and perception. you can easily experience this in viewing illusory phenomena:

old woman or young girl illusion

you say the general features of an object always remain the same, and yet i don't think you realise how much of this is made up by your brain. for example, are you aware that we all have a blind spot in our vision - a gaping hole in the centre of our foveal vision, which the brain, miraculously, mends together for us. likewise, consider the room you are in with it's four straight walls and 90 degree corners. you may be surprised to learn that likely none of those corners are presenting to your eye at 90 degrees. your brain is simply interpreting them as so.

my point is that there are no "constant sensible qualities" of an external object that are perceived - the brain makes up a large part of your experience; a spoon is not a spoon ...

from the point of view of the mental processing of the external world, then, yes, indeed, things are in constant flux. if they were invariably constant according to the external world, we would all likely go mad - nothing would be predictable and our understanding of the world would be wildly inaccurate.

further, "same" and "different" are always relative then. same and different qualities of sense objects are necessarily dependent on the sense-base perceiving them, and that sense base is in constant flux. the pupil size changes, the angle of the head changes, our perception and recollection of phenomena changes. we say 'same' but there is no absoluteness in that statement whatsoever. that's an entire deception created by the mind. hence we mistake seeing a stranger for a friend, and old woman for a young girl, etc.

your very example of the sudden perception that "the curtains have faded" is a very example of the mind ignoring salient information until it becomes too obvious to ignore. thus, our ability to perceive flux in an external sense object has nothing to do with the reality of what is occurring. further, within the mind, i reiterate that there is constant flux of the mental aggregates arising and passing away instantaneously.

The contradiction [involved in the definition of flux or continuous change] arises from failure to see that change at any given level of generality must be discontinuous and absolute, and that there must be different levels of generality. When these are taken together, any desired approximation to "continuous change" can be obtained without contradiction

surely, the inability in daily life to retain a single state of consciousness of a sense object, or a feeling, or a single perception, or an intentional thought, unchanged and unaltered, for even a single minute, is ample evidence of the discontinuity and absolute incessant change occurring instant to instant.

for the buddha, this process (dependent origination) is incessant. within samsara, there is only the possibility of prolonging a particular perception in jhana, which can result in rebirth in the insensible formless realms where one maintains a single percept for a period of time, before that percept passes away too.

in this context, i cannot understand your argument against the idea of flux in dependent origination.

alternatively, from what you say, you seem to imply that your objection the the use of the

word 'flux' is a linguistic one - the connotation of flux as denoting a smooth transition, rather than continuous change. if that is what you mean, i can accept that, but i'd note that that is simply your verbal linguistic (and western cultural) interpretation of language. it's not an absolute, and it's not a genuine basis for an argument in this context. language is a culturally negotiated set of conventions. you are applying a western interpretation of language to an eastern framework of thought. if this is the basis of your objection to 'flux', then simply define your terms and renegotiate those meanings in the face of this novel cultural contact.

the buddha circumvents this argument. he speaks to the arising and passing away of phenomena in a dependent fashion. a phenomenon (e.g., sense contact) arises to a peak and then passes away, then conditioning the arising of another phenomenon (e.g., consciousness) arising to a peak and then falling away, etc. there is conditionality, but each individual phenomena arising and passing away has no intrinsic essence - it's constantly (and you will dislike this word) in flux. this absence of essence at this level of arising and passing away is anatta.

you seem to consider the possibility of this way of thinking about phenomena here:

Perhaps, then, we are wrong in thinking that 'a continuous succession of changes' is the same as 'continuous change'. If these two are not the same, and 'continuous change' is the truth, then we must deny the existence of separate individual changes

however, it seems you are unable to accept this, as you subsequently reify this change by analysing it in terms of sections of a whole, but then contradictorily, refusing to allow change as occurring within each of those sections. it seems to me that your natural bent is towards reification and this is preventing you from seeing anatta.

i note that your comment that states of mind "do not come within the sphere of science" is limited by the science of your time. in modern science, mental states are clearly the purview of research and empirical elucidation. you note that your original correspondent does not appear to accept flux in mental state. i'm not sure why they would think that if they were educated in the buddha's teachings (perhaps they were not). however, on the basis of the above, i cannot understand how you can state that "the notion of flux cannot be applied to states of mind".

accordingly, your argument of "familiar" sense objects falls down: nothing is truly ever familiar, but the brain - falsely - makes up that familiarity. if that were not true, then what happens to one's brain would never impact the familiarity of objects. that's not the case, as dementia for example, makes things entirely unfamiliar, though they do not objectively change.

You say 'The word flux means continuous change. If this idea is applied to everything it would be correct to say that what I see now, e.g. a tree, is not the same as I continue to watch it as it is subject to continuous change'

i cannot see why you consider this to be false? why is it incorrect to state that there is no intrinsic essence to conditioned phenomena? you can certainly state that there is no

intrinsic essence to the mental processing of external sense objects. if you are referring to the truth / reality of external sense objects, independent of mental processing, this is irrelevant to buddhism. perhaps you are fixated on the 'truth' of the verbal linguistic label. however, even at the cultural level, the notion of 'tree' breaks down when analysed.

your objection to this way of understanding the buddha's teaching is that "it does not explain why what is impermanent is suffering, and what is suffering is not self".

however, the answer to that is quite clear: greed aversion and delusion arise as a result of ignorance of the true nature of phenomena. our mistaken assumptions of the permanence of phenomena, of the capacity of phenomena to satisfy us, and of an intrinsic essence to phenomena, are all false, and this false assumption leads us, invariably, into reliance on a false understanding of the world, and naturally, suffering.

seeing impermanence (or flux) is the first step to understanding that these phenomena have no true essence, and hence are unreliable for our happiness. impermanence (or flux) are integral to the initial step of realising the truth of the buddha's path:

seeing impermanence as intrinsic for the buddha's teaching

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comments on the above critique are welcome.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-19 03:58:50**

surely, the inability in daily life to retain a single state of consciousness of a sense object, or a feeling, or a single perception, or an intentional thought, unchanged and unaltered, for even a single minute, is ample evidence of the discontinuity and absolute incessant change occurring instant to instant.

for the buddha, this process (dependent origination) is incessant. within samsara, there is only the possibility of prolonging a particular perception in jhana, which can result in rebirth in the insensible formless realms where one maintains a single percept for a period of time, before that percept passes away too.

How were you then able to write this, which certainly took more than a single "instant"?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-19 05:11:42 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

when we look at the mental activity during that process, there is incessant arising and passing away of mental objects, and dependent origination.

Sure, when you choose to zoom in on and overemphasize specific perceptions. But if there isn't *something* in your mind that's remaining the same throughout, how can you weave together words and paragraphs to convey a coherent message? If the entire mind

is changing from moment to moment, you would forget what you're trying to write and would have to start afresh each new instant.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-19 07:56:09 (in reply to a comment not included)**

that theme is picked up and considered from one perspective. it's put down for the moment while we gather thoughts and compose a sentence, then it's picked up and viewed from another angle before again being put down to write further, and so on. in between that consideration of the theme are considerations of paragraph and sentence structure, word selection, etc.

this, we're not sustaining that theme for the whole period of time we're writing  
- there are myriad incidental mental activities that are interspersed.

Your direct attention will be shifting between different things, but the fact is that if there was no overarching theme of "I am writing an essay about X" enduring *uninterrupted* (not at the level of direct attention, but peripheral to it) for minutes or hours on end, there is no reason why your thoughts would remain "on topic" instead of shifting to something completely unrelated.

That's why when you're walking, you can start to think about endless different things to the point where your attention is totally away from the individual movements of your legs, and yet you wouldn't stop walking. Your attention could be shifting a million times per second to this or that, and yet the intention to walk stays unchanged up until the moment where you actually stop walking.

You can come up with an intricate system of rationalizations to argue that experience doesn't work in this way, but it will always continue to do so even while you deny it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-19 08:42:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I'm not sure what you mean by 'uninterrupted'. you acknowledge that the mental process is interrupted by various sense objects, related to and unrelated (is this what you mean by 'peripheral?') to the theme of consideration.

The mental process is not "interrupted" by various sense objects. Rather, the sense objects are changing on a different, lower level than the overall intention to write an essay. A verbalized thought or image of "I want to write this essay" certainly has to give space to other thoughts in order to actually start coming up with ideas for the text, but the *overarching* attempt or intention to write an essay remains there. There is an *implicit* (*peripheral*), as opposed to explicit, awareness of "I am writing an essay", *without* it needing to be brought to the center of your attention.

i don't see this as reflective of the necessity for a uniform, unchanging theme, but rather a reflection of the clinging and craving that's associated with the

sensation of a pleasurable mental sense object. as a result of that delight, the mind picks up and plays with, repeatedly, that mental sense object.

So the Buddha was clinging and craving when he gave long discourses that revolved around one central theme, without changing subjects? You also stated before that jhāna is the only state where the mind sticks to one single object. Doesn't that imply that jhāna is a state of more craving and delight than non-jhāna?

however, sometimes the topic of thought we are dwelling on as we walk becomes so engrossing that we fail to monitor our walking and we may stumble or walk past our destination.

Sure, but that was not the point. The point is that regardless of how engrossed you get, you don't actually *stop walking*. That means that there is a layer of your experience (*cetanā* to walk) that, until you stop walking, is *not* changing, no matter to what and how fast your attention shifts.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-19 12:40:09 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

i'm not sure if this is true - i believe there is a sutta where a monk is walking and he enters the first jhana, and then he proceeds from there eventually into the third (i think) jhana, at which point the buddha instructs the other monastics to support the monk and lower him to the ground (in not sure if i've recollected that sutta correctly as i've never been able to find that sutta again since initial reading - if you know of it, please let me know!).

There is no question that this account is not from an EBT source. If anything, you might have read that in a later text or commentarial story.

Leaving that aside, you missed the point of essentially all of what I wrote, as has been the case before.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-19 16:14:19 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

You wrote:

finding 'something' that 'endures', IMHO, verges on eternalism.

and

That sounds like atman (of some sort) to me. Or concept. No phenomena occurs uninterruptedly.

If it does, then your definition of anattā is not in accordance with the Suttas. The Buddha said in his second discourse that things are anattā because they cannot be fully controlled

to our satisfaction, not because they have no “lasting identity”. The Suttas quite clearly state that things do *endure*, and not only as an “illusion” of the ignorant mind, but for the Buddha himself, and his ability to see that is *praised*:

“Sir, **the Buddha** knows feelings as they arise, as they **remain**, and as they go away. He knows perceptions as they arise, as they **remain**, and as they go away. He knows thoughts as they arise, as they **remain**, and as they go away. This too I remember as an incredible and amazing quality of the Buddha.”

—MN 123

Conditionality still remains.

“Conditionality” (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is not about a process of momentary changes, an Abhidhammic idea that’s utterly absent from the EBTs. It’s about the fact that no matter how long any given thing lasts, there will *always* be something else that it depends on, the most fundamental being this fragile body remaining alive. That’s why in MN 38, the Buddha discusses dependent origination in terms of the *nutriment* of the things that have arisen, and makes it clear that passion is abandoned by recognizing that without the nutriment, the thing standing upon it cannot remain. That is why things are anicca, dukkha, and anattā; no moment-to-moment process is mentioned.

In the same vein, SN 12.67 compares “conditionality” to two sticks standing upon each other, such that if you take away any of them, the other cannot stand. Again, no mention of “moments”.

Memory is being passed to the next moment.

“Passed on” by what? The answer can only be: something that is remaining unaffected by the changes. And that “something”, that background mental context, even though it can last for a long time, is not “eternal” or permanent at all: if you trip, hit your head, and become unconscious, which is totally possible the entire journey, you won’t be able to walk nor even think about walking anymore.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-20 03:12:46 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Being subjected to change cannot be controlled to our satisfaction. Change is oppressive and often unwelcomed.

Of course. Nobody is denying that things are subject to change. But saying that things are *subject* to change (*vipariṇāmadhamma*, mentioned repeatedly in the Suttas, including the Anattalakkhana I linked), and saying that things are *uninterruptedly changing*, with no duration in between, are earth and sky.

If one posits a thesis of “*Identity that endures* [for quite long time, sometimes]” is that which is cut off, sounds like in Ucchedavāda. IMHO. Please correct me if incorrect.

You're confusing identity in the sense of a thing remaining the same throughout time, and the sense of self which, as always explained in the Suttas, comes down to *taking* things as "mine". A thing remaining the same for however long does not force you to take it as "mine": even the most ignorant person in the world wouldn't automatically regard their neighbor's house as "mine" just because they see it as remaining the same for many years.

The lack of understanding of how something (everything, in the end) will be suddenly ripped away from you *sometime* in the future, even if its billions of years later, means not seeing the peril of taking it as "mine", and that's why appropriation and the sense of self take place even though they're entirely mistaken. The change that will *eventually* happen to every phenomenon does not care at all about how attached you were to it.

In fact, the erroneous sense of "mine" develops from familiarity, which *requires* things to last for a while.

(has moment of arising, **duration** and cessation).

You can't call it "momentary" and at the same time acknowledge that it has a duration.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-20 03:54:51 (in reply to a comment not included)**

i feel that you're suggesting here some sort of phenomenon that's permanently present (or at least persisting). however, i don't think this is supported by either what you're saying here, **or the buddha's words**.

You often use the phrase "the Buddha's words", but have so far not provided any evidence that the Suttas discuss experience in the terms you advocate. They certainly do speak of arising and ceasing, but they also clearly speak of *duration* as I pointed out in my reply to VitakkaVicara on this same thread. See also what I wrote, with Suttas to support it, regarding *paṭiccasamuppāda* not being a "momentary process", an idea which on the other hand is not found in the EBTs.

"Sir, suppose they were to ask me: 'What are the things for which arising is evident, vanishing is evident, and change-while-persisting is evident?' I'd answer like this:

'Reverend, the arising of form is evident, its vanishing is evident, and **change-while-persisting** is evident. The arising of feeling ... perception ... choices ... consciousness is evident, its vanishing is evident, and change-while-persisting is evident. These are the things for which arising is evident, vanishing is evident, and **change-while-persisting** is evident.'

—SN 22.37

we can directly see this - we can see that consciousness of various objects comes and goes, and this demonstrates impermanence to us directly. nothing stays in the stream of dependent origination permanently - anicca - and this process is infinitesimally quick. I don't think we can deny this.



We certainly can deny it. The “infinitesimally quick” change is an imaginary construct seen by a person who already decided beforehand, when told by somebody else, to look at experience that way. It is not immediately apparent, timeless, and verifiable (independent of scientific and technological advances that didn't exist in the Buddha's time) as the Dhamma is said to be. What *is* undeniable even to an illiterate farmer is that things are *subject to change* and never last infinitely, and that's quite a different matter.

when we, delusionally, take conditioned phenomena to be permanent, satisfactory, and possessed of some reliable essential nature, we suffer.

Yes, and something does not need to be in “flux” in order to be unreliable. That's an unjustifiable jump.

the mind craves permanence - delusion pushes us towards it - and seeing how denial of that permanence causes suffering is instrumental in us seeing through samsara.

This very statement implies that at least craving *does* last for more than a single instant. It implies that there was craving before the change happened, and since that craving was *still* there at the time of the change, suffering arose.

rather, i am saying that anicca is actually about the arising and passing away in the mind of mental / sensory objects that are cognised, sensed, perceived, and acted upon mentally. it's not about the external world but the internal one:

Again, yes, the Suttas speak of “arising and ceasing”, and I'm not discounting that. What I and the Suttas are disagreeing with is the “0 duration” idea.

seeing phenomena solely in terms of non-ownership misses this broader understanding that they actually have no essence.

SN 22.95, and perhaps others, certainly alludes to the “lack of essence” in all the aggregates. But where does it say that the lack of essence is due to flux? Looking at the similes given by the Buddha there, does a lump of foam (a plantain trunk, a mirage) lack essence *because it's constantly changing*?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-20 14:52:08 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

from my reading, it seems the buddha is saying the reverse of what you are suggesting - that is, it is because the aggregates are anatta, they cannot be compelled, not vice versa.

This is grasping at straws.

the pali word that has been translated as ‘remain’ here is uppajjanti, meaning “presents oneself; is present, appears; stands”. ‘remain’ seems a fairly loose translation.

No, it's "upaṭṭhahanti", which occurs *besides* "uppajjanti", showing that it's clearly not the same. "upaṭṭhahati" literally means "stand near", and it always implies duration.

i don't think there's any real connotation of feelings persisting here, but rather "arise, present and pass away".

So the Buddha repeated the same idea twice for no reason?

the relevant word here is 'thitassa' meaning 'standing; being, staying (in any state or condition, often with absolutive); remaining, existing, present; firm, steady'. given the context of 'alteration' and change of the phenomena, i don't think the line supports a notion of a static persisting state.

Alteration (aññathattaṃ) of *that which stands* (*thitassa*) is what it literally means. The genitive (-assa) conveys "while". Again, the point is that change occurs *within* stability or duration. But ultimately, everything that remains stable in relation to something else *eventually* also changes, which is why nothing is ultimately permanent. The phenomenon of darkness stands unchanged while particular changes happen from dusk to dawn, but even that which was stable eventually *has to end*, and thus the sun rises. That is the structure of change that Ñāṇavīra proposes, and that is verifiable from basic observation, and dukkha and anattā follows seamlessly from it without having to introduce things like:

actually, if you think about it, walking requires constant feedback from proprioceptive and sensory receptors to keep balance as we raise a foot, and to adjust our weight as we walk on say uneven gravel.

...which are not timeless and directly visible (akālika, sandiṭṭhika) Dhamma. It hinges on notions facilitated by modern science (which, valid as they may be, are irrelevant to suffering and freedom from it). The Buddha also never thought of bringing it up, which is at odds with the degree of importance you attribute to it.

unless you're suggesting that the mind processes information in parallel (which isn't supported by dependent origination),

Again, you're taking it as an axiom that dependent origination is a "process", whereas I've already shown here that the Suttas do not support that interpretation, and blatantly acknowledge that things do last (not forever, but for *some* amount of time).

The very Sutta you quoted in your post proves that the Buddha thought it perfectly appropriate to state that the body can stand (tiṭṭhati) for way longer than an instant. And the context makes it clear enough that he's not talking about "conventional truth" vs. "ultimate truth".

This body made up of the four primary elements is seen to last for a year, or for two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or a hundred years, or even longer.

You will always find a way to disregard the evidence if you cling strongly enough to a view, so I don't think there's anything more I can do here.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-23 04:09:52 (in reply to a comment not included)**

What do you make of Ven. Bodhesako's claim that the background only exists in relation to a particular point of view, that it ends when the perspective changes?

It's correct. It always depends the point of view you take, the very thing which is being denied in vain (while it's still there) by the idea of "flux", as if all experience is happening from one static and unchanging point of view (ironically implying permanence of the point of view that looks on at the endless change). Every point of view that can be taken is itself determined by circumstances and thus subject to change.

When you exist on the level of sense objects, the body/sense organs will seem "extra-temporal" from that perspective (which is not an explicit thought or idea but a tacit context), and you won't be able to see it as also *subject to* change at the level where it truly is, thereby undermining the perceived permanence of anything you might take as self, without un-absorbing your point of view from sense objects, which is the purpose of virtue and sense restraint.

That's one of the ways to understand the simile of the wet sticks in MN 36.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-24 04:11:45 (in reply to a comment not included)**

As I understand it, FS is essentially an analysis of Invariance under Transformation, so it has nothing to do with impermanence. It describes the structure of duration.

Yes, the purpose of FS is to "prove", regardless of the Buddha's teaching, that the idea of "flux" and "moments" is at best a view that gets "plastered" on top of experience, in denial of the way things actually manifest. For 99% of people it's probably pointless to study it, since those who already have faith in his teachings and try to take on the phenomenological attitude fail to understand it, let alone the people who staunchly believe in flux, who do so precisely due to not being able to think phenomenologically and coherently.

So is the *aniccatā* that the Buddha speaks of pertaining to the relationship between the foreground and background of experience,

Yes. Or you could say it's about the relationship between your experience and that which determines it, due to which it's liable to abrupt cessation (which is also within that experience, but needs to be *known* as a context, not directly attended to, such as the body).

I'm trying to figure out where I should be focusing my practice.

That would be the Gradual Training. Even if all these things "make sense", they would not be seen concretely, in the manner that would liberate you, unless the prerequisites have

been established. Purification of behavior, purification of mind, and only then purification of views.

## Facing boredom and not chase after pleasure

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-04-17 12:40:34

One of the biggest bound with sensuality I have to work on is my attitude when facing boredom. For as long as I can remember I've always tried to escape boredom with pleasurable and stimulating activities to the point where I developed an irrational fear of it.

For so long, I've even followed a process that will dictate what I will do most of my free time that can be summarized thus:

### If thinking about doing such and such activity

- Doesn't provides me with pleasure at the prospect of doing it, I'm feeling an aversion for doing that activity as if it's going to be a chore and I will not do that to kill time
- However if it does provides me with pleasure at the prospect of doing it, I will probably dabble into that until it does not provides me with pleasure anymore (sooner or later in a matter of days/weeks)

Most of the time I will always need to have something to do on the side when I'm not busy, if I don't I will be restless, an unreasonable feeling of dread will take hold of me "I don't know what I'm going to do later, I need to find something quick", relentlessly reviewing past activities and new possible forms of activity until I find one that can provide me with pleasure.

*(Note that I don't have any difficulty regarding doing things that need to be done but which doesn't provide me with pleasure at the prospect of doing them, I'm only talking about the free time when duties and essentials basic tasks have been done)*

I think I've clearly adopted an attitude of aversion towards boredom and irrational addiction towards pleasure, and the fact that it has so much weight in my life and that it basically leads it is the sign that I need to get rid of it.

**So**, I really need ideas to start changing these habits otherwise I will just continue to repeat this never ending cycle, so I came to wonder: what do noble disciples free from sensuality do when they have free time? I believe they are probably not chasing pleasurable and stimulating activities in the way I'm doing it.

Should I just force myself to sit or go for very recurrent walks and dwell in non-activity most of my free time? Working to establish yoniso-manasikara and lessen appropriation of the aggregates; applying what Ajahn Nyanamoli teaches regarding becoming aware of craving in my experience and including my attitude in regard to it as being there because of craving; just dwelling in an untroubled state without forcing anything when feeling

pleasant or on the contrary take advantages of these moments to question and review in what ways I could still be liable to craving and work on severing the resistance...

Surely I also could do activities related to the Dhamma, like studying suttas and books about Dhamma, at least when the prospect of doing it feels like a chore or neutral enough, and is not provoking delight so I know that is not going to be unwholesome activity disguised as wholesome.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-18 04:25:51**

You don't have to come up with a specific "plan" in order to not give in to the pressure of boredom (since that would become your giving in to it). All you have to do is make sure that *whatever* you do is still in accordance with the context of allowing the pressure to endure for as long as it wants, and that might very well vary from one day to the next. Only you can know when a particular action—externally wholesome as it may be, including contemplating the Dhamma—is or is not aimed at escape thing boredom (based on the inclinations of your mind *right now*, not some pre-defined guideline).

## **Questions on suffering and views.**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** monkeyseashore 2024-04-16 06:36:02

warm greetings all,

### **Q: Suffering arises as a result of our views on experience (the 6 senses)?**

Examples of what I mean by this:

1. The view that these thoughts/feelings are mine.
2. The assumption that I have to act on this idea from the mind.

If this is true, then by just being attentive/aware of what happens throughout the day [with withdrawal from sensory engagement], you can see what sort of habits/assumptions about the 6 senses you have. Then you can modify those assumptions (by no longer acting in that way). Is this correct? For example, I could have had the view that "this thought is horrible" and have aversion towards it. But then I change my view around it to "let me (openly) hear what this thought has to say", which removes the aversion around it.

What I don't understand is what makes wrong views like "externalism" or "materialism" so wrong. Those to me seem like philosophy (doesn't really affect my direct experience) vs what I described above is about reality (looking at your present experience). Why does it matter if someone thinks that "everything is molecules" if that same person corrects the way they regard experience in terms of their views on the 6 senses?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-17 03:15:11

Suffering arises as a result of our views on experience (the 6 senses)?

Yes, but the caveat is that those views that are the root of suffering are not deliberate. Starting from the point of view of ignorance, which we all do, it's utterly impossible to take a detached perspective from which you can see your own views and assumptions. The views and assumptions that cause suffering are there precisely because you are unable to see yourself having them. Otherwise, the Buddha's teaching—whose essence is in telling you that there *are* wrong assumptions no matter how sure you are that there aren't for as long as you're not at least a sotāpanna—would not be necessary.

Therefore:

If this is true, then by just being attentive/aware of what happens throughout the day [with withdrawal from sensory engagement], you can see what sort of habits/assumptions about the 6 senses you have. Then you can modify those assumptions (by no longer acting in that way). Is this correct?

No, you would be practicing attentiveness/awareness *with* the wrong assumptions from start to finish, and anything that you're able to "catch" and then modify would be superficial and secondary.

The wrong assumptions can only start to become apparent for what they really are over a prolonged period of time, as a result of gradually facing the discomfort that arises from no longer feeding the dependence on sensuality and emotional safety that one finds in the world. Only a stream-enterer or higher has understood the nature of assumption and freed themselves from it partially (but irreversibly). The understanding of the Four Noble Truths, which is what makes one a stream-enterer, is all about the recognition that *no amount* of unpleasant feeling—irrespective of its cause or characteristics, so not limited only to painful bodily sensations but including the deepest and most complex types of emotional upset and dissatisfaction—is in itself suffering\*,\* and it is rather craving alone that is responsible for suffering.

And one also starts out not even seeing that craving for what it is, noticing at best its secondary byproducts like obvious lustful or angry thoughts, which can be very well be individually managed and suppressed for quick relief without putting a dent on the actual craving.

What I don't understand is what makes wrong views like "externalism" or "materialism" so wrong. Those to me seem like philosophy (doesn't really affect my direct experience) vs what I described above is about reality (looking at your present experience).

Such standpoints of "philosophical" nature are also secondary results of the actual views and craving that are not even seen. That's why a person can perfectly align their standpoints with "Buddhist doctrine", rejecting both eternalism and materialism and embracing (what they think is) the Middle Way, and yet their underlying view would remain unchanged, shown by how they remain equally subject to suffering.

Why does it matter if someone thinks that “everything is molecules” if that same person corrects the way they regard experience in terms of their views on the 6 senses?

It matters because if they had truly understood their six senses, they would realize that whether “everything is molecules” or not is totally besides the point, and thus they would simply stop thinking in those terms. They would realize that their idea of “everything is molecules” (or the opposite, that nothing is molecules) is and always will be fully enclosed within their six senses, and thus it cannot possibly be a statement about a supposed external reality “beyond” the 6 senses (which can only be conceived through a wrong assumption, never actually experienced).

Thus, if they still adhere to that view or any other of that nature, it can only be because they remain ignorant of the nature of the six senses.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-18 04:12:47 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Then based on either the experience of (#2 and/or #3) someone then changes their views? Or if there is something wrong with my understanding may you please explain a bit more?

It’s not even that they would necessarily change their views. But at least they would begin to recognize the real “scope” of the problem if they go through with the restraint, and would stop thinking that changing their views is as easy as they may have previously thought.

What would you consider to be a prolonged period of time

Indefinitely. If there is an intention to “return” at some point, it doesn’t actually count as withdrawal, and the mind would not reveal its true colors.

to what extent does one need to absolutely withdraw from unnecessary sensory engagement?

Completely. But the caveat is that it’s not about “sensory deprivation” and total isolation from everything in a contrived retreat environment, which is unsustainable and would have to get interrupted at some point. The practice is to continue living your life “normally”, except for the fact that you *never, without exception*, act upon a mental state if it’s bound with sensual craving, aversion, or desire for distraction. The foundation for that is the 8 precepts and the guidelines on speech (no harsh, slanderous, or trivial talk), and then based on that the subtler tendencies and views on a mental level can start to become revealed at their “root”, and then restrained and abandoned.

Is craving something other than any pull/push on top of the present experience? Is it different from the pressure (felt either physically or mentally) to act on X [eat cake, pursue an idea, etc]?

It depends. It is a “pull” for sure, but unless you have been living withdrawn, the “pull” you would be seeing would really be a secondary after-effect of the craving, not the craving itself. Craving is non-specific, and much more subtle than the obvious hankering after some particular thing. In fact, both indulging in your desire *and* trying to get rid of it and manage it fundamentally keep adding to the same craving.

Restraining particular desires *might* eventually reveal what craving is. But it’s not guaranteed, especially if one isn’t making enough effort to understand.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-05-09 11:39:57 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Isn’t there a sort of a counter-intention, in that someone who still values sensuality, but wants to no longer value sensuality, has to have a intention/goal of “I will not consider or act out of this current value of sensuality” [which is visible as a push/pull]?

Yes, what will be motivating you will of course still be a form of pull. But that’s why it’s a Gradual Training. Even if you end up acting out of agitation or pressure of some sort in order to keep the precepts unbroken, that’s OK, because at that stage the level of acting out of pressure that you’re concerned with is that of bodily and verbal action. The subtler pressures won’t even be clearly recognized at that point, so there’s no need to worry about them.

Therefore:

In my direct experience the real problem I see is with the mind in that it tells me to do this or that, even if I don’t want to do this or that. Do you see it differently?

Yes, that’s true, but the point where you would begin to have a mind that doesn’t pressure you in any unpleasant ways is in the first jhāna. And you won’t reach that point unless you get your virtue and sense restraint in order first. Once those have been well established and stable for a good while, you can start trying to discern how to not be driven by *any* kind of pressure, even the “wholesome” ones, which is the stage of purifying the mind from the five hindrances.

Bhante do you see anything wrong with my understanding? Is the way I use dukha and craving the same way you understand them?

It’s fine as a contemplation to motivate you to restrain yourself. The profound recognition of what craving and dukkha are would only become available later on as a result of having restrained yourself long and well enough.

I would just add, in light of the above, that it’s not about holding *no values*, since that’s a value that you’re inevitably holding as well. It’s about not valuing sensual pleasures specifically, and valuing renunciation instead, even if out of craving initially. Eventually



you can learn to value renunciation and be equally restrained but without craving, and that's when you would be at peace.

## Role of focus

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-04-14 04:01:15

Just looking for perspectives on this particular view of practice. As I understand, the only problem with contemporary practices is the notion of avoiding what is present in favor of fully indulging in one sense object. However, if you can maintain awareness of the necessary overlying context, ie; body is the container, and you don't shift away from anything that arises, then there is no problem with stabilizing the mind on the sensation of breath, for instance. It's actually better than letting it jump all over the place and cause trouble.

Either way, the phenomena don't care about you, they will arise. But in the 1st option, your underlying view is that they ARE yours since you don't have enough insight persisting. With peripheral awareness, you have just made a simple discernment, and now that knowledge is included in this otherwise very similar experience. You don't lose that knowledge unless you deliberately go and distract yourself from it. But just sitting on the breath won't make established background knowledge fade away, and it also won't prevent other things from arising. So the difference emerges in that arising, where the meditator with peripheral awareness feels no need to turn away from pain, towards pleasure, etc. Or if they do, they know where that pressure comes from too. It takes YOU out of the sense objects, essentially. But that doesn't mean that YOU shouldn't stabilize your mind... it's more peaceful, more wholesome than letting a monkey jump around and steal food from passers-by. Even if you know it's not your monkey, everyone would be better off if that thing were tied down and given something of its own to nibble on.

I ask this because I have seen videos where Ajahn seems to discourage this type of focusing, and on the other hand I've directly heard "yes, by all means focus on the breath if it keeps you from acting out of the hinderances" in another video. I just want to clarify this so I can put it to rest in my own practice, I'm sure that there is a subtle piece that I'm not appreciating that kind of unites both sides of the coin, or maybe I correctly identified that piece above. Either way, I'm unsure.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-14 11:10:42

the only problem with contemporary practices is the notion of avoiding what is present in favor of fully indulging in one sense object.

No, that's not the only problem with contemporary practices. Although it's less common, there are many teachers who *speak against* the intense concentration on one fixed object (a paradigm originating from the now mostly disregarded Visuddhimagga) and advocate a more "open awareness" style of practice instead, and that doesn't make their approaches right by any means.

then there is no problem with stabilizing the mind on the sensation of breath, for instance.

Well, there is no problem with that *in itself* inasmuch as there is no problem with staring at a wall, sweeping leaves, or sewing. The problem is when there is a *view* that doing that in any way contributes to the cessation of craving any more than staring at a wall, etc. does (because those things also keep your mind from “jumping all over the place and causing trouble”).

While you’re watching your breath (or anything else of that nature) and everything is seemingly clean and pure, passion, aversion, and distraction, and all the ignorance and wrong views are very much still there lurking, pulling the strings “from above”. To use an analogy, all it really does is make the defilements operate at a lower frequency that the “ear” of an ordinary person no longer detects, and so it *seems* to them like they have a pure and unagitated mind at that time. To someone who’s been sleeping on urine and excrement their whole life, even the dustiest of floors will seem clean.

So instead of that, a person should make effort to see for themselves what exactly are the defilements, what is that “jumping around” of the mind really, instead of rashly assuming that it’s as straightforward as the content of thoughts changing from one thing to the next—in which case a sniper whose mind does not waver from his intended target would have a mind that’s not “causing trouble” at that time. Any sensible person knows that that’s not the case, but they would not reflect deeper and realize that their meditation should revolve around stopping *that* kind of trouble on every level instead of just slowing the mind down, which is, as illustrated by the example, utterly unrelated to the problem. It’s the basic error of mixing up correlation with causation: “whenever there’s a lot of craving, my mind moves around a lot, and therefore the movement is the culprit”.

And getting to understand what craving actually is—which can only be done on the basis of steadfast virtue and restraint—will require lots of “movement” of the mind in the form of self-questioning, investigation, and reflection, and that is not a problem at all, because even the first jhāna *is* thinking-and-pondering, as the Suttas themselves say (although nowadays people like to insist that the Buddha used the term *vitakkavicāra* when he really meant something else).

I ask this because I have seen videos where Ajahn seems to discourage this type of focusing, and on the other hand I’ve directly heard “yes, by all means focus on the breath if it keeps you from acting out of the hinderances” in another video.

You’re probably referring to this instance. He said right afterward that the difference between attending to your breath rightly is and wrongly is whether you have the view that the *arising of the thought itself* is an issue, and you definitely would have that view if you are anchoring your mind in the *sensations* of your breathing, which is not Anapanasati at all. Having your attention on the level of sense objects, whether it’s one fixed object or a range of constantly changing ones, inherently prevents you from having the type of perspective that can even recognize what the hindrances are, let alone overcome them. Again, at best it makes them operate at a lower frequency.

This talk goes into detail on abandoning the hindrances, and it's in those same terms that Anapanasati should be understood.

## Money, Material Safety and Dhamma

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-04-12 14:08:52

Do you think making money and following Dhamma are incompatible?

I know of the tenth precept as well as of Ajahn Chah emphasizing the fact that you can't want to follow the Dhamma and stay attached to your money (I'm paraphrasing).

I am asking because something like 1 year ago I started wanting to make money so as to be able to escape my current life and condition, but I quickly realized it wasn't going to happen or at least not very quickly, and it started making me quite miserable feeling so much delight at the idea of having much money so as to have that material safety and not have to restrict my wants and just escape the "rat race", but not being able to experience the target of that delight.

During this time I started investing my dormant savings here and there, and a few months later, because of that miserable feeling and the fact that I was questioning more and more the point of continuing that quite absurd meaningless life of commute, work and sleep, and also not being interested in the usual point of interests people are looking for in life so as to keep going (family, friends, career, the holy...), I was coming back to Buddhism stronger than ever because I was curious about the Buddha and his way of being able to be at peace without all these material considerations, and also because I felt a natural inclination towards the Buddhist spirituality for a long time.

Thanks to the Bhantes at Hillside Hermitage I feel like I learned a lot in the past few months about the Buddha teachings and also about "myself" and I was even surprised by how I was able to have more self control and to reduce my suffering in my daily life.

Until there I was letting my investments work without giving it much consideration, but recently my interest for it started rising again since it began to give me good results and also needed me to give it more attention so as to optimize the profits. But with it came back the lure of profit as well as the agitation, worry and the doubt, I realized I've been thinking almost exclusively about that in the previous weeks, the delight in the prospect of material safety came back even though I know it is quite pointless and will not be source of happiness/peace at the end of the day; and that my Dhamma practice have practically come to an halt, that I have even regressed on some points.

And so this led me to question whether these two aspects of my life could coexist, giving it all to search material safety on one hand (which has such a strong pull) and giving it all to search spiritual safety on the other hand, right now I feel like they are in complete contradiction and going toward one leads me further away from the other.

Not sure why I'm bringing this, I think I already know the answer to that question, maybe just to try and find some motivation and samvega, but I guess I would like to know how

YOU are dealing with that, and also just address the topic on this sub and hear what you think about it

**Edit:**

**Materiel safety** is a bit too encompassing, I was mostly thinking about **monetary freedom**, being able to answer all monetary needs, for yourself and for your close ones, that kind of relative safety, also not needing to do alienating jobs wasting the time we have at our disposal but being free to live however you want and need (in the limits of the law)

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-13 05:04:46**

It seems like you're presenting it as an all-or-nothing when it shouldn't be. You can invest effort in taking care of your finances without it necessarily involving giving in to hindrances, but what *is* black-and-white is that, at least if you hope for significant achievements in the practice, satisfying your sensual desires and worldly ambitions must not be in the list of intended uses for the money you earn.

If you set that up as a context and make effort in constantly recollecting it, the amount of concern and agitation that would arise would be severely limited, since fundamentally the cause of any hindrance is dependence on sense pleasure (i.e., the *why* of your attempt to earn money, not the attempt itself).

## **Would that meditation practice be ok ?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-04-12 09:07:28

After encountering HH I dropped my morning sitting practice to focus on sense restraint first. Since then sense restraint helped me tremendously to improve my outer and inner conduct. I can clearly experience the pressure on the senses when the mind is craving something. I can clearly see how it is indeed disagreeable when the mind doesn't get what it wants. At times I noticed too how this craving appears and just vanishes without having done anything to suppress it. As explained in this sub before, the restraining needed to be tighten at some point because things got easier and I wasn't feeling bothered anymore. This has been my experience. I'm nowhere perfect as I'm still struggling noticeably in the evening time to not indulge in watching TV shows or to browse the web.

So my question is : Would it be ok now to start practicing again a sitting meditation in the morning knowing that this won't bring any kind of insights but it's just pleasant and healthy for the brain ? It might also helps in stopping the pattern of the mind which seeks instant gratification. My fear is that I don't want it to be a cheatcode making me unable to feel the pressure/craving on the senses. I actually tried this morning. Inspired by a video from HH (the ultimate method for overcoming hindrances) it went like this : I brought up in the mind a thought of sensuality to see how the mind reacted and immediately desire arose. I did not indulge furthermore the thought but concluded this desire was not

leading to detachment and I’m not free from sensuality. Did the same with the other hindrances. The problem is that at some point contemplating like this the mind got quieter and when I brought up those thoughts the mind was more or less unmoved and some pleasure arose. Because it felt useless and wrong at this point to bring up thought of hindrances I switched to knowing the breath. Just knowing that I was breathing in or out. If I got distracted I tried to identify if it was a thought of ill-will, agitation and so forth without totally forgetting the breath.

So is that totally wrong or is that ok to practice sitting meditation along those lines ?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-13 04:49:51**

The problem is that at some point contemplating like this the mind got quieter and when I brought up those thoughts the mind was more or less unmoved and some pleasure arose.

If you are asking this question (i.e., there was the possibility for doubt in your experience at that time), then it must have been because you didn’t actually address the hindrances sufficiently. You have “addressed” the hindrances when there is no chance for even the greatest of your desires and the greatest of your fears to move you even as you’re thinking about them. And you would never achieve that just by observing your breath in the way you’re describing, which is more like getting occupied with something else altogether instead of doing the work.

Instead of finding one nice, clean corner in a messy house that you can dwell peacefully in when you close your eyes and forget about the rest (which is what most meditation practices are about), it’s about cleaning the whole house—*trying* to find dirt—so that eventually, no matter whether you walk, stand, sit, or lie down *anywhere* in that space, you will be at ease. Only the latter qualifies as right samādhi, and fosters the type of wisdom that matters.

## **“One has to experience the pleasure of jhana before doing the sense restraint”**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Belozersky 2024-04-08 15:08:45

I’ve encountered this view i.e. that one has to achieve jhana before one can start abandoning sensuality since it will alleviate the pain of restraint, quite a handful of times on Reddit, SuttaCentral and even heard it from some ajhans. Does this view have any grounding in the suttas? Because, *prima facie*, it seems that such view contradicts many suttas (e.g. DN2) where a trainee get himself established in sila and restraint first, and only then he achieves jhana.

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-09 13:36:04

The view might stem from a gross misreading of MN 14:

Sensuality gives little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the woe in it is what's greater. Mahānāma, even though a noble disciple has seen this as it is with right understanding, as long as they do not achieve the joy and ease that are apart from sensuality and detrimental phenomena, or something even more peaceful than that, they still might return to sensuality. \* But when they do achieve that joy and ease, or something more peaceful than that, then they do not return to sensuality. \*

“Not returning to sensuality” means becoming an anāgāmi, the point being that unless a noble disciple (sotāpanna or sakādagāmi) has become established in jhāna, they still be *liable* to thoughts and intentions of sensuality. But it does not imply at all that even a noble disciple, let alone a puthujjana, is justified in not being restrained until the jhāna is magically bestowed upon them. No restraint means no jhāna; right restraint is jhāna.

As stated in AN 10.61, it is the misconduct of body, speech, and mind caused by lack of sense restraint that lies at the root of the five hindrances, so any practice of “jhāna” that somehow circumvents the need for sense restraint, putting the emphasis on various other things instead—having nothing to do with inclining the mind towards renunciation, which is how jhāna comes about—is sure to be misguided.

“Bhikkhus, having not given up these six things, it's impossible to abide having entered upon the first jhāna. What six? Sensual desire, aversion, indolence and lethargy, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt. And the woe in sensuality hasn't been seen clearly as it is with right understanding. \* “Not having given up these six things, it's impossible to abide having entered upon the first jhāna.

—AN 6.73

It goes without saying that whoever does not practice sense restraint has not fulfilled the sixth prerequisite.

## Is experiencing less suffering the yardstick to judge the efficiency of a buddhist method ?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-04-02 20:32:56

If I'm not mistaken it's when we experience less suffering thanks to implementing the Buddha's teaching that we can accept it without a doubt. If such is a case, how can we dismiss other buddhist teachings or even non buddhist teachings as dead-ends even though according to numerous autobiographies and testimonies those others methods (Dzogchen/Mahamudra/Advaita) produce an extinction of suffering ? For reference, this gem of an answer from Bhikkhu Anigha answers partly this question but doesn't address the suffering aspect which is why I'm posting this.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-03 15:05:56**

No, “experiencing less suffering” is practically speaking not an accurate measure, because that can be achieved through various other means, including other religions, which from a Buddhist point of view are based upon wrong view.

The way to tell that a teaching works is that it pushes you to first and foremost acknowledge your liability to suffering *more* instead of less, and frees you from the whole “size” of that liability even while it’s there, rather than the opposite way most teachings go of encouraging you to *ignore* the fact that you’re liable to suffering, uncertainty and disappointment by getting absorbed on something that you have greater control over, and then helping you cover up the issue even more by layering various poetic concepts and mystical notions over it.

For example, a person would be free from attachment towards things they depend on and not suffer if something happens to them because “in ultimate reality” there are no “things” for them anymore, but just a heap of *kalapas* (\*or whatever other fancy metaphysical idea their individual approach rests upon), whereas the Buddha’s teaching would force you to acknowledge the significance of the things you hold dear and free you from all delight and attachment as well as lamentation and despair *while their significance remains*. It’s like you’re no longer frightened by a scary figure because you put a mask over it, instead of *actually* having become fearless.

There are some ascetics and brahmins who perceive that it’s day when in fact it’s night, or perceive that it’s night when in fact it’s day. \* This way of being of theirs is muddled, I say. I perceive that it’s night when in fact it is night, and perceive that it’s day when in fact it is day. And if there’s anyone of whom it may be rightly said that a being not liable to muddledness has arisen in the world for the welfare and happiness of the people, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans, it’s of me that this should be said.

—MN 4

As a corollary to this, the right practice of Dhamma will for most people (especially today) be more unsettling than reassuring in the early stages, because it requires uncovering a wound (the liability to suffering) that has been festering for ages but had been kept at bay with a combination of bandages and morphine.

**Right View vs. Fruit of Stream Entry**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** upasakatraine 2024-04-02 12:41:38

Would it be correct to state that Right View as an understanding of ‘what needs to be done’ comes about as a precursor and pre-requisite to the ‘experience’ of Stream Entry ?

In other words, Right View constitutes the knowledge of the path and practice that can lead to a temporary ‘event’ where one experiences freedom from the hindrances. Is this an accurate statement to make ?

If this is accurate, would Right View be a precursor to an *inevitable* Stream Entry fruition ?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-03 05:30:59**

Would it be correct to state that Right View as an understanding of ‘what needs to be done’ comes about as a precursor and pre-requisite to the ‘experience’ of Stream Entry ?

Yes, a person on the path to stream entry could be said to possess the Right View. With that I mean the first of the 8 noble individuals who is already guaranteed to become an Arahant eventually, and not just any devoted “Buddhist practitioner” (see comment at the second link).

In other words, Right View constitutes the knowledge of the path and practice that can lead to a temporary ‘event’ where one experiences freedom from the hindrances. Is this an accurate statement to make ?

Not quite. There is no “event where you *experience* freedom from the hindrances”, in the sense that it “comes over you” one evening by itself. The hindrances are abandoned through *diligence*,\* (*with uncompromising virtue and sense restraint as necessary prerequisites*) so it’s whenever that person who is already a noble one is steadfast enough in doing that work that they will acquire the “fruit” of stream entry, of which the release and joy are secondary and not to be emphasized at all. What actually matters is that they gained unshakable certainty in their understanding\*, and thereby given up the first three fetters. They would’ve unavoidably solidified their understanding at the time of death anyway, as stated in SN 25.1, but that’s the worst case scenario.

## **Guarding the sense doors**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Particular-Snow2271 2024-04-01 20:04:39

Hi, I’ve been quite interested in this practice for the past few months, and I find that I’ve been in contemplation/meditation for a while, I can experience what this means. I’ve also experienced glimpses of the deathless before, so I get it on that “level” as well. However, with my normal waking mind, this is quite difficult. I try but the practice seems to have little no potency.



I would like to be able to practice throughout the day, during my “normal” life and I’d like to practice it more effectively when I am deciding to train. Do you have suggestions for both situations? I read in another post about sights being the easiest to start with, does it make sense to start there? I made a list of signs and features you might perceive with the eye:

- Labels
- Names
- Beautiful.Ugly
- Tall/short
- Meaning
- Color
- Thin/fat
- Far/near
- Shape
- Color
- Texture, smooth, jagged etc.
- Memories they provoke
- Ideas and beliefs they provoke
- The emotions and feelings they provoke

Does this seem useful, am I missing anything? Any thoughts/feedback would be helpful.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-02 17:07:31**

Sense restraint is not about preventing any of the things you listed from arising, which is unsustainable and ultimately impossible. It’s about the recognition that *what* you perceive is not up to you to decide, but that you are certainly responsible for whether you choose to allow your mind to get sucked into those perceptions in such a way that desire or aversion increase.

Having seen a sight with the eye, he doesn’t grasp at signs and features of it on account of which—due to abiding with the eye faculty unrestrained—bad, detrimental phenomena of longing and upset would flow in on him. He practices to restrain that; he guards the eye faculty and brings about the restraint of the eye faculty.

Most people hold the view that their defilements are the fault of the objects and thoughts that arise for them, and from that the natural course of action is to try to shut everything out. But the defilements are in your *attitude* towards the objects, and if that is not clearly seen, you cannot possibly know what the signs that either nurture or diminish that attitude are. And precisely because people see the practice as involving suppression of every-

thing, it creates this artificial distinction between “normal life” and “practice time”, since you clearly can’t be living with that intense focusing on every twitch of your attention all the time. But the defilements, when discerned clearly, can and should be restrained 24/7 even while you go about your life (as long as it doesn’t involve breaking the precepts, see below), and you would never get tired or wound up from that unbroken practice. On the contrary, it’s where the true peace comes from.

Also, sense restraint is always the stage that comes after virtue and seeing the danger in the slightest fault in the Gradual Training, so it’s impossible to do it properly unless one is already proficient in never transgressing the 8 precepts. Sense restraint will not help you make keeping the precepts easier; it’s the other way around: purifying your bodily and verbal actions from desire and aversion *first* will eventually allow you to discern how, on the subtler mental level that sense restraint operates within, those same defilements arise.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-04 13:50:31 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So ... would the same principle be true for sense restraint? One restrains the impulses of anger and desire they feel, but on the level of thinking out of them instead? And are these impulses what is meant by “nimittas” in sense restraint?

Not quite. Impulses arise because of a lack of sense restraint beforehand. The purpose of sense restraint is, as the formula always says, to prevent states of desire and aversion (impulses) from “flowing in”.

Sense restraint simply means preventing yourself from becoming absorbed in the “world” of an arisen object, to put it like that—preventing loss of perspective, because that is always the root of desire and aversion.

I have seen Ajahn Nyanamoli describing sense restraint as restraint concerning the SIGNIFICANCES of sense objects... but surely things can be significant but still NOT evoking of lust/ hatred, no?

“Significance” in this sense doesn’t mean “relevance”, but more like “characteristic”. But characteristic not in the sense of patterns, shapes, auditory frequencies and so on on the ultra-particular level of sensory perception as people would think (operating on that level entails being already unrestrained in the way that actually matters), but on a more general level that involves all the five aggregates (that’s what a “phenomenon” is).

For instance, when you encounter agreeable food, there will be a whole array of feelings, memories, ideas, pressures, intentions, etc. associated with that food (and that includes even the inclination to get super focused on your eating to “catch” the moments of delight similar to what you described), and sense restraint is practiced by not falling for *any* of those more particular directions including in the name of “practice”, while also not preventing it from being there completely. You just don’t “open the door” for it (i.e. *grasp at*

the arisen signs and features).

You would practically achieve that by staying with the general context that you're eating the food only for the sake of survival even *while* the other myriad of more detailed significances are trying to catch your attention, and not allowing yourself to overthink it (but also not "underthink" it, i.e. losing the right context which will result in falling into delight in the food).

This recent video on the HH channel describes precisely how sense restraint works: you don't put things in the "center stage" of your attention, but at the same time you don't try to completely shoo them away as is people's natural reaction (because that requires you to grasp at their signs and features, ironically; the sign of "deny this" still involves "this").

Sense restraint prevents you from *losing* perspective in the first place, but when you have already lost it (i.e., when you find yourself already getting ragdolled by the impulses and obsessions), then the task is to regain perspective (and obviously to foresee it next time).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-04-30 03:24:59 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

What I'm referring to is when overall, I'm feeling neutral, or even pleasant - and yet, there are more specific pressuring feelings of displeasure or pleasure within that simultaneously - what I meant by "impulses". It's that initially manifested experience that I can't really prevent - a pressuring displeasure WITHIN the neutral feeling that COULD potentially take over if I give in to it. It doesn't seem to constitute a "loss of perspective" yet at that point.

...perhaps our disagreement here may stem from different ways of using the word "impulse."

I see, I indeed misunderstood what you meant with "impulse". In that case, yes, that's exactly what sense restraint is. The analogy of the bee buzzing in front of you is quite accurate. It's because people, if they don't outright indulge, have a tacit expectation that no "buzzing" should take place *at all* right from the start that they can't practice sense restraint and all the rest properly. But it's not a matter of choice, and enduring the "buzz" is necessary once your virtue is firmly established.

As such, the overall experience of when I HAD to eat certain foods that I desired would simply be awkward and somewhat uncomfortable, with the tension just sitting there, waiting for involvement.

That's why it's said that pleasure should be seen as pain, and that requires the "buzz" to be there to some degree (mentally, of course).

## **Sankhara as an attitude?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-03-28 23:01:43

I was reading the translation Ven. Anigha released for MN 35 and found this interesting note here which states:

saṅkhāras are, strictly speaking, neither the simplistic “choices”, nor the abstruse “fabrications/volitional formations”. They are “movements” in the most general sense, but they need not always be fully deliberate. For instance, a puthujjana’s misconceiving of the aggregates as “mine” is a saṅkhāra (SN 22.81), but because they’re unable to recognize that attitude as a saṅkhāra—and thereby straight away as impermanent, in which case they would irreversibly cease to be a puthujjana—that “activity” continues to take place. It is therefore not possible to simply choose not to take things as self: that saṅkhāra is neither a “choice” nor an “intention”.

SN 22.81 states the following:

Here, bhikkhus, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards form as self. That regarding, bhikkhus, is a formation.

I’m unable to understand this, maybe I can sum up the difficulties in comprehending this into different parts:

1. Why is that “regarding” an activity?
2. It makes sense for that “regarding” to be an attitude: I simply *find* myself already having appropriated this experience as a whole *for me*. But this understanding of that “regarding” as an attitude seems incompatible with that “regarding” being an activity. One is implicit (attitude), whilst the other is explicit (activity).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-29 12:59:20**

1. Why is that “regarding” an activity?
2. It makes sense for that “regarding” to be an attitude: I simply *find* myself already having appropriated this experience as a whole *for me*. But this understanding of that “regarding” as an attitude seems incompatible with that “regarding” being an activity. One is implicit (attitude), whilst the other is explicit (activity).

\* Because it’s something that can be brought to an end, something that’s “taking place” rather than something that’s static (in which case one would be hopelessly subjected to it and thus to suffering). Of course, a puthujjana cannot stop regarding things as self simply by trying, but that’s because they haven’t recognized the “regarding” as it is to begin with. Thus, whatever they might think needs to be stopped will not be *that* activity, but rather some other one that’s secondary to it. If they did recognize it, they would give it up immediately as the Sutta says, but then they wouldn’t be a puthujjana anymore.

In other words, the root of the puthujjana’s problem is not that he regards things as self,

but that he can't even recognize *how* he's regarding things as self—it's an ignorance of ignorance (\*\*§\*\*25 of Ñāṇavīra's Note on PS). That's why your efforts should always be directed at rectifying your views about what the sense of self and ignorance even are, rather than at relinquishing whatever you may currently think those things are.

\* The attitude will feel implicit to the extent that it's not understood. But the more the "dust" that is obscuring it is cleared out (through none other than virtue and sense restraint), the attitude gradually begins to become more explicit. Once there is not a trace of doubt about what the attitude is, the attitude will be gone, and that's stream-entry. Then, for a stream-enterer or higher, taking things as "mine" (the subtler *asmimāna* as opposed to the coarse *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* of the puthujjana) is in a sense a matter of explicit choice, which is why they're instructed not to do so in MN 1 and throughout the discourses.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-31 06:00:25 (in reply to a comment not included)**

With the ignoring of that arisen notion, there is conceiving of what is perceived (perceived is not recognized as 'just' perceived). Conceiving what is perceived there is the notion of separation (self and the world are different), unity (self and the world are the same), separation-and-unity, neither-separation-nor-unity.

Yes, but it's important to clarify also that "just perceived" doesn't mean what people usually think it does: feelings should not exist, only "raw sense data". They may not outright say the point is to get rid of feelings but that's really what it is if you read between the lines. Apply this contrived view to everything you experience so that with the suppression of feeling, there is suppression of craving, while ignorance remains unaffected.

So quite contrary to that, you would learn to "just perceive" things by not overlooking what is being felt—non-specific pleasantness, unpleasantness, or neither—while there is perception, as opposed to by attending even harder to "bare perceptions" (which covers up the immediate symptoms of the illness of dukkha by actually making the root cause, ignorance, worse).

The "assumed privileged position" (the regarding) is also *ignored* and will remain ignored to the extent that the All hasn't been discerned. With the non-ignoring of the All, there would be the non-ignoring of the "assumed privileged position" to the aggregates on account of which the privileged position implying mastery ceases as the mastery is seen 'within' non-mastery.

Correct. The "assumed privileged position" is there because, while there is perceiving, most importantly the current feeling and the intentions in regard to it (the other half chunk of "the All") are not sufficiently recognized as simultaneously present (*ayoniso manasikāra*). That's what not grasping the signs of the mind means. There is then automatically the assumption (which is not at all conscious or deliberate) of that other half of the All (background) happening somehow "outside" of the rest (the foreground), hence "privileged position". With ignorance, there will be assumption; you don't need to *decide*

to start having *upādāna*, as people would think, and thus it's also not a matter of choice to stop it: the direct choice to stop it will be happening from that same "privileged position", that same ignorance, thus maintaining it.

The hindrances hinder is because they maintain the non-recognition of the All because they keep one 'stuck' to immediacy and prevent the recognition of the *presence* of the reflexive hierarchy. And this is why sensual desire is the *chief* hindrance: it is *the* basis for occupation with immediacy (= six senses). Being occupied with immediacy, one maintains one's ignoring, and maintains the ignoring of one's ignoring.

Yes, it's impossible to act out of a hindrance without at the same time overlooking the presence of the background (peripheral feeling and intentions in regard to the thing you're acting out of).

If this isn't too unnecessarily technical of a question, could you elaborate on how the reflexive hierarchy is the citta? I wonder whether there's something I'm misunderstanding regarding the citta on account of which I'm unable to understand the relation. The reflexive hierarchy is in essence degrees of knowledge of what is present, but what does this hierarchical knowledge have to do with the citta which holds the *attitudes*?

It's nothing mystical or esoteric. The citta is really just the reflexive (background) aspect of the experience as a whole. As implied in what I wrote above, when you're having an experience in the foreground (which will always be composed of all the five aggregates, never just one), there will be another background "half" to that (which will also be composed of the five aggregates). *yoniso manasikāra* is about taking any aspect of the general level (body, feeling, moods, phenomena) and not losing sight of it while the particular (again, involving the whole five aggregates) endures. When done rightly, that right then and there closes the opening for every type of unwholesome, and sustaining that is what "tames" the citta: the hierarchy "broadens" so that there is no longer have a tendency to lose sight of the general, even if you make no effort to remember it, and that's *samādhī*. Whether you walk, stand, sit, or lie down, there can be no hindrances (see also AN 3.63).

Being rightly aware of that background is all it takes, you don't need to then get rid of the pressure to act out. You just maintain the recognition that there are these two simultaneous aspects: the thing (1st "half" of the All), and the intention to act out of it (2nd half), and just keep that dog "on the the leash" for as long as it takes.

That's the entire principle of purification of the mind, without exception. And, of course, when you act out of body and speech, there is 0 possibility of discerning any of this, as you're already swimming far past the origin of the stream, so to speak. That's why virtue comes first.

## Why is fear not explicitly called out as a hindrance ?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** upasakatraine 2024-03-26 14:24:31

I have been wondering this for sometime now, and as far as I can tell it is likely because fear is embedded within the first two hindrances of sense-desire, and ill-will.

The way I see it, fear is the manifestation of the pain of the likely unfulfilment of sense-desire, or cessation of object of sense-desire.

In this regard, fear is also the underlying proximate cause for ill-will in.

However, the phenomenon of fear is such a primal one - and the Buddha also spoke about it specifically in Suttas (Fear & Terror).

I am curious regarding the treatment of fear as a hindrance, and the nature of practice that strikes at the root of it.

My understanding is that *freedom* from fear, is synonymous with having attained the deathless - since the likelihood of fear persists as long as death applies (i.e. the phenomena of person-hood still remains). Hence one is free from the fear of death (and consequently *any* fear), only at the attainment of the final knowledge.

Kindly correct my understanding if inaccurate.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-28 19:15:54

Fear could be considered as being within the fourth hindrance, which is agitation/anxiety in general. It's also the 9th of the 10 fetters, abandoned only by an Arahant.

## Just sit and die?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Ctrl\_Alt\_Explode 2024-03-25 18:59:03

Hypothetically speaking, if you really got yourself rid of desire (you won't leave your meditation to chase some sort of sensual pleasure, like "let me go and grab a snack" or "let me watch a movie"), and you get yourself rid of aversion (any pain or discomfort from sitting won't disturb you, not even if you sit for hours), and you have contentment/equanimity (you're completely content while meditating, you don't need anything else, you're OK), wouldn't you just "sit there" and die then?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-26 15:35:26

No, what you're describing as freedom from desire and aversion is becoming a robot (unfortunately confused with Arahantship quite often).

An Arahant still experiences motivation to do things, as that is part of the five aggregates, even in samādhī.

But the difference with an ordinary person is that such actions are never rooted in a sense of entitlement to feel one thing and not feel something else (see this reply for more on what that means). So if the action he was motivated to do does not produce the expected results, he will not suffer at all, having fully understood that his own experience does not belong to him. And that difference in the way they see things would not even be necessarily apparent to someone else from the outside, apart from the fact that there are a few specific things an Arahant can never do (and which someone who hopes to move closer to Arahantship should certainly not be doing either).

## Not acting out of any feeling

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** cruisermoves 2024-03-25 16:41:44

I was reading the article by Sister Medhini about fixed views vs unfixed certainties (<https://www.hillsidehermitage.org/fixed-views-vs-unfixed-certainties>) and towards the end she says “if you train towards not acting out of feeling to any extent at all....” This seems amazing to me. Is this how we should train?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-26 07:18:18

There is a difference between acting “with” a feeling and acting “out of” a feeling. The latter means that your action is rooted in either desire to increase a pleasant feeling or resistance to an unpleasant feeling. But if you make an action without either of those attitudes regarding the feeling that is there, you didn’t act “out” of it.

For this to make sense, it must be understood that “feeling” is always a broad mental phenomenon, and it’s, to put it roughly, what you’re referring to when replying to the question “how are you doing right now?”. A feeling is emphatically not a physical sensation.

When you’re hungry, there would normally be both an unpleasant feeling (i.e., a mental uneasiness), and a physical sensation in your stomach. An action of eating would be “acting out” of the present feeling if you eat in order to get rid of the mental displeasure, as opposed to just the physical phenomenon of hunger. In other words, if your motivation behind eating is emotional. You would know that it is because there’s some particular food that you want, for instance, as opposed to just about anything that will quell the physiological hunger.

With any feeling, there is an endless range of things that you can do which would not be a form of acting “out of it”. If your mind is obsessed by the pleasant feeling of some sensual object, you can do chores, go for a walk, read, think about other things—pretty much anything that does not entail engaging with that object by body, speech, or mind.



So “never acting out of feelings” does not entail locking yourself up in a dark cave and never moving a limb ever again.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-27 19:03:16 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

However, this seems to state that there is only *a* feeling. But, isn't there feeling associated with each sense base?

There is, but there is one feeling in your experience as a whole that determines how the particular feelings in each sense are experienced, and it is that broader feeling that one shouldn't act out of. On that broader level, there can only be one feeling at any given time.

This was how I understood how I could have a pleasant experience of eating something nice whilst being in pain physically.

Both of those instances would be particular feelings. If the more general feeling were unpleasant, (e.g., you know this is your last meal) then even the nicest food would not feel satisfying. If the more general feeling were pleasant, even physical pain would not bother you (e.g., when people are so pleased by the context of “I'll look better in the mirror” that the pain of exercise can even be enjoyable).

You “act out” when your choices are aimed at increasing pleasure or avoiding displeasure on that general level, not when the action is directed at a particular feeling (e.g., the Buddha interrupting his discourse to lie down because his back hurts).

But, again, feelings are not sensations, so what the Buddha is trying to get rid of there by lying down is not just the sensation of tightness (a perception) in his back, but also the mental displeasure (feeling) that is associated with it. And it's not unwholesome because the more general feeling, whatever it was in that situation, is still being endured and not interfered with.

And that's also you wouldn't necessarily be able to tell an Arahant externally: you would still see them doing things so as to change what they feel on the particular level (except breaking the basic precepts and celibacy). The deeper layer of feeling that they have thoroughly understood as “not mine” and are incapable of resisting or delighting in is apparent only to them (and to each individual respectively). The idea that you train equanimity by arbitrarily enduring particular pains (such as not moving even when your knees hurt during meditation, or the whole bunch of Jain practices) is thus entirely misguided. Ascetic practices, if undertaken, must be done with reference to the general feeling; otherwise, they're no better than any plain old military training.

Edit: You can think of perception as encompassing things like (for each of the 6 senses respectively): blue, yellow, red; high pitch, low pitch; petrichor, lavender (smells); salty, sweet, etc.; hard, soft, cold, hot, etc., and finally the endless array of content of mental images. Feeling, on the other hand, is only “nice”, “not nice”, or neither.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-28 18:51:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Let's say I'm feeling neutral and then out of the blue I'm starting to feel lustful. If vedana/feeling can only be pleasant/unpleasant and neutral, being lustful here would be what ? and would it be a particular or a broad vedana ? Maybe I'm making this complicated when it's not ... sorry if that's the case.

Lust is not a feeling. It's your attitude towards the general feeling that seeks to make it more pleasant (or less unpleasant) by seeking out particular pleasant feelings. And you *can* certainly succeed in producing the particular pleasant feelings you wanted—that's not the problem with lust. Fundamentally the suffering was on the level of the general feeling, which can very well remain the same despite experiencing even the best imaginable pleasures on the particular level. Therefore, by giving in to lust, one makes oneself more addicted and dependent on what is essentially a risky gamble (whether you actually succeed in altering the general feeling through the particular ones).

Also does this understanding of having two kinds of vedana (the broad one and the particular one) is based only on the satipatthana (vedana within vedana...) or is it a natural understanding coming from disparate suttas showing both broad and particular vedana being taught by the Buddha ?

It's implied in many Suttas, especially wherever dispassion/Nibbāna is described as pleasant (*sukha*). For example, SN 22.43 describes how by knowing the nature of a feeling (which could in itself be *dukkha*) as it is, one would abide at ease (i.e., a general pleasant feeling). That would not be possible if both feelings were on the same level: it would require you to replace the old feeling with a new one, and for that the aggregates would have to be in your control. Not seeing that there are two layers of feeling at any given time automatically results in attempts at “management”, and from the previous paragraph it should be clear why that amounts to meditating with sensuality.

(The same principle is also echoed in AN 6.55 on the section about the Arahant's citta (i.e., his general feeling) remaining unmoved regarding the feelings of the 6 senses).

## **Only an anagami removes hindrance of doubt?!**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** VitakkaVicara 2024-03-24 22:54:04

In another post, Additional\_Fix8417 has said that:

Edit: regarding vicikiccha, it is only doubt in the Buddha's Teaching that is uprooted by the sotapanna. The sekha up until anagami still faces the hindrance of doubt (doubt as a general phenomenon, as it is tied to mama)

Without doubt as a fetter, how can it ever be a hindrance? It is like saying “*without roots, that plant will still grow and bother me*”. The sotapanna removes all doubt regarding Buddha's Teaching (*though he, and even an Arahant can still be ignorant/doubtful about unrelated*

*worldly things disconnected from the Dhamma. An Arahant needs to ask for directions and ask people's names).*

Please explain.

Thank you.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-25 05:04:14**

A sotāpanna is beyond doubt regarding the Triple Gem and regarding their own understanding, but they are still subject to resisting displeasure on a subtler level. The five hindrances are simply five alternative ways in which that tendency can manifest; they're not fundamentally different from each other, so you can't have three or four of them instead of five. If one of them is there, all the others are there by implication. So without fully having transcended the hindrance of sensuality for example, which a sotāpanna hasn't, the hindrance of doubt cannot but be there too.

The fetter of doubt is not on the same level as this—it's not doubt about this or that. It's specifically about how the puthujjana lacks certainty about what the way out of suffering is. So, in other words, if a sotāpanna is not diligent enough in recollecting the same understanding that already freed them from the fetter of doubt and that they cannot doubt, the hindrance of doubt will be lingering; if he does make effort, the hindrance will necessarily fade. But the puthujjana is still in the woods about his understanding to begin with, so that he may not even be able to give up the hindrance of doubt no matter how hard he tries. That is due to the fetter of doubt.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-25 12:46:33 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Hindrance of doubt is manifestation of fetter of doubt. How can sotapanna be hindered by doubt in the Buddha, Dhamma etc?

It's not doubt about the Dhamma, as I pointed out. It's the natural, inherent uncertainty in everything else that is there even for an Arahant, and which carries an unpleasantness that the sotāpanna might fail to fully withstand, and thus they end up acting to get rid of that unpleasantness at least mentally (= hindrance of doubt). Hence I mentioned that it's on the same level as sensuality. If you have desire for something, the uncertainty that it might get taken away by somebody else or that you won't get it will emotionally affect you (= hindrance of doubt), etc.

## How Virtue, not “Concentration” or “Absorption”, Overcomes the Hindrances

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-03-20 04:13:23

New Dhamma discussion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igC9gzKZV6o>

Essay “Sīla is Samādhi”: <https://www.hillsidehermitage.org/sila-is-samadhi/>

MN 18 (see comments): <https://suttas.hillsidehermitage.org/?q=mn%2018>

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-21 14:35:07 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

Bhante, this comment isn’t directly related to the content of this post but I didn’t think it was significant enough to warrant a separate post. However, I was currently looking through this entry on the meaning of ariyasavaka that argued it meant “disciple of the noble ones” instead of “noble disciples”. From searching the suttas on instances of ariyasavaka, it appears to be a sound conclusion. Would it be possible to know your opinion on it?

The article fails to provide convincing evidence. The first quote it gives does not mean one qualifies as ariyasāvaka by ordaining. It’s rather operating on the premise that the person who ordained was already a noble disciple, i.e., got the Right View, which is how they’d be able to follow all of the instructions that come afterwards, especially the part about the four *satipaṭṭhānas* which is at the core of the discourse. As said in MN 107, even the Gradual Training is for trainees (*sekha*), namely the first 7 of the eight noble individuals. It’s not at all far-fetched that in the Buddha’s time, most people would ordain *because* they got the Right View, not in order to get it. Apart from the greater proliferation of sensuality in people’s mind’s today, the other great issue is that when people gain faith in “the Dhamma” nowadays to the point where they would ordain, the vast majority of the time there are alien components in their view that don’t fit with what the Buddha was actually teaching, whereas back then there was no room for such misrepresentations to prevail.

The same principle carries over to the second passage quoted in the article from the Chinese Āgama:

“A householder’s son hears that Dharma taught by him. On hearing it, the householder’s son ***gains confidence in the Dharma taught by the Tathāgata***\*\*\*”

As per all the Suttas in SN 25 (Okkanasamyutta) one who “merely” has faith in the Dhamma is already on the path to stream-entry, i.e. they are the first type of noble individual (sotāpatti-magga). What this means is that unless a person is at the point where they’re guaranteed to become a sotāpanna before they die, what they have faith in is **not** the Dhamma—it’s on some level a distortion of it, no matter how much effort and dedication they put into practicing exactly what (they think) the Buddha said. That is

what it means to be a *puthujjana*, and that's why the standard formula always says "...an unlearned ordinary person who has not seen the noble ones...", i.e., whatever they think would make someone a noble one is incorrect.

Moreover, in SN 55.40 the Buddha clearly states that whoever lacks the four factors of stream entry completely does not qualify as an ariyasāvaka, but as "an outsider, standing on the plane of ordinary people". The qualification "totally and utterly" is there not to include the a *puthujjana* who considers themselves Buddhist, but to include the dhamma-follower and faith-follower, the sotāpatti-magga individuals referred to above (who are said to have "transcended the plane of *puthujjanas*" in SN 25) That is, they do have a degree of faith in the Triple Gem, and they possess the five faculties (which a *puthujjana* does not, SN 48.12). But they have not yet abandoned the first three fetters fully. And that is what explains the passage from AN 3.94 and others which you referenced.

As for the last passage quoted in the article, an "untamed" death for a noble disciple would mean, for instance, a sotāpanna dying without becoming an Arahant. The whole Sutta is instructing a noble disciple on how to tame his mind, whereas a *puthujjana* doesn't see his own mind in the first place. In other words, a *puthujjana* wouldn't just die an "untamed death"; they would also die without even knowing what "taming" entails.

So no, I'm afraid there is no flexibility. In order to qualify as a "disciple of the noble ones", if we were to translate it that way hypothetically, one would need to now *what* truly makes someone a noble one in the first place. Even if from a "third-person/public-world" perspective (which is impossible to actually have) that teaching *is* really the teaching of the noble ones, it would not be the teaching of the noble ones **for you** unless you know exactly what makes it so, i.e., are a noble one yourself.

In the end, even the Triple Gem exists only "within you". Not in some corny way, but in the sense that it's always going to be what **you** think the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are that you're putting your faith in.

## Trying to grasp how to not act out on a mental level (inspired by the recent video)

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Belozersky 2024-03-19 17:27:16

When my mind encounters a pleasant idea, for example a sexual fantasy, I understand that if I were to pursue it or, in other words, start to entertain it or delight in it, I would be acting unskillfully i.e. I would be acting out of pressure by trying to develop this thought further. When this understanding (that pursuing this idea is unskillful) happens some sort of a "click" occurs, for the lack of a better word, which "blocks" my engagement with such thought, and, afterwards, this thought retreats into the background of my awareness (so it is not in my immediate focus anymore, but I can still feel the pressure of it, so to speak) while I continue whatever I was doing at that moment. I'm not trying to actively dispel such thoughts like some people might do with their intrusive thoughts.

So, is this the correct way of restraint on the mental level? Thanks

(Sorry for somewhat clumsy description, just want to understand how to practice).

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-20 04:24:50**

So, is this the correct way of restraint on the mental level? Thanks

Yes, in theory. But if it's not already resulting in the first jhāna by itself, it means that there's still some form of inaccuracy present (either still welcoming the thoughts somewhat or still denying them somewhat), and this would be maintained by lack of restraint on the physical and verbal level. If that isn't impeccable, then it might *seem* like one is discerning the mental level correctly while actually one isn't. Discerning mental unwholesome actions correctly and restraining them would have to result in the impossibility of unwholesome bodily and verbal actions, not in simply repressing them or forgetting about the possibility to do them.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-24 13:42:29 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

As long as it's not being done to replace/override the other images, then yes, that is how the right thoughts are cultivated. That is subtler than it sounds; everyone starts with a natural tendency to try to sort out the unwholesome thoughts by just pasting the wholesome ones on top of them (e.g., the popular "loving-kindness" meditation), and for as long as that is the case, the whole effort will be rooted in aversion and will not lead to right samādhi.

That's why reflection requires "endurance". You direct the mind to wholesome thoughts *while* the other images are still lurking around pressuring you to think them intentionally, and you refrain just from that final deliberate engagement (which is where all unwholesome states are to be found, not before that).

It's as if someone is asking you to sign a contract, but you simply don't do it, no matter how long they stand there trying to coerce you with threats. The purpose of the wholesome thoughts is to keep reminding yourself why *you* shouldn't sign, not to keep telling the person to go away (which doesn't work because he's actually your boss).

### **In DN 21 and AN 9.3 what is the cutting of thought and reflexion referring to ?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** obobinde 2024-03-19 16:22:24

Engaged in a conversation on another forum these two suttas were mentioned where the stopping of thinking and pondering is presented as a worthwhile goal and a usecase for anapanasati. It got me wondering as I've never heard about it before. I think in DN 21 the Buddha may be talking about first and second jhana where in the second thinking and pondering are absent hence more happiness but I can't be sure. No idea for AN 9.3. What do you think ?

DN21

AN 9.3

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-20 04:04:02

Firstly, it's easy to overlook what the Buddha states as coming before those four practices at the end:

...

(5) A bhikkhu with good, friends, companions, and associates is expected to be wise, to be endowed with the understanding related to arising and passing away that is *noble, penetrative, and leads to the complete exhaustion of suffering*.  
[= a bhikkhu is a sotāpanna at least]

But then, a bhikkhu *grounded on these five things* should develop four further things.

—AN 9.3

(It's also clear from the context that "good friend" (*kalyāṇamitta*) is someone who could elucidate on and thus help you to attain such understanding, and therefore they must possess it themselves. It doesn't simply mean anyone who also happens to be a Buddhist).

*Ānāpānasati* leads to the "cutting off of thoughts (*vitakka*)" if practiced correctly because it's about precisely the opposite of what people would generally think it is. Establishing the context of the body breathing as a background makes particular thoughts (*vitakka*) lose their significance and therefore subside because they're being undermined through *yoniso manasikāra*. That means that while they arise, they're being known as standing upon the necessary foundation of this body (that breathes).

This is another story altogether than the usual focusing on your *sensations* of breathing in order to suppress your thinking, which is ironically prioritizing and increasing *vitakka* (immediacy) and overriding *vicāra* (reflexion/context), while it should always be the other way around.

"When this composure has been developed and cultivated by you in this way, then you should develop this composure with thinking (*vitakka*) and pondering (*vicāra*); you should develop it without thinking but with pondering only; you should develop it without thinking and without pondering.

—AN 8.63

Focusing on sensations (*vitakka*) can successfully be accomplished by children in the span of one meditation session, while, as the Sutta clearly says, what's actually being described requires the Right View (as well as virtue, learning from other noble individuals, and diligent effort in abandoning unwholesome states).

Regarding DN 21, the fact that the happiness that doesn't have thinking and without pondering is better than that which does is simply a statement that the second jhāna is better than the first, and that should be uncontroversial. But the Buddha also stated that one who tries to enter the second jhāna without being steady in the first (which is *characterized* by thinking and pondering) will fail to get either of them (AN 9.35), and this is exactly what people are usually attempting to do.

## Skilful boundary for contemplation practice

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** upasakatraine 2024-03-13 11:30:09

To what extent is it beneficial/unbeneficial to bring to mind circumstances that would cause one to suffer, as a means of ascertaining one's liability to still suffer?

Just as it would not be wise to subject oneself to circumstances provocative of sensuality, in order to verify or test one's endurance of it - would it not also apply to bringing up 'thoughts' pertaining to circumstances that are provocative of fear/anger/anxiety etc.?

However, one of the suggestions Ajahn makes in his talks are to ask yourself from time to time 'am I still liable to suffer / what could cause me to suffer'.

How is one to understand where the skilful boundary lies in such an evaluation; so as to not overstep into the territory of unbeneficial.

Many thanks in advance

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-13 13:09:59**

This talk goes precisely into this.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-14 17:47:39 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So how would an Ariyasavaka then approach that very prospect? He would discern an arisen citta afflicted with fear/anxiety, on account of that prospect, and he discerns an arisen unpleasant feeling simultaneously. He **having established the right order beforehand**, that feeling is felt unyoked, and he endures it to the extent it persists. Therefore his task is to maintain that state



of heedfulness of the background, under the pressure that tries to pull him towards the foreground, while that prospect of thought is present in the foreground.

Yes. The “foreground” is not this or that specific thought or image, but the whole experience of the thing that’s pressuring you. A noble disciple then knows how to rightly establish a background to that foreground so that they remain “unyoked” from it.

Further, is the endurance of the unpleasantness of that prospect of thought, in itself sufficient to erode the craving in regard to the thought itself and its likely materialisation in real life ? Or does the ‘harness need to be tightened’ ever so slightly (i.e. move gradually from the prospect of the thought, to slowly allowing the thought itself to be fully brought up and persist) as one progresses in this direction ?

The mind will naturally be able to “look” at it more directly as the craving is indirectly starved by sustaining the right context, but you can’t measure that progression. All you can do is make sure that to whatever degree of the thought is currently enough to provoke the mind, you refuse to abandon the context, and that you don’t bite more than you can chew. Also, it’s important to remember that this whole practice applies, as said in the video, when the mind isn’t currently taken by any obvious unwholesome states. When there is something in particular that’s agitating the mind, the right thing to do is to not act out of it until the mind goes back to baseline. Trying to do the contemplation at that time would result in acting out of aversion to the pressure.

When he discerns that the prospect of that thought is no longer as provocative of aversion, how does he then confirm that it is truly an erosion of craving - and that he hasn’t simply ‘got used to it’ - or are the two the same thing ?

It would be clear that it’s truly an erosion of craving because the mind is not shaken by the storm anymore, rather than there no longer being a storm (AN 6.55). In other words, the same feeling is still there, but the mind is now equanimous *in spite of it* (uprooting), not equanimous because the old feeling got replaced with a neutral one (management).

“Herein, what are the six kinds of equanimity based on the household life? On seeing a form with the eye, equanimity arises in a foolish infatuated ordinary person, in an untaught ordinary person who has not conquered the boundary [of pressure] or conquered the results [of action] and who is blind to danger. Such equanimity as this does not transcend the form; that is why it is called equanimity based on the household life.

“On hearing a sound with the ear...On smelling an odour with the nose...On tasting a flavour with the tongue...On touching a tangible with the body...On cognizing a mind-object with the mind, equanimity arises in a foolish infatuated ordinary person, in an untaught ordinary person who has not conquered the boundary [of pressure] or conquered the results [of action] and who is blind to danger. Such equanimity as this does not transcend the mind-object; that is why it is called equanimity based on the household life. These are the

six kinds of equanimity based on the household life.

“Herein, what are the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation? When, by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away, and cessation of forms, one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that forms both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, equanimity arises. Such equanimity as this transcends the form; that is why it is called equanimity based on renunciation. **[i.e., the equanimity transcends even the way the form is felt\*\***, see AN 6.55]\*\*

“When, by knowing the impermanence, change, fading away, and cessation of sounds...of odours...of flavours...of tangibles... of mind-objects, one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom that mind-objects both formerly and now are all impermanent, suffering, and subject to change, equanimity arises. Such equanimity as this transcends the mind-object; that is why it is called equanimity based on renunciation. These are the six kinds of equanimity based on renunciation.

—MN 137

That is also what is meant with “separation” (viveka) in the first jhāna.

## New section on HH website for accurate Sutta translations

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-03-13 10:43:09

suttas.hillsidehermitage.org

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-13 12:21:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

The content of the note appears to be outside the note within the translation content rather than within the note. Maybe this is just an issue for me.

Fixed, thanks.

It also appears that there are sections that don't have their translation counterparts.

Yes, this is a feature of the original translation files from SuttaCentral that I've modified. Sections that merely repeat something that was already said are sometimes either left out if they don't add anything new—such as the repetition of the original statement after a simile—or are abridged (e.g., when the monks recount an already narrated event to the Buddha).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-14 15:37:09 (in reply to a comment not included)**

No, it wasn't on purpose. It's fixed now.

## **Anagami and Arahants are in constant Jhana?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-03-13 01:32:46

I was contemplating the hindrances and noticed that if all that was required to get into jhana was the temporary abandonment of the hindrances then that would appear to contradict the suttas. Ironically, in my contemplation I was contemplating the hindrance of doubt, and this question is certainly present on the basis of that hindrance, so in a sense I'm just pushing back my progress in terms of discerning the escape from the hindrances.

But simultaneously, I discerned a sense of fear that I thought was gone for good; I thought I was no longer liable to a significant protection towards 'my' worldview, but it seems I was wrong. So instead of just enduring doubt, I decided it would be a better endeavor for me to further push myself in a position of fear and endure *that*.

Now that I've established my intention here, I'll get to the actual issue.

It's quite clear from the suttas that hindrances need to be temporarily abandoned to abide in the jhanas. The Buddha compares the five hindrances to a prison, and it's clear that to abide in the jhanas, one must *escape* the prison and not just be at the mercy of the prison guards and just not get tortured by them for some time. Hence, the argument of simply 'doing away' with sensual desire temporarily without having explicitly discerned its escape beforehand and *actually* having escaped doesn't seem to hold. However, if discerning the escape from the hindrances is sufficient for jhanas, then that means an anagami, who would've ended any sensual desire (and consequently, ended all hindrances, as far as I can see), would be abiding in jhana constantly. And the same with an arahant.

However, this doesn't seem to measure up well with the suttas:

'Sir, this is not my only incredible and amazing quality; there is another. Whenever I want, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, **I 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, **I enter and remain in the second absorption**, which has the rapture and bliss born of immersion, with internal clarity and mind at one, without placing the mind and keeping it connected. And with the fading away of rapture, **I enter and remain in the third absorption**, where I meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, personally experiencing the bliss of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.' With the giving up of pleasure and pain, and the ending of former happiness and sadness, **I enter and**

**remain in the fourth absorption**, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness.’

AN 7.53

Nanda’s mother is an anagami who can abide in all four jhanas, however, the fact that she states “whenever I want, ..., I enter and remain in the first absorption” suggests that there’s a state where she *isn’t* in the first jhana. But that normal abiding of hers should already be an abiding devoid of the hindrances as she destroyed the fetter of sensuality. So it appears that jhanas are abandonment of the hindrances + something else, and I’m unsure of what that ‘something else’ is.

In SN 4.23, we see the Arahant Godhika who’s unable to remain in the “liberation of mind”, which I thought referred to jhanas, but that doesn’t seem to be the case as it’s not mentioned in Pali. But then what can it be apart from jhana since the mind is already liberated for an arahant? Or maybe he wasn’t an Arahant considering liberation of mind refers to that, and attained it when the moment he killed himself?

But I also remember reading some sutta where the Buddha or some arahant had some sort of pain and then decided to dwell in jhana (not sure if it was first or higher ones though) but the sutta seems to have just disappeared..

**EDIT:** It appears, at least currently, that I’ve solved the conundrum I was in through shameless use of analysis (instead of trying to discern escape from the hindrances, presently, thereby entertaining heedlessness). I would appreciate thoughts on this if possible:

AN 1.53 states that one with a mind of metta is not devoid of jhana:

“If, mendicants, a mendicant develops a mind of love even as long as a finger-snap, they’re called a mendicant who does not lack absorption, who follows the Teacher’s instructions, who responds to advice, and who does not eat the country’s alms in vain. How much more so those who make much of it!”

However, according to MN 55, the Buddha *constantly* abides with that mind of metta:

“Yes, sir. Sir, I have heard that Brahmā abides in love. Now, I’ve seen the Buddha with my own eyes, and it is the Buddha who truly abides in love.”

“Any greed, hate, or delusion that might give rise to ill will has been given up by the Realized One, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and is unable to arise in the future. If that’s what you were referring to, I acknowledge it.”

Thus, through basic *modus ponens* here, one can argue that the Buddha – in his *constant* abiding – isn’t devoid of jhana. The only way I can currently conceive of contesting this is if one argues either of the following:

1. That either one of the translations are wrong
2. That either one of the suttas are inauthentic

3. That when the Buddha says that one with a mind of metta isn't devoid of jhana he doesn't *really* mean jhana (or he means a variant of 'jhana' that isn't discussed of in any of the suttas)

I cannot adequately assess accuracy of any claims to (1) or (2) due to my lacking analytical capabilities. However, (3) can be axiomatically rejected on the basis that the Buddha – being the foremost of the teachers out there – wouldn't willingly entertain a contradiction (A is not-A) so as to lead astray many of his potential disciples.

The issue that one is now presented with is the task of reconciling this interpretation with the supposed implication that an anagami is capable of abiding in non-jhana as mentioned in AN 7.53. After reflecting on the language, one can notice that stating “whenever I want I can remain in the first, second, third, fourth jhana” doesn't imply that one's default abiding is a state that is *not* those four states.

For example, humans can rightly state “whenever I want, I can enter and remain on the ground, in the underground, or above the ground”; these would be the only possible states of existence in space for a human with reference to the earth, but that doesn't mean that in stating this I'm existing in an area apart from such spaces.

Anyways, I certainly need to stop my analysis here otherwise I'll go back into even more of my previous analysis-inclined mind, which would exist in contradiction to heedfulness.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-13 13:57:55**

Arahants and Anāgāmis are most certainly not constantly in jhāna. If that were the case, the Suttas wouldn't exist, since speech ceases in the very first jhāna

SN 17.30 also states that an Arahant can lose their “pleasant abiding in the present experience” (*ditṭhadhammasukhavihāra*), an epithet for the jhānas, if things that obstruct solitude take up too much of their time.

The Buddha compares the five hindrances to a prison, and it's clear that to abide in the jhanas, one must *escape* the prison and not just be at the mercy of the prison guards and just not get tortured by them for some time. Hence, the argument of simply 'doing away' with sensual desire temporarily without having explicitly discerned its escape beforehand and *actually* having escaped doesn't seem to hold.

That is true, but at the same time it doesn't mean that this escape would be permanent. The freedom from hindrances is indeed absolute and immovable while it's there; it's not that you simply “forgot” about these things for a few hours because you were focused on your meditation object. In other words, that state is such that even if you tried to arouse hindrances, you would fail, in the same way that in the past you would have failed if you tried *not* to have them. That's because what either overcomes or is affected by the hindrances is the *citta*, not *mano* or the other five senses, and all volition and direct control can only happen through *mano*.

But if you don't protect the things that brought the citta to that "invincible" state, i.e., virtue, restraint, and seclusion, it would eventually fade away. An Arahant would not lose the first two, but they would on a daily basis be losing the third, on account of practical necessities like going for alms round.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-14 17:58:08 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The only way in which that can be argued against is if I were to re-evaluate some axioms and perhaps see 'jhana' as an idiom rather than the absolute jhana.

Well, yes, usually jhāna is taken as this fixed "state" that you are either in or not. There are the jhāna factors and so on, but it's not a clear cut binary. For example, when laypeople would hear the Dhamma from the Buddha the first time and become sotāpannas, the Suttas say their minds would become pliable and calm through understanding the danger in sensuality that the Buddha pointed out. You could say that's a taste of the first jhāna (not that the "full" version has less thinking or something, but even greater abandonment of hindrances, i.e. inability to lose context and dispassion despite any degree of thinking).

Jhāna literally means "contemplation, reflection" (that is accompanied by pliability of mind and joy arising from burdenlessness), and not "ecstatic, mystical state of altered consciousness", as I pointed out in this essay.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-07-18 05:08:43 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

These are different contexts. You can put it this way: *citta* starts out defiled owing to one's own past actions, but you cannot directly reverse that. What you do is, having restrained unwholesome acts by body and speech, you also restrain acts of sensuality and aversion by *mano* (*manosañcetana*). If you do that properly, with discernment and *yoniso manasikāra*, the *citta* is purified, and then what comes through *mano* no longer matters because it cannot induce defilements regardless of how much it used to. It then becomes clearer that that's also Māra's domain, whereas before it felt like *mano* is "me".

## Citta

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Chemical-Medium4316 2024-03-07 15:08:40

I'm trying to identify the citta in full clarity so to correctly practice metta. I Need clarity about it help would be appreciated

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-08 19:58:24**

You won't be able to identify the citta by trying to identify it; it would just be an abstract idea even if it's correct. You get to see the citta in the way that actually allows you to develop it only by restraining yourself from the actions which by default run with the inclinations of the citta, and by not delighting in company and dwelling in solitude. To the extent you keep acting out of greed, aversion, and delusion to any degree, you are precisely adding to the ignorance of what the citta is.

Once you start to see more clearly what the mind is on account of that basic training that basically "pulls you back in" from the level of the world and objects, you would get to see that aversion is not something that "happens" to you by accident—which is the only thing that would justify having to manage it and get rid of it through various secondary methods and exercises. Aversion is there because you intentionally let your mind take pleasure in the idea of removing unpleasant feelings that came on their own. And if you now see that attitude and are thus able to abandon it, mettā would automatically be there, because in the ultimate sense the problem was never the person or what they did to you. They were just the scapegoat for the realm problem: fact that you wanted to get rid of the unpleasant feeling. Now that that's not there, there would be no reason for you to not have a friendly disposition towards them.

But without the sufficient preliminary training in virtue and restraint mentioned above, that subtle internal choice to resist the unpleasant feeling, which is the unwholesome attitude of the citta, would've never become apparent. You would instead be still trying to deal with the people that are causing that unpleasant feeling, by repeating the mantra "may you be well" and whatnot, ironically perpetuating the wrong view that the problem is on the side of the person or situation instead of your mistaken relationship to your own aggregates/senses.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-09 09:24:04 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

However, all of this is possible quite easily *while* one delights in company, which is supposed to be obscuring one's perspective with regards to the levels of generality present in one's experience. So does that mean these attitudes that are discerned aren't really the attitudes of the citta, and the citta holds more fundamental attitudes?

Also, Ajahn seems to be stating that it's impossible for an untrained mind to even discern the attitudes if one is not physically secluded, which makes me even further believe that I'm not 'seeing' the right thing.

Yes, therein lies the answer. All of what you described is still theoretical; it's not the concrete type of knowledge that would actually free you.

The extent to which you truly know your citta as it is, is the extent to which you cannot suffer, because it entails becoming aware of craving and of how you're actually responsi-

ble for it. From that position, you couldn't possibly keep "doing" it even if you tried. You would get to realize that it's entirely impossible for craving, let alone any of its further unwholesome byproducts, to *impose* themselves on you (which is how you become incapable of engaging in management, which always operates from the view that these things just *occur*, and you need to be "antidoting" them after-the-fact). It would have seemed like craving is something that just "comes up" without your say only because you did not see your citta for what it was, meaning you did not sufficiently see resistance against feeling as an arisen intention that you can either give in to or not.

In other words, just being able to see the citta makes suffering become entirely a matter of choice—a choice which you of course could never intentionally make.

The only way through which I'm capable of 'discerning' that is through inference; for example, discerning that there is restlessness or boredom manifest, which must *logically imply* the existence of a more fundamental attitude of resistance towards the experience as a whole

Yes, you start with that "inference". You know that on account of things like restlessness, there must be something more fundamental that has been nourishing those states to the point where they are. But if just you try to get rid of the first thing that you become aware of, which is what people usually do by trying to suppress any and all bothersome mental activity, you won't even allow yourself an opportunity to discern the citta. It's like preoccupying yourself with the flies out of the knee-jerk reaction to get rid of them ASAP, instead of investing that effort in looking for the source of the stench that's attracting them to begin with.

if one hasn't discerned the attitude of resistance that underlies one's experience as a whole, then regardless of whether one discerns the fact that there is this experience-as-a-whole that is present in conjunction with this fragile body, that 'experience-as-a-whole' is precisely *not* what one takes it to be due to the fact that the experience-as-a-whole would *also* include that always-enduring peripheral attitude of resistance which is what one will *now* identify with as being me, mine, what I am, however subtle. Thereby, not really dwelling independent of the *entire* world. Is this understanding correct?

Exactly. You don't have to *choose* to regard something as you or yours in order for the sense of self or attachment towards the world (the aggregates/senses) to be there. All that's required is for the discernment of the totality of the experience to fall short of what that totality actually is, and craving and ownership will find a "space" *automatically*. That's what the Buddha meant with "knowing things as they are" (*yathābhūta*); he wasn't talking about some ultimate hidden reality but about knowing these peripheral phenomena that are already there, but just get overlooked. And that's actually much harder and subtler than all the esoteric perceptions of sense objects that people regard as "insight".



## Can you observe the mind?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** ajmonkarsh 2024-03-02 23:47:40

I've seen somewhere on HH that it isn't possible to do this. Assuming the mind is not its thoughts; I am observing my thoughts? Feelings?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-03 15:43:19

The mind (citta) cannot be recognized as an object or through direct perception, including the “mental eye” (mano). The mind is, practically speaking, the domain where attitudes are held regarding the things you experience, including your innermost thoughts and feelings. That is to say, the mind is not the experiencing of a pleasant feeling, for example, but the attitude of welcoming and delighting in it (or the opposite if the mind has been trained). Therefore we often say that the mind is “always peripheral” to what you're attending to.

This “indirect” nature of the mind is the reason why the Buddha compared the individual who recognizes their own mind with a skilled cook who picks up on the preferences of his master. The cook does not *hear* the king saying “I like this dish; I don't like that one” (i.e., one does not apprehend the mind as an object), but he instead is able to indirectly infer the king's preference based on what he does with x and y dish. In the same way, you know your mind as that which inclines towards or away from experiences and harbors greed, aversion and delusion towards them.

The citta starts to become apparent bit by bit through the Gradual Training, because the mind is that which insists in acquiring pleasure and getting rid of displeasure even when you set boundaries on that through your direct intention. It starts to become evident that there is that unclear “something” in your experience that keeps trying to go left even though you're earnestly trying to go right, so to speak.

A Definitive Guide to Seeing your Mind.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-06 17:23:46 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

What is the relation between the citta and the training?

Is the training supposed to help tame the citta so at one point it never comes into conflict with one's will/direct intention? Or maybe, is the training supposed to help one remove an assumption in regard to the citta? Or “just” to remove that ingrained tendency to crave and replace it with the tendency to not crave? Or something else..?

I don't really know what to make of it in relation to the knowledge regarding the aggregates and the senses

First of all, the goal is to see the citta. Until one sees that, any idea about “what” needs to be trained, or even about what assumption or craving are, will remain inaccurate. When, having recognized the citta, one tames it (samādhī), the recognition of what the aggregates and senses are will be there on its own, because those things are already there.

“For one who is composed no volition need be exerted: ‘Let me know and see things as they are.’ It is inevitable that one who is composed knows and sees things as they are.

—AN 10.2

It’s not like you need to go looking for “things as they are” somewhere else; they’re being *overlooked* because of the underlying tendency greed, aversion, and distraction, i.e. the tendency to lose perspective of the context in favor of the content.

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**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-03-02 10:29:39

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## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-03 15:17:54

“do my efforts *really* contribute to the kind of merit that could mean I can continue practicing towards the dhamma in a different life, beyond the death of my body?”

Unfortunately, it is safe assume that that won’t happen unless you at least become a sotāpanna. The things that you think of as “the Dhamma” while still being a puthujjana, and your motivations for practicing them, are things that you will lose when you die.

You will certainly reap mundane rewards proportional to the corresponding effort that you put into virtue, restraint, generosity, and non-greed and non-aversion, but that doesn’t mean that the “practice” as such would get carried over. That would only be the case for a noble disciple.

## Formal Meditation

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Omaree9 2024-03-01 12:19:57

What is the right way to go about formal meditation? Choose a context and let the mind revolve around that context? How do you all practice?

Edit: when I say formal meditation I mean set time aside to contemplate certain themes that the Buddha recommends to reflect on like death, impermanence, un-ownability of the aggregates, dangers of sensuality, etc

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-01 15:37:54**

As u/SDC pointed out, it's not a problem to set aside dedicated periods of reflection. What we advise against is "formal meditation" in the sense of taking up some sort of exercise, *whatever* that may be, with the purpose of having some sort of special insight or experience resulting from it, failing to see that the relevant insight is found at the level where your views and assumptions with which you try to overcome suffering are.

Instead, you'd just be trying to address whatever you *now* think suffering is, by overcoming whatever you *now* think craving is, in order to reach whatever you *now* think freedom from it is, by means of whatever you *now* think the path is. Since those background assumptions remain essentially untouched, you would actually remain stagnant on the level that matters, irrespective of how many liberative experiences and novel releases you achieve sitting on that cushion.

Then there's also the fact that most of the time it doesn't actually affect, or not sufficiently at least, people's lifestyle "off the cushion", while in reality the choices affected with craving that one makes through one's life are what's most prominently responsible for one's suffering, not the lack of proficiency in whatever exercise the chosen meditation revolves around.

The right "formal meditation" would be therefore about continuously questioning, discarding, and finally upgrading one's views about what meditation even should be if it is to lead to the end of suffering, for example, and about contemplating what exactly is hindering one from reaching that.

Once this work is finished, and sotāpatti has been reached, as it inevitably would be, formal meditation is about being in solitude and purifying the mind from hindrances and craving, having now acquired the direct knowledge of what those phenomena actually are.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-01 16:08:11 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Like contemplating the danger of sensuality or keeping in mind the nature of the body and the actuality of death.

You can do that, but always within the overarching frame of trying to understand what is the right way to practice those contemplations so that they free you from suffering entirely, not with the aim of just doing them as if that in itself will lead to something of value.

in keeping the right context in mind when engaging with things to make sure unwholesome states are not engaged in and proliferated.

And yes, for the purpose of restraint as well, it is necessary to keep a context in mind that prevents you from going with the grain of things that pressure you. So it's beneficial to set time aside to understand and cultivate those contexts, and discern how it is that

they can prevent you from falling into unwholesome states not just then and there, but throughout your whole day. That's not really what people would tend to understand as "formal meditation" though.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-02 06:02:24 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

That's right. First they should lead to the overcoming of unwholesome actions by body and speech, and only then can unwholesomeness within the mental domain start to be seen more clearly.

## Questions on the right view

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Tao\_389 2024-02-29 19:01:31

I had a couple of questions on the right view and would be grateful for any clarifications on this:

1. How is one with the right view sure that their mind will never lose this understanding? Just like all the other things in the experience that are liable to change, what is the property of mind that makes this kind of understanding not change?
2. Is the above knowledge of lets say the "permanence" of right view always known to the one with right view?

Thank you.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-01 16:02:24**

How is one with the right view sure that their mind will never lose this understanding? Just like all the other things in the experience that are liable to change, what is the property of mind that makes this kind of understanding not change?

They would know that they have understood even the experience of not knowing, such that even if they were to completely forget everything they know about the Dhamma, they would still not suffer. That is how you know that you have arrived at the understanding that uproots things, instead of managing them, because the salient quality of management is its dependence on things that you learned and became skilled at, and could therefore gradually forget and lose your proficiency in. Just like any ordinary ability. That dependence on memories, perceptions, and acquired information is what's in common to every meditation method, and even the "insights" that may come out of them, which is why that can never result in anything but transient and conditioned freedom.

Is the above knowledge of lets say the "permanence" of right view always known to the one with right view?

It's the same principle as the following:

“But Master Ānanda, when a mendicant is perfected, would the knowledge and vision that their defilements are ended be constantly and continually present to them, while walking, standing, sleeping, and waking?”

“Well then, Sandaka, I shall give you a simile. For by means of a simile some sensible people understand the meaning of what is said. Suppose there was a person whose hands and feet had been amputated. Would they be aware that their hands and feet had been amputated constantly and continually, while walking, standing, sleeping, and waking? Or would they be aware of it only when they checked it?”

“They wouldn't be aware of it constantly, only when they checked it.”

“In the same way, when a mendicant is perfected, the knowledge and vision that their defilements are ended is not constantly and continually present to them, while walking, standing, sleeping, and waking. Rather, they are aware of it only when they checked it.”

—MN 76

## New Essay: Pervading the World with Friendliness

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bhikkhu\_Anigha 2024-02-29 17:51:08

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-01 14:34:01

u/foowfoowfoow

equating this passive harmlessness with active intentional goodwill is an error.

grey is not black certainly, but it is not white.

The “passive harmlessness” that you're describing is not mettā. It's simply a mind still liable to ill will that momentarily does not have it. If the mental state does not fit the description the Buddha gives, then the tendency to ill will has not been sufficiently subdued. That's absolutely not the same as saying that “active intentional goodwill” has not been sufficiently fabricated.

even in the suttas you have quoted, the buddha directs monks to actively develop goodwill after abandoning ill will. this points to the two mental states being non-equivalent.

It points them to foster and nurture the mental state that they already achieved. In MN 40 for instance, it clearly says that the monk abides in the liberation of mind through mettā having properly abandoned the unwholesome states that obstructed it. It does not say that first they abandon the unwholesome states, then they “do” their mettā practice, and *then* they abide with a mind full of mettā towards the whole world.

And yes, that state then has to be further cultivated, nobody says that there is no effort involved; there is, just as one must further develop and steady the first jhāna after attaining it. The point is not that mettā does not require effort at all, but that you don't get it by directly generating some preconceived idea of mettā *while* you still have the susceptibility to ill will, because that mettā, no matter how agreeable it feels, will be necessarily tainted by craving and hindrances, and thus not be of any value. This is what the quote from AN 8.63 is referring to.

In the excerpt from MN 55, the Buddha states that he can be said to abide in mettā as Brahmā would because he has destroyed any passion, aversion, and delusion on account of which ill will could arise. He doesn't say "I abide in mettā because I indeed have the greatest good will for all beings, like a mother for her child" or something along those lines.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-01 14:59:05 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

'When I exert a [physical, verbal, or mental] fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of exertion there is dispassion [dukkhanidānassa saṅkhāraṃ padahato saṅkhārappadhānā virāgo hoti]. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of equanimity there is dispassion.'

The operative expression there is "cause of suffering". There will be cases where striving is what goes against the grain of craving, and cases where equanimity is what goes against the grain of craving. But first a person needs to have discerned for themselves what that "cause of suffering" is, and (to make it relevant to the topic at hand) that displeasure is not the cause of suffering—that displeasure is not ill will.

When you see for yourself the in reality large (yet initially invisible) gap between even the most intense mental displeasure on the one hand—such as that of your limbs being severed one by one—and aversion on the other hand, then anything you do within that will not be considered "active striving" if you compare it to someone who can only avoid the unwholesome state by managing and covering up the *displeasure* of it, by manually producing the opposite. There will be different levels to it, but it's only "active" when compared to the right equanimity.

In other words, for someone who is used to management, the right type of active striving will feel like "just" equanimity, and the right equanimity will be something that they can't even conceive of yet.

That is why there is wrong effort in the eightfold wrong path, culminating in wrong liberation, and all of it is based on wrong view (i.e., as to what the cause of suffering is). It cannot be taken for granted that as long as you're trying to overcome the defilement *somehow*, you're going in the right direction.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-02 05:15:54 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

No, there certainly would have to be effort involved in attaining stream entry, But the key is that any effort would have to take place within the context that at any given time there is a high probability of not only falling into wrong effort, but of not knowing wrong effort as wrong effort. Not forgetting that the mind has a deeply rooted tendency for management that could creep in at any time. Having that context, which is basically the right-est type of sati one can have initially, changes things completely because it makes the efforts be relentlessly self-critical and self-adjusting as opposed to being taken at face value. It also makes the whole thing more unpleasant, as the weight of ignorance and the lack of any safe ground to stand on is being rightly acknowledged.

There are things that a puthujjana does that take them closer to stream entry and things that don't, but they will only know that in hindsight when they get the Right View and thus the ability to clearly know right as right, or Dhamma as Dhamma. And one thing for sure is that whenever something seems to “work” in eliminating your suffering and yet having discovered that somehow didn't turn you into a sotapanna, it's not the right direction, but still the old management in a new form.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-02 05:30:04 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

i don't disagree that metta practice can be practiced after one has broken the fetters of ill will.

The point is that there can be no mind of metta until the tendency for will has been actually abandoned so that no amount of displeasure can push your mind into aversion at least at that time—that you cannot use metta to “antidote” your ill will by covering up the displeasure as it's typically done. I'm not saying that you need to abandon the *fetter* of ill will in order to practice metta, which would be illogical.

this is the mettacetovimutti that the buddha teaches that is additional to the worldly practice of metta

The practice of metta that existed before the Buddha's type is supramundane if we compare it to the practice of management that is called metta today. The people who were proficient in it (e.g., the teacher Sunetta) did not become anagami merely because the Dhamma was not available in their lifetime. The development of mind they achieved on account of that practice *would have been* more than sufficient to destroy most if not all the fetters if they had met the Buddha, whereas the “worldly metta” you're describing doesn't even result in sotapatti even though people who engage in it have ample familiarity with the Buddha's teaching. It also doesn't at least result in the destruction of sensuality as Sunetta's practice of metta did.

That means that it's of no relevant benefit.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-02 15:05:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

bhante, when you say “until the tendency for ill will has been actually abandoned” it certainly sounds like you’re saying the fetter needs to be broken (given the fetters are tendencies). if this is what you are inferring, i don’t believe this would be correct according to the suttas.

if on the other hand, you simply mean that when a person starts to practice metta, they must simply put aside all thoughts of ill will when they initially start to practice, and while they continue to practice, then i would agree with you. this does appear to be the correct interpretation according to the suttas.

Neither of these are what I’m referring to. Abandoning the tendency to ill will so that metta can arise means abandoning the hindrance of ill will. The hindrance of ill will is not the *thoughts* of ill will that you say must be “simply put aside”. For you that “putting aside” means simply suppressing them and ignoring that you’re still liable to them so that you can start fabricating benevolence instead.

But what I’m describing is that the mind must reach a state where even if strongly disagreeable feelings would arise, they would not be able to move your mind into having thoughts of ill will, *without* needing to resort to the fabricated sense of “greatest goodwill” to cushion and ameliorate the displeasure.

Again, the quote from AN 8.63 that I already included in the essay:

“Well then, mendicant, you should train like this: ‘My mind will be steady and well settled internally. And bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen will not occupy my mind.’ That’s how you should train.

When your mind is steady and well settled internally, *and bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen don’t occupy your mind*, then you should train like this: ‘I will develop the mind’s release by friendliness. I’ll cultivate it, make it my vehicle and my basis, keep it up, consolidate it, and properly implement it.’ That’s how you should train.

- AN 8.63

That state is temporary and it’s not the same as the destruction of the fetter of ill will (but cultivating that temporary liberation would certainly lead to it eventually). That temporary liberation is simply the actual abandonment, as opposed to the management and covering up of the hindrances.

certainly, the weak man initially cannot lift the heaviest weights. they cannot bring forth metta in aversive situations - it does take practice to get to that stage.

however, how else will they build their muscles except by practice? if someone dedicates themselves to the practice, and makes every effort to bring forth



metta in aversive situations, they are lifting weights both on and off the cushion. at some stage their practice will mature and they will get it - metta will become easy for them in any situation.

Yes, it takes practice to increase your skill in management, but that's not what I'm referring to. The management method you are describing is not training you to lift heavier weights; it's all about making the weights lighter so that you can lift them. Making yourself like and have affection for the person you previously found unpleasant takes all the "weight" off, so you're not making your mind stronger at all, but quite the opposite.

## How to abandon deeply rooted views/goals

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** monkeyseashore 2024-02-29 01:56:36

Dear friends,

From past practice, I have some bad habits (that get triggered automatically).

For example:

The suppressing thoughts/thinking. From past practice, I tried to "have a quiet mind with no disturbance" which ended up suppressing things, (and painfully too). However now I believe this has become an ingrained habit, that can happen automatically when the conditions are right. For example:

1. Thought arises
2. Mind (automatically) suppresses it
3. Pain from that suppression.

How do I remove this habit from my mind, and in general other bad (habitual/automatic) habits?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-02 06:10:12

You don't need to remove the habit directly. You just have to recognize that now, while that habit is taking place, you have a choice to simply recognize the "mind that wants to suppress" as "mind that wants to suppress", and simply not act out of it. That's how you would actually remove the fuel that's feeding that mental state.

If you try to suppress the intention to suppress, you are actually feeding exactly the same habit in the name of overcoming it.

If you're sinking in the mud yourself, Cunda, it is quite impossible for you to pull out someone else (**your own mind**) who is sinking in the mud. But if you're not sinking in the mud yourself, it is quite possible for you to pull out someone else who is sinking in the mud. If you're not tamed, trained, and extinguished yourself, it is quite impossible for you to help tame, train, and

extinguish someone else. But if you are tamed, trained, and extinguished yourself, it is quite possible for you to help tame, train, and extinguish someone else.

In the same way, someone who is cruel extinguishes it by not being cruel. An individual who kills extinguishes it by not killing. ... (an individual who suppresses extinguishes it by not suppressing).

- MN 8

## “Rightly discerning aggregates is like penetrating a hair-tip with an arrow”.. why?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-29 01:02:32

I was reading this Sutta and came across this verse:

“Those who see the five aggregates

*Sukhumam te paṭivijjhanti,*

as other, not as self,

*vālaggam usunā yathā;*

penetrate a subtle thing,

*Ye pañcakkhandhe passanti,*

like a hair-tip with an arrow.

*parato no ca attato.*

### Thag 20.1

Why is it such a subtle and difficult thing to discern the aggregates as such? I mean, can't I simply enumerate “*this* form, *this* form, *this* form, any form whatsoever at all is impermanent, not me, not mine, not I am”? And the same for the other aggregates? That doesn't sound like such a difficult thing to do compared to the analogy given which is splitting a hair-tip with an arrow.

Is this perhaps related to the fact that discerning *any* form, far or near, large or small, with all its various permutations, is difficult to do? I don't really know how to do this apart from holding a thought of ‘all form’ – which would extend an open awareness to discernable forms within the visual field – and directing the idea of anicca towards it.

Now the other issue here is discerning consciousness; it cannot even be discerned because it escapes any attempts at discernment. Consciousness necessarily has to come first for there to be any discernment anyways, the fact that there is discernment means there is

consciousness. Everything affirms the existence of consciousness (it is the that-because-of-which-everything-is) and there’s an idea of permanence associated with it partly due to this fact.

Well, maybe I should reflect on what I mean by ‘discerning’ since perhaps this is in some sense its discernment. But either way, I cannot *observe* by any means, the change in consciousness. I can indirectly relate the presence of consciousness (through their even being the discernment of this body) to this enduring body, but then question whether consciousness and body really co-exist? Could it not be the case that this consciousness is more fundamental than the body and when the body ceases, there is only consciousness left?

I’m unsure. Maybe such a “subtle thing” is about “including the sense of self” into the picture as it is often discussed?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-29 07:01:58**

I’m unsure. Maybe such a “subtle thing” is about “including the sense of self” into the picture as it is often discussed?

Yes. Even the most untrained puthujjana can see *instances* of form, feeling, etc. and know them as impermanent, etc. But what is subtle and hard to do is see those peripheral, more “personal” aspects of experience that you naturally takes for granted, and that endure *simultaneously* with the particular content, as also being within the aggregates.

A good example of this is the situation described in the previous thread, where one recognizes that the attempt to even contemplate things and “practice” which seems fine superficially is underlain by a subtler aversion to the present feeling . That is a real part of your experience/five aggregates that is not recognized *while it’s there*.

But if you embark on a quest to “catch” such background intentions and inclinations with your direct attention, you will for that very reason fail to see them, and there will be pressures and attitudes lurking underneath *that* activity you’re engaging in. They are always there **in regard to** the things you attend to directly. To use Ajahn Nyanamoli’s simile, it’s like those stars in the sky that are seen only *as peripheral* to other stars, and disappear the moment you try to zone in on them. Knowing the aggregates as they are requires you to have sufficiently grasped the signs of the mind/developed sufficient yoniso manasikara, and that means being able to recognize these overlooked phenomena.

This is why the Buddha compared the aggregates to a murderer who earns your trust and kills you when you don’t expect it. The way the householder in the simile places trust in that person and doesn’t suspect them is analogous to how one overlooks the peripheral aspects of the five aggregates where all the assumptions and wrong attitudes become established.

To extend the simile, people would instead tend to think of the aggregates as things they can see from afar as they’re approaching, and that’s how the naive methodical and systematic attitudes toward the practice come about. You’d think you escaped the danger

by warding off and “antidoting” these obvious thoughts and pressures and focusing on objects, while you continue to commune with the murderer.

Edit: The Sutta with the relevant simile is SN 22.85

## Questions on the Samanadipa vids

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sahasarani\_mw 2024-02-26 12:12:45

Theruwā sarānai! These are some questions I have had for some time while listening to and contemplating Samanadipa’s set of new videos. Forgive the length, as usual!

1. In “Discerning the Middle Way”, Bhante Anigha (I presume) points out that discernment of intentions should be about discerning one’s attitude towards feeling, not about what one would state as their intention if one were to be asked.

The example given in the video (34 min) is that intentions such as “I want to be admired/understood” that go unnoticed while in company are closer to the sort of intentions you want to be discerning, NOT intentions like “I-am-sweeping-today-bc-there-is-no-time-to-sweep-tomorrow”, for ex.

My question is - what exactly is wrong with discernment of intentions in the way mentioned in the sweeping example?

From my personal experience, it’s possible that one COULD in fact be sweeping simply because it is a practical thing that happens to need to be done now ... NOT out of some sort of emotional compulsion or distraction, restlessness, desire, and so on. One may happen to feel neutral while sweeping, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that they are sweeping BECAUSE they feel neutral. Action doesn’t need to come OUT OF feeling, does it - action can be PARALLEL to feeling instead.

To give an example of this “parallelness”: I was listening to Dhamma talk yesterday afternoon and when I reflected on why I was doing it, I found that though my mood was pleasant while listening - I was not listening BECAUSE it was pleasant. Basically, the pleasant feeling was there, but was not the reason for me choosing to engage in that particular task. I could have just as easily sat quietly or read some suttas instead, without much mental resistance.

In another instance, the same intention of wanting to listen to a talk arose with an almost palpable urge/pull to experience the pleasure of distraction. At that time, I wouldn’t have been able to so easily choose to do something else - since in that state of mind, NOT distracting myself would be experienced unpleasantly. Acting OUT OF feeling.

2. Yesterday morning I woke up in a pretty bad mood (the ambiguously nauseous kind). I then decided to “let the displeasure endure”, and contemplated how the displeasure arose on its own and I had no say in it being there.

Later, upon reflection, I realized that ALL of it - the “enduring”, the contemplation - were ALL rooted in a subtle hope in my experience that my efforts would GET RID OF the bad

mood. That the endurance would make the displeasure vanish once I got it right. So what I initially thought to be khanti was fully enclosed within AVERSION (but not at the coarse level I'd usually see it in).

Another time, I was sitting and was considering what topic I should choose to contemplate on, when I questioned myself why I wanted to contemplate in the first place. The answer was a subtle pressure towards the possibility of the peaceful feeling that often arises during contemplation. I then reflected that my entire intention to contemplate was rooted in a desire for pleasant feeling. If I did decide to contemplate anything other than my present situation there, my contemplation would have been WITHIN desire.

Would these examples be more along the lines of how I should be discerning intentions in terms of one's attitude towards feeling? The push towards pleasure, the push away from pain - that dominate and envelop one's entire situation?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-27 06:41:01**

From my personal experience, it's possible that one COULD in fact be sweeping simply because it is a practical thing that happens to need to be done now ... NOT out of some sort of emotional compulsion or distraction, restlessness, desire, and so on. One may happen to feel neutral while sweeping, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are sweeping BECAUSE they feel neutral. Action doesn't need to come OUT OF feeling, does it - action can be PARALLEL to feeling instead..

That's true. But most people would not be seeing it that way when they hear the expression "the intention behind the action". They would often tend to review the logical/rational reasons for doing it at the expense of checking whether there is emotional pressure at the background pushing them to do it.

When the action is "parallel" to the pressure as you put it and not rooted in it, then the stated reason for the action is irrelevant. You could even be misjudging the situation and making a mistake on worldly terms, but in terms of Dhamma the mistake is acting out of craving.

In another instance, the same intention of wanting to listen to a talk arose with an almost palpable urge/pull to experience the pleasure of distraction. At that time, **I wouldn't have been able to so easily choose to do something else** - since in that state of mind, NOT distracting myself would be experienced unpleasantly. Acting OUT OF feeling.

Yes, and this is one instance where one would easily assume it's automatically fine because it's superficially a wholesome action. And the highlighted part is key in recognizing what is underlain by unwholesome intentions and what isn't.

Later, upon reflection, I realized that ALL of it - the "enduring", the contemplation - were ALL rooted in a subtle hope in my experience that my efforts

would GET RID OF the bad mood. That the endurance would make the displeasure vanish once I got it right. So what I initially thought to be khanti was fully enclosed within AVERSION (but not at the coarse level I'd usually see it in).

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Would these examples be more along the lines of how I should be discerning intentions in terms of one's attitude towards feeling? The push towards pleasure, the push away from pain - that dominate and envelop one's entire situation?

Indeed, that's what is meant by an "underlying tendency", and also by "grasping the signs of the mind". The unskilled monk in SN 47.8 is superficially doing the work and genuinely thinks he's cultivating the right context. But behind that effort there would be a more subtle aversion (or delight and anticipation for an experience of relief), and because he doesn't see *that*, he can't possibly abandon the hindrances because he's, as it were, infecting himself in his very attempt to cure the infection, just not in the obvious way he'd be aware of.

Seeing the attempt to get rid of a bad mood and including even that within what you're enduring and contemplating would be a quintessential example of "enduring things on the right level", and those more subtle intentions could not become palpably apparent to someone who isn't virtuous and restrained.

Also, it's exactly this type of "subliminal" intention that is perpetually there during the deliberate implementation of a meditation method or technique, and people are not training themselves one bit towards grasping the signs of those intentions with that, since they're necessarily focused on what to "do" and the expected results. In fact, it's wrong even if that "doing" is precisely the right endurance, forsaking of methods, and right contemplations that we talk about, not to mention if it's full on object-focusing.

In other words, the tendency to turn anything into a method is simply the tendency to overlook the signs of the mind. Now if on top of that the *instruction* is also in the form of a method, then not only are you already an "unskilled cook", but you're also being encouraged to remain as one.

You suffer because you resist unpleasant feeling and want it to be otherwise, or crave for pleasant feeling to increase (because not enough pleasure is unpleasant). It doesn't matter if the source of those feelings is something "internal" that feels as if it's personal and you're responsible for it, like a bad mood. If you develop khanti towards that internal domain, it would be impossible to be bothered by external things, as well as to act out of

the inner ones.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-28 20:04:57 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It boils down to what OP mentioned above

In another instance, the same intention of wanting to listen to a talk arose with an almost palpable urge/pull to experience the pleasure of distraction. At that time, **I wouldn't have been able to so easily choose to do something else** - since in that state of mind, NOT distracting myself would be experienced unpleasantly. Acting OUT OF feeling.

The unwholesome “drives” are those where your mind would be nagging you if you don't give in to them. Things are unwholesome not when their *content* is like this or like that, but when there's clearly that pull of the mind underlying them (i.e. craving). It means that if you succumb in such cases, you are “spoiling” your own mind just like you would a child, by letting it have whatever they want if they only yell at you loud enough. But if the child is asking politely and it's clear that they won't get upset if you say no, then it's fine. Instead of saying “check the intention behind the action”, you could say it's about checking whether there is an *impulse* behind the action or not.

In the case of trying to get rid of a bad mood as above, it's unwholesome because it's rooted in that same kind of impetus, just on a much subtler level that won't become apparent until you have been practicing virtue, restraint, and are able to discern the signs of your mind to a significant degree on account of that. Only then does this deeper plane of wholesome vs. unwholesome become properly discernible. Otherwise, when you try to look on that “level”, it can easily seem like everything is a problem (which is incidentally related to how concentration gets conceived as the freedom from unwholesome).

It's possible for neutral actions like sweeping and going for walks (or even contemplating and trying to “endure” things) to be underlain by craving, but it's essentially pointless to even attempt to address that if the sensual, averse, and careless actions that entail a much greater degree of impulsivity, and that you *are* clearly aware of, have not been abandoned, hence *gradual* training.

It makes no sense to place gold on a crucible for melting when there are still coarse impurities in it.

“Gold has coarse corruptions: sand, soil, and gravel. A panner or their apprentice pours it into a pan, where they wash, rinse, and clean it. When that's been eliminated, there are medium corruptions in the gold: fine grit and coarse sand. The panner washes it again. When that's been eliminated, there are fine corruptions in the gold: fine sand and black grime. The panner washes it again. When that's been eliminated, only gold dust is left. A goldsmith or their apprentice places the gold in a crucible where they blow, melt, and smelt it. Still the gold is not settled and the dross is not totally gone. It's not pliable,

workable, or radiant, but is brittle and not completely ready for working. But the goldsmith keeps on blowing, melting, and smelting it. The gold becomes pliable, workable, and radiant, not brittle, and ready to be worked. Then the goldsmith can successfully create any kind of ornament they want, whether a bracelet, earrings, a necklace, or a golden garland.

In the same way, a mendicant who is committed to the higher mind has coarse corruptions: bad bodily, verbal, and mental conduct. A sincere, capable mendicant gives these up, gets rid of, eliminates, and obliterates them.

When they've been given up and eliminated, there are middling corruptions: sensual, averse, or cruel thoughts. A sincere, capable mendicant gives these up, gets rid of, eliminates, and obliterates them.

When they've been given up and eliminated, there are fine corruptions: thoughts of family, country, and being looked up to. A sincere, capable mendicant gives these up, gets rid of, eliminates, and obliterates them.

When they've been given up and eliminated, only thoughts about the teaching are left. That composure is not peaceful or sublime or calm or unified. It is held in place by forceful suppression.

But there comes a time when that mind is stilled internally; it settles, unifies, and becomes composed. That composure is peaceful and sublime and calm and unified, not held in place by forceful suppression.

-AN 3.101

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-03-22 17:33:39 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

This means there are two problems with my discernment: 1.) it wasn't something one could call "peripheral" discernment, since I was directly attending to these intentions and - 2.) The "sign" of my mind was seen when it was NO LONGER the sign of my mind... Basically, I saw it only in hindsight.

Sure, it'd have been ideal that you had noticed the issue right then and there. But the fact that you realized it at least in hindsight is already a step closer to the sign of the mind than not realizing it at all. If the recognition were truly null, it wouldn't even have occurred to you that that was a mistake. That means that on future occasions, there is at least *some* chance that you'd be able to grasp that "sign" while the underlying unwholesome intention is present and actual.

Discernment of one's intentions (as well as reflection in general) seems to me to necessarily depend on DIRECT ATTENTION. If I reflect and question myself on why I am doing something - whether it is acting out of feeling or not - this self-questioning/ reflection must depend on my directly attending to & thinking about how I feel, no? I am thinking, pondering, and considering things in



experience... so how can this result in peripheral discernment?

Well, it might seem to you now like this is “direct attention”, but from the point of view of the average practitioner who doesn’t live restrained enough, and is trying in vain to compensate for that by overriding the level of reflection and pondering with the “present moment”, it’s not.

“Peripheral awareness” doesn’t mean that you don’t think about it at all and it must somehow magically appear by itself. It means that you are thinking and pondering about the phenomenon *while it’s there*—in this case the subtle intention to get rid of a bad mood **by** “enduring it”, instead of *actually* enduring it (which you must have picked up on beforehand to reflect on it in the first place, otherwise you’ll remain “absorbed” in it).

You fall from “peripheral awareness” when your attempt to contemplate the present phenomenon results in you trying to “replace” it with another one, which is what you would’ve been doing in the instance you mentioned: thinking and pondering about the nature of the bad mood or whatever it is so as to *get rid of it*. Or, when it’s something pleasant, you would lose peripheral awareness by overlooking the manifestation of that experience (which is in itself not delight), and letting your mind rest on the particulars of it so you it can “squeeze” more out of it. In both cases, you end up overriding what was there on its own because you couldn’t withstand its initial “weight”/pressure. But if you learn how to contemplate *concretely* (a.k.a. “peripherally”), even your active contemplation and reflection about the nature of that thing will not be interfering with it in either “direction”, so to speak.

A few talks that might clarify this further: “Don’t Be Afraid To Question Yourself”, “The Meaning of Right Samadhi”, “Meditation — The Right Kind of Questioning”.

And, really, essentially all of the Dhamma talks are meant to be “peripheral” reflections: the person is supposed to be seeing the things being discussed in their present experience, having them “at the foreground” of their attention, *while* the context of those very phenomena is being elucidated. It’s really nothing mystical; it’s the basic principle of how all reflection already works, but unfortunately it needs to be pointed out explicitly.

The problem of the ordinary person is not that they don’t know *how* to reflect, but that they don’t see the phenomena that they should be reflecting upon (e.g., their own “hidden” intentions), because they don’t see the signs of their mind, and on top of that they give in to the things that make it even harder to do so (sensuality, ill will, distraction).

## Free from sensual desire = free from fear?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** craveminerals 2024-02-25 20:56:25

Hi fellow practitioners,

Would it be correct to say that one free from the fetter of sensual desire would concurrently have eliminated all possibilities of fear and anxiety to arise? (as the non-returner / anagami, who is also free from ill will)

That must be a sublime peaceful state!

As greed & sensual desire is about obsessing about, wanting to obtain, or protecting this or that ‘pleasant thing’, and wishing to remove all ‘unpleasantries’ — once the underlying desire is uprooted, why would one even care? Whether things are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, you have ‘no bets in the game’, you can’t win or lose. So logically, no fear would arise.

Before coming across Ajahn Nyanamoli’s and HH’s teachings, I hadn’t deeply considered the ‘indirect’ approach of uprooting fear- and all suffering for that matter- by training oneself in virtue and sense restraint.

(Then there’s the question/curiosity of what happens to deeply rooted “biological fears”, regarding survival for example - I would suppose anagamis, or even Arahants experience them as well- although as “first arrows” but no more. But maybe it’s fruitless to speculate on this point..)

What do you think? Please share any related thoughts or comments you might have.

Best wishes,

A fearful person

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-26 10:27:18**

Would it be correct to say that one free from the fetter of sensual desire would concurrently have eliminated all possibilities of fear and anxiety to arise? (as the non-returner / anagami, who is also free from ill will)

Yes. What would remain for an anāgāmi is a subtler restlessness/agitation/uneasiness, not full-blown anxiety and fear.

(Then there’s the question/curiosity of what happens to deeply rooted “biological fears”, regarding survival for example - I would suppose anagamis, or even Arahants experience them as well- although as “first arrows” but no more. But maybe it’s fruitless to speculate on this point..)

There’s no such thing as a “deeply rooted biological fear”. Certain especially forceful and threatening pressures exist for almost every set of 6 senses (e.g., a gun pointed at one’s head), and each individual mind is either developed such that that *internal* threat does not turn into fear, or it isn’t.

When a mendicant’s mind is rightly freed like this, even if potent sights come into the range of vision they don’t overcome their mind. The mind remains unaffected. It is steady, imperturbable, observing disappearance. Even if potent sounds ... smells ... tastes ... touches ... and phenomena come into the range of the mind-sense they don’t overcome the mind. The mind remains unaffected. It is steady, imperturbable, observing disappearance.

Suppose there was a mountain that was one solid mass of rock, without cracks or holes. Even if violent storms were to blow up out of the east, the west, the north, and the south, they couldn't make it shake or rock or tremble.

In the same way, when a mendicant's mind is rightly freed like this, even if potent sights come into the range of vision they don't overcome their mind. ... The mind remains unaffected. It is steady, imperturbable, observing disappearance.

—AN 6.55

## What exactly is Anatta?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Handsome\_God123 2024-02-24 06:27:33

Is it a mindset of not regarding things as not self, or is it the thought that there really is no self.

A lot of teachers have different takes on this I would love to see what HH takes on this as well as more experienced posters in this sub.

Also I want to apologize if my point is not clear enough. English is not my first language, I hope everyone can understand.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-24 14:26:25

*Anattā* is about the fact that the aggregates are ultimately not in your control, as demonstrated by MN 35 and SN 22.59. It's not about whether you *deliberately* call things “me” and “mine” or not, and it's also not a metaphysical statement in the style of “God does not exist” that you just “agree” with or not.

You gauge how much you have understood *anattā* not by your intellectual understanding of fancy ideas, nor the attainment of mystical experiences through meditation, but by reflecting on how deeply you'd suffer if you lost the things that are dear to you (or failed to acquire them in the first place).

The degree of suffering that arises there is the amount of control that is assumed over the aggregates, and thus the degree to which a self, in the sense of a master of the experience, is still assumed. Whether you then “believe” that “in ultimate reality there is no self” is irrelevant.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-25 12:34:03 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

This to me felt like a first arrow type of reaction to the situation (my body is doing this crying thing) as opposed to the second arrow of pain in reaction to

the situation. Although it was emotional, it didn't feel like suffering. I wonder if I am thinking about this correctly?

You wouldn't be able to not experience the second arrow only in certain situations. In other words, unless you've got the Right View once and for all, then whenever you don't suffer, it *has* to be because the first arrow was not as strong. And of course, with the Right View comes freedom from doubt, so in that case you would be fully certain that the second arrow cannot return.

It's important to recognize that sometimes the feeling that accompanies certain perceptions can diminish, so that suffering would not accompany those same perceptions as much as it did for you before, or as much as it does for other people. Virtue and restraint alone can achieve that to a degree.

But the freedom from the second arrow that a sotāpanna has gained is such that even when the feeling accompanying the perception is intense, when it truly has that existentially threatening "edge" to it, they still don't suffer. So it's no exaggeration to say that this is outright *inconceivable* from an ordinary person's point of view.

If suffering is a liquid and the mind is a barrel, then the sotāpanna is not overwhelmed by suffering because the barrel simply has no bottom, not because there is a limit to the amount of liquid that comes in, nor a constraint on the types of liquid.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-26 09:52:37 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

It's talked about here

**New discussion with Ven. Anigha!**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-22 07:20:51

[deleted]

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-23 19:30:42 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

but simply work with it/live with it/stay passive about it

Not if they "stay passive". One does needs to understand what right endurance is in order to become a sotāpanna. One's initial attempts will always be somewhere off the mark until that point.

So yes, one doesn't necessarily need to "wrap one's head around" the *theory* per se, but about how to endure things correctly so that there is neither welcoming nor denying of mental states/aggregates. That understanding is not strictly theoretical, as it is achieved

*I AM NEW TO BUDDHISM AND HAVE WATCHED A FEW VIDEOS BY HILLSIDE HERMITAGE, I DON'T GET*

in a concrete or “experiential” manner through trial and error with virtue and restraint as its basis, but it is a form of understanding nonetheless that one previously didn't have.

It's the concrete, “lived” understanding of the Middle Way that you wouldn't lose even after death, whereas all the theory and information would get erased.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-24 16:55:49 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

but I couldn't find the one about having khanti towards the senses

AN 5.113

the one cited at around 29:15

AN 6.52

**I am new to Buddhism and have watched a few videos by Hillside Hermitage, I don't get what the problem is with Orthodox or mainstream Therevada**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Honest\_Chemist\_9025 2024-02-20 22:18:28

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-21 14:33:57**

“The problem” is not mainly some specific point of doctrine; it's the fact that people's spiritual practice in general, whether it be mainstream Theravada or anything else, hinges unwittingly on ignoring or covering up one's liability to suffering—in various ways ranging from simple to elaborate, and which may or may not have any common ground superficially—in order to achieve freedom from suffering, whereas the genuine Dhamma is about confronting your liability and uprooting it, so that there remains nothing at all that *could* make you suffer but which you didn't acknowledge so as to feel relief as soon as possible.

Therefore, the liberation that lies at the end of mainstream approaches is such that some things *could* still make one who reaches it crave and suffer, hence it's not true liberation. Peace would be there only for as long as one happens not to experience those things, no matter how unlikely and distant they are.

Edit: All specific disagreements in doctrine are a consequence of this fundamental difference.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-23 07:21:21 (in reply to a comment not included)**

As I understand it, various meditation teachers (ex: Mahasi) do teach how to totally “uproot suffering” through developing wisdom. I do not know any authentic teacher of meditation who teaches mere suppression of “suffering”.

This is why I wrote “hinges *unwittingly*”. It’s obvious enough that nobody would be teaching something and calling it Dhamma while fully knowing that it’s only managing things superficially (unless they’re deliberately deceiving people, which I assume is rare). It goes without saying that almost every teacher would not only claim but be inwardly certain that their approach leads to uprooting suffering.

But what all these practices have in common is that when things that cause suffering arise, you do something to get rid of *them*, and not to train your mind in such a way that they no longer cause suffering whether they arise or not. And with “they” I mean not only perceptions and thoughts, but emotional states which are also ultimately not in one’s control, and arise due to contact.

You would be free—regardless of what method you used to arrive at it, even if it supposedly involved the 4NT, the three characteristics, and so on—because you no longer experience certain feelings and mental states, and that’s also partly due to a sheltered environment.

Put someone who has come to an advanced stage of practice through these methods in a situation where their life and well being is in very acute and immediate danger for a sufficient amount of time, and their peace would wear away. The internal pressures and disturbances that they achieved relief from by covering them up would forcefully come back, and they would not be able to help but to identify with them, appropriate them, or try to get rid of them.

A person trained in true uprooting would be able to remain unperturbed *despite* the arising of such internal threats stemming from the aggregates themselves, because they have practiced the right context of non-ownership in regard to *any* feeling, instead of practicing mindfulness with the covert purpose of dampening what they feel.

The latter would remove the suffering because the *trigger* for craving was taken away, not because the tendency to craving itself was uprooted.

## **Upadana and Knowledge outside of the five aggregates?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Strange\_Dealer8956 2024-02-20 08:16:42

So one experiences a feeling and the mind’s automatic reaction to get rid of it or want more of it.

If one chooses to act out of this automatic intention by body, speech or mind because one thinks of these intentions as mine (upadana), isn’t think process also expressed as a sankhara (mental activity)? Thus making it also within the five aggregates?

Also side question: can knowledge of the characteristics of the five aggregates can also been seen as the absense of upadana?

Thanks in advance

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-20 17:49:20**

If one chooses to act out of this automatic intention by body, speech or mind because one thinks of these intentions as mine (upadana), isn't think process also expressed as a sankhara (mental activity)? Thus making it also within the five aggregates?

Yes, the saṅkhāras that are there when avijjā is there are saṅkhāras (\*“\*with ignorance as condition, activities”). But you can't characterize that as “thinking processes” because that implies a person can just decide to become aware of them and remove them, whereas those things are there *because* you can't see them even when you try; that's what ignorance is. Ignorance means *not knowing*, not just “forgetting to check”. That's why it's a massive contradiction when people think that they first “catch” their defilements and then “let go” of them by doing this or that.

There is no interval between recognizing upādāna or craving correctly and giving them up.

can knowledge of the characteristics of the five aggregates can also been seen as the absense of upadana?

Therefore, yes.

Upādāna is the lack of knowledge of the upādāna-aggregates, and absence of upādāna is knowledge of the upādāna-aggregates, which means there are no upādāna-aggregates anymore.

Point being, you can't know upādāna *as* upādāna and still have it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-21 13:57:11 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yes, a false sense of certainty is one of the symptoms of assumption, in this case the assumption of sensuality. But you could lose the sense of certainty and start doubting sensuality while still having the assumption, because it's more deeply rooted than that.

A sensual act is determined most acutely by the “perversion of perception”, whereby you regard getting yanked by something as pleasant because it's *content* is pleasant, not seeing that the context of something being imposed on you and pressuring you whether you like it or not makes it be fundamentally unpleasant no matter how agreeable it is.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-21 14:07:14 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Pre right view, upādāna is part of five aggregates as saṅkhāras with ignorance as it's condition.

Post right view, knowledge can be seen as lack of upādāna. Thus by definition it's outside of the aggregates.

You have to distinguish between the five aggregates (pañcakkhandā) and the five assumed aggregates (pañcupādānakkhandā). You could say knowledge takes you “outside” of the five assumed aggregates (because lack of knowledge is what determines them), but not outside the five aggregates. Nothing whatsoever can be outside of form, feeling, perception, activities, and consciousness, but there can be an end to upādāna.

For someone with right view there is still upādāna when mindfulness is not present, correct?

Yes, but never to the same degree as a puthujjana. And that upādāna would only be regarding sensuality, not views, virtue and duty, and selfhood. That remaining upādāna would be there when a sotāpanna strays from the noble eightfold path they acquired.

## **Reflection on Conceit and Speech**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-20 04:18:48

“Monks, I will teach you craving: the ensnarer that has flowed along, spread out, and caught hold, with which this world is smothered & enveloped like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, & bad destinations. Listen well, and I will speak.”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said: “And which craving is the ensnarer that has flowed along, spread out, and caught hold, with which this world is smothered & enveloped like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, & bad destinations? These 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is internal and 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is external.

“And which are the 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is internal? There being ‘I am,’ there comes to be ‘I am here,’ there comes to be ‘I am like this’ ... ‘I am otherwise’ ... ‘I am bad’ ... ‘I am good’ ... ‘I might be’ ... ‘I might be here’ ... ‘I might be like this’ ... ‘I might be otherwise’ ... ‘May I be’ ... ‘May I be here’ ... ‘May I be like this’ ... ‘May I be otherwise’ ... ‘I will be’ ... ‘I will be here’ ... ‘I will be like this’ ... ‘I will be otherwise.’ These are the 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is internal.



“And which are the 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is external? There being ‘I am because of this (or: by means of this),’ there comes to be ‘I am here because of this,’ there comes to be ‘I am like this because of this’ ... ‘I am otherwise because of this’ ... ‘I am bad because of this’ ... ‘I am good because of this’ ... ‘I might be because of this’ ... ‘I might be here because of this’ ... ‘I might be like this because of this’ ... ‘I might be otherwise because of this’ ... ‘May I be because of this’ ... ‘May I be here because of this’ ... ‘May I be like this because of this’ ... ‘May I be otherwise because of this’ ... ‘I will be because of this’ ... ‘I will be here because of this’ ... ‘I will be like this because of this’ ... ‘I will be otherwise because of this.’ These are the 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is external.

“Thus there are 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is internal and 18 craving-verbalizations dependent on what is external. These are called the 36 craving-verbalizations. Thus, with 36 craving-verbalizations of this sort in the past, 36 in the future, and 36 in the present, there are 108 craving-verbalizations.

“This, monks is craving the ensnarer that has flowed along, spread out, and caught hold, with which this world is smothered & enveloped like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, & bad destinations.”

AN 4.199, Ven. Thanissaro

I used to think I gave up gossiping and coarse forms of discussion of other people, what they do, why they do what they do, and so on. But I realized that wasn't the case today and also found out that I'm almost like a zombie mindlessly talking without any particular reason; it's like that image of a donkey with a carrot in front of it: it'll just pursue it mindlessly, thinking that by moving in that direction it'll *eventually* end up getting what it wants, but never *actually* getting it. There's just some vague ambiguous goal of “perfected pleasure” (the carrot) that I'm seeking, which I never actually reach; my verbalization is a manifestation of this. It's just constant useless blabbering.

Perhaps this is the nature of craving as a whole, but it just became clear as day to me right now, and only in the instance of speech. Perhaps the whole notion of “moving with the grain” is just this constant mindlessness and zombie-like behavior?

But more specifically, when I analyze my speech (internal & external), it's entirely composed of “I” or “others”; the *exact* same permutations mentioned in the sutta above. More precisely, the locus here is “I” against which there are “others”; every discussion of how others are, are not, is related to how I am, or am not. So the fundamental basis for this verbalization is as the sutta points out, the notion of “I am”. Even right now, I have a tendency to unnecessarily provide details and examples about **me**.

My reason for restraining this currently is simply because it's unnecessary. But I wish to know what the sutta means here so that I can reflect on a better reason. It seems to

be positing some relationship between craving and conceit, and I've never been able to understand this relationship. I understand (theoretically) the relationship between craving and the sense of "mine", but what does craving have to do with "me or I am"? Why are those verbalizations particularly *craving*-verbalizations? It seems to imply that the removal of craving would also annihilate such manners of thinking; why? What is the danger in regarding something as "me" or thinking in terms of the various permutations of "I am"?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-20 17:05:20**

The Pāli is *taṇhāvicarita*, which means literally "craving-roaming" or "craving-wandering", not "craving-verbalization".

What's being referred to here is the *context* behind your thinking, whether or not you ever verbalize the words "I" or "mine". Having such contexts present more strongly might *result* in a person talking about themselves a lot, but that would be one of the many secondary symptoms of appropriation that can be superficially managed and suppressed; it's not the illness itself.

These tendencies can only be overcome if one has recognized the sense of self as a phenomenon rightly and learned to put it second, which makes there be no need to micro-manage your speech. You would naturally talk less about yourself without actively trying, while still freely using the words "I" and "mine" when necessary, and without any of these permutations of craving being there.

One cannot simply choose to not regard things as self, because it will result in the "seeing not-self with self" that MN 2 refers to. As the Sutta implies, these ways of thinking are there because craving is there. If you deal with that (by first understanding what craving actually is), you pull out the actual root of it all, whereas if you just cut the branches by squashing and "antidoting" every sense of "I" or "mine" you become aware of, the root remains intact, and there will be appropriation in one of these 18 permutations as the overlooked context to that whole tactic.

## **Yoniso manasikara**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Print-Remarkable 2024-02-17 21:46:09

I've been listening closely and repeatedly to the below video trying to gain a better understanding of overcoming defilements with proper yoniso manasikara coupled with another's utterance. Some what understandable when using the examples for the defilement of lust. But one of my main issues is the defilement of worry. So in the case of worry, would the proper attention to the root or womb be ignorance? Example (worry about job) or (worry about family issues) The womb in these instances being ignorance in ownership or misappropriating things out of my control such as situations at a job or dealing with family. Or in other words I'm ignorant in thinking I can own or change bad

situations and thus ignorance leads to the sankhara of ownership? Am I on the right track here? Thank you Dhamma family

<https://youtu.be/UiaSmfyHcEg?si=0SHzjJzERmW-Trb1>

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-18 19:08:02**

But one of my main issues is the defilement of worry. So in the case of worry, would the proper attention to the root or womb be ignorance? Example (worry about job) or (worry about family issues) The womb in these instances being ignorance in ownership or misappropriating things out of my control such as situations at a job or dealing with family. Or in other words I'm ignorant in thinking I can own or change bad situations and thus ignorance leads to the sankhara of ownership? Am I on the right track here?

Well, as always, the first “root” or “womb” that you need to start investigating is your lifestyle. You can be trying to figure out how to attend to things correctly and whatnot, but fundamentally if you are still in coarse ways maintaining the dependence of your well-being on not only your own body and mind, but on sense pleasures and external possessions, then you can't be surprised if a lot of worries arise and you get overwhelmed by them, because as the Buddha said, where there is desire there will be acquisition, and with acquisition comes the need to protect. You could then find clever ways to cover up the worry, but the *liability* to worry will still be there for as long as desires are acted out of.

There's only so much intensity of worry (and hindrances in general) that you can properly surmount and learn to be unaffected by without covering it up, and you will have more than that much if you don't keep the 8 precepts.

Having said that, you can't really see ignorance as “the womb” directly, because ignorance can never be something you're concretely aware of. It's by definition beyond your immediate reach.

Instead, while the worries are there, you need to find a reference point that allows you to maintain perspective and not be going “with the grain” of the worry, but without ending up suppressing it and replacing it with something else entirely. For example, knowing that while you're worried, you're feeling displeasure, or while you're worried, your body is there, liable to sickness, aging, and death.

That's all there is to it, and the failure to do it properly is in the fact that the mind will be veering either towards not recognizing the context clearly enough, or emphasizing the context too much and losing sight of the whole situation and pressure to which that context applies, which makes it not be a context any longer and defeats the whole purpose. You don't need to “resolve” the hindrance which is what most people would be trying to do; you simply need to keep perspective in face of it.

When the context has been sustained properly long enough, then whatever you were thinking will not be a “worry” anymore, even if it's the same thing. That's because the

worry (and the suffering) was not *in those thoughts*, but in your mind jumping into them head-on, so to speak. That becomes impossible if the context is clear and stable to the point where it's impossible to forget it even if you make no effort to recollect it.

Also, it's not about *constantly* attending to it as you would in a meditation technique. You only have to "refresh" it once you notice your mind actually *giving in* to the worry or whatever it may be. You don't lose the context *because* the hindrance is there, but because you act out of the hindrance, even by mind.

## What did the householders in the Buddha's time see to want to go into the homeless life?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-15 20:05:04

The suttas and vinaya are filled with householders realizing some inherent danger in remaining as a layperson and it appears that that danger is so much that it overrides all their responsibilities. I can imagine an only son leaving his family to ordain being a significant threat to that family's well-being considering Indian societies are structured around their kids providing full support to their parents which is the case even today.

This is also my only obstacle towards ordination. Leaving my parents without properly fulfilling my duties to them feels like the biggest possible betrayal one could partake in to me. It's incomprehensible to me what kind of danger the people in suttas saw that it completely overrode this sense of duty that must've *also* been there for them and most likely in an ever more pressuring sense.

Like I remember reading a biography in *Great Disciples of the Buddha* regarding a monk who'd apparently seen worms die in a field and that was enough to arouse enough sense of urgency in him to ordain? First of all, is this even realistic? Secondly, if so, what is the danger that that monk must've seen to then want to ordain? And lastly, why is there such difference between now and then? Is this a difference in time or between individual tendencies, both, neither?

I do recall there being a sutta that differentiated between the individuals whose sense of urgency is aroused on account of hearing of sickness, old age and death, then individuals who have it aroused on account of seeing, and experiencing it themselves. But what quality is responsible for these varying discernments into the danger of remaining a lay person?

For context, I managed to find the relevant excerpts from the book and it turns out that that's apparently the backstory of Ven. Mahakassapa (named Pippali as a layperson):

He was named Pippali. His father owned sixteen villages over which he ruled like a little king, so Pippali grew up in the midst of wealth and luxury. Yet already in his youth he felt a longing to leave the worldly life behind and hence he did not want to marry. When his parents repeatedly urged him to take a wife, he told them that he would look after them as long as they lived but that

after their deaths he would become an ascetic. Yet they insisted again and again that he should take a wife, and thus just to comfort his mother he finally agreed to marry—on the condition that a girl could be found who conformed to his idea of perfection.

For that purpose he commissioned goldsmiths to fashion for him a golden statue of a beautiful maiden. He had it bedecked with fine garments and ornaments and showed it to his parents, saying: "If you can find a maiden like this for me, I shall remain in the home life." But his mother was a clever woman and thought: "Surely my son must have done deeds of merit in the past, and he must have done them together with a woman who is the counterpart of this golden image." Thus she approached eight brahmins, showered them with rich gifts, and asked them to take the image and travel around in search of a human likeness of it. The brahmins thought: "Let us first go to the Madda country, which is a gold mine of beautiful women." There they found at Sāgala a girl whose beauty equalled that of the image. She was Bhaddā Kapilānī, a wealthy brahmin's daughter, age sixteen, four years younger than Pippali Kassapa. Her parents agreed to the marriage proposal, and the brahmins returned to tell of their success.

Yet Bhaddā Kapilānī too did not wish to marry. Like Pippali, she longed to live a religious life and wished to leave home as a female ascetic. Such correspondence between her aspiration and that of Pippali was not due to chance but sprang from the strong kammic bond they had forged in previous lives. Maturing in the present life, this bond was to unite them in marriage in their youth and to lead to a decisive separation later on—a separation which was again to be resolved by a union at a still higher level, when both consummated their spiritual endeavours by winning the supreme fruit of holiness under the Enlightened One.

Pippali was most distressed to hear that his plot had been foiled and that his parents had actually found a girl who matched the golden statue. Still intent on escaping from his agreement, he sent the following letter to the girl: "Bhaddā, please marry someone else of equal status and live a happy home life with him. As for myself, I shall become an ascetic. Please do not have regrets." Bhaddā Kapilānī, likeminded as she was, independently sent him a similar letter. But their parents, suspecting such an exchange would take place, had both letters intercepted on the way and replaced by letters of welcome.

So Bhaddā was taken to Magadha and the young couple were married. However, in accordance with their ascetic yearning, both agreed to maintain a life of celibacy. To give expression to their decision, each night they would lay a garland of flowers between them before they went to bed, resolving, "If on either side the flowers wilt, we shall understand that the person on whose side they wilted had given rise to a lustful thought." At night they lay awake all night long from fear of making bodily contact; during the day they did not even smile at one another. As long as their parents lived they remained aloof

from worldly enjoyment, and they did not even have to look after the estate's farms.

When Pippali's parents died, the couple took charge of the large property. **It was then that they felt the spur that set them on the course of renunciation.** One day, as Pippali was inspecting the fields, he saw as if with new eyes something that he had seen so often before. **He observed that when his farm hands ploughed the land, many birds gathered and eagerly picked the worms from the furrows. This sight, so common to a farmer, now startled him. It struck him forcefully that what brought him his wealth, the produce of his fields, was bound up with the suffering of other living beings.** His livelihood was purchased with the death of so many worms and other little creatures living in the soil. Thinking about this, he asked one of his laborers: "Who will have to bear the consequences of such an evil action?"

"You yourself, sir," was the answer

Shaken by that insight into kammic retribution, Pippali went home and reflected: "If I have to carry along the burden of guilt for this killing, of what use to me is all my wealth? I would be better off giving it all to Bhaddā and going forth into the ascetic life."

But at home, at about the same time, **Bhaddā had a similar experience**, seeing afresh with a deeper understanding something she had very often seen before. Her servants had spread out sesamum seeds to dry in the sun, and crows and other birds ate the insects that had been attracted by the seeds. When Bhaddā asked her servants who had to account morally for the violent death of so many creatures, she was told that the kammic responsibility was hers. Then she thought: "If even by this much I commit evil, I won't be able to lift my head above the ocean of rebirths even in a thousand lives. As soon as Pippali returns, I shall hand over everything to him and leave to take up the ascetic life."

*Great Disciples of the Buddha, p. 105*

So it seems that their families were both quite wealthy and so that sense of duty must've not been so heavy even though it was still likely there, but it seemed to have not bothered either one considering they were both quite intent on renunciation from a fairly young age (16, and 20). I understand inherently wanting to remain celibate, not get married, not inclining towards proliferation of sexual desires, wanting them to lessen, not being passionate with regards to the world. However, the rest of the story seems odd.

It seems that it wasn't because of the death of the animals that they'd gone forth but rather some understanding into the metaphysical notions of karma that also don't seem to fair up well with my own understanding currently. For instance, why are they ones who'll have to "bear the consequences for such evil actions" when that's not even something they've intended?

However, the general point still remains that there seems to be some danger seen in re-

maintaining as a layperson throughout all the people who wish to go into homelessness that apparently I cannot see. But if such a danger does in fact exist, then I would like to see it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-17 09:47:16**

It's not like you're missing some piece of information that will reveal you the danger. The mind fails to see things as they are not because it hasn't been *told* the way they are, which is certainly necessary, but because of its own defilements that haven't been cleared up.

Some people's starting point might naturally be less cluttered with obstructions, and that is why some people would without even needing a lot of instruction, incline towards renunciation just by hearing about the misfortunes of someone else (AN 4.113).

(The story about Mahā Kassapa is commentarial and thus most likely fictitious).

The only way to clear up these obstructions is as always adherence to the gradual training. There is some possibility, depending on whether you're wearing away things properly or not, that the danger that you already know intellectually would one day become apparent enough to push you to ordain.

But waiting for that is always a risky choice, because nobody has an outside view of their own situation, and it's impossible to be sure that the way you are practicing and living now is genuinely training your mind properly except in hindsight. It is perfectly possible that taking the plunge and ordaining is exactly the push that would help you to take on the practice on the right level, which you (unwittingly) may not have been doing before, or it could also be that you would eventually see the danger just by practicing in your current environment, but after so long that by the time you felt inspired to go forth, it would be too late—assuming you live that long, to begin with.

Choosing to maintain the status quo until something magically changes is always unwise; at the very least you should be striving further in renunciation whether or not you ordain. Renunciation is also a gamble from one's initial point of view affected by ignorance, but the difference is that even if you don't "win", the only loss it can result in is only worldly and transient, no matter how much it hurts.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-18 06:42:57 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

How is renunciation a gamble? Is it because one doesn't yet know what renunciation truly is? Or that one doesn't know the kind of renunciation that's conducive to liberation?

I meant it just in the sense that when you're starting out you never know for sure that liberation is possible or that you'll achieve it. Since the mind still values sensual pleasures inherently, it'll feel like you're taking the risk of missing out on something that you already have in exchange for something you're not sure even exists.

But I still don't understand how it is a gamble. Whatever has been let go of has only been freeing – even though it may be through that management kind of renunciation.

But yes, if you just go through with it even partially, you would start to see for yourself that renunciation is actually more pleasant. At that point you can then reason that that ease of renunciation is closer to what Nibbāna is than any other fancy ideas you might have about it.

The only issue is that I do not see how I can just “switch” to that non-management kind of renunciation, it seems wholly inaccessible.

You can't just “switch” to it by choice. It's more like you simply need to be aware that there is always more to even the basic virtue than what you already have unless you're a sotāpanna, otherwise you'll start to think this part of the work is done and now it's time for something else, which is how most people go off track.

So there might be a tendency to try to get rid of the desires and so on, but as long as you not only keep the precepts and restraint but also question and investigate yourself and avoid becoming content with that, it will become apparent how you can start to refine it and go beyond management. You don't use the fact that your restraint won't be perfect as a reason to not do it, because that's how it'll certainly remain less than perfect.

We all start out wrong, and there's nothing we can immediately do to change that. The real problem is when you overlook that fact, either because nobody told you or because you didn't make enough effort to remind yourself.

## Resistance is suffering

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-02-14 10:50:41

Hello, I'm looking for some clarifications about tanha and assumption of sensuality.

In Ajahn Nyanamoli's book I found this passage on the assumption of sensuality:

### **The Only Way to Jhana - Chapter 4 : Desire to end desire**

Taṇhā is more on an immediate level of your attitude towards your present enduring feeling, whatever it is. That attitude is always rooted in resistance. Even if there is craving for pleasure, that is rooted in you resisting the current feeling, which is not in itself unpleasant, but it's not sufficient—the pleasure is not sufficient, which is why you crave for more pleasure—which means, it's painful.

Any resistance is painful, and with the mind of resistance, if you experience pleasure, you will be resisting it by default, because by default, you want more



of it. With the mind not free from *taṇhā*, when you experience pain, you're resisting it by default, because you don't want any of it. You want it to completely go away. With the mind not free from *taṇhā*, when you experience a neutral feeling, you will automatically resist it, you will incline towards oblivion, towards ignoring it, towards turning away from it, because you don't understand it. *Taṇhā*, practically speaking, is always that resistance on the level of what you're currently feeling.

Q: Even if you're feeling pleasure, you're still resisting it. It's not good enough for you.

Nm: Absolutely. That's why if you're not free from craving, every pleasure will be underlain by craving for more. With the presence of resistance, there is the presence of dissatisfaction. Presence of *taṇhā* means *dukkha* is there, presence of *dukkha* means *taṇhā* is there.

If *taṇhā* is still present, that means that there is still resistance to whatever feeling is there for you at the time, and that's why you suffer: not because of what is felt, but because of that resistance. And why would you be resisting? Why is it that you're not content with an agreeable feeling that is present? Why is it, that by default, the mind wants more of it? It's because of the wrong view in regard to what pleasure is, what sensuality is, and what gratification is.

Sensuality is a form of *upādāna*, an assumption. It's basically the view and the values that you uphold throughout your day-to-day existence. Sensual desire is felt unpleasantly and that's why you want to gratify your senses, because non-gratified senses hurt. However, your resistance is the suffering there, and so if you stop resisting the non-gratified senses, they'll stop hurting and there will be no suffering there despite the senses being ungratified. But when you don't see that the suffering is on the level of your resistance, you think suffering exists because of the non-gratification of the senses, and so you go out and seek gratification, and that's why you keep perpetuating your suffering.

So first, you need to stop seeking out the gratification of the senses, so that your resistance to the non-gratified senses becomes apparent as the cause of your suffering. Only then can you realise, 'Oh, I stop resisting, it stops hurting'. Which means that gratifying the senses becomes redundant. The habit of resistance (craving) perpetuates the sensuality view that non-gratified senses cause suffering and gratified senses means freedom from suffering.

*Taṇhā* feeds *kāmapādāna*—the assumption of sense desire, and the *kāmapādāna* feeds *taṇhā*. It's a vicious circle, it has no beginning. It's not that you were pure, then you develop *taṇhā*, and then you develop *upādāna*. No, you start already infected, perverted, mistaken, confused, assumed. Corruption is beginningless. And that's why if you understand it, if you uproot the gratuitous assumption or the craving, both will be uprooted and cannot revert back. That uprooting is irreversible.

I'm really just looking for confirmation or correction, could anyone please tell me if my understanding is correct or if anything is missing or misinterpreted please?

**Sensual desire in regard to feeling** : resistance to the current feeling that add a layer of suffering on top of the current feeling because the sense mind wants to have what it doesn't have (either more pleasantness or less unpleasantness)

**Pleasant feeling** : resistance towards it because wants more of it

**Unpleasant feeling** : resistance towards it because don't want it

**Neutral feeling** : resistance towards it because don't want it (don't understand it)

So roughly speaking are these the steps to see the way out of kamupadana and eventually free oneself from tanha all together after refinement?

1. Any contact is there accompanied with feeling, there is sensual desire in regard to this feeling, meaning resistance to it
2. Resistance to the feeling hurts so want to gratify the sense so it doesn't hurt anymore
3. Stop resisting the feeling and it will stop it hurting so there is no need to gratify it anymore
4. We are left with only the current feeling

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-15 12:52:15**

So roughly speaking are these the steps to see the way out of kamupadana and eventually free oneself from tanha all together after refinement?

Yes, but point #3 is where the vast majority of the work lies. Learning how to stop resisting feelings without that turning into a subliminal attempt to get rid of them is what takes a long time.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-22 13:34:36 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is the first and the second arrow contained in this small expression of paticas-samupada?

No, that's not really how PS works. Paṭiccasamuppāda is not giving you an "explanation" of how everyone's experience comes to be, like a sort of quasi-scientific universal principle of the mind. It's a description of a puthujjana's suffering—of his *assumed* aggregates and what they depend on. It's a description of the second arrow alone.

When there is no suffering, it's because the entire thing did not take place at all, starting with ignorance. The feeling that is there on the basis of contact is already suffering because it already involves ignorance. The five aggregates free from assumption, i.e., that are not dukkha, are not within paṭiccasamuppāda.

## Hello

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** matrixunplugged1 2024-02-13 20:58:46

Hello,

I recently discovered this community, I have gone through many of the posts here and other forums and many videos on the youtube channel as well, just tried proper sense restraint for past few days and I am convinced.

My main question is, since developing the right view involves a lot of critical analysis, the “peripheral view” of different kinds of sensuality whilst staying present with whatever comes up (forgive me for my simplistic and maybe erroneous reduction), if a person is not intelligent enough to properly do the critical analysis, how can one bring one's abilities to that level, is that possible, if so how can I do it? I will start going through all of the HH youtube videos carefully, start reading the suttas, Ajahn Nyanamoli's books/ essays, but would appreciate any other tips. Thank you!

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-14 07:20:45

Not being *as* able to perform what you call the “critical analysis” and not being able to wrap one's head about all the theoretical nuances is not the central obstacle on the path.

The only true insurmountable obstacles on the path are: 1) Trivializing/underestimating avijjā and the Dhamma 2) Lack of renunciation, virtue and sense restraint.

In order to not fall into #1, all one has to do is regard the idea that one is already partaking in even one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path as too good to be true. That will ensure that, despite inevitably still having certain misunderstandings, one will at least not be *cultivating* them by failing to be sufficiently skeptical towards one's own practice., and failing to treat the Dhamma with due respect.

This is the reason for our continuous insistence on how there is no right meditation or understanding before one becomes a sotāpanna. Anything less than that attitude entails an unrealistic assessment of one's predicament of being immersed in ignorance, not realizing the sheer magnitude of it.

As regards point #2, people's idea that they can practice the Dhamma without actually abandoning the actions that go against it is a result of point #1, but it's still worth a separate mention.

If a person relentlessly makes sure to avoid those two pitfalls, they would realize the essence of all the more detailed and intellectually challenging stuff we teach eventually

with only the Suttas as their guide. People back in the Buddha's day didn't have a tendency (or much less at least) for either of these two things, which is why so many of them realized the Dhamma without the need for so many technicalities.

It's also how there are "faith types" who achieve enlightenment through faith. It's those people that go so intensely in the opposite direction of these two pitfalls that they can do without as much intellectual aid. "Faith" is not about a feel-good sense of blind devotion and admiration that has no direct bearing on your actions.

## Overcoming drowsiness and dullness?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-12 09:00:27

Hi all, just want to ask for opinion regarding dealing with drowsiness and dullness.

SN 46.53 (I'm quoting parts from the sutta)

When the mind is sluggish, it's the right time to develop the awakening factors of investigation of principles, energy, and rapture. Why is that? Because it's easy to stimulate a sluggish mind with these things.

When the mind is restless, it's the right time to develop the awakening factors of tranquility, immersion, and equanimity. Why is that? Because it's easy to settle a restless mind with these things.

What does it mean by developing the awakening factors of principles, energy and rapture when the mind is sluggish? Likewise for when the mind is restless?

How does one stimulate the sluggish mind with principles, energy and rapture?

How does one settle the restless mind with tranquility, immersion and equanimity?

Does this investigation happens in sequence?

i.e

investigation of principle -> energy -> rapture

developing tranquility -> immersion -> equanimity

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-13 17:38:15

To add to what SDCjp wrote, the awakening factors do not exist before stream-entry (SN 46.30) The very first factor, sati, is about recollecting one's right understanding. If one doesn't have it to begin with, one cannot recollect it.

Besides that, the same principle applies to dullness and drowsiness as to all other hindrances: the hindrances are simply 5 manifestations of one's overall impulse to act on account of what's felt. So whatever one does to overcome a hindrance, it must not be operating under the same principle of wanting to get rid of whatever feeling is there, in

this case the displeasure of a dull mind, no matter if in theory “dullness bad”. It isn’t in itself, just like any other mental state. What’s bad is when you *act*, even mentally, out of the pressure of a mental state. Sāriputta for example became an Arahant by knowing “sluggish mind” as “sluggish mind”, not by *doing* something to get rid of it. “Knowing it” means you are aware of it’s presence to the extent that neither succumb to it, nor do you overshoot it and act as if you’re entitled to control the arising of pressure (SN 1.1)

If you try to get rid of any hindrance directly, what will always happen is you will end up feeding another hindrance in the process (trying to get rid of sensuality directly, people do asubha with aversion; trying to get rid of ill-will directly, people do mettā with longing and attachment; trying to get rid of sloth and torpor, people feed restlessness, etc.). There will always be a subtler hindrance motivating any such attempts.

(Edit: If you’re full on nodding, it’s perfectly fine to get up and walk. Also, you shouldn’t be meditating with eyes closed. That’s almost a one-way ticket to wrong samādhi).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-14 10:58:14 (in reply to a comment not included)**

On every occasion. When you close your eyes, you’re automatically in La-La Land, which is what most people regard as “meditation”.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-14 12:21:48 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Can you expand more on it Bhante? How do you contemplate or meditate? Do you not get distracted when you don’t close your eyes? Do you feel bright room or dark room matters in the contemplation or meditation practice?

Sense perceptions, as long as they’re not accompanied by lust or aversion, are not distractions. *Moha* (distraction or delusion) is a mental choice that one must learn to recognize and restrain. It’s not something that “just happens” to you merely by having functioning senses.

“Bhikkhus, possessing five things a bhikkhu is unable to enter and dwell in right composure. What five? Here, a bhikkhu is not forbearing with sights, not forbearing with sounds, not forbearing with smells, not forbearing with tastes, not forbearing with touches. Possessed with these five things a bhikkhu is unable to enter and dwell in right composure”

—AN 5.113

This means that if one needs to shut away the senses in order to be free from delight and aversion, it is impossible that one’s samādhi will be right. That’s when one is practicing concentration/absorption instead proper samādhi.

What one certainly does need to do is withdraw oneself from coarse distractions such

as other people, which is why the Suttas always say the monk goes to the root of a tree, an empty hut, etc. The presence of other people is what *does* count as an impediment to the right kind of samādhi, even if they're perfectly silent and motionless in a dimly lit meditation hall.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals—with different domains and different feeding grounds—and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of its own feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, ‘Let me enter an anthill’ ... as above ... The monkey would pull another way, thinking, ‘Let me enter a forest.’

“Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would stand close to that post or pillar, they would sit down there, they would lie down there. So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has developed and cultivated mindfulness directed to the body, the eye does not pull in the direction of agreeable forms nor are disagreeable forms repulsive; the ear does not pull in the direction of agreeable sounds nor are disagreeable sounds repulsive; the nose does not pull in the direction of agreeable odours nor are disagreeable odours repulsive; the tongue does not pull in the direction of agreeable tastes nor are disagreeable tastes repulsive; the body does not pull in the direction of agreeable tactile objects nor are disagreeable tactile objects repulsive; the mind does not pull in the direction of agreeable mental phenomena nor are disagreeable mental phenomena repulsive.

“It is in such a way that there is restraint.

SN 35.247

Peace comes from *restraining* the senses, not from shutting them off.

(As for the other questions, you can start a separate thread).

## Metta abandons only ill will ?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Appropriate\_Bear\_840 2024-02-11 08:22:16

I had some doubts about metta practice from one of u/Bhikkhu\_Anigha's comment on another post.

The sole purpose of practicing *mettā*, which is the foundation upon which the next 3 are built, is to abandon ill-will

Is metta a practice just to overcome ill will? That makes no sense to me, How is it possible to overcome ill will without simultaneously overcoming sensuality? I know the approach

to both practices are different and the themes you contemplate also vary but shouldn't diminishing ill will also diminish sensuality?

They are able to "witness with the body" the cessation of a defilement

Does defilement here mean hindrance or something else? When you stop taking up hindrances and start seeing them arise at the level of the body, This vision applies to all hindrances, Either your mind is subjected to all the hindrances or it isn't subjected to any of them (pls correct me if i said something inaccurate). So When you "witness with the body the cessation of a defilement", I suppose this is to mean something other than "not taking up the hindrance of ill will and thus all hindrances" because these hindrances can rearise if you "loose" mindfulness. So, does "cessation of the defilement" mean the recognition that the hindrance of ill will has permanently subsided and can never reappear again even if you get distracted from your establishment of metta and no circumstance or loosening mindfulness can reintroduce ill-will back into your experience. If so, is it possible to be permanently free from one hindrance and be subjected to the rest?? I'm very confused about this part.

This excerpt is from the suttas.

Take another mendicant who says: 'I've developed the heart's release by equanimity. I've cultivated it, made it my vehicle and my basis, kept it up, consolidated it, and properly implemented it. Yet somehow desire still occupies my mind.' They should be told, 'Not so, venerable! ... For it is the heart's release by equanimity that is the escape from desire.'

Does desire here mean sensual desire? When practicing brahmaviharas, does one have to develop their mind all the way to equanimity to be free from sensual desire? if so, Why is that? I cant see how one does not abandon sensuality alongside ill will.

Also is ill will and sensuality abandoned immediately by someone with the right view after establishing mind on metta or jhana and thus becoming anagami or is that a gradual turning away of the mind? Also, do you have to do further contemplations on the disgust of sensuality or the peril of ill will in order to free yourself once after you've established your mind on this greater context or is this process automatic?

Sorry to bother you with so many questions. This has been bugging me for a while

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-11 10:59:40**

Is metta a practice just to overcome ill will? That makes no sense to me, How is it possible to overcome ill will without simultaneously overcoming sensuality? I know the approach to both practices are different and the themes you contemplate also vary but shouldn't diminishing ill will also diminish sensuality?

I was not implying that mettā is some sort of direct "antidote" to *ill-will only* as people tend to understand it. mettā overcomes all the 5 hindrances, and all craving entirely if

paired with Right View. What I meant with “sole purpose” is that the goal of mettā is not give rise to *pleasure* as people would think, but to train the mind to be unmoved by the displeasure that other people might generate. Being moved by that displeasure is what ill-will is.

The usual way of practicing mettā is actually just another way of being moved by that displeasure, such that you feel the need to jump into feeling *affection* for the person instead so that the displeasure gets covered up. This is in its essence the same principle as sensuality: you can’t endure the displeasure of not seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling or touching some object that is pulling your senses, and so you jump the get the pleasure of that object to distract you from the more fundamental discomfort of the senses being attacked by things beyond your control.

Hence, mettā done rightly removes *all* tendencies for sense desire too. Mettā as generally practiced not only fails to address them—it’s *driven* by those same underlying tendencies.

So, does “cessation of the defilement” mean the recognition that the hindrance of ill will has permanently subsided and can never reappear again even if you get distracted from your establishment of metta and no circumstance or loosing mindfulness can reintroduce ill-will back into your experience. If so, is it possible to be permanently free from one hindrance and be subjected to the rest?? I’m very confused about this part.

In the context where I wrote that (certain ascetics who fully developed mettā outside the Buddha’s dispensation), yes, it was a permanent abandonment of ill-will (and a permanent abandonment of sensuality by definition too). A puthujjana can be free from sensuality, which means they can also be free from ill-will.

If so, is it possible to be permanently free from one hindrance and be subjected to the rest?? I’m very confused about this part.

So no, in that case they would’ve been freed from the other hindrances too. But they were still puthujjanas, so the fundamental level of ignorance remained. So as the Suttas say, they would be reborn in the same plane as an anāgami, but eventually after many eons they would fall back down into the sensual or lower realms. But of course, they would’ve become anāgāmis almost instantaneously if they’d heard the Dhamma, just like the Buddha’s former teachers, but they never did.

Does desire here mean sensual desire? When practicing brahmaviharas, does one have to develop their mind all the way to equanimity to be free from sensual desire? if so, Why is that? I cant see how one does not abandon sensuality alongside ill will.

No, that’s a mistranslation. The word is *rāga* which is “passion”. What remains when the first three brahmavihāras have been developed is a subtle residue of passion (more on the level of the passion for form or the formless that an anāgāmi still has, not *sensual* passion). That’s what’s abandoned through the final abiding of upekkhā. Sensuality would’ve already fallen away long before, through the very first brahmavihāra which is mettā.



Also is ill will and sensuality abandoned immediately by someone with the right view after establishing mind on metta or jhana and thus becoming anagami or is that a gradual turning away of the mind?

Yes and no. As per AN 3.94, a sotāpanna who dies while the mind is free from hindrances would essentially die as an anāgāmi. But unless that happens, they are liable to fall back from that and be affected by sensuality and ill will at some point again. Repeated abiding in samādhi would be necessary to make the abandonment permanent.

Also, do you have to do further contemplations on the disgust of sensuality or the peril of ill will in order to free yourself once after you've established your mind on this greater context or is this process automatic?

Those contemplations *are* what would establish the mind on that greater context and strengthen it once it's already there. That's what it means to "steady your mind" in jhāna and "make much of it" for example: clarify the danger of sensuality even more by reflecting on it, which indirectly increases the wholesome joy of withdrawal. It doesn't mean "get absorbed on this object even more".

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-12 15:57:06 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Can a sotapanna abiding in jhana become an arahat by cultivating dispassion to that wholesome experience without technically becoming an anagami first (considering his mind hasn't turned away completely)?

Yes. They're not "stages" that one needs to pass through necessarily.

Is this what constitutes a sakadagami? I suppose sakadagamis exist on a spectrum with some having minds almost fully turned away and close to the state of anagami and others with minds very similar to their previous sotapanna state. Is this correct?

Yes, a noble disciple who can already attain jhāna and understands how to abandon the hindrances clearly would tend to be a sakadāgāmi at least.

Also, can this turning away of mind be perceived? I don't think it's just citta nimitta at that point ?? Can someone abiding in the jhana know just how far his mind has given up the hindrances permanently?

No, there's no sudden flash of light or fireworks. One would know the mind has given up the hindrances permanently when without any *samādhi*, in the midst of assailing sense objects, the mind still remains dispassionate. And to know what a dispassionate mind even is, one needs to have grasped the *cittanimitta*.

Sorry for picking your words like this, but by repeated, you do mean the length of time one abides in the states has to be of a sufficient duration and not that one has to reestablish his mind in this state multiple times after falling away to make the state permanent right.

No, the length of time is irrelevant. It's not like you're channeling some sort of energy by being in this "state". It means one has to strive in abandoning hindrances again and again over a long period of time, until the mind becomes totally familiar with what the hindrances are and "sees through them" all the time, no matter how outwardly busy you get.

Does discerning higher states of samadhi make the process of turning away faster?

Not that it's "faster" as if you're waiting for some magical click to happen. Higher states of samādhi allow for the ordinary state of no samādhi to be understood and penetrated with wisdom even more clearly. (That's why "absorption" is so wrong; it *disassociates* you from your ordinary experience, and so it is useless in helping you overcome anything permanently).

## How to understand MN20 in relation to 'Sīla is Samādhi'?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GoteMcGoteface 2024-02-09 17:50:43

I'm having some trouble reconciling two teachings, hopefully you can help. In the 'Removal of distracting thoughts' MN20, the Buddha teaches 5 methods to remove unskillful thoughts. He says...

When evil unskillful thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion arise in a bhikkhu through reflection on an adventitious object, he should, (in order to get rid of that), reflect on a different object which is connected with skill. Then the evil unskillful thoughts are eliminated; they disappear. By their elimination, the mind stands firm, settles down, becomes unified and concentrated

getting rid of a coarse peg with a fine one

Then the other 4 methods: seeing danger, ignoring, stilling thought formation, 'crushing mind with mind'.

This seems to go against the idea of enduring unwelcome thoughts as taught in the essay 'Sīla is Samdhi'. As reflected in the following passages:

...thoughts in the form of desires, annoyances, boredom/laziness, anxieties and doubts about various issues will inevitably come to the foreground of attention, ...start trying to see how a different route than the usual two extremes that one is used to (indulgence and denial) could in fact be taken towards those mental states.

it is one's **volitional lust**, one's *deliberate choice to accept* the presented possibilities to try to "release" the mental pressure that is the problem

It must be emphasized that the purpose of this contemplation of danger is not to get rid of the arisen *thought*, but to address one's inability to remain

*internally* unmoved by its alluring nature

in the above Sutta, the man simply *refrains* from doing what would cause the lamp to burn longer than it should on its own. He doesn’t *manually* try to get the oil out or put out the fire. This is the only way to abandon an unwholesome state without generating another.

you always *touched* the trap either to eat the bait or to throw it away, and that’s all the hunter needed to get you. But now, you are learning to not *take* the bait, nor try to *remove* it either

Initially I thought the Buddha could be referring to the removal of the 3 poisons, which would make sense with ‘not touching the bait’ of the thoughts. But that can’t be so as it distinctly says evil, unwholesome thoughts (connected with 3 poisons desire, hate, delusion), which is the same phrase used in the formula on sense restraint, (that without samvara such states would assail you), but in that case it is dhamma rather than vittaka.

Many thanks to Bhikkhu Anigha for writing this essay, I feel like it will be a massive help in my practice. Best wishes.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-10 05:26:09

The confusion is rooted in an extremely common (including by translators) careless reading of the relevant passages, paired with a confirmation bias in favor of meditation techniques.

*Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno yaṃ nimittāṃ āgama yaṃ nimittāṃ manasikaroto uppajjanti pāpakā akusalā vitakkā chandūpasamhitāpi dosūpasamhitāpi mohūpasamhitāpi, tena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā tamhā nimittā aññaṃ nimittāṃ manasi kātabbāṃ kusalūpasamhitāṃ.*

Take a bhikkhu who is attending to some **sign** that gives rise to harmful, unfavorable thoughts connected with desire, aversion, and muddledness. That bhikkhu should attend to a different **sign** connected with what’s favorable.

The Buddha also gives a simile:

Just as a skilled carpenter or his apprentice might knock out, remove, and **extract a coarse peg by means of a fine one**, so too...when a bhikkhu gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome...his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated.

This is not saying that you should attend to a different *dhamma/vitakka*, which is what people interpret it as (“focus the mind on a *different object*”). The word is *nimitta*, which absolutely does not mean “object”, nor even “thought” or “mental image”.

SN 47.8 describes how a monk who cannot grasp the *nimitta* of his mind is unable to abandon the defilements. This is a slightly different context but the meaning of the word is the same. You cannot grasp the “object” of your mind, that’s preposterous. What

it's talking about, to put it simply, is noticing the *attitude* that your mind harbors towards this or that object, which is where the defilements are. It compares the monk who is able to notice that attitude with a cook who catches the subtle *signs* that reveal the king's predilection for certain dishes. The whole point is that those *nimittas* are not observable *objects* of perception, in which case there would be no possibility for the cook not to catch them unless he were blind, and the Buddha would've chosen a different simile.

The *nimittas* that MN 20 refers to are on exactly the same level; it's certain attitudes that the mind holds towards this or that thing which is feeding the unwholesome thoughts. So only by first recognizing that attitude would one be able to "replace" it with an attitude connected with the wholesome. Replacing one *object* with another does nothing to the attitude, which is why it will remain the same. Also, notice that the simile is replacing one coarse peg with a finer, not replacing a coarse peg with *another* coarse peg, which is what happens when you simply switch to another object.

Essentially, this is why meditation techniques are "meditation with sensuality". Because one cannot catch those *nimittas* of one's own attitude and can only cover up the underlying craving by attending to different *object*, the attitude of sensuality and the hindrances as a whole remain there. This is what AN 11.9 refers to with "harboring sensuality *internally*, he meditates...."

The main takeaway is that one needs to be willing to admit that one doesn't even know what craving and defilements are in order to do the work of uncovering these "signs", instead of conveniently assuming that by switching the object of attention, which even the most untrained, ignorant beginner could understand, the problem is solved. The purpose behind the Gradual Training is to contain the outpours of one's defilements so that gradually the signs of those defilements can become more and more apparent. It's by definition not something that the average person can even relate to, and is the primary reason why one wouldn't see the Four Noble Truths—insufficient recognition of the signs of the mind.

It's because of this that MN 2 starts off by saying that the abandonment of defilements is "only for one who knows and sees", and not simply for one who can replace one object with another, i.e., everyone. These 5 strategies in MN 20 are in fact not even addressed to a puthujjana, because it talks about "one devoted to the higher mind", which would have to be a sotāpanna at least—precisely one who can grasp the signs of their mind. A puthujjana first needs to see clearly what desire, aversion, and delusion are in the first place, thereby getting the Right View, before they can properly implement these 5 strategies.

(Edit: Another problem with the idea of "switching the object" is that it would only be applicable when you're sitting in "formal meditation", whereas what the Buddha is referring to here is the urgent task that can and should be carried out *at any time*, "as if one's head were on fire" as other Suttas say).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-10 13:30:59 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The 5 parts of MN20 (switching nimitta, see danger, ignore etc) are still aiming at the vanishing and going away of assailing vitakka. So the bhikkhu is practicing for the purpose of banishing those vitakka not recognising their safety in the presence of them.

Yes, of course the Sutta is describing a situation in which *something* needs to be abandoned. It's not that one shouldn't do anything. But the key is that, as the passage says, it's the thoughts *connected with desire, aversion, and delusion* that need to go away. So by, for example, establishing the right attitude/context that is an infertile ground for those mental states to continue, *whatever* thoughts you have will no longer be affected by them, i.e. **you will now have thoughts not connected with desire, etc.** It doesn't necessarily mean that you will change the *object*; that would only be the case if there was no reason to be thinking about that object except the unwholesome. Say, if the mind was revolving around thoughts of food but there was no actual hunger to justify those thoughts, and it was just rooted in desire for that sense pleasure. But if there was a practical reason for you to be thinking about whatever it was then you would keep doing so without any unwholesome roots present.

Once that principle is developed to the max—keeping in mind that this is simplifying it for the sake of explanation; in practice the undeveloped mind will fail to distinguish the unwholesome states clearly enough as in SN 47.8—there is *nothing* that the mind is being held hostage by, as it were. As it says at the end, you can think whatever you want to think and not think whatever you don't want to think, and there is no impetus born of hindrances behind any of that. The sense of relief that comes from that is the joy of the first jhāna.

So it's actually the polar opposite of the common conception of jhāna involving being locked into one object. There's no *freedom* involved in that. It's just a nicer form of bondage that for an ordinary person would feel liberating even though it really isn't.

Another question about nimitta - in the standard sense restraint passage the Buddha mentions nimitta but also what is sometimes translated as a “secondary detail or characteristic”. (na nimitta·ggāhī hoti does not seize a nimitta, n·ānubyañjana·ggāhī does not seize a detail). Is this just the first and secondary attitude that you take?

It's most certainly not a “detail or characteristic”, which carries the view that it's some aspect of the *sensory representation* of the object that you need to restrain yourself from seizing (e.g., pretend you're just seeing an abstract, unspecific shape while you look at another person). That's acting as if it's up to you what significances come with sensory perceptions, ironically taking ownership of the entire thing.

Those *nimittas* would also be attitudes, but the thing is that the “attitudes” are technically more in the objects than they are in your mind. For example, both the sign of attractive

(*subhanimitta*) based on which lust increases, and the sign of unattractive (*asubhanimitta*) that causes lust to decrease, are “available” in the object you perceive. Thus it is said that you should not grasp at those signs which would arouse lust or aversion.

But I prefer to talk about it as an “attitude” rather than a “characteristic” of the object, because people are already too likely too misinterpret the latter. You could also say that it’s a “context”; every object in and of itself has various contexts that can be adopted towards it—ways in which it can be *regarded*, as opposed to gimmicky ways of playing around with your perceptions which is what people would understand as “not grasping details and characteristics”.

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as **permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure**: they are nurturing craving.

[...]

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as **impermanent, as suffering, as nonself, as a disease, as fearful**: they are abandoning craving

—SN 12.66

These are all different *nimittas* that one could emphasize, the former being those which need to be avoided in the practice of sense restraint.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-11 07:09:33 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Do you think that *taṃ nimittaṃ* here refers to a different *nimitta* than *cittassa nimittaṃ*?

They’re the same essentially. In the first occurrence of *nimittaṃ uggaṇhāti*, it’s about recognizing the sign of the fact that the defilements, when the *satipaṭṭhānas* are practiced with *this* attitude, are abandoned. You would only be able to know that if you can see the sign of the mind, because only then would you have the criterion to know whether it’s defiled or not in the first place (which is why stream entry is the indispensable prerequisite for right meditation). And the other way around too: you would only know the mind indirectly by understanding that there is *something* there that doesn’t directly appear, and which is indirectly affected by the attitude you undertake toward things. So if one can grasp any sign pertaining to the mind, one can grasp all of them; they’re just different aspects of the same recognition that can be individually emphasized.

This is mirrored by how if one sees any Noble Truth, one sees all the others (conversely, if one doesn’t see one, it’s because one doesn’t actually see the other three). Each truth pertains to one aspect of the same sign of the mind.

In the context of this Sutta, the monk who cannot grasp the sign of his own mind is unable to recognize the problem, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation all at

the same time. So he would not recognize that his attempt to practice the 4 satipaṭṭhānas is itself underlain by the same craving he’s trying to abandon, and he would simultaneously not know that *that’s* what the problem is. He would be thinking that the problem is in the *content* of his application of the four satipaṭṭhānas, that maybe he should be using this object instead of that object, that he should be breathing like this and not like that, etc. And ironically many people would think that this is what it’s about; knowing which object to use, how, and at what times so that the *symptoms* of craving are replaced with pleasure, thereby covering it up.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-11 10:05:16 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Different defilements need different “antidotes”. For anger it is metta, for lust it is asubha. etc. If one doesn’t know one’s state of mind and its problems, then of course one cannot abandon the arisen defilement. If one doesn’t know the obstruction, then one will not know the correct way out.

Not really. The view you’re alluding to is what we call *management* as opposed to *uprooting* of defilements. What this Sutta is referring to is way more subtle than just knowing which “antidote” you should be applying at what time. It would be, for instance, not recognizing how the impulse to apply an “antidote” is itself rooted in craving against displeasure, and how that antidote is being applied to the symptoms rather than root of the illness. All such practice provides is an immediate relief from the feeling caused by the underlying craving—not by *abandoning* that craving at its root, but by invoking a different feeling: a more pleasant one in the case of mettā to counter the displeasure, and a more unpleasant one in the case of asubha to counter the pleasure. The craving thus stops making noticeable “noise” even though it still lies latent there. Not seeing the signs of the mind, one would not also overlook the fact that that’s what’s actually going on.

Mind cannot arise without an object. It ALWAYS has an object. It can be sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, mental idea... If one cannot grasp that, then there is no mind.

True, but that’s not what I meant. I was referring to the potential misconception that the *nimitta* that one “grasps” could be some sort of direct representation of the mind, whereas the mind is always that which is at the background of objects, and *nimittas* in themselves are always indirect. They are not “images” of things, but *signs* of things, including of mental phenomena.

Why can’t one do it in a busy mall but has to go into seclusion if one shouldn’t try to replace one object with another? By going into seclusion one does replace one object (seeing people at the mall) with seeing wall of a cave, or trees

Yes, that’s exactly what most people would think seclusion is for: running away from the disturbances. But seclusion is for the sake of *facing* the disturbances clearly on the mental

level, not for appreciating the peaceful atmosphere and the chirping of the birds for its own sake.

When you go into seclusion, unless you're an anagāmi, or you're actively trying to ignore things by focusing on an object, your mind will naturally start coming up with thoughts and memories about things that it wants, such as the pleasure of being at a busy mall, faced with stimulating sense experiences. Instead of trying to think about something else so as to superficially calm the mind down, you would, *while* the mind still has those intentions, contemplate the danger of craving for pleasure so that dispassion becomes established in regard to the *same thing*, no so that the mind *forgets* about what was tempting it.

You can't do that as well as you could in seclusion *while* you're in the busy mall, because it's not the same to experience things with your 5 senses as it is to contemplate them mentally.

Either way, it's not that one should *never* "change the object", but that changing the object does nothing to fix the problem. So sure, you can forcefully stop thinking about things when the mind is too overwhelmed so that you don't proliferate the defilements further. But that's more like withdrawing from a fight that you're not ready for than a victory, so the less you need to do it the better. What one shouldn't do is think that meditation is about just doing that repeatedly until some sort of bliss born of oblivion is reached.

If you stop practicing like that completely for a good month or two, the mind would be back to square 1.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-12 06:30:49 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Craving for jhana/arupa states (rūparāgo & arūparāgo), Ignorance (avijjā) and few other fetters are abandoned at Arhatship. For most people it is quite a long way away thus making it (craving for management) irrelevant **until** lower factors are abandoned first. One can't abandon higher fetters until one abandons LOWER factors first. Fetter of Ignorance (and other higher fetters) are still present. So I think it is wrong to demand an Arahatta-magga level practice until one is actually close to it. Right?

The (actual) jhānas can only be attained precisely by abandoning management. That is why they lead to Arahantship instead of *away* from it. Management can never magically result in uprooting, any more than running away from fights can make you a better fighter.

A child who goes into 1st grade (or even much higher grades, ex 5th-6th) isn't expected to behave like grade 12 student.

So it's more like, someone who practices management is attending the wrong school altogether. Wherever they end up won't be Arahantship, because their practice is literally about *ignoring* the Four Noble Truths, and pretending like *feelings* are what suffering is.



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-12 06:37:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Maybe for someone really shitty at meditation or just starting out. Anyone who has gained any modest skill in working with their mind learns to alter the troublesome relationship to thoughts and sensations itself as well, not just cover them up or swap out their objects.

From the ultimate point of view that we’re talking about, that “altering of the troublesome relationship” you refer to, if it’s done through a meditation technique, is very much still a cover up. And the problem is not so much that it *is* a cover up, as almost everything an ordinary person does already is that, but that the cover up of meditation techniques tends to carry the view that it *isn’t* in fact a cover up, so it’s infinitely more detrimental.

Always resorting to caricatures and low-hanging fruit. For example, mockingly characterizing a method as “focusing on one’s nostrils” when a sensible person knows this is a failure mode, not the instruction itself.

So sure, we “caricaturize” it often because otherwise we’d have to spend a long time going through the myriad different permutations and subtler ways in which the same principle manifests, but ultimately the principle that makes “focusing on one’s nostrils” wrong is an underlying tendency of the mind that would extend to the attempt to apply *our own instructions*, let alone other contemporary techniques that are more nuanced than pure nostril-watching. For instance, even the most “open awareness” type of approach is still wrong because it would still involve the same attitude as focusing, even though they’re starkly different on the surface.

You could say that that tendency is necessarily there until a person attains stream entry, which is why it’s so important for them not to think that they’re already meditating properly: *managing* their feelings instead of uprooting their *craving*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-12 07:18:57 (in reply to a comment not included)**

How can one ATTEND to something that is NOT an object? The fact that the bhikkhu in question is said to be “attending to some sign” implies that the thing attended to is an object of attention. “Grasping” has quite different (indirect) connotations than “attending”, so it seems difficult to say that the nimitta mentioned here is the same as the one in the Cook’s Simile.

Well, of course there is nothing that can be designated that is outside the sphere of the six senses. But still, signs are always on a different level than the objects they signify. That’s what they’re *defined by*: the structural fact of pointing toward, characterizing or indicating something *while* being separate from it (and this definition applies to all the occurrences of “nimitta” in the Suttas, including mundane ones, like the “pubbanimitta” for Brahma’s appearance in DN 11 being a light that appears.

Therefore, when you *attend* to a sign, meaning when you take it as an object in its own right, it ceases to be a sign and becomes the main object which has its own signs. That's the basic principle of how the mind works.

How can one attend to their own attitude - nimitta, as you put it?

So it is a form of “attention” (*manasikāra*) from a third person point of view. It can't be anything else because all dhammas originate from attention as the Buddha said. But for your *personal* point of view, while things are being concretely experienced, a nimitta will always be there *in regard to* what you're attending to.

And as I mentioned in another comment somewhere here, “attitude” is not a literal translation of nimitta. Attitudes are only one kind of nimitta, but it's one of the most practical forms of them. I don't think there's a word that would translate it literally while also giving you any sort of palpable sense of what it means.

For example, the asubhanimitta is not strictly an “attitude”, it is a characteristic of the *thing* that is already implicit in it (AN 6.41). But if I say that you need to find the asubha in the *object*, people will interpret it as if the asubha is in some visual perception (even imaginary) that they can directly apprehend, which is emphatically not the case (otherwise there wouldn't have been those Vinaya stories of monks engaging in intercourse with the wounds of decomposed corpses). So thinking in terms of the attitude towards the object, which strictly speaking also belongs to the object/aggregates in the final analysis, is a more useful pointer.

the sutta literally says that bhikkhu is giving attention to something is what makes it sound like “nimitta” is being used in reference to a palpable object of some sort.

Besides, one has to keep in mind that the word “give attention” in English has connotations that the phrase “[nimittam] manasi karoti” in Pāli doesn't. The latter literally just means “to make into the mind”.

If the replacement is a replacement of one “attitude” with another, this would then just be replacing one fine peg with another fine peg ... what exactly would be “coarser” about the first attitude in that case? Just the fact that it is unwholesome?

When the mind is taken by unwholesome thoughts, one is not even *aware* of the attitude that is present. From one's point of view, it's more like one is *absorbed* in whatever one is thinking about, and this is the “coarse peg”. Thus, the shift of nimitta will always be experienced more as if you *introduced* something more subtle into the experience that wasn't there before (a peripheral attitude). The wrong attitudes cannot be there *while* one is aware of having them; they are there precisely to the extent they are not seen for what they are.

If, on the other hand, you simply attend to something else altogether, there is no sense of introducing something more subtle. It's more like you just replaced an apple with an orange.

(Edit: Also, it might be helpful to take into account the description at the end of MN 28, which squarely refutes the common idea that you can possibly have just one “object” present in your experience. Every single “object” that is cognized by a sense base is itself composed of the five aggregates, and included within that would be your attitudes, intentions and inclinations towards that object. That’s why you can change those while the “object” as a whole remains the same.)

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-12 15:38:14 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

You allude to it being a matter of applying one’s own instructions, but what does that mean? Enduring the pressure on the right level once it is elicited by renunciation/sense-restraint is an instruction of sorts too.. so what, though?

What I meant is that even religiously adhering to HH instructions would not ensure that one isn’t operating under the principle of management. As in, a person could be fully sold on the idea that the practice is about “enduring things on the right level and uprooting things instead of managing them”, and *still* be managing things while explicitly telling themselves that they’re not doing so, and being dead sure about it.

That’s because that “principle” I’m referring to is not something that a person can simply stop doing; it’s something that underlies their entire existence—it *is* existence in fact (bhava). It’s the (unseen) attitude of seeking an escape from *dukkha* by substituting or manipulating the feeling that’s causing it rather than being unmoved by that feeling, which would be the true uprooting of craving.

A person will usually not outright say to themselves that they’re trying to get rid of their feelings; they’ll always *think* that it’s the craving that they’re abandoning. They’d fall into that if they started their practice with the pernicious assumption that they already know what craving is, whereas the practice should’ve from the very start been about abandoning their wrong assumptions about what craving is, which is what eventually results in sotāpatti. Engaging in any form of meditation without abandoning those wrong assumptions first necessarily entails doing that meditation *with them*, and with craving by extension.

That’s how profoundly ingrained these tendencies are, and that’s why there is no right meditation (actual abandonment of craving) without the Right View.

I also somewhat disagree with framing open awareness as involving focus.

That’s not what I meant. I said they involve the same *attitude* as any focusing practice, i.e. the attitude of management. Of course they are the opposite of focusing, and the point is that even that doesn’t make them better by any significant margin.

continually relaxing any tendency of the mind to fixate on particulars, but still maintaining metacognitive awareness and alert presence.

But why would someone feel a need to do that? The answer is: it covers up whatever

displeasure they were experiencing. The right practice, available only once a person becomes a sotāpanna, would be such that you don't suffer without having to “relax” or “do” anything regarding the feeling that arose. The different “methods” the Buddha taught, like the four satipaṭṭhānas and anapanasati, are just different angles from which to approach that “non-doing” in regard to whatever arises, no matter how unpleasant and threatening.

It might not be fully *sufficient*, but neither is cardio and weightlifting for a boxer and no one regards that as a misguided covering up of their actual task.

That's not an accurate analogy because these practices don't prepare you to abandon craving at all. “Success” in them happens precisely when you get what you craved for—when you get rid of what was bothering you—regardless of whether it's by “relaxing”, by contemplating, by focusing, by “just being”, or by anything whatsoever (including “enduring things on the right level”) that a puthujjana might feel “works” for them without immediately turning them into a sotāpanna. If it doesn't, it's still a cover up on some level.

The “cardio and weightlifting” of a Dhamma practitioner would be virtue and sense restraint, if anything.

So, just to be clear, the issue I'm describing is not solved by doing what we say instead of what all other teachers say. It's solved by acknowledging that for as long as one remains a puthujjana, the work is to *find out* what the practice is, not *do* the practice. As we say often, a person will need to question their attitudes and motivations behind even virtue and sense restraint. Even that you cannot “just do”, because until the person abandons *sīlabbataparāmāsa*, that will also be a form of management. The difference being it doesn't in itself bring wrong views and delusion to increase, unlike meditation techniques.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-13 14:14:18 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Is that roughly correct?

Yes, theoretically, as long as it's interpreted in a simultaneous and structural sense instead of a temporal, sequential one. Although, again, it doesn't hurt to emphasize that the most important point is not that people should simply replace whatever “model” they have with this one. It's that they need to come to terms with the fact that the practice and the correct implementation of whatever the right model is starts with sotāpatti, not before.

If people take every single HH teaching as gospel and reject everything else, but continue to relate to the Dhamma as if they have a good sense of what they're doing and how it's leading them to liberation, that wouldn't be much of an improvement (e.g., they rashly assume that they're already capable of doing away with the fourth layer of the model, which will automatically mean that they're still operating on levels 2 and 3).

One must instead take the attitude of someone who's trying to find their way out of a vast maze with only a couple of very rough pointers. Being perpetually ready to accept that what seems like the right direction to go (what seems like it's removing the 4th layer)

might very well not be, because you genuinely have no way to tell except in hindsight, *once* you’re out of the maze alive (i.e., once you know beyond doubt that you’re free from wrong view).

If a sensible, self-transparent person were to approach the Dhamma with that attitude, paired with virtue and sense restraint, they might be able to make it out of the maze without detailed instruction such as this “model” we’re discussing (and the rest of the “jargon laden dhamma/existentialism fusion” as you put it).

And that, furthermore, people often think they’re operating on the level of 4 while they’re actually still subtly performing 2 & 3 moves by trying to modify feelings instead of directly uprooting them at their source via the gradual training as an overcoming of the valuing of sensuality; e.g., they might tell themselves that they’re equanimously observing an unpleasant sensation/emotion with detachment, but they’re actually doing so with an unacknowledged underlying attitude of hoping that this will eventually remove or lessen the unpleasant sensation/emotion?

That’s right. But, to go further, they might even genuinely succeed in lessening the unpleasant emotion. People clearly often do, otherwise management techniques wouldn’t be so popular—*they work*. The problem is that this type of success still depends on the principle of *action*, no matter how infinitesimally small, and it’s a universal law that no action can with 100% certainty produce the desired result. Hence, it’s not the Dhamma, because it’s categorically impossible for the Dhamma to fail. The Dhamma is the *cessation* of action, not action that *provides* freedom from suffering (a contradiction in terms; action *is* suffering). It’s the inviolable nature of things that if there is no craving, no suffering can be there, regardless of what you do or don’t do.

Uprooting, in contrast with management, “works” such that you don’t have to do anything whatsoever or obtain any result in order to be free. Neither before things manifest, nor while, nor after, with no exceptions. That is the stilling of all *saṅkhāras* and the relinquishment of all appropriation which the Suttas describe as Nibbāna—it’s not a mystical state of consciousness resulting from meditation.

And that is what needs to be understood to *become* a sotāpanna; it’s not that only an Arahanth has access to that.

(Since people often get confused, it’s worth pointing out that jhānas and samādhi also partake in the same principle of cessation and uprooting, and are reached through abandoning all dependence on management. It’s not like they’re the “right management” that magically leads one to the ending of management.)

“Reverend, they say that ‘extinguishment is apparent in the present life’. In what way did the Buddha say extinguishment is apparent in the present life?”

“Here, a bhikkhu, separated from sensuality ... dwells in the first jhāna having entered it. To this extent the Buddha said that extinguishment is apparent in the present life in a qualified sense. ...

AN 9.47

“Thus, friends, you should train yourselves: ‘Being monks devoted to Dhamma, we will speak in praise of jhana monks.’ That’s how you should train yourselves. Why is that? Because these are amazing people, hard to find in the world, i.e., those who dwell touching *the deathless element* with the body.

AN 6.46

(Edit: Also, regarding the model you presented, emotions/feelings actually precede perception *structurally*. It’s a common error of modern thought to assume that “the facts” are primary and feelings secondary).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-13 19:10:04 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I see where you’re going, but not quite. nimittas are the signs through which you recognize/relate to *one thing*, so it’s not the same as the dependence of one thing upon another as in PS.

You would know what feeling, craving, and contact are by grasping their nimittas, and on the basis of that their dependence would become clear.

By not grasping their nimittas, what a person would think craving is, actually isn’t, for example. Any alleged recognition of “with feeling, craving is” would thus also be missing the mark.

That’s what ignorance is, in a nutshell: because of the lack of knowledge of the *signs* of an orange, one would think something is an orange when it’s actually a mandarine, or think it’s a mandarine when it’s actually an orange. avijjā works exactly the same way (not knowing the *signs* of wholesome and unwholesome, for instance).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-17 11:09:07 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

But when I ask myself to what end one would do that, it is for the same ending of suffering/dissatisfaction (dukkha →dukkha-nirodha) that the whole dhamma undertaking is always about, right? How then does this escape the “manipulation of feelings” accusation you level against the other contemporary approaches?

The need to manipulate one’s feelings does constitute another layer of feeling, which is the second arrow.

But a puthujjana must think in terms of giving up *all* need to manipulate his feelings, not of finding the second layer and abolishing it, because whatever he thinks that second layer is will necessarily be within the first—that’s exactly what makes him a puthujjana. So no

matter how far he steps back in his experience, even if he goes back to some hypothetical layer 16 within the structure we discussed, he will still just be dealing with the first arrow.

So it differs from contemporary approaches most crucially in that those would not be giving you that disclaimer, allowing you to proceed with your limited understanding of what suffering is and “just practice”. They don’t force you to challenge your conceptions about what actually needs to be fixed; they just give you different tools to pick and choose from. If they then go even further in telling you absurd things like that focusing on breathing sensations until you enter a trance is the way out of suffering, that’s just the cherry on the cake, not the cake itself.

Is it simply because it is actually effective and the other way is not?

Ultimately yes, but practically no. The other way can seem totally effective because people already don’t recognize their *liability* to suffering on the broadest level; all they recognize is particular sufferings, even if it’s the aggregation of all the sufferings they know. This results in them being free from (internal) things that *try* to make them suffer, while the liability to suffering is destroyed when *despite* your aggregates trying to make you suffer, you can’t. Only that counts as success from a truly Buddhist standard, because the former can be achieved for a while by any random person who goes on vacation and/or takes drugs—awfully effective for many—whereas the latter is something that nobody in the world except the noble ones can even fathom.

HH talks in terms of being “unmoved” in relation to craving and aversion, but unmoved cannot just be non-acting, but an actual alleviation of the suffering associated with it, so this seems like a second-order craving of sorts? Do you view the yoniso manasikara resulting in non-appropriation and non-ownership of the feelings as a way out of this?

So yes, that’s correct. But a puthujjana would only see for himself what is that associated suffering that gets alleviated (the suffering of *kamma* that I alluded to earlier) by enduring whatever for him *seems* to be the suffering without acting out of it. That endurance is what yoniso manasikāra is.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-23 14:09:47 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Yes. And it’s not even that you need to deliberately *attend* to the sign of craving for comfort or against discomfort. It’s the default attitude.

So effort needs to be made to attend to and clarify signs like the danger of *this intention* of seeking pleasure and avoiding displeasure that is there, and how giving in to that makes you more affected by displeasure when it inevitably comes.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-25 12:51:21 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

while endurance is just feelings urges of wanting and not wanting but not performing the associated behaviors that would satisfy them.

This is exactly what yoniso manasikāra achieves. If you don't have that underlying context then you cannot "endure" things properly. Your endurance would still be a form of engagement and investment in them.

Only when your mind is simultaneously established on something more primordial than the pressure—such as, yes, the body, but apprehended as a background foundation to your experience and not as a foreground sense perception—can you transcend the two opposing ends of indulging and denying. Those two opposing things both "satisfy" the pressure.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-25 13:11:07 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

For instance, if we see the danger in the slightest fault, we should, at all times, try to avoid scratching our body because of an itching sensation, and other similar almost automatized reactions to body and mind commands. Right?

That said, even most of the venerable ones deluge in scratching. Somewhat it seems that this kind of acting, like scratching, should be no more once one get right view and right effort is achieved. Is that so or I am confused?

If you take such things to be unwholesome then you will certainly become unnecessarily neurotic and wound up. "Danger in the slightest fault" refers only to the actions pertaining to the 8 precepts, and the 4 forms of wrong speech.

You basically don't need to be at all concerned about what bodily actions you do unless it falls within those (even a little bit, hence "slightest fault") or within unmistakable indulgence and ill will.

In case of doubt, since most of us don't have available a proper teacher to ask to, it is better to "over do it" than to fall short (specially in the beginning)?

It's certainly critical to dedicate time to straightening out one's views in the beginning, since almost all of us today start out extremely amiss. But it should not be done at the expense of the actual training in restraint, and there will come a point where one has all the "ideas" down well enough, after which the lack of practical application will become the true limiting factor.

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**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-09 14:59:22



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### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-10 04:23:15**

In this context, as a *prerequisite* for going in to solitude, it would simply mean that one should have reached the point where breaking the 8 precepts takes more effort than keeping them.

Solitude and seeing the signs of the mind on the basis of that would eventually result in the “accomplishment in virtue”, which is the Right View (the ability to be virtuous without *śīlabbataparamāsa*).

## **Do you think going forth is the best possible way to train the mind?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-02-09 08:41:55

Hello, I was wondering about one point and since I have no experience in the matter, I'm curious what people that possibly have some experience might think about it.

Do you think going forth and ordaining is the best way to put all the odds in your favor when it comes to train to become a sotapanna or anagami?

The reason I'm wondering is that I realized that in my daily living I encounter plenty of agreeable and disagreeable sense-objects in the society on which I have no control and that can allow me to endure the discomfort from the pressure and not delight in the perspective of getting rid of it.

I'm bombarded with pressurable things, the mind is pushed left and right, while on the other hand, I imagine the life of a bhikkhu (but I might be wrong, after all I don't know what's it is like at all) to be less stressful on the level of encountering all these sense-objects, being surrounded by people wanting to live peacefully, also people that are more likely to be easy to live with because more restrained than those we can encounter in the world, and so all-in-all possibly being a less pressuring context, or maybe at least pressuring at first because of not getting used to so much austerity, but once one gets used to it I feel like it could be possible to fall into a sort of “complacency” by not being pressured enough to be able to train the mind.

I'm not saying that to criticize, I'm genuinely curious about it.

I read the story from someone who got into a one-year thailand retreat and was not doing much during all that year, he admitted not being asked much by others because he was

a foreigner (??) but I believe that even if he was doing some tasks the result would have been similar.

He said his mind got peaceful by being extremely secluded from all the pressuring things of the world, but that as soon as he had to come back into the world for administrative purposes and having to confront the effervescence of the world, people being in hurry, not being considerate, the peace disappeared.

So I understand it as if his mind wasn't trained enough to be immovable by the pressure of disagreeable things in the world.

What do you think?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-10 04:50:42**

He said his mind got peaceful by being extremely secluded from all the pressuring things of the world, but that as soon as he had to come back into the world for administrative purposes and having to confront the effervescence of the world, people being in hurry, not being considerate, the peace disappeared.

Yes, this is the only peace that the vast majority of people who ordain get to experience, and it's mainly because of their wrong views of what the practice is about.

Monastic life is, or at least was meant to be, where one can *begin* to confront the things of the world in their entirety, because it's only when you're not engaging with them that you get to see them in their fullness. That probably sounds absurd to someone who is immersed in the world, but it's when your engagements have been minimized in the way prescribed by the Vinaya that you start to come face to face with "pressuring things". The full extent of pressure can only be experienced when there are no "outlets" for it in terms of bodily and verbal action, and blocking those outlets is what monastic discipline is about.

Not having those fixed constraints, counterintuitively, allows even a layperson who keeps the 8 precepts to let off some of the steam of their restraint without realizing it, and this is why not going forth is a compromise.

Since people, when they take on the robe, think of virtue as only a set of observances that only need to be externally kept, and are basically just imitating the standards of whatever tradition they joined, they never force themselves to take on virtue "on the right level" as we say, meaning that, indeed, at some point things become peaceful and it seems like there is nothing further to do on that front, because the initial difficulty (if there was any) of the mere external adherence to the rules has faded.

At that point, the natural assumption for most monastics is that the further "development" that's needed is in the meditation technique department, which will cement them even more in the wrong type of peace that comes from circumstantially avoiding disturbances.

But beneath all that superficial peace, the *value* of the things of the world remains untouched. The work of wearing away that value is what would force one to confront those things that one only externally relinquished. A layperson is in a much less advantageous position to *question* that value to begin with because they still to some extent carry it forth through their very livelihood, even, again, if they keep the 8 precepts.

The internal valuing of the world that remains is measured by whether or not a monastic *could* still disrobe, and to what extent, having done so, they would return to the same things that they previously relinquished. If they do so, it means that they were abstaining from those things only because their external *duty* of being in robes, which they no longer see a purpose for, obliged them to. They never took advantage of the external restraint to become internally and irreversibly dispassionate towards the world.

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**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-07 20:06:08

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## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-08 06:27:11

There is no inherent problem in meditating with sensuality from a worldly point of view. In an isolated analysis, it is better than coarser forms of sensuality such as anything that involves breaking the five precepts *if* it is being done at the expense of those more unwholesome things. If a person totally replaces those things with their “meditation” of choice, it will probably lead to a better rebirth at least. (But even that is quite an achievement; most people do their “meditation” on the side of their coarse sensual engagements. They don’t even replace one with the other).

However, when it does become a net negative by far rather than a net positive is when people start thinking that by engaging in such meditation, they are on some level partaking in the Buddha’s teaching, and when they start using Buddhist terminology such as jhānas, wisdom, Four Noble Truths, etc., to talk about the experiences that result from those practices. They then start to not only delude themselves, but also others who might’ve strived for and achieved *actual* freedom from suffering rather than this bogus version of it that’s available for much cheaper.

If a person’s goals are limited to the 4 things you listed, then potentially they can achieve that though doing what almost any “Buddhist” teacher today would instruct them to do. But ideally, if they insist in practicing like that, they better do so with the knowledge that that’s not *actually* the Buddha’s teaching, and that the true purification from defilements comes at a higher price than they’re currently willing to pay.

If they want to achieve *freedom from suffering* in the Buddha’s definition, however, then seeing any value in meditating with sensuality will become a categorical obstacle. It will prevent them from ever finding out what sensuality actually is, as they think they’re already

abandoning it by getting these counterfeit “jhānas”, and yet they’re not even scratching the surface.

## Ajahn Chah’s approach to meditation

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Strange\_Dealer8956 2024-02-06 15:33:32

In this talk Ajahn Chah talks about using meditation to calm the mind to then give rise to mindfulness.

We take note of these three points [nose-tip, chest, abdomen] in order to make the mind firm, to limit mental activity so that mindfulness and self-awareness can easily arise.

Is this approach also valid? Or is it that any progress with the meditation approach as apposed to the wisdom approach (as the talk goes on to mention) is only due the work of changing your actions based on awareness of intentions which is now more discernable due to the meditation.

[https://www.ajahnchah.org/book/On\\_Meditation1.php](https://www.ajahnchah.org/book/On_Meditation1.php)

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-07 11:14:41

The gist of it is that Ajahn Chah seems to not have had a sharp sense of what exactly obstructs the majority of people from reaching what he (most likely) did attain, and to not have had a very technical knowledge of the Suttas. What he describes in the context of meditation is how things would unfold for a mind that has already been trained and withdrawn from the things that actually obstruct calmness (sensuality and aversion): by that point you can genuinely just *choose* to “let go” of your thoughts and only contemplate your breathing, for example, without it being unwholesome. That is what it means for the mind to be “pliable”; it seamlessly goes along with whatever you tell it to do.

But it is impossible for it the mind to be malleable like this for whomever has not first tamed it through renunciation and restraint, which, based on statements from his disciples, was the subject of the majority of his talks to the monks. Ajahn Chah giving a discourse on meditation practice was rare, but the ones he gave are obviously what has been given the most emphasis.

For people whose minds are still pulled by sensuality, what attending to the breath and trying to “let go of preoccupations” will result in is a contrived attempt to *suppress* their thinking and mental movements, which means that they’re trying to run away from things to be free from them. The exact same principle of sensuality and craving lies behind their endeavor of attaining samādhi, because that’s the impetus that their minds still carry, maintained through nothing other their unrestrained actions: chasing pleasure and avoiding pain.

“The Blessed One, brahmin, did not praise every type of meditation, nor did he condemn every type of meditation. What kind of meditation did the Blessed One not praise? Here, brahmin, someone abides with his mind overcome by sensual passion, a prey to sensual passion, and he does not understand as it is the escape from arisen sensual passion. **While he harbours sensual lust internally**, he meditates, premeditates, out-meditates, and mismeditates. He abides with his mind overcome by ill will, a prey to ill will...with his mind overcome by sloth and torpor, a prey to sloth and torpor...with his mind overcome by restlessness and remorse, a prey to restlessness and remorse...with his mind overcome by doubt, a prey to doubt, and he does not understand as it is the escape from arisen doubt. **While he harbours doubt internally**, he meditates, premeditates, out-meditates, and mismeditates. The Blessed One did not praise that kind of meditation.

—MN 108

“Harboring internally” means that, due to not even understanding what the hindrances are and how they are abandoned, those hindrances remain at the back of one’s mind no matter what one is meditating upon and experiencing. So due to not having actually dealt with the problem of sensuality beforehand, and trying to jump right away into watching their breath, sensuality is there whether the person realizes it or not—even if they are able to attain some (from their ordinary point of view) special blissful states. The hindrances are not particular thoughts that you can get rid of by attending to something else; they are the context with which you live your life and relate to your experience, including while you are watching your breath or what have you. That context cannot be removed by *doing* something directly; it is either fueled or starved indirectly through the choices you make by body, speech, and mind (AN 10.61).

In MN 125, the Buddha states that the reason why a certain prince cannot comprehend what unification of mind (*ekaggatā*) is is because his mind is still bent on sensuality, not because he hasn’t been focusing on his breath long or well enough.

Likewise, for a person in a similar position, which is just about everyone today, any meditation they do and unification of mind they attain will be underlain by their sensual inclinations, evidenced by how they would perfectly be able to enjoy worldly pleasures on the side, whereas if they were truly attaining the right type of calm that Ajahn Chah is pointing to, those things would start to become repulsive and unthinkable to engage in.

“Bhikkhus, without giving up these six things, it is impossible to dwell in the first jhāna having entered it. What six? Desire for sensual pleasures, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. **And the danger in sensual pleasures hasn’t been seen as it is with right understanding.** Without giving up these six things, it is impossible to dwell in the first jhāna having entered it.

—AN 6.73

The stage that Ajahn Chah is describing, where you can slow your breath down and quiet

your thoughts, etc., would come about in the right way only if you have *already* conquered the hindrances and can let go of them at will. That's the only way that your mind will genuinely stay settled upon something *on its own*, with little to no need for **you** to be trying to stop thinking, and therefore that meditation would not be rooted in suppression, aversion and not wanting to take responsibility for the wildness of your own mind, looking for an easy shortcut instead.

Hence, his giving that sort of instruction to beginners was—as regards teaching skill, which is ultimately a mundane factor and doesn't in itself invalidate his understanding—a mistake. He was talking as if it would just be as simple for anyone as it was for him.

In contrast, in AN 8.63 for example, the Buddha instructs the monk that he must get his mind to be stable and unmoved by unwholesome states **before** he starts practicing the *brahmavihāras* and *jhānas*, not that he should practice those things *in order to* make his mind unmoved by unwholesome states, the topsy-turvy way in which people like to go about it, and which results in seeing anything but the true Dhamma.

“Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who has five qualities can't dwell having entered right composure. What five? It's when a bhikkhu can't endure sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. A bhikkhu who has these five qualities can't dwell in right composure having entered it.”

—AN 5.113

If you can't endure the five senses *as they are* in your ordinary state of being without any sensuality or aversion arising whatsoever—if you are not already in total control of those five animals all the time—then whatever states of samādhi you get will be wrong.

It's as if there were a room that you're responsible for keeping clean and tidy: any attempt to leave the room when it's still a mess will be inevitably rooted in an aversion to doing your duty. But if the room is nice and orderly and *then* you decide to go to another room, it would not be because you're running away from the mess. You have nothing to fear if you were to stay in the current room indefinitely.

In the same way, you would only be able to start shedding away the coarse aspects of thinking *after* it has been fully purified from sensuality and unwholesome states and you're already burden-free *all the time*, without having to attend to your breath at all. If you try to do it before that, it will inevitably be because you're chasing a separate (also sensual) pleasure that will temporarily absolve you from the very task that would actually free you from disturbances eventually.

(P.S. The fact that Ajahn Chah's teaching skills might not have been the best is concretely evidenced by how the actual essence of his message seems to have gone over his disciple's heads; just by reading his *already tampered-with* recorded talks carefully, one realizes that his living disciples are perpetually misrepresenting him. Who knows how much greater the discrepancy would be if we would have access to his verbatim statements).

Jhāna Comes Only *After* Renunciation

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-07 13:24:21 (in reply to a comment not included)**

This meditation discourse also feels off in contrast to the numerous talks by Ajahn Chah where he emphasises the question “what are you resisting?” which is the main theme of sense restraint and renunciation.

Yes, that's another thing worth noting. One has to contrast these instructions he gave with his underlying *view* of the Dhamma, which he emphasized much more frequently than these occasional mentions of nostrils, etc.

On many occasions he would be correcting the people who showed up to him with the wrong attitudes toward meditation that are widespread today. It seems that he just wasn't too skilled in making sure that he wasn't misunderstood *in the first place* so that he didn't have to correct people later.

See for example this section from “About Being Careful”:

When we see the body in the body, which means we see the Dhamma in the body, knowing our own and others' bodies as impermanent phenomena, then we don't need detailed explanations. Sitting here, we have mindfulness constantly in control, knowing things as they are, and meditation then becomes quite simple. It's the same if we meditate on *Buddho* - **if we understand what Buddho really is, then we don't need to repeat the word 'Buddho.' It means having full knowledge and firm awareness. This is meditation.**

Still, meditation is generally not well understood. We practice in a group, but we often don't know what it's all about. Some people think meditation is really hard to do. “I come to the monastery, but I can't sit. I don't have much endurance. My legs hurt, my back aches, I'm in pain all over.” So they give up on it and don't come anymore, thinking they can't do it.

**But in fact *samādhi* is not sitting. *Samādhi* isn't walking. It isn't lying down or standing. Sitting, walking, closing the eyes, opening the eyes, these are all mere actions.** Having your eyes closed doesn't necessarily mean you're practicing *samādhi*. It could just mean that you're drowsy and dull. If you're sitting with your eyes closed but you're falling asleep, your head bobbing all over and your mouth hanging open, that's not sitting in *samādhi*. It's sitting with your eyes closed. ***Samādhi* and closed eyes are two separate matters. Real *samādhi* can be practiced with eyes open or eyes closed. You can be sitting, walking, standing or lying down.**

*Samādhi* means the mind is firmly focused, with all-encompassing mindfulness, restraint, and caution. You are constantly aware of right and wrong, constantly watching all conditions arising in the mind. **When it shoots off to think of something, having a mood of aversion or longing, you are aware of that.** Some people get discouraged: “I just can't do it. As soon as I sit, my mind starts thinking of home. That's evil (Thai: *bahp*).” Hey! If just that much is evil,

the Buddha never would have become Buddha. He spent five years struggling with his mind, thinking of his home and his family. It was only after six years that he awakened.

Some people feel that these sudden arisings of thought are wrong or evil. You may have an impulse to kill someone. But you are aware of it in the next instant, you realize that killing is wrong, so you stop and refrain. Is there harm in this? What do you think? Or if you have a thought about stealing something and that is followed by a stronger recollection that to do so is wrong, and so you refrain from acting on it - is that bad kamma? It's not that every time you have an impulse you instantly accumulate bad kamma. Otherwise, how could there be any way to liberation? Impulses are merely impulses. **Thoughts are merely thoughts. In the first instance, you haven't created anything yet. In the second instance, if you act on it with body, speech or mind, then you are creating something.** *Avijjā* (ignorance) has taken control. If you have the impulse to steal and then you are aware of yourself and aware that this would be wrong, this is wisdom, and there is *vijjā* (knowledge) instead. The mental impulse is not consummated.

This is timely awareness, of wisdom arising and informing our experience. If there is the first mind-moment of wanting to steal something and then we act on it, that is the dhamma of delusion; the actions of body, speech and mind that follow the impulse will bring negative results.

**This is how it is. Merely having the thoughts is not negative kamma. If we don't have any thoughts, how will wisdom develop? Some people simply want to sit with a blank mind. That's wrong understanding.**

Some other excerpts from "Still, Flowing Water";

•Some people think that meditation means to sit in some special way, but in actual fact standing, sitting, walking and reclining are all vehicles for meditation practice. You can practice at all times. *Samādhi* literally means "the firmly established mind." **To develop samādhi you don't have to go bottling the mind up. Some people try to get peaceful by sitting quietly and having nothing disturb them at all, but that's just like being dead. The practice of samādhi is for developing wisdom and understanding.**

•*Samādhi* is the firm mind, the one-pointed mind. On which point is it fixed? **It's fixed onto the point of balance. That's its point.** But people practice meditation by trying to silence their minds. They say, "I try to sit in meditation but my mind won't be still for a minute. One instant it flies off one place, the next instant it flies off somewhere else... How can I make it stop still?" **You don't have to make it stop, that's not the point. Where there is movement is where understanding can arise. People complain, "It runs off and I pull it back again; then it goes off again and I pull it back once more..." So they just sit there pulling back and forth like this.**



•Meditating to find peace... You must understand what peace is. **If you don't understand it you won't be able to find it.**

•We speak of wisdom (paññā) and samādhi as separate things, but in essence they are one and the same. Wisdom is the dynamic function of samādhi; samādhi is the passive aspect of wisdom. [...] In our practice it isn't necessary to talk of samatha (concentration) or vipassanā (insight), just call it the practice of Dhamma, that's enough.

•Therefore it is said to begin the practice by calming the mind. Put awareness into the mind. If the mind is aware it will be at peace. **Some people don't go for awareness, they just want to have peace, a kind of blanking out.** So they never learn anything. I

•The right way to train the mind is to make it bright, to develop wisdom. Don't think that training the mind is simply sitting quietly. That's the rock covering the grass. **People get drunk over it. They think that samādhi is sitting.**

•We have to know when the mind is thinking good and bad, changing all the time, we have to know these things. If we understand this point, **then even while we are thinking we can be at peace.**

•Some [feelings] are pleasant, some are unpleasant, but that's not important. That's just their business. Just like the monkey, all monkeys are the same. We understand [feelings] as sometimes agreeable, sometimes not - that's just their nature. We should understand them and know how to let them go. [Feelings] are uncertain. They are transient, imperfect and ownerless. Everything that we perceive is like this. When eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind receive [feelings], we know them, just like knowing the monkey. Then we can be at peace.

•For the really earnest student, the more [feelings] the better. But many meditators shrink away from [feelings], they don't want to deal with them. This is like the naughty schoolboy who won't go to school, won't listen to the teacher. These [feelings] are teaching us. When we know [feelings] then we are practicing Dhamma. The peace within [feelings] is just like understanding the monkey here. When you understand what monkeys are like you are no longer troubled by them.

**You must know [feelings] before you can let them go. When you see that [feelings] are impermanent you will be untroubled by them.**

Most people who would just jump into his instructions on watching the breath carrying all these views that he himself is denouncing.

To pick an example for the sake of contrast, Ajahn Maha Boowa genuinely seems to have been giving his students this array of clear-cut techniques that they should just mindlessly grind away it, without all these nuanced recognitions of what is truly wholesome and unwholesome, warning of the subtle pitfalls on the level of underlying views and notions,

etc.

His teaching is in the spirit that the Dhamma is a *result* of meditation (in the sense of a mechanical performance of mental drills), whereas it is evident if one inspects carefully that for Ajahn Chah the Dhamma/Right View comes first, and meditation can only be right if it's founded upon that.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-08 14:47:09 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Every single time the Buddha mentioned the word “sati”, he was talking about peripheral awareness.

Sati means recollection/memory, and the nature of every memory, even ordinarily, is that it's peripheral to whatever it's bound with. We can never *choose* to have a memory of something. If we could, we would never forget things. We can only start attending to a memory directly (at which point it will become the foreground, carrying its own individual memories) if it was given there peripherally with what we were attending to initially.

The practice of focusing on objects which is what people take to be “sati” is therefore something else altogether. Context/memory/sati is not even what they're practicing; there is always a context enduring *peripherally* to the focusing, and that context is always necessarily wrong. And they're not aware of it because their whole aim is to turn the mind away from everything except what they're focusing on.

This is what passages like the following succinctly convey:

“Meditate like a thoroughbred, Sandha, not like a wild colt. And how does a wild colt meditate? When a wild colt is tied up near the feeding trough he meditates: ‘Fodder, fodder!’ For what reason? Because when a wild colt is tied up by the feeding trough, **he does not ask himself: ‘Now what task will my trainer set for me today? What can I do to satisfy him?’ Tied up by the feeding trough, he just meditates: ‘Fodder, fodder!’**

So too, Sandha, a person who is like a wild colt, when gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty hut, dwells with a mind obsessed and oppressed by sensual lust, and he does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen sensual lust. Harboring sensual lust **internally** [i.e., **with a peripheral context of sensuality that he overlooks by focusing on the foreground**], he meditates, premeditates, out-meditates, and mismeditates. He dwells with a mind obsessed and oppressed by ill will ... by dullness and drowsiness ... by restlessness and remorse ... by doubt, and he does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen doubt. Harboring doubt internally, he meditates, premeditates, out-meditates, and mismeditates.

## 22.95. A Lump of Foam

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** According\_Clerk2745 2024-02-06 06:38:06

Would love to get @bhikkhu\_anigha interpretation of the Phenapindupama sutta. From a pair of eyes with little dust☹️.

<https://suttacentral.net/sn22.95/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

I always like to keep a sutta in my mind throughout my day and night, constantly reminding me to keep on track. M.n. 10 udana Bhiya sutta is one of them. The other is this Phenapindupama sutta.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-06 14:31:40

Things being “hollow, void, and insubstantial” does not mean that your *experience* of them is somehow “illusory” and that you need to uncover a hidden “reality” instead. This would be wrong because it would imply what your new way of experiencing things, that “reality” you discovered, is not *equally* hollow, void, and insubstantial. The Sutta itself says that *ALL* manifestations, no matter how exalted and unique they are, should be equally regarded. But people stop at the ordinary and don’t apply the same context to their mystical meditative experiences, because then their mistaken emotional dependence on them—the fact that they still have the same attitude as ordinary people just in regard to a different thing—is automatically revealed.

These similes the Buddha uses mean that things, the way in which they *already appear*, are hollow. So you don’t need to be chasing down some special “direct experience” of emptiness, which is a fallacious notion, but simply understand that your everyday feelings, for example, *while* they are very intense and disagreeable sometimes, are not of any significance at all.

The contemplation of lack of substance should not be done so as to *get rid* of the pressure that things exert, but to understand their nature *while* one is fully enduring their pressure.

So instead of hoping for some special, esoteric experiences and *perceptions* of emptiness—yet another kind of worthless and insignificant “shimmering mirage” that just happens to stand out from the rest—to arise on account of mechanical focusing, you would *genuinely* practice in line with the contemplation of the aggregates being hollow and void through renunciation and restraint.

Restraining lustful and averse intentions in relation to certain cognized forms that are felt and perceived is how one is regarding all those things as a “lumps of foam, water bubbles, etc.”. Committing sensual and averse actions is how you *do* implicitly regard the aggregates as substantial and meaningful whether you want it or not, regardless of what lofty ideas about emptiness you might have.

All the talk on impermanence, suffering, not-self, and emptiness is just hot air unless a person is restraining their actions, because as the Buddha said, actions are what the fool and the wise person are defined by.

“A wise person with great understanding is one who does not intend in a way that leads to their own harm, to the harm of others, or to the harm of both.”

—AN 4.186

## Sensual Pleasure

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** NAD1701 2024-02-03 22:23:12

What is sensual pleasure?

1. Is it the five chords of sensual pleasure that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likable, connected with sensual desire, and provocative of lust?
2. Is it the same as the gratification on account of the pleasure and joy that arises dependent on these five chords of sensual pleasure?
3. Is it something apart from these?

MN 13. The Greater Discourse on the Mass of Suffering Sensual Pleasures “And what, bhikkhus, is the gratification in the case of sensual pleasures? Bhikkhus, there are these five cords of sensual pleasure. What are the five? Forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire, and provocative of lust. Sounds cognizable by the ear...Odours cognizable by the nose...Flavours cognizable by the tongue...Tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire, and provocative of lust. These are the five cords of sensual pleasure. Now the pleasure and joy that arise dependent on these five cords of sensual pleasure are the gratification in the case of sensual pleasures.”

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-04 19:24:50

1. Yes. The five cords of sensual pleasure are the five “avenues” of experiencing sensual pleasure. And as the definition says, it’s particularly those things which are wished for, desired and agreeable most importantly (and this will depend on the individual). It’s not taking about *objects of the five senses* in general, because those are sometimes neutral or even disagreeable.

Thus, it’s a fallacy when people think that becoming oblivious to the entire range of the 5 senses means escaping sensual pleasure; the thing that they are escaping *to*, the object or what have you that they’re focusing intently on, is *also* “wished for, desired, and agreeable”. It just happens to not be as coarse as what can be perceived with the senses in ordinary life, which does not make the situation any better apart from that this pleasure doesn’t require engaging in misconduct to seek out things externally. It’s not a real escape, because no understanding of danger whatsoever, nor of gratification for that matter, has taken place.

2. The gratification is the pleasure and joy that arise from experiencing things that are desired. So it’s referring to something that you experience *on top of* the sense objects that are in themselves already agreeable, and it’s on the basis of that “peripheral”

feeling, not the “foreground” one which is always pleasant, that pleasure from the five senses can be *emotionally and “existentially”* gratifying at all.

To illustrate this, imagine experiencing the most delightful pleasure of the senses while suffering from acute depression. The pleasure at the foreground is *exactly the same*, but at the background the mind is not really enjoying it, so it’s not “gratifying” at all. If that pleasure were in itself what gratifies, and not the *mental* joy and elation that sometimes arises and sometimes doesn’t, people could be cured from depression no matter how severe instantaneously by just getting bombarded with things that their senses enjoy.

But everyone knows that that’s not how it works. On the contrary, people often fall into depression due to having had *too much* access to sensual pleasures, to the point where nothing can make them feel that pleasure and joy on the mental level again, no matter how much pleasure their *senses* experience.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-05 12:54:23 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Such a person would need to recognize that the first step will not be joy, but the opposite. Virtue and restraint will pull them out of listlessness eventually, but only if they stick to the training even when they lack motivation (and if the mind is truly listless, then choosing restraint over sensuality should not be that big of an issue). Once they become established in virtue, the enjoyments that have been given up and which the mind was previously apathetic towards will begin to regain their “shine”, since they’ve been put out of reach again.

At that point, when they’ve already pulled themselves out of that mire, the person can begin to understand the gratification and danger in sensuality now that the mind “cares” about it again, thereby training it to become dispassionate for the right reason unlike before.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-06 15:33:53 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So an object being merely agreeable and pleasure arising on account of it is not an issue in and of itself. But if it agreeable alongside it being desired, provocative of lust etc then it is a sensual pleasure.

That’s right, as long as the mere *experiencing* of that object does not entail having broken the precepts, in which case it will be sensual inevitably. The precepts and celibacy cannot be broken without desire for sensual pleasure being the motivation.

Apart from those things, you could tell if something is a sensual pleasure or not by checking your mind’s reaction to the prospect of not getting it, or of it being taken away if you already have it. If there is apprehension, it is quite probably sensual. If there isn’t, then it’s likely just an agreeable object.

But one has to be investigating that repeatedly (which is what “mindfulness” is all about), because the mind’s attitude towards things is not fixed and can easily change.

Check out the talk “Sensuality VS Agreeability”.

>Then the gratification that is experienced is the pleasure on account of the desire, lust etc.

Yes, the gratification is always the relief that you get from “scratching the itch”. If there is no itch in the first place, then there is no gratification of anything. It would just be agreeability that you wouldn’t be bothered if it disappears.

## [deleted by user]

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-01 14:29:13

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### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-02 12:44:59

The best and only way to start even seeing what “maintaining the context in the background” means is upping one’s threshold of restraint. Keeping the precepts and restraining the senses *forces* you, whether you realize it or not, to have at least some degree of context present without making it into a foreground because the “foreground” will always be occupied by the situation that’s tempting you to break the precepts.

If, having *not* done that to the necessary degree, one tries to start sustaining the context as a background to one’s *thoughts*, which is takes much subtler discernment, there is no way that one will not be turning that context into an object of attention in some way, even if one thinks one isn’t doing so. If those prerequisites have been met on the other hand, one won’t even have to *try* not to make the context into an object of attention: that mistake will have become obvious and impossible to fall into.

This is why the precepts and restraint are not “entrées before the main course”. The entire gradual training is about the same background-foreground training, on successively more refined levels (keeping in mind that the first “stage” of keeping the precepts is not just about sticking to external rules of behavior, which in itself requires little to no context, but about “seeing the danger in the slightest fault” as the Buddha put it).

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-02 13:45:41 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

So I read your writings and listen to the videos looking for instructions to become a sotāpanna because, again, I am coming from a background of DOING things. But the actual instructions seem vague to me, and I feel like I’m floundering again (like when my practice started years ago).

Well, in that case, you could start working on recognizing that need to “do something” beyond simply not acting out of desire and aversion as a “fault” just like breaking the precepts (because if you were truly succeeding in “just” restraining those things, you would have no doubts about the practice). That is one underlying tendency that you would not be able to restrain without a background context that goes in the opposite direction of where that pressure is pointing towards.

Any videos/writings on actual practice would be beneficial to me. I feel like I’m looking for a guidebook on becoming a sotāpanna.

Depending on what you mean by “actual practice”, we may or may not have anything to offer on that front. The true abandonment of defilements is by default something that goes over people’s heads and seems “too ambiguous”; something “more palpable” is usually thought to be required. That’s the real reason behind the Buddha’s hesitation to teach the Dhamma soon after his enlightenment; it’s not because he thought people would not be able to wrap their heads around observing one’s breath intently, or radiating kind thoughts to others, which people, *children* even, with no prior experience can understand.

If you have developed your bodily and verbal restraint as you say, then what you should work on would be your views. As you align your views closer to the Suttas, you may find that keeping the precepts is not as easy as it was with the views you previously had. Wrong view makes one’s motivations for the same externally “good” behavior be mixed with greed, aversion and delusion, a good example being the view that the purpose of the practice is *getting* some special pleasure rather than *renouncing* all conceivable pleasures. Keeping the precepts and being restrained then becomes easy in the same way that quitting drinking and partying is not so difficult when it’s being done for the purpose of a “greater” pleasure, e.g., making more money and having a more fulfilling life overall.

Being virtuous without the promise of a “reward” on the other hand, but purely through the context that sensuality is harmful and a cause for suffering *in its own right*, not because it hinders the attainment of this *other* pleasure or special meditative experiences, is felt very differently. Once the mind is fully confident, pliable and at ease with *that* kind of renunciation, which is already a form of samādhī, sotāpatti is not far away.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-05 18:24:53 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

I said that with reference to SN 6.1:

“Nevermind trying to elucidate

What I attained with so much hardship.

By those afflicted by passion and aversion

This Dhamma is not easily understood”

It goes against-the-grain;

it's refined, profound, hard to see, and subtle.

Those inflamed with passion do not see it,

enveloped by the mass of darkness.”

The Dhamma that is widely taught nowadays, which people who are inflamed with passion do rather easily partake in just by doing some arbitrary method—that is “palpable” to the majority who has too much dust in their eyes to actually see—is something that he wouldn't have hesitated to teach.

You see almost anyone, no matter how weak faculties they have and how much they continue to act out of passion—the very thing the Buddha said is the obstruction to clear seeing—attaining it at least partially as long as they put in the work, just like a mundane endeavor. There's nothing truly profound about it.

## Possible explanation on how meditation methods lead to enlightenment?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** iurileao 2024-02-01 13:01:11

I have found this article called “An Enlightened Mind Has Done This: Two Types of Objectification”, written by a certain Mr. Roger Thisdell, who claims to have become enlightened in may 2021. There he explains how the meditation methods he's trained in led to his enlightenment:

<https://www.rogerthisdell.com/post/an-enlightened-mind-has-done-this-two-types-of-objectification>

He also presents a phenomenological model of the enlightened mind, or so I understood, in this one:

<https://www.rogerthisdell.com/post/centrelessness-boundarylessness-phenomenology-and-freedom-from-the-cage-of-the-mind>

I would appreciate if the more experienced members of the community could help with pointers on instances of right/wrong view in the reasoning presented.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-02 05:54:34

The elephant in the room here is one celebrated but gratuitous notion which is greatly responsible for the distortion and decline of the Dhamma:

The view that, *to any extent*, “things are not what they seem”, and that *this* is what insight is about.

We take those parts of ourselves initially perceived to be most intimately us, and observe them with sustained and clear perception so that we come to un-



derstand them **in a much more raw, bare-bones fashion (meaning without a narrative/conceptual/linguaging interpretation).**[...]

When the adept meditator presses her fist into a wooden table **she perceives the tactile points of pressure as amorphous clusters of sensations** that are not just expanding and contracting in terms of shape and intensity of feeling (which they do), but also the sense of the table or thing disappearing altogether, in a phenomenologically microscopic way. **The feeling of ‘hardness’ is flowing and evaporating, and not fixed for her.**

Through sustained observation, we come to see that all that appears in the mind is not only impermanent but empty in nature. **Appearances not only arise and then vanish, but as soon as they arise they are already disappearing;** and anything and everything that is scrutinised with clear attention is realised to be lacking inherent existence. No phenomenological data point has a solid core to it. All content taken to be an object is seen as a fabrication. **Everything is a process. A verb.**[...]

It is as though each data point of experience is known to itself, in its own place, and doesn't relay back to some central point of knowing. If I feel a sensation in my knee, the knowing of the sensation is all in the knee and there isn't a sense that that sensation is related to anything happening in the head. **Sensations appear in their own place and that information lacks directionality.**[...]The process was perceived like this:

Attention is aimed down to the knee from the head → sensation in knee detected → sensation data sent back up to the head → sensation is now known in the head, but happening ‘down there’.

**Now, all this directionality and time delay is removed from the process of knowing sensations.**This is particularly cool when hearing sounds, as the sounds are perceived/ processed/understood/known from their origin. **I no longer have the sense that I am hearing from my ears, or that sounds travel to my ears.** [...]

The view underlying most of contemporary Buddhism and meditation is that the problem of ignorance is in **how** experience shows itself to us, based on which one concludes that by *altering* how experience manifests, by bringing about any conceivable **different mode of perception**, one is abandoning ignorance and giving rise to the knowledge that the Buddha talked about.

But this is catastrophically wrong for various reasons, and it is based on this wrong conception alone that meditation methods gain any value. The performance of these techniques eventually allows for these different modes of experiencing things (which can then be misconceived by an ignorant mind to be the true *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*) to arise—there's no denying that, and it certainly takes a lot of dedication to achieve those results. But there is no reason why *meditation* is the only way to reach this—psychoactive drugs could result in the same at least momentarily, which is why some people (includ-

ing monks sometimes) believe that either of these two things *even remotely* could be an instrument on the path to enlightenment (at least the one that the Buddha attained and taught the Dhamma for).

“From wrongness comes failure, not success. And how is it, bhikkhus, that from wrongness comes failure, not success?

“In a person of wrong view, wrong resolve comes into being. In a person of wrong resolve, wrong speech. In a person of wrong speech, wrong action. In a person of wrong action, wrong livelihood. In a person of wrong livelihood, wrong effort. In a person of wrong effort, wrong recollection. In a person of wrong recollection, wrong composure. In a person of wrong composure, **wrong knowledge. In a person of wrong knowledge, wrong liberation.**

“This is how from wrongness comes failure, not success.

—AN 10.103

The Buddha stated unambiguously what “the problem” is, and it’s not the way in which your perceptions *arise* (which includes whether or not there seems to be a “center” to them), but the *attitude* that you hold towards experience, with no regard in any shape or form for *how* it has arisen.

“Therefore, bhikkhus, **any kind of form whatsoever**, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, **gross or subtle, inferior or superior**, far or near, all form should be seen as it is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

**“Any kind of feeling whatsoever ... Any kind of perception whatsoever ... Any kind of activities whatsoever ... Any kind of consciousness whatsoever**, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all consciousness should be seen as it is with correct wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

—SN 22.59

“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 being, craving for non-being.

“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.

—SN 56.11

“Bhikkhus, when one **lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases**. With the cessation of craving comes cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging, cessation of existence ... cessation of birth ...

aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and the man would not pour oil into it or adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, when the former supply of fuel is exhausted, that oil lamp, not being fed with any more fuel, lacking sustenance, would be extinguished. So too, when one lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

—SN 12.53

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present **regard** that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving they are nurturing acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they are nurturing suffering. In nurturing suffering they are not freed from birth, aging, and death; they are not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say.

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present **regard** that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as nonself, as a disease, as fearful: they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving ... **they are freed from suffering, I say.**

—SN 12.66

These rarefied modes of perception that meditation techniques can give rise to are also within “that in the world which is pleasant and agreeable”, the true sense of self being on the level of how you *regard that*. It’s the background context and assumptions you hold towards all those “insights” and experiences (and that you’re drifting further and further away from recognizing by putting the emphasis on these “special” instances of the aggregates). Whether you *perceive* a center to the experience or not is beyond irrelevant to the understanding of *anattā*, and thinking that liberation is to be found in that is ironically a failure to see **all** perception as lacking any eminence whatsoever (which is what true “emptiness” is about).

The insight, the “transcendental” knowledge the Suttas talk about, is about understanding the banal and mundane things that you have always experienced since the day you were born and before (elation, sadness, lamentation, confusion, pressure, uncertainty, restlessness, desire, aversion...), not about **experiencing** transcendental things, which is a contradiction in terms: as soon as you regard an experience—which can never be anything apart from form, feeling, perception, intentions and consciousness—as transcendental and liberative, you have no clue what is truly transcendental and liberative for that very reason.

And, of course, the Buddha’s diagnosis of what the root of suffering is forces one to effect a fundamental change in one’s actions and way of living life, whereas this doesn’t, as long as you can put in the time for it, like any other mundane skill.

As a sidenote to all this, this wrong view of what insight is about naturally leads to the loss of the categorical divide in the Suttas between puthujjana and ariya, as well as the assumption that the former can just *choose* to regard their in the way an ariya would if they just try. This ensures that whoever puts their effort into this won't ever develop themselves in the way that matters so that they *can* regard their experience rightly in the first place (in the Buddha's definition) because they think they *already are doing so* by looking at things "objectively" so that there is no sense of self, failing to see that one is a puthujjana **because** whatever one imagines the sense of self to be actually isn't, and **because** the true sense of self survives completely unscathed behind any observation of not-self one may engage in.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-05 17:56:15 (in reply to a comment not included)**

If you can start a thread yourself based on what exactly you're confused about that would be more useful.

## Relationship between precepts and craving

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-02-01 04:03:02

Up till now I thought that keeping the five precepts was to prevent actions rooted in coarse forms of craving, but after reflecting on this, I think there may be some issues with this understanding. For me it's certainly true that if I were to break the five precepts, it's quite clearly due to the resistance to what is currently felt. But these actions of killing, stealing, lying, etc., seem entirely possible without craving.

For example, the Nazis seemed to have entertained a whole lot of dehumanization of the Jews which allowed them to kill them quite dispassionately at such a high rate. I imagine there's probably certain people in the world where the act of killing has been stripped of its significance of taking-the-life-of-another and become just another mechanical act in the same way as, say, washing the dishes. Maybe hitmen fit the bill here: someone calls them up, tells them to kill this person for whatever amount, they find their target at a random place, shoot them up, and job done. In the same way as I throw out garbage once a week – there's no craving involved here.

The reason why I'm thinking in terms of this hypothetical is because if it is the case that precepts can be broken without coarse forms of craving, then the whole reason of keeping them to restrain from coarse craving seems to be redundant. And so that must imply there's some other more important reason/principle that I'm missing out on here.

The reason why I kept the precept to not kill is because I used to kill tens of bed bugs every day because they made it impossible for me to sleep, and then one day I recognized the possibility that perhaps these bed bugs are just like me and other humans, except in different form: all of them wanting to live and not wanting to die. So then I gave up killing, but I still recognize the possibility of killing in extremely threatening circumstances.

The reason why I kept the precept to not steal and lie was because in both these acts there was an element of hiding an action from others. While I might steal and consequently hide the act of stealing, in doing so, the entire burden and weight of that act would always be on me. Constantly thinking: “what if others find out about this?”; it felt like these actions were literally in my shadows ALL the time. Whenever I was alone, I would just be constantly reminded of what I did and how bad it was regardless of how insignificant the act was, like even stealing one dollar. At a certain point, the burden of what I’d done in the past was so much that it made me crazy and I realized it’ll be beneficial for me to never steal and lie.

I’m too young to break the other precepts, but I naturally didn’t incline towards it.

These were my reasons for keeping the precepts prior to the Dhamma. But when I encountered HH, I recall hearing that they should be kept as development of the mind/restraining coarse forms of craving. And so I thought that that was a better and more superior principle (which could then be extended to other acts much more naturally) to mine, but now I seem to be in a dilemma where it seems even this reason has something superior to it.

As a side note, reflecting on what I’ve written, I notice that I hold the view that craving is a kind of on/off switch; sometimes there is craving, sometimes there isn’t. But given the fact that there is craving so long as there is avijja, that suggests one inflicted with avijja cannot not have craving at any particular instance of their life. But this doesn’t make sense. There are clearly times when there’s no pressure/resistance towards anything within my experience; some instances where I’m very calm or serene, or even after satisfying sensual desires and thoroughly having the sense that I’m “done with it” for now.

Would appreciate any help here.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-02 07:17:25**

But given the fact that there is craving so long as there is avijja, that suggests one inflicted with avijja cannot not have craving at any particular instance of their life. But this doesn’t make sense. There are clearly times when there’s no pressure/resistance towards anything within my experience; some instances where I’m very calm or serene, or even after satisfying sensual desires and thoroughly having the sense that I’m “done with it” for now.

This is where the gist is at. You should keep the precepts not because they make you not suffer (i.e. not have craving) *now*, but because keeping them reduces your *liability* to suffering (i.e. liability to craving). Yes, craving is always there to some degree for as long as there is ignorance, but that doesn’t mean that it’s *symptoms*, such as pressure and suffering, are always there (or at least not in the strength that a puthujjana who by default overlooks these things would be able to recognize them).

While a person who gets used to killing might at a certain point stop experiencing the strong craving and therefore suffering that lead them to commit that action in the first

place, becoming “numb” to it, they will still unavoidably be sentencing themselves with every further action to feel that much more “confined” by displeasure, due to feeling the impulse to get rid of it by any means like they did the previous million times (just like a drug addiction). The *assumption* that displeasure requires a response is inevitably strengthened, and the strength of that assumption is the degree to which *not* responding to displeasure will result in suffering (same for sensuality).

The reason why I kept the precept to not kill is because I used to kill tens of bed bugs every day because they made it impossible for me to sleep, and then one day I recognized the possibility that perhaps these bed bugs are just like me and other humans, except in different form: all of them wanting to live and not wanting to die. So then I gave up killing, but I still recognize the possibility of killing in extremely threatening circumstances.

So in this example, it's not that once your aggregate of virtue is developed you would cease to feel (even acute) displeasure on account of the bed bugs. The peace from virtue is in recognizing you no longer needing to do anything *about* that displeasure no matter how acute it is, and thus it's not a problem. Virtue is thus the stepping stone to learning how to “not suffer amidst suffering”.

Therefore, *any* breach of virtue, no matter how much it hurts or doesn't *right now*, is cultivating the opposite, “suffering amidst suffering”, because you're cultivating the attitude that displeasure (or lack of pleasure) *is* in fact such a big problem that it seemingly justifies these unrestrained actions. If that arisen feeling was not implicitly suffered-in-regard-to, no matter how little, you wouldn't have committed the action in the first place.

## Root of hindrances

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-01-31 09:38:11

From what I understand, Ajahn Nyanamoli advocates to train until one is able to see when one's intentions are rooted in the hindrances and to endure the discomfort that these hindrances brought with them without acting out of it, doing it over time (months, years) will allow the mind to cool down and these hindrances to lose their grip.

Is there a need to keep digging at the root of the hindrances after or during the process?

Recently I've started to put the finger on the fact that sometimes symptoms ill-will or agitation seem to arise when something doesn't go as planned.

Anger/irritation can make itself felt when I'm expecting something of my fellow man that I judge normal or common civism and the opposite happens (e.g. I'm waiting in line, someone come and go at the start of the line instead of the back).

Agitation and worry can make itself felt when I'm expecting the circumstances to go one way, and it doesn't go as planned (e.g. I thought traffic would be as usual and that I would be on time at work, but there is an accident on the road and now I'm going to be late and everything that goes with it).

From my point of view it seems like ill-will or agitation weren't already present, but the fact that I had expectations and that they got undermined by circumstances caused these hindrances to show up.

From here, should one accept that they have expectations and that it would be undermined by circumstances resulting in hindrances, and endure these hindrances on that level?

Or should one work on these expectations and free themselves from it so that the hindrances can't appear because of it in the first place?

I come to you essentially because I don't exclude that there is a possibility the hindrances were already there and that it could be why circumstances not meeting expectations resulted in symptoms of ill-will and agitation, since this doesn't appear to me to be the case I might have it completely backward and the task could then be more daunting than what I thought.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-02 04:02:36**

Is there a need to keep digging at the root of the hindrances after or during the process?

It's not like there is a deeper "root" of them that a person would be able to access and "dig out" while the prior training has not yet unfolded sufficiently. Rather, for as long as one's virtue and sense-restraint (not sense-denial) could be more strict than it is at the moment, one could address the hindrances better.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the hindrances *are* the actions that are committed on account of pressure, be they coarse or very subtle. The point of the training that people have a tendency to want to do as soon as possible, the which is the mental purification part, is about exactly the same restraint as the bodily and verbal purification. It's not like then you start "digging up" some hidden energies in your mind, but that the recognition of your own intentions behind your actions is now sufficient for the way in which upi *mentally* proliferate thoughts and pressures to become apparent *on its own*, without having to "dig it up" deliberately. One then is able to restrain effortlessly in the same way you'd prevent yourself from breaking a precept: you are *already* aware of yourself about to do something with your arm or say something with your mouth, it's impossible not to be, so you simply abstain from it. But the accurate recognition of those choices won't be even there without thorough development of restraint in regard to the coarser choices., just as it's impossible

to even notice, let alone get rid of, the subtle impurities in gold while the coarse ones are still present.

So, it's not the expectations that you have about other people, or anything else that you could be aware of by *trying* to be aware of it by choice. It's something that will eventually become apparent by itself only once the mind has become steady at the level where there is no further work to be done regarding body and speech. And that alone should result in a certain degree of "blameless ease".

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-02 13:16:23 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So were I mixed things up is that one doesn't have to restrain themselves until they are able to recognize when their intentions are rooted in the hindrances, but rather until they are able to recognize when their intentions are rooted in *taṇhā* in relation to contact/feeling **resulting** in them acting out in the form of the hindrances?

Yes, the hindrances are not in this or that intention that you can just "catch", it's the general principle of acting out of feeling that underlies one's entire existence. And for as long as feelings are acted out of through body and speech, the way in which the same thing is happening through mental actions cannot possibly be discerned.

It doesn't seem to be the case for me at the moment, because when "mentally proliferating thoughts and pressures become apparent on their own" (say in a heated moment when irritation is there, because it's one of those I know the best), I am aware of me proliferating what I could do before doing it, I am then also aware of myself about to do it, but then it's not so simple to abstain from it.

Seeing perfectly well what I could do, there is then a pressure as if this is what I must do and I really have to take it upon myself to not do it, really go against the grain of my entire body needing to do that.

If you get to that stage in the first place where the mind is irritated and it's painful not to act out, then the proliferation already happened without notice. What I'm referring to is that the hindrances can only start to be abandoned once one's discernment is such that one recognizes the "becoming irritated" to begin with as a *choice* (again, just like a bodily or verbal choice) not when irritation is already there and one then has to abandon it. By then it's too late, and the fact that it happens means that the mind still cannot recognize the subtler mental choices that lead to that irritation even *arising*.

And I'm wondering if this isn't because I didn't develop enough the contentment in the virtuous behavior, so when big pressure is there the choice going with the thoughts "why should I resist and make myself feel so bad? Clearly acting out will release me from that unpleasant moment" takes over the other one "let's not give in but take pleasure in being able to renounce this unvirtuous behavior".



Well, it's not really a matter of “if only if had done *that*, this wouldn't have happened”. One has to accept that these things are inevitable to a degree, which is how one sees that there is still work to be done. If one were at the stage where one *could* prevent these things, they wouldn't be happening to begin with, or at least you wouldn't be having any doubts whatsoever about how to go about it.

There is never some quick fix that'll sort everything out. Mistakes in the application of some meditation technique can be fixed in no time just by implementing someone's “tips”, but with this there will never be quick or sudden improvements, because it's about actually purifying the depths of your being from passion, aversion, and muddledness. “Success” will thus not be there to the exact degree that those 3 things are still there, and vice versa.

“Just as, Pahārāda, the great ocean slants, slopes, and inclines gradually, not dropping off abruptly, so too, in this Dhamma and discipline penetration to final knowledge occurs by gradual training, gradual activity, and gradual practice, not abruptly. This is the first astounding and amazing quality that the bhikkhus see in this Dhamma and discipline because of which they take delight in it.

—AN 8.19

## How is Stream Entry not a “special experience?”

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Glassman25 2024-01-29 23:08:03

I've read this sentiment a couple times recently. It seems to me that the moment one achieves this that it would be quite special!

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-30 13:23:53

What u/no\_thingness wrote is essentially correct:

There can be a “special experience” of joy and relief on account of *recognizing* stream-entry, but stream-entry in itself is not an experience; it's an *understanding* of the nature of all experience. So no matter how lofty and sublime the realization that one now sees the Four Noble Truths is, *that* experience is also known as impermanent, suffering, and unownable, so in that sense it's not more “special” than the experience of any other feeling which has been understood in that same way. The usual view is that one understands the nature of things *because* of getting some experience, and that's completely the wrong way round.

It's thought that stream-entry is achieved by getting a “glimpse” of Nibbāna, and therefore the *experience* of that glimpse is the breakthrough. But that's plain absurd because if you forgot about that glimpse, in just the same way as you would forget some experience that happened in your childhood that was *at the time* really special, you would lose your sotāpatti.

It's irrelevant whether people then claim that "No no, *this* experience is different from all others and you can never forget it". That's just a testament to how they haven't at all understood how "*everything* that is of the nature to arise is of the nature to cease".

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-02-05 09:12:05 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The point is not that *stream entry*, i.e. understanding the Four Noble Truths, is not special because that would be ridiculous, but that this understanding is not measured by an "experience" or special "glimpse" that you get one evening which suddenly turns you into a sotāpanna, which is generally the sort of result people expect.

"Experiences" are irrelevant; the understanding of the *nature* of any experience is what is "special" and a puthujjana needs to strive for.

## Unable to take the precept of non-lying

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Tao\_389 2024-01-29 13:53:48

I am not able to take the precept of non-lying with its full value. It feels like it's just too much weight I could take on. Even celibacy seems easier to me than this. It is not like I keep lying and so it is hard to take up this precept but I have lied on occasions. When I contemplated on what things exactly prevent me from taking this precept, I came to know that it was due to emotional attachment to my parents / family. Specifically, there have been some situations where if I had to tell a small deliberate lie that would result in much lesser unpleasant emotions to my parents or so, I have chosen to lie. And if I do take the precept right on, I know internally that I am not ready if the worst possible thing would challenge me.

Here in my culture lying isn't even considered something quite bad or so. I am not trying to rationalize lying but just that in my environment how trivial is lying considered and how my attitude towards it has been unfortunately shaped.

I am really not sure how to go about this. I have been keeping the other 4 precepts and celibacy but I guess that this might be a fruitless endeavor. I would be grateful for any comments on this.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-30 13:51:23**

With this sort of situation, it's always the same principle: one will not be able to get out of it until one has a good enough reason to put up with the displeasure of restraining oneself. It's not about hoping that restraining yourself and being more virtuous will *stop* being painful.

To an extent, it can help to clarify exactly *why* lying is for your own harm. More specifically, how the choice to not tell the truth in every single situation, though seemingly less

unpleasant on the surface, involves a deeper, more “thorny” kind of suffering than any form of displeasure that would come from telling the truth.

Lying can be momentarily less painful but it always entangles you more on the emotional level, because next time, telling the truth will be that much more difficult—you’re becoming more existentially dependent on avoiding displeasure each time you do it.

The pain of telling the truth is momentarily worse, but there is no accumulation of burden for the future on account of it. It’s like the pain of enduring heat, cold, hunger, etc. It can be very sharp, but emotionally it doesn’t *have* to bother you if train your mind, and it doesn’t bring any additional repercussions.

## Am I discerning correctly?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** serculis 2024-01-29 12:50:13

Trying to wrap my head around using mindfulness to discern my thoughts and behaviours. I would be grateful if someone could scrutinise my thoughts so far with the following example:

Context: former binge eating disorder. Currently eat 90% healthy, squashed my habit of needing occasional snacks to keep my diet “sustainable”, now eating more like a monk i.e. gathering foodstuffs and eating them indiscriminately instead of needing a recipe meal, trying to reach my goal of not needing junk/treats ever again.

The other night, work was terrible. Incredibly understaffed, having to work through my breaks and doing lots of overtime. Sleep deprived. Mind is agitated. I didn’t have time to cook a substantive meal, so I had to run to the shop and get a sandwich, scoff it down and get back to work. On the way home at night, I wanted to get a takeaway. I was mindful and knew I wasn’t hungry as the sandwich removed that hunger, but I thought that because work was terrible and ruined my break, I wanted to recuperate, basically ‘feel better’ by indulging in a takeaway. Typing it now cringes me, but I was very distressed in the midst of it.

Anyway, I started paying attention to my thoughts. The first thought was ‘it’s been a shitty night and I deserve to treat myself’, then the next thought was ‘I had to work through my break for the fifth time this week and it’s unfair, I want to recuperate and have some me-time’. Thought after that was ‘this is too hard’. I understood the thoughts as manifestations of craving, and recollected that if I gave into them, the next time I get cravings, it would be due to my past actions. However the pressure got incredibly strong and I thought ‘sorry man, it’s too difficult tonight, I give in’ and was about to pull up to buy food. Then I stopped and realised that very last thought was no different from the rest, but I identified it as ‘me’ thinking, as if there was all these thoughts over there, but I’m over here observing it all with my own thoughts. As soon as I recollected that, I was able to resist the pressure. After that, I felt proud of myself for resisting the pressure. However I then recognised that the feeling of pride wasn’t my doing either, and identifying with it would perpetuate the permanent sense of self I already feel, so I stopped identifying with it in that moment, and

with that I stopped caring whether the feeling of pride persisted or disappeared because it had nothing to do with me. Then I went home and slept.

Is this... at least... a less wrong way of discernment?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-30 07:11:16**

The fact that you restrained yourself is good, but there is still some “looking at the wrong place” happening.

Anyway, I started paying attention to my thoughts.

This is where you started on the wrong foot. Don't try to pay attention to your *thoughts* to find where craving is: thoughts will always be secondary manifestations, *symptoms* of the underlying craving. This is exactly why the “pressure got incredibly strong” in the first place: through trying to deal with the symptoms, the illness was being maintained., i.e., the attitude of “I want to get rid of these thoughts” is itself rooted in the same craving.

Next time, look at what you are *feeling* overall, in the broadest sense, not in regard to this or that particular thought. That general feeling will be either a ease, unease, or neither. In this case there was a feeling of unease (that was there even *before* you were tempted to get more food), and all you had to do is recognize that and endure it on *that* level, not caring at all about what thoughts you were experiencing for as long as that feeling was still being endured. And you had to be doing that from when you were at work experiencing displeasure, not *after* when the temptations to act out of it started to manifest, which would've prevented them from being nearly as oppressive. By then it's too late, and all you can do at that point is grit your teeth and not act out.

With this, the actual root of the issue, the tendency to *act out* of that feeling, which includes indulging in its thoughts *and* trying to get rid of them, would've worn out. If there is less pressure to act out of that background feeling, then the same thoughts might even arise but their *weight* would be much less, and you would have no trouble ignoring them. Just like when you might have a thought about eating your favorite food when you have no appetite at all: it's the same thought and the same prospect of pleasure, but you are not moved by it.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-30 13:01:28 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I only focused on the thoughts because being untrained, I often identify with the voice in my head, thinking it's genuinely me talking. That's why even when I'm feeling bad, I'll have thoughts trying to convince me “this time, due to XYZ reason, it's okay to give in”. Maybe this comes from lack of understanding or clarity on why it's obviously never okay to give in, hence there shouldn't be “consultation” with my thoughts where I delight in possible exceptions to giving in?

It's your attitude towards the present feeling that makes thoughts be an issue. So on the level of thoughts, you can *think* you are not identifying with other coarser thoughts ("the voices"), but for as long as there is an underlying tendency to either resist the general feeling or delight in it, that whole choice to not identify with thoughts will still be a subtler thought that you are identified with.

If you recognize the enduring feeling correctly and restrain yourself from delight or aversion on *that* level, no amount of "voices in your head" can cause you to have delight or aversion, no matter their content. And that goes the other way too: no matter what your thoughts and reasoning say, if the action will be rooted in delight or aversion towards what you're feeling here and now, it *will* be wrong. That's why what's wholesome or unwholesome always depends on your state of mind, i.e., what attitude is there regarding what you feel right now, not on what you *think* is wholesome or unwholesome.

In the video "sixth sensed animal" Ajahn Nyanamoli used the analogy of walking your dog and seeing a deer in the distance. Your dog hasn't noticed it yet but you have, and you know once your dog sees it it will start barking and will try to drag you. Is noticing the deer before the dog basically the same thing as me noticing the unpleasant feeling during work, way before I even was tempted to get food?

Yes, that's exactly the principle I was alluding to.

So you can take that as a general rule of thumb: whenever you "suddenly" find yourself really pressured to do something, it must have been because at some point, when things were still calm, you started "moving" in that direction with a bit of delight, aversion, or carelessness that *back then* you brushed off as "fine". But it will always end up snowballing, and every further "harmless" engagement in that direction will make it more painful to restrain yourself later.

## Results versus deliberate decisions

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-01-28 22:17:08

I want to see if I am totally mistaken or not...

The way I understand, and in some (very few) cases know from experience, is that attachment, e.g. is not something we eliminate directly as a willful act, but is a consequence of insight into the nature of things.

Almost every aspect of the dhamma i would claim to understand (again, very minimal) has turned out like this. It of course requires volition in the direction of things, but i have yet to say to myself "i will renounce this or that" or "i will no longer experience an emotional bond with this or that" and have it happen because i willed it. My meager progress is almost like the rest of my experience: i ultimately have no say in the matter; once i understood that i cannot breathe underwater it became impossible for me to ever even need to consider it. That is an awful example, but hopefully my overall question and

perspective are clearer.

I appreciate any input.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-29 12:58:11**

The way I understand, and in some (very few) cases know from experience, is that attachment, e.g. is not something we eliminate directly as a willful act, but is a consequence of insight into the nature of things.

Almost every aspect of the dhamma i would claim to understand (again, very minimal) has turned out like this. It of course requires volition in the direction of things, but i have yet to say to myself “i will renounce this or that” or “i will no longer experience an emotional bond with this or that” and have it happen because i willed it.

This is correct in a certain sense. The mind is what is attached to things, and it simply doesn’t work such that you could directly tell it to “drop” things. All one’s direct volition can do is either proliferate or starve the mind’s attachments.

So it is one’s previous repeated choices to abstain from volitional actions that would proliferate attachment (choices of virtue and sense restraint) that eventually wear it out. There must be *some* degree of understanding involved in those choices for them to have a sound basis (e.g., knowing that the goal is freedom from suffering and that certain actions factually take one in the opposite direction), but true insight always arises as a *result* of attachments having worn away, not the other way around.

This means that renunciation will inevitably be painful initially and will entail going “against the grain”. One should not expect insight or disenchantment to arise *first* so that renunciation then becomes easy.

“What do you expect, Aggivessana? It is impossible that what is to be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, reached through renunciation, realized through renunciation, will ever be known, seen, reached or realized by Prince Jayasena, who lives amidst sensuality, enjoys sensuality, itches with thoughts of sensuality, burns with the fever of sensuality, and is engaged in the pursuit of sensuality.

—MN 125

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-30 06:51:16 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is it worthwhile to sit doing nothing and resisting the mind’s attempts to make me act in some way as a beginning practice or is it simply a one time exercise meant to demonstrate to people that neutral feeling is unpleasant and the mind will want to distract itself?

Neither really. As a beginner, that attempt to “formally” resist the mind’s attempts to make you act in some way will be acting in some way right then and there. One starts out by not even seeing as it is what the pressure to act, thinking one can “observe” it directly like that.

This is why there is a Gradual Training in a certain order. The stage of sitting down in an empty dwelling and purifying the mind from hindrances comes at the point when one isn’t a beginner at all anymore, and is already able to grasp the signs of their mind.

Prior to that, one’s conception of what the hindrances are will necessarily be way too coarse and inaccurate for one to abandon them, and the attempt to do so will result in either winding oneself up into frustration, or falling into the trap of “concentration”, which is so attractive precisely because it brings about a wrong kind of peace that *doesn’t* require development in the Gradual Training beforehand.

See this talk.

## Role of virtue beyond stream entry

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** TD-0 2024-01-27 17:01:06

As the title states, I’m interested in clarifying the role of virtue beyond stream entry. I understand why and how virtue and restraint play a key role in developing the Right View prior to stream entry. But once the fruit of stream entry has been attained, one’s liability to suffer has been reduced to “7 grains of sand”. At this point, they have the understanding that makes them “incapable of suffering amidst suffering”. So, my question is, essentially, why bother being virtuous any more? Why follow the Noble 8fold path?

My current hypothesis is that it has to do with the belief in rebirth. As in, a stream enterer has at most 7 lifetimes left to live, so it makes sense to continue developing their practice in this life in order to shave down those remaining lifetimes and achieve “final extinguishment” as soon as possible. This is all well and good.

However, without the belief in rebirth, the entire framework seems to break down. In the sense that a stream enterer is incapable of suffering amidst suffering, but mundane pleasant vedana is still “agreeable” and easy to access, while Right Samadhi, which is supposedly far superior to anything that’s accessible through the senses (again, something they would need to take on faith prior to experiencing for themselves), is much more difficult to cultivate, so they can “settle for” enjoying mundane pleasant vedana without any craving or attachment, afford to be lazy and careless all the time, and even engage in “wrong” conduct in this life with no liability to suffer on account of it.

What’s wrong with my reasoning here?

E: I thought I’d reframe the question here – Basically, if a stream enterer is “incapable of suffering amidst suffering”, and therefore has barely any liability to suffering left, what motivates them to keep practicing? Is it the belief in rebirth? Or is it that whatever suffering that remains is painful enough that they still need to maintain their practice?

## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-28 07:08:04

What's wrong with my reasoning here?

Nothing, really. This is exactly why the lay stream-enterers of the Buddha's time would go back to their normal lives despite the fact that understanding the danger in sensuality is part and parcel of their insight. The understanding they gained did not depend on them continuing to follow any form of virtue or observances, which is in contrast to a puthujjana: if the latter stops "doing" whatever they regard as the practice, they will fall away from whatever development they had. This is why a stream enterer does not hold on to *any* practices and observances, not even the "right" ones of virtue, sense restraint, etc. (Keeping in mind that holding on to them and following them are not at all the same).

Furthermore, even if they wanted to, they *cannot* experience the results of their misconduct in the same way and degree as a puthujjana. Being free from self view and knowing the noble truths is the reason for that: the suffering caused by their actions does not "land" due their insight of not-self. The suffering that they *do* experience is the one that leads them to commit the actions in the first place, and this is absolutely minuscule in comparison.

And this is what people misunderstand: being free from suffering does not mean you don't experience unpleasant feeling; it means your mind is not troubled by it when it comes (that's what freedom from kamma is about). So even though a sotāpanna is liable to experience a lot of displeasure on account of their remaining fetters of sensuality, and ill will, that displeasure does not "touch" them. The feelings that come on account of those fetters and of acting out of them are within the first arrow, not the second. In other words, the difference between a sotāpanna and an Arahant or Anāgāmi is the magnitude of the first arrow that they experience, because of which the former is still liable to *act* in unwholesome ways due to that first arrow. The latter two are incapable of committing sensual or averse actions because they don't experience the pressure to do so in the first place.

That being said, the sotāpanna's degree of development does entail a great reduction of the intensity of the first arrow as well, meaning that there are certain things that they would not even be *pressured* to do, namely the actions that would land them in the lower realms. This does not mean that they cannot break the five precepts, but that the *mental state* behind their transgression can never be as twisted as it can be for a puthujjana. (AN 3.101 referenced above). For example, they might intentionally kill under certain severe, threatening or very careless circumstances, but pure cruelty would most likely be impossible. Externally though, the action might look the same as a puthujjana's.

"Bhikkhus, a person accomplished in view has given up six things. What six? Personality view, doubt, holding on to virtue and duty, and forms of passion, aversion, and muddledness that lead to states of misery. [*apāya; traditionally this means the literal hells and so on, but it would also include intense suffering in this very life*]

—AN 6.90



The only external actions that one who sees categorically cannot commit are outlined in AN 6.94. Those things cannot be done *without* the intensity of the 3 defilements that would lead them to states of misery.

So, in the end, a noble disciple will only continue striving in the Noble Eightfold Path to the degree that they feel dissatisfied with the amount of freedom they gained. Some of them would be perfectly content with it, and they would have a natural tendency to still adhere to the five precepts the vast majority of the time, but they would not necessarily undertake things like celibacy and sense restraint, which are the requirements to take the mind *beyond* where it already is, for puthujjana and noble disciple alike. But within 7 births at most, or even at the time of their death in the current life, they will become dissatisfied with their progress and will take up the training seriously again.

A puthujjana should purify their behavior like their life depends on it if they want to have a chance to get the Right View, but people's conception of a sotāpanna who is *always* perfectly diligent and virtuous, and who would suffer on account of their misconduct, is due to their own holding on to virtue and observances.

True freedom is true freedom—there are no “buts” or “ifs” to worry about once it's attained. Adhering to constraints is only necessary for *progressing* towards greater freedom.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-29 13:26:52 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

A sotāpanna can transgress without having to experience the unwholesome states (chiefly remorse) that would (rightly) haunt a puthujjana as a result of the very same actions.

So a puthujjana can be perfectly well behaved, meaning that such unwholesome states will not be manifesting, but when they *do* slip and the mind starts showing its underlying tendencies, they know no escape. If they keep misbehaving past a certain point, they will start factually losing the modicum of grip on their minds that they had.

This is why an ordinary person cannot conceive of how a sotāpanna can let loose as much as they want and essentially not suffer, never actually *regressing* from the Dhamma. The suffering of a sotāpanna, since it is IN the very performance of the actions itself (including mental ones), can easily be eliminated and the state of peace restored by simply undertaking the training again and abstaining from those behaviors.

In short, there is no suffering as soon as virtue and sense restraint are re-established. That's why all a sotāpanna really needs to do to become an Arahant is adhere to those two things long enough, so that they become *incapable* of not adhering to them. The “liberation by mind and by wisdom where all unwholesome states cease without remainder” grow naturally as a result of that, and they would become like the fifth type of person.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-29 15:09:09 (in reply to a comment not included)**

You're right, it seems I misremembered the letter of the Sutta, but the message is the same.

The 4 types of people who still transgress and/or experience regret are being told to dispel the influxes (*āśava*) of transgression or of remorse and to further develop their mind and wisdom, to gradually destroy the *āśavas* and be like the 5th person (the Arahant). This means that *all* of these 4 individuals are at least *sotāpannas*, since a *puthujjana* cannot “dispel *āśavas*” (also implied in AN 2.11), and there is no guarantee that they are heading towards Arahantship just by restraining their behavior. That is to say, they can *make choices* to restrain themselves (and should), but, unlike the *sotāpanna*, there are likely to be *other* defilements behind those choices (such as wrong views/motivations like self-mortification and denial).

A *sotāpanna* understands the “liberation by mind and liberation by wisdom where unwholesome states cease”, but not *without remainder* (which is the Arahant). It is for that very reason that they can dispel not only the defilements that pushed them to transgress, but even the remorse that would come from it, but not to the point where they will never do it again in the future.

So you could put it this way: the results of a *sotāpanna*'s actions would arise (remorse for example, pressure of hindrances in general), but they don't *have to* experience them if they don't want to. They can do away with those things if they just try, and keep developing their minds as if nothing happened. It's like someone who gets locked into a room for which they have the key: they might choose to stay in it (keep experiencing the unwholesome states) if they don't feel a particular urge to leave, but whenever they decide to leave, they *will* leave.

Though a fine thoroughbred may stumble,  
it soon stands firm again.  
Even so is one accomplished in vision—  
a disciple of the Buddha.

—Theragāthā 1.45

So yes, *hiri* and *ottappā*, the first 2 of the 5 powers a noble disciple possesses, should be employed by them so that they *want to* “get up” (or get out of the room) as soon as possible, or so that they don't stumble in the first place. But these 2 powers are separate from regret, which is a hindrance that they would abandon *through* *hiri* and *ottappā*.

A *puthujjana*, in contrast, may well not be able to get up at all if they fell too hard (ending up in the lower realms), or they may get up on the wrong foot, so to speak (take up the restraint wrongly).

## Spreading a heart full of love

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** craveminerals 2024-01-25 10:45:56

Hi fellow practitioners,

I saw a video of Ajahn Nyanamoli talking about how the common practice of ‘spreading and sending’ metta- is basically useless, because, if I understood correctly, if your heart is truly full of metta you don’t have to spread it around, it’s instead just a friendly disposition toward all beings and phenomena. He also said that the common practice of spreading metta is often used as a “coverup” and as an escape from difficult emotions- avoiding the task at hand- and that all sounds very sensible to me.

But why does some suttas talk in this manner, how to make sense of texts like the one below? Anuruddhasutta—Bhikkhu Sujato.

“And what is the limitless release of the heart? It’s when a mendicant meditates spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, they spread a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will. They meditate spreading a heart full of compassion ... They meditate spreading a heart full of rejoicing ... They meditate spreading a heart full of equanimity to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, they spread a heart full of equanimity to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will. This is called the limitless release of the heart. And what is the expansive release of the heart? It’s when a mendicant meditates determined on pervading the extent of a single tree root as expansive. This is called the expansive release of the heart. Also, a mendicant meditates determined on pervading the extent of two or three tree roots ... a single village district ... two or three village districts ... a single kingdom ... two or three kingdoms ... this land surrounded by ocean. (...) “

Also, perhaps the following is a bit off topic, but I think it’s interesting to consider.

The sutta then continues talking about how this pervasion and spreading results in different kinds of rebirths- among the company of gods of ‘limited radiance’, ‘limitless radiance’, ‘pure radiance’ and, interestingly, among those of ‘corrupted radiance’ - apparently because of this; “Their physical discomfort is not completely settled, their dullness and drowsiness is not completely eradicated, and their restlessness and remorse is not completely eliminated. Because of this they practice absorption dimly, as it were.”

Now, I don’t know how relevant it is to the practice of ultimate liberation to think about what kind of god one could become in a future birth. But I can’t help but wonder if those ‘forcefully practicing’ metta, in exclusion of ‘real practice’, may be on the path towards the gods of corrupted radiance..

Anyhow my question is- ‘spreading and radiating’ does seem to be a practice, and one which bears certain results, unless I’m misunderstanding something? I suppose that

the friendly disposition which Venerable Nyanamoli described doesn't exclude anything whatsoever, but it apparently lacks the 'radiating'.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-25 17:53:30

There's a few widespread distortions in translation to clear up:

Firstly, *mettā* is not "love". "Love" is *pema*, and this needs to be "abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future."

Sorrow springs from love,  
fear springs from love;  
one free from love  
has no sorrow, let alone fear.

—Dhammapada 213 (interestingly, Ven. Sujato has chosen to translate *pema* as "attachment" here instead of questioning his rendering of *mettā*)

"Loving-kindness" would thus be similarly incorrect for *mettā*. A *mittā* (like *kalyāṇamittā*) is a "friend", and from this, the word *mettā* is derived, hence we use the term "friendliness" instead. Friendliness is a natural, inherent quality of a liberated mind (just like compassion, contentment, and equanimity), whereas "love", a little or a lot, is a defilement.

Apart from that, there is another misleading alteration in every translation I've seen so far:

**...meditates spreading** a [mind] full of [friendliness] to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth.

("abides pervading", or "keeps pervading" in other cases)

But what the Pāli actually says is

**"...dwells/abides having pervaded/suffused (*pharitvā viharati*)** with a mind of friendliness the first, second, third and fourth direction. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having pervaded the whole world with a mind of friendliness—abundant, expansive, boundless, free of enmity and aversion.

They might seem synonymous, but there is a crucial difference. The former implies you are actively engaging in this *process/activity* of spreading *mettā*, whereas the latter means you "passively" dwell *having established* a this attitude towards the whole world (and then, to insert the famous line from the Karaṇīyametta Sutta, you protect that *attitude* like a mother would protect her only child).

The idea that it's a "process" is not accidental, and these two ways of practice are mutually exclusive since each implies a completely different notion of what the state of mind to be cultivated (and to be abandoned) is.

The sole purpose of practicing *mettā*, which is the foundation upon which the next 3 are built, is to abandon ill-will, and ill-will towards other people or events arises when there is an *unpleasant feeling* in regard to them and the mind is untrained in regard to such feelings. It's an *additional layer* on top of the unpleasant feeling, of you resisting that feeling and wanting it to go away, because of which you then project the issue externally and start blaming the other person, wishing them harm, plotting revenge, etc.

And how do you know that it's an "additional layer"? Because often a *friend* can come along and do something that makes you feel displeasure, but you never hate them or wish them harm. You calmly put up with the disturbance and maybe even laugh it off (a prank, for example). But if a person you already dislike does the same thing and causes you the same discomfort or inconvenience, you get angry in a fingersnap. This gives a clue as to what "friendliness" actually is, and the fact that literally everyone already has it with *some* people at least, without having to go around saying "may you be happy" and smiling whenever they think about them. The problem is that this friendliness is affected with *love* and delight in company almost always, but the **liberation of mind** through *mettā* (*mettā-cetovimutti*, the term always used in the Suttas) must be based upon seclusion, dispassion, cessation, and result in relinquishment, as well as being immeasurable and all-pervasive, without bias for some beings over others.

And as soon as you start thinking about specific people to "radiate beams of loving-kindness" towards them, you *are* biasing them right then and there. If you were to receive news at that very moment that they were murdered, the degree to which went out of your way to cultivate that sort of attitude for that specific person would be the degree to which you would be averse to whoever killed them, not wishing *them* well just *as much* as the victim.

And how is hate born of love? It's when someone likes, loves, and cares for a person. Others treat that person with disliking, loathing, and detestation. They think: 'These others dislike the person I like.' And so hate for them springs up. That's how hate is born of love.

—AN 4.200 (already linked above)

Now, upon taking a closer look, it will become apparent that this process of "spreading loving-kindness" and repetition of cheesy phrases that people do in the name of *mettā* is not about abandoning the *resistance* to the displeasure that other people cause you—it's about *getting rid* of the displeasure and replacing it with pleasure instead, so that, by "cheating" as it were, ill-will no longer arises.

But ultimately you cheat nobody but yourself, because you're not actually *training* your mind so that it becomes imperturbable in every circumstance, however the aggregates happen to manifest; you're *fabricating* a new circumstance that will prevent your untrained mind from showing its true colors temporarily. And with "temporarily" I mean until the day you die at the latest, because many people who are very committed to this can certainly keep those states of mind going for a long time at least to a degree, until something that's far beyond their tolerance threshold comes up.

But the thing is, even they would realize, if they just took a moment to reflect with unrelenting honesty, that if they *stopped* engaging in that contrived “kindness” practice that pastes this artificial pleasure over the natural displeasure of interaction with other beings, the ill-will would eventually come back. So in the end, what you’d be practicing with that is literally *control* of your feelings, *ownership*, not relinquishment, endurance and most importantly purification of *craving* in regard to them.

And this leads to the next point where many people go wrong: the *brahmavihāras* in general are not “skillful fabrications”; they are one amongst many ways the Buddha taught for the *abandoning* of fabrications. What I’m referring to here is the notion many people have that “OK, yes, mettā is ultimately a fabrication, but I’ll use this fabrication to abandon the other ones and eventually ‘drop’ it”. But that’s not how it works. As I alluded to above, mettā is an *inherent quality* of an undefiled mind, it’s not something you “do”. That quality will be there *on its own* as soon as you correctly abandon what’s obstructing it, which is the resistance to displeasure—and **that** is the “fabrication” (*saṅkhāra* born of *avijjā*). Even the most untrained puthujjana *naturally* wishes every other being well for as long as they have no reason to rejoice in their harm, and that “reason”, when it’s there, is always this internal resistance (that is not accidental and one is solely responsible for maintaining and proliferating).

So to return to the passage, one “*dwells having pervaded* the entire world with a mind of friendliness” *immediately*, not through the application of some sequential technique that you just “do” and which may or may not work, but through *understanding and clarity of discernment*, i.e., when one recognizes the *possibility* of displeasure arising, whether it’s caused by other people or by inanimate things, and makes a determination not to resist it and act out of it, *while the unpleasant feeling remains*, because that was never the problem; the *craving against it* was.

(That’s not to say that the mind will listen to that determination you make immediately, however.)

This is how you *know* beyond doubt that your mind is established in true mettā: you don’t need to go around sugarcoating the bad things other people do in order to prevent ill-will from arising. You can confidently have two recognitions in your mind simultaneously: “this person is a complete idiot” and “I do not harbor the slightest bit of animosity towards him”. This is what the Buddha displays all throughout the Suttas.

Now, I don’t know how relevant it is to the practice of ultimate liberation to think about what kind of god one could become in a future birth. But I can’t help but wonder if those ‘forcefully practicing’ metta, in exclusion of ‘real practice’, may be on the path towards the gods of corrupted radiance..

No. Unfortunately, such people would not be on the path to any of these rebirths, not on account of such practices at least, because elevating the mind up to the level of these realms requires an immense and factual lessening of one’s underlying tendency to *aversion*, as opposed to a skill, great as it may be, in *masking* aversion by replacing displeasure with pleasure.

These are the same realms that would be reached by developing the second jhāna, depending on one's proficiency in it.

Edit: You can't arrive at that "whole world", "immeasurable" level by simply adding up every part of it. That "whole" has to be discerned as *one phenomenon* and then the attitude directed towards *that* (See for an example of this the "others might attack that bhikkhu" passage in MN 28). The whole is not the sum of its parts in this case.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-26 18:09:00 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So you've made clear that whatever a worldling thinks metta is - most likely isn't, and whatever lofty things they try to do & achieve before having done the preliminary work of training and correctly discerning their mind - just turns out wrong.

Yes. If a person (today with the Buddha's instruction available) is getting very tangible results in terms of meditative bliss and such but still doesn't have the Right View, it's because whatever they're doing is not mettā. A person who is attaining (right) states of samādhi and wholesome joy cannot possibly *not* enter the stream if they're familiar with the Buddha's teaching, because reaching those states requires a more developed mind than sotāpatti does (it's the *last* and most refined component of the Noble Eightfold Path). Most lay disciples back in the day who were not anāgāmis would've died without having attained what is generally conceived of as "meditative joy", whereas nowadays the whole picture is upside down.

But let's say that someone who is more developed, who has attained right view, who knows what is defiling them and what is not, and has uncovered metta as an *inherent quality* of their mind. Is there a "practice of metta" for such a person? Or are they already pervading, suffusing "*the world*" with it, so to speak?

There is definitely work in this regard that ought to be done by a trainee. That's when all these things discussed in the Suttas start to apply. The famous Mettā Sutta (Suttanipāta 1.8) in fact starts with, "*This is what should be done by one who is skilled in what's beneficial, and who has broken through to the path of peace*".

All a noble disciple needs to "do" is refrain from resisting the *possibility* of unpleasant feeling born of contact with other beings, and that would be their practice of *mettā*. That possibility, when properly discerned, inherently applies to the whole world without, as I mentioned above, having to be concerned with this or that individual at all, be it to like them or to hate them. Regardless of whether it's someone from the first, second, third, or fourth quarter, the only way anyone can make you angry is by arousing displeasure in you, so if you have addressed *that* as a general possibility, you have addressed all the four quarters. It's about guarding the one "gateway" through which everything comes.

This, for a noble disciple, eventually results in a "boundless mind", the "divine abiding"

of mettā, one of the many forms of right samādhi (which has nothing at all to do with the common conception of sitting crossed legged in “concentration”):

I dwell having pervaded with a mind of friendliness the first, second, third, and fourth direction. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, I dwell having pervaded the whole world with a mind of friendliness—abundant, expansive, boundless, free of enmity and aversion.

[...]

As dwell like this, if I walk, at that time my walking is divine. ... my standing is divine. ... my sitting is divine. As dwell like this, if I lie down, at that time my lying is divine. This is the divine high and luxurious bed that I get these days when I want, without trouble or difficulty.”

—AN 3.63

And that divine abiding is a byproduct of the *continual absence* of the activity of aversion, not a result of the *continual maintenance* of the activity of “loving-kindness”—a subtle but big difference. To illustrate, the latter would be like reaching jhāna by *doing* pītisukha, which is impossible. That pītisukha is a *result* of the right effort of abandoning all passion for sensuality and the hindrances.

I’m confused why the Buddha would emphasize “the entire world” so often.

So that’s why. There is a boundlessness, expansiveness, thoroughness and completeness that is not present outside the attainment of that *liberation of mind* through mettā, even for a noble disciple (because samādhi is always only a temporary liberation). But as I alluded to above, it’s pointless to explain the *practice* of mettā with its *result*, most importantly because nobody who is already familiar with the Dhamma has gotten nor will get to this point without reaching sotāpatti first (not to mention without fulfilling the foundation for it that they’re already too happy to skip, i.e., the gradual training).

Moreover, if the final result is what’s emphasized, many people might get the impression that we’re talking about the same “state” that they’ve already experienced before just because from *their* perspective, the muddled absorption born of loving-kindness fabrication *seems* “boundless” and “expanded”. But wrong view (the ignorance or outright misconception of what craving is, aversion in this case) cannot but culminate in wrong samādhi, and making much of that and getting the fruits of it results in even further harm, not in benefit. To one who has no faculty of taste, a drink prepared with sea water is indistinguishable from a normal one, so they’ll keep gleefully chugging it down to their own detriment.

Or as in the sutta I mentioned- through step by step enlarging it’s range, with the help of visualizing tree roots, villages, kingdoms, etc.

That’s a different practice though. That’s why it says that “these two things are different both in meaning and in phrasing”. And it doesn’t say “visualizing”. It’s pretty much exactly the opposite direction of that: widening the context of your mind (hence “expansive”), by recognizing that everything you’re experiencing, even thoughts and “visualizations”, is



happening *within* that root of a tree, within that village, within that kingdom etc. Establishing the “right order” by putting that surrounding context first, and whatever is happening in your body and mind second (meaning you see one as the foundation for the other while both are present). It’s not about other beings and your attitude towards them unlike the brahmavihāras.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-26 20:54:16 (in reply to a comment not included)**

and can ALSO actually indicate two actions CONCURRENT with one another: (the common (wrong?) translation you mention ) “One dwells SUFFUSING”...so whilst one meditates/dwells, one is also simultaneously pervading.

Another common example of that concurrency in absolutes found in Pali is “having dispelled all darkness, the sun shines”. Which wouldn’t literally mean the sun first removes the darkness and THEN shines. I’ve seen some even interpret the standard phrase “having abandoned the hindrances, he abides in jhana” in the same way - as in the abandoning being simultaneous with the jhana (something I find personally questionable, since this would render the “purification of mind” in the gradual training that precedes Jhana useless).

There would appear to be a discrepancy here because of the natural tendency (even for Pāli scholars) to think in terms of linear sequences of events operating through cause and effect instead of phenomenologically (simultaneous dependence). What people interpret as “concurrent” in these seemingly irregular scenarios of the absolute—since they’re trying to approach Pāli through the “worldview” of English—is in reality not really a concurrency, but one thing being subordinate to another *structurally* but not temporally. That is to say, the absolute comes *always* structurally first but not necessarily first in *time*. Something can come later in time only if it comes second in structure (“the right order” often referred to in HH talks).

To illustrate with the examples you mention, the constructions (“**vivicca** kāmehi **vivicca** akusalehi dhammehi ... *viharati*”) and (“**pharitvā** *viharati*”) are saying that the action/status in italics depends on the action in bold. And this is very different from “dwells suffusing” and “dwells abandoning”, which would be two things happening side by side with a concurrency as you put it and not a mutual dependence, meaning you *could* stop suffusing and abandoning and “just dwell”. But the dependence that is implied in the absolute means that as soon as the “suffusion” or the “abandonment” go away, there will be no “dwelling” (at least not in *that* state). The present participle (pharanto viharati) is what actually implies concurrency, so that it’s two actions that are mutually unrelated apart from the fact that they’re happening simultaneously.

This applies to the example of the sun you brought up too. The dispelling of darkness and the appearance of light are not two separate processes, and the element of light is dependent on the element of darkness, such that *phenomenologically*, in terms of the five aggregates, the presence of light (“the sun shines”) is subordinate to the absence of darkness

(“the sun having dispelled the darkness”). But **science** would probably say that darkness is just the absence of light *within the visible spectrum* and that ultimately there is no such thing as darkness. (And, not by coincidence, this is a perfect parallel to the subject at hand: the presence of mettā is in truth subordinate to the absence of aversion, whereas people see it as if aversion is the absence of loving-kindness, and thus fabricating loving kindness is the way to end aversion).

So, simply put, phenomenology is implied in Pāli in ways that English lacks, which is not accidental due to *who* it was that compiled these texts (Arahant monks), as well as the original spoken language upon which Pāli is based on belonging to the very group of people who understood the Dhamma so much more easily in comparison to us today.

However, even if we were to assume Bhante Anigha’s translation as correct (having pervaded, one dwells) - that pervading is STILL something that would have to have happened at some point, be it in the past or in the present. If the metta meditation is simply dwelling after having established this attitude of metta, then what precisely is the establishment of the attitude of metta, if not the dwelling in it? How would one then establish that attitude, sans the suffusing and pervading?

As I alluded to in the other reply to OP, it’s the same principle as the first jhāna. Just as the attitude enabling the first jhāna is the giving up of sensuality, the attitude enabling the brahmavihāra of mettā is the giving up of aversion. Both are *abidings* that result from establishing the respective attitude (or rather, abandoning the respective wrong attitude) and sustaining that long enough.

Most usually things seem to be described in the Suttas in terms of negatives. .... non hate, non desire, non ill-will. But the word “metta” seems more of a positive thing (as opposed to abyāpāda, or even nekkhamma, for instance), which may be why people interpret it as a fabricated thing. If metta was simply non-ill will, why call it “friendliness”, and differentiate it from simple non-hate and non-aversion? Why make it a separate thing?

So the “positive” comes from sustaining the negative. Understanding what the negative is and how it comes about is the only thing that practically matters; the “positive” comes irrespective of one’s preconceived ideas about what it is if one sustains the negative rightly (which, to repeat, is only practically possible with the Right View). Same again as with the first jhāna, or with Nibbāna for that matter. It makes no difference what you *expect* pītisukha born of separation to be or the peace of Nibbāna to be—what matters is that you cultivate the *basis* for them, i.e., total disenchantment with sensuality for the former and total absence of any passion, aversion, and muddledness towards anything at all for the latter.

To use the simile in AN 7.71, it’s a futile distraction if the hen just *wishes* for her eggs to hatch safely (=the person literally *wishing* to have mettā by “radiating” affection to others); what truly helps at all is if she puts her wishing aside and *sits on the eggs properly* (=the person focuses on abandoning the resistance to displeasure and nothing else).

Perhaps the entire destruction of lust, HATE, and delusion is only for the Buddha's noble disciples, but (I mentioned this in a comment in an HH vid which implied brahmaviharas require Right View) in the Suttas, there are plenty of examples of non-ariyas practicing the Brahmaviharas, meaning that metta is something on a different, simpler level than the destruction of hate and ill-will.

Yes, but those non-ariyas had never heard the Dhamma (e.g. Sunetta in AN 7.66). If they did while having that degree of development, they would become not even sotāpannas, but anāgāmis, just as with the jhānas. They are able to “witness with the body” the cessation of a defilement, which even a sotāpanna cannot do, so the only thing stopping them from the Right View was not knowing that they should generalize that very principle to include *craving* in its entirety as well, which would've probably taken them a jiffy to do. To use the Buddha's simile, it's like someone were looking for heartwood, but due to sadly not knowing what heartwood actually looks like because nobody showed them, they would walk away with sapwood instead, while the heartwood was right there, ripe for the picking.

Basically no one is even *able* to be in that position today. By the time they get even close, they'll have enough yoniso manasikāra so that, paired with the utterance of another that is nowadays available in excess with the Suttas, they will see the Dhamma.

Edit: Also, there's one thing people would tend to forget which those non-ariyas did *before* they attained the liberation through mettā: they went forth. They were all renunciates, and Sunetta was free from sensuality. See what needs to be abandoned *before* mettā can be practiced in AN 8.63; the very thing without which the Buddha says Mahānāma wouldn't be a householder anymore in MN 14. If even lay *sotāpannas* didn't fulfill the precondition for succeeding in mettā, what is to be said of those today who aren't even that, and to boot aren't *at least* taking their virtue and restraint very seriously?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-27 05:25:26 (in reply to a comment not included)**

It seems to me, that taking the world to be more fundamental instead would (probably) lead to some form of eternalism about the world, because if it goes something along the lines of

For the body to persist, the world has to persist

For the world to persist, it does not seem required that the body persists

The world at the very least *might* persist past the body, but hey, it seems to be pretty much always present throughout my life, so who is to say it won't continue... and boom, eternalism

But then in any case, there seems to be an immediate problem with 2), in that it assumes the persistence of the world outside of what we can know from within our senses / within the context of being subject to death and not knowing what

exactly death entails. And then the 3) also is basically just an assumption that is unverifiable given our mortality.

All this is exactly why the Right View is necessary to practice any of these “wider contexts” rightly. Before that point one *cannot help* but fall into the view that things (will) exist or not, eternalism or annihilationism. One can abandon the ridiculous, coarse views of the self being eternal and infinite and so on, but deep down one of those two fundamental *attitudes* is perpetually there for a puthujjana, in the way that they implicitly regard their experience without even knowing.

But with the Right View, there is no conceiving of an “outside world” anymore. That conceiving exists only as the counterpart to the assumption of the self “inside” that defines a puthujjana.

So within that accurate phenomenological picture of everything being *within* the 6 sense base that a sotāpanna has understood and gained access to, there are things that are “here” and things that are “yonder”. And the things that are “here” can be seen to depend on the things that are “yonder”, or vice versa. So the body “here” can be seen to be dependent on the food, environment, etc. “yonder”, and this would lead to dispassion toward the entire picture, or alternatively the *perception* of anything “yonder”, such as food and the environment, can be seen to be dependent on the functional sense organs and body “here”, which would equally lead to dispassion.

When a puthujjana tries to see this, the “here” will inevitably involve the self in some tacit way that they can’t see, and the “yonder” will imply the assumption of an “outside world”. If those assumptions were even *seen* as they are, they wouldn’t be there anymore, so they wouldn’t be puthujjanas.

## Meditation in the gradual training presented in DN 2

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Bodimmowo 2024-01-23 21:18:56

I have a few questions about the gradual training presented in DN 2 and I hope to hear the answers from – especially anyone from the Hermitage:

1. What kind of meditation is recommended?
2. How exactly the five hindrances are abandoned?
3. Is it possible for a lay person to follow this training?

Thank you in advance for reading and/or responding.

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-24 15:11:21

What kind of meditation is recommended?

Reflection on the benefits of renunciation and the danger of desire and aversion (MN 19, MN 106). Whenever the abandoning of hindrances is talked about in the Suttas, in DN 2

for example, it's reached by *reflecting* on the hindrances as unwanted and unbeneficial, until the reason for the hindrances being there (i.e., the lack of awareness of their true nature and the careless welcoming of them that follows as a matter of course) has been sufficiently worn out for the hindrances to *not* be there anymore.

However, there is no way that one will mentally abandon the hindrances if physically and verbally one has not abandoned them, especially sensuality. And this is why virtue and sense restraint are a prerequisite for purification of mind in the Gradual Training. You'd be closer to freedom from hindrances by being virtuous and restrained than by practicing any contemplation on the basis of insufficient virtue, because it boils down to what the mind *values* deep down in the end, in the broadest scale of your entire life, not to what mental drills you go through in one particular sitting.

So a person who wasn't celibate before but now is, is *just on account of that* closer to the right meditation, because they couldn't possibly live that way by choice unless they, by a large margin, began to prefer renunciation over sensuality.

Is it possible for a lay person to follow this training?

The Buddha is never seen teaching meditation or satipaṭṭhānas to laypeople in the Suttas (except once or twice to some who were already stream-enterers, and even then it wasn't satipaṭṭhānas but recollection of the Triple Gem). Not because they couldn't *try* to practice in the same way as monks, but because it wouldn't produce the kind of result that truly matters for as long as they didn't internally cherish renunciation enough to give up the very things that make them laypeople (which is not the clothes they wear, but the unrestrained behavior and pursuit of pleasure). And that's because, again, cherishing renunciation is the prerequisite for "success" in meditation, and laypeople in general are *afraid* of renunciation instead of cherishing it (AN 9.41). Meditation, as an advanced stage of the gradual training, is nothing but a further *cultivation* (*bhāvanā*) and refinement on a deeper level of the renunciation you already established. If you don't have it to begin with, what is there to cultivate and refine?

And then these three examples, which were neither supernaturally inspired, nor learned before in the past, occurred to me.

Suppose there was a green, sappy log, and it was lying in water. Then a person comes along with a drill-stick, thinking to light a fire and produce heat. What do you think, Aggivessana? By drilling the stick against that green, sappy log lying in the water, could they light a fire and produce heat?"

"No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it's a green, sappy log, and it's lying in the water. That person will eventually get weary and frustrated."

"No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it's a green, sappy log, and it's lying in the water. That person will eventually get weary and frustrated."

"In the same way, there are ascetics and brahmins who don't live withdrawn in body and mind from sensual pleasures. They haven't internally given up or stilled desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and passion for sensual pleasures.

Regardless of whether or not they feel painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to overexertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision, of supreme awakening. This was the first example that occurred to me.

Then a second example occurred to me. Suppose there was a green, sappy log, and it was lying on dry land far from the water. Then a person comes along with a drill-stick, thinking to light a fire and produce heat. What do you think, Aggivessana? By drilling the stick against that green, sappy log on dry land far from water, could they light a fire and produce heat?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it’s still a green, sappy log, despite the fact that it’s lying on dry land far from water. That person will eventually get weary and frustrated.”

“In the same way, there are ascetics and brahmins who live withdrawn in body and mind from sensual pleasures. But they haven’t internally given up or stilled desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and passion for sensual pleasures. Regardless of whether or not they suffer painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to overexertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision, of supreme awakening. This was the second example that occurred to me.

Then a third example occurred to me. Suppose there was a dried up, withered log, and it was lying on dry land far from the water. Then a person comes along with a drill-stick, thinking to light a fire and produce heat. What do you think, Aggivessana? By drilling the stick against that dried up, withered log on dry land far from water, could they light a fire and produce heat?”

“Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because it’s a dried up, withered log, and it’s lying on dry land far from water.”

“In the same way, there are ascetics and brahmins who live withdrawn in body and mind from sensual pleasures. And they have internally given up and stilled desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and passion for sensual pleasures. Regardless of whether or not they suffer painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to overexertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision, of supreme awakening. This was the third example that occurred to me. These are the three examples, which were neither supernaturally inspired, nor learned before in the past, that occurred to me.

—MN 36

Once renunciation is established externally, whether one lives in a house or in a monastery, it becomes a matter of learning how to contemplate rightly so that the mind can be internally purified too.

At Savatthī. “Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases. With craving there is assumption; with assumption there is being; with being there is birth; with birth there is aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. Such is the

origin of this whole mass of suffering.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and a man would pour oil into it and adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, sustained by that oil, fuelled by it, that oil lamp would burn for a very long time. So too, when one lives contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

“Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases. With cessation of craving, cessation of assumption ... cessation of birth ... aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and the man would not pour oil into it or adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, when the former supply of fuel is exhausted, that oil lamp, not being fed with any more fuel, lacking sustenance, would be extinguished. So too, when one lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

—SN 12.53

“Bhikkhus, just as this body, sustained by nutriment, subsists in dependence on nutriment and does not subsist without nutriment, so too the five hindrances, sustained by nutriment, subsist in dependence on nutriment and do not subsist without nutriment.

—SN 46.2

“Bhikkhus, whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon **[not to mention *does and says*]**, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of sensual desire, he has abandoned the thought of renunciation to cultivate the thought of sensual desire, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of sensual desire. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of ill will...upon thoughts of cruelty, he has abandoned the thought of non-cruelty to cultivate the thought of cruelty, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of cruelty.

[...]

“Bhikkhus, whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of renunciation, he has abandoned the thought of sensual desire to cultivate the thought of renunciation, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of renunciation. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of non-ill will...upon thoughts of non-cruelty, he has abandoned the thought of cruelty to cultivate the thought of non-cruelty, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of non-cruelty.

—MN 19

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-25 04:00:09 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So it seems that the Satipaṭṭhānas were taught to Laypeople, although only mentioned a couple of times throughout the Suttas.

Yes, shortly after I realized my statement was slightly off in the highlighted part:

The Buddha is never seen teaching meditation or satipaṭṭhānas to laypeople in the Suttas (except once or twice to some who were already stream-enterers, **and even then it wasn't satipaṭṭhānas but recollection of the Triple Gem**).

I mainly had AN 11.11-12 in mind when I wrote this, but the 3 Suttas you mention do explicitly contain the satipaṭṭhānas. And there are others where they are implicitly there, such as SN 22.1 and MN 143.

However, in all of these cases the laypeople in question were at least stream-enterers (and in SN 47.29-30 it's pretty clear that they were non-returners *before* they received Ven. Ānanda's instruction; you don't "become" a non-returner out of the blue like that).

In MN 51 it's not explicitly stated, but there is this utterance from the Buddha regarding the person who said "we white-clothed lay people...":

"Mendicants, Pessa the elephant driver's son is astute. He has great wisdom."

The texts only show the Buddha making this statement with reference to eminent noble disciples like Ānanda, Sāriputta, Mahākaccāna, and the bhikkhunīs Dhammadinnā and Kajaṅgalikā, and the layman Pessa wouldn't be the exception.

So the point still stands unchanged:

And that's because, again, cherishing renunciation is the prerequisite for "success" in meditation, and laypeople in general are *afraid* of renunciation instead of cherishing it

...because someone like Pessa would never have gotten "great wisdom" (which means at least the Right View) and therefore gained the 4 satipaṭṭhānas if his mind didn't already value renunciation internally, even if *after* he became a sotāpanna he continued to live in sensuality. He didn't value it enough to strive further for non-return, but the fact that he became a noble disciple is testament that his mind was at least *sufficiently* inclined toward renunciation, in contrast to the vast majority of lay practitioners.

"Aggivessana, how is it possible that Prince Jayasena, living in the midst of sensual pleasures, enjoying sensual pleasures, being devoured by thoughts of sensual pleasures, being consumed by the fever of sensual pleasures, bent on the search for sensual pleasures, could know, see, or realise that which must be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realised through renunciation? That is impossible.

"Suppose, Aggivessana, there were two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined, and two tamable elephants,



horses, or oxen that were untamed and undisciplined. What do you think, Aggivessana? Would the two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined, being tamed, acquire the behaviour of the tamed, would they arrive at the grade of the tamed?”—“Yes, venerable sir.”—“But would the two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were untamed and undisciplined, being untamed, acquire the behaviour of the tamed, would they arrive at the grade of the tamed, like the two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined?”—“No, venerable sir.”—“So too, Aggivessana, it is impossible that Prince Jayasena, living in the midst of sensual pleasures,...could know, see, or realise that which must be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realised through renunciation.

“Suppose, Aggivessana, there were a high mountain not far from a village or town, and two friends would leave the village or town and approach the mountain hand in hand. Having reached it, one friend would remain below at the foot of the mountain while the other would climb to the top. Then the friend who remained below at the foot of the mountain would say to the friend who stood on the top: ‘Well, friend, what do you see, standing on top of the mountain?’ And the other replied: ‘Standing on top of the mountain, friend, I see lovely parks, lovely groves, lovely meadows, and lovely ponds.’ Then the first friend would say: ‘It is impossible, [131] friend, it cannot happen that while standing on top of the mountain you should see lovely parks, lovely groves, lovely meadows, and lovely ponds.’

“Then the other friend would come down to the foot of the mountain, take his friend by the arm, and make him climb to the top of the mountain. After giving him a few moments to catch his breath, he would ask: ‘Well, friend, standing on top of the mountain, what do you see?’ And his friend would reply: ‘Standing on top of the mountain, friend, I see lovely parks, lovely groves, lovely meadows, and lovely ponds.’ Then the other would say: ‘Friend, just a little earlier we heard you say: “It is impossible, friend, it cannot happen that while standing on top of the mountain you should see lovely parks...lovely ponds.” But just now we heard you say: “Standing on top of the mountain, friend, I see lovely parks...lovely ponds.”’ Then the first friend would reply: ‘Because I was obstructed by this high mountain, friend, I did not see what was there to be seen.’

“So too, Aggivessana, Prince Jayasena is obstructed, hindered, blocked, and enveloped by a still greater mass than this—the mass of ignorance. Thus it is impossible that Prince Jayasena, living in the midst of sensual pleasures,...could know, see, or realise that which must be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realised through renunciation.

(See also the simile of the wet sticks in MN 36 I quoted above).

The point is not that being a lay person is an obstacle, but that valuing sensual pleasures more than renunciation is.

## Contemplation to assist Sila

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** sahasaransi\_mw 2024-01-23 07:56:18

If I understand correctly, it seems that HH encourages that alongside keeping the precepts, one should also contemplate themes such as: why they are keeping the precepts, the value of the precepts, if they know what keeping the precepts has to do with the Dhamma, the danger of sensuality/peril in ill will, etc etc.

Ajahn Nyanamoli said in one video (“Do You have Faith”) that one still unestablished in virtue should be contemplating such themes constantly & frequently to help accomplish themselves in virtue, since it is due to lacking confidence in the VALUE of virtue that one then lacks faith in keeping their restraint.

In “The Meaning of Right Samadhi” (starts at around 27:15) the “samadhi of virtue” is also discussed, in which it is said again that while keeping the virtue and sense restraint, one should also be contemplating the danger and the benefit of virtue/sense restraint.

Now, all of this makes sense and is pretty reasonable - as one who restrains would have that very restraint as practical fodder for their contemplation (ex: using your experiences of restraining from sensuality to contemplate the background pain of desire that restraint reveals), and one who contemplates would have further reason to restrain in their daily life (since you know WHY you do it). A kind of washing one hand cleans the other scenario. Through restraint, you see the value. Through seeing the value, you restrain.

However, (and I finally get to my question) how exactly is this idea of frequent contemplation to help one’s VIRTUE supported by the Suttas? There are indeed suttas where the Buddha says that through pursuing the INSIGHT of the DANGER in sensuality and BENEFIT of Renunciation, he attained and abided in the first Jhana, but where is something similar mentioned for mere virtue and sense restraint? Not including ofc, the Sotapanna’s recollection of his virtue seen in the Suttas (bc the fact that a Sotapanna recollects his unblemished virtue probably doesn’t mean that a puthujjhana unaccomplished in sila should be doing the same??).

The best I can find is this -

☒☒And what, mendicants, is the power of reflection? It’s when someone reflects: “Bad conduct of body, speech, or mind has a bad, painful result in both this life and the next.” Reflecting like this, they give up bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind”

But even this seems to suggest a sort of contemplation-once-and-then-you’re-done-and-now-your-sila-is-perfect-forever situation, not some sort of day-in-day-out contemplation

practice.

Virtue as shown in the context of the gradual training doesn't mention any sort of contemplation alongside it ("Come, bhikkhu, be possessed of morality..."), hence the reason for my doubt in this sort of practice. Virtue and precepts seem like something "simpler" to me (at least from my humble not-yet-accomplished in virtue perspective) - that should not need this sort of intense and frequent reflection and contemplation in order to be fulfilled.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-23 15:55:23**

There are indeed suttas where the Buddha says that through pursuing the INSIGHT of the DANGER in sensuality and BENEFIT of Renunciation, he attained and abided in the first Jhana, but where is something similar mentioned for mere virtue and sense restraint?

But in regard to what can that insight take place apart from the virtue and sense restraint that have been developed beforehand? How can you experientially recognize the benefit of something if you have never done it?

Before my enlightenment, while I was just a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me too: 'Good is renunciation, good is solitude.' Yet my mind did not launch out upon renunciation and become placid, settled, and liberated in it, though I saw it as peaceful. It occurred to me: 'Why is it that my mind does not launch out upon renunciation and become placid, settled, and liberated in it, though I see it as peaceful?' Then it occurred to me: 'I have not seen the danger in sensual pleasures and have not cultivated that; I have not achieved the benefit in renunciation and have not pursued it. Therefore my mind does not launch out upon renunciation and become placid, settled, and liberated in it, though I see it as peaceful.'

—AN 9.41

Since the very day the Buddha went forth, his adherence to the precepts was spotless, and yet here he's saying that still his mind was not becoming settled upon renunciation. This means his virtue was in place, but since he had not reflected upon the benefits of that virtue sufficiently in a way that would make his mind cease to *value* the things that he had given up through restrained behavior, he was unable to attain the *joy* of renunciation (i.e., samādhi, the first jhāna).

So that's what the instruction to "reflect on the benefits of virtue", is pointing to, not that "*doing*" the virtue necessarily requires reflection. To the extent that the mind does not have samādhi, it still does not *internally value* the virtue and sense restraint that have been established more than it values the pleasure that it has externally given up. There is external but not internal renunciation. And needless to say, it will be impossible to internally value and enjoy renunciation and consequently get samādhi while still externally being unvirtuous and unrestrained.

There is nothing else that must be done to attain (right) samādhi apart from this, which is exactly what the Buddha did. Not to say that samādhi is *easy*: it'll probably take several years for most, and require the right view as well. But it's no more *complicated* than this, which is why the Suttas don't go into greater detail. ("Concentration" methods, on the other hand, are easy to get quick results from but convoluted in the end, since all this "patchwork" and supplemental techniques are necessary to deal with the situations where they don't work, plateaus, etc., and hence there's always more detail and information to add).

(bc the fact that a Sotapanna recollects his unblemished virtue probably doesn't mean that a puthujjana unaccomplished in sila should be doing the same??).

A sotāpanna who does that would be progressing further towards Arahantship; a puthujjana who does that properly (i.e. with yoniso manasikāra) would be purifying their mind from the obstacles that prevent them from getting the right view, so that:

...Then the Blessed One gave Sīha the general a progressive discourse, that is, a talk on giving, virtuous behavior, and heaven; **he revealed the danger, degradation, and defilement of sensuality and the benefit of renunciation. When the Blessed One knew that Sīha's mind was pliant, softened, rid of hindrances, uplifted, and confident**, he revealed that Dhamma teaching special to the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Then, just as a clean cloth rid of dark spots would readily absorb dye, so too, while Sīha the general sat in that same seat, there arose in him the dust-free, stainless Dhamma-eye: 'Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.'

Also, reflecting on virtue is not just for the sake of samādhi, but also to develop understanding as to what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. Understanding, by seeing it in one's own experience, how virtue and sense restraint are to be correctly practiced (internally, not in the sense of external observances) creates the basis for recognizing the Middle Way.

For instance, all monks (at least in theory) keep exactly the same rules, but the lack of understanding of the *attitude/context* that makes virtue right often leads to the same precepts being taken as a form of self-mortification/denial of the world rather than the middle way. "Shunning the bait", to use the simile in MN 25. One doesn't need to be consciously trying to torture oneself to fall into that; all that's required is to not understand what wholesomeness is and why virtue is conducive to it, and one will automatically be running away from things rather than relinquishing them (and the techniques then come in to further the same wrong direction).

That's why there's no such thing as even Right Speech, Right Action or Right Livelihood without Right View. Even when perfectly emulating every action the Buddha makes, a puthujjana's lack of direct knowledge of the nature of those actions and *why* they are beneficial would prevent them from being ultimately right *for them*. It would be *silabbata-parāmāsa*.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-23 16:30:15 (in reply to a comment not included)**

his also applies to other discursive contemplations like “*my beating heart...*” that Ajahn Nyanamoli sometimes mentions. It was very interesting contemplation, but after few days I can’t avoid repeating it like a mantra.

At what point should one stop?

There isn’t a point where one should “stop”. If that contemplation (or literally any other found in the Suttas) has not resulted in purification from hindrances and sotāpatti, it’s because something’s off in one’s way of doing it.

When it becomes a mantra as you put it, it’s because it’s being done divorced from the present feeling/pressure, and is not actually addressing the defilements (even if they’re not explicitly present, the *possibility* of defilements arising). It also means that the mind is now comfortable with one’s level of restraint, so the way to make reflection not abstract anymore would be to tighten the renunciation, by working towards the eight precepts for example, gradually if one must, or for one who is already keeping the eight, seeing in what other ways they allow their mind to “rest” in worldly pleasures, even just mentally.

Pulling the mind back from that will immediately, “experientially” reveal the extent of the mind’s attachment to life (or , with another approach, delight and dependence on the sense bases), and the contemplation of how the beating heart undermines that life (or, impermanence of the sense organs) cannot but hit the nail on the head, so to speak.

Even *thinking* about things that one *could be* attached or averse to if there isn’t anything particularly sticking out at the moment should be enough to expose the mind’s sensitivities, and it is there that any contemplation should be applied. It should never be an unchanging observation or repetition of anything, neither a rudimentary object/sensation nor a more intricate discursive reflection, because the defilements never stay in the same “place” for you to conveniently be able to address them by doing the same thing over and over. That’s the fundamental issue with meditation techniques and concentration: your mind wandering into a certain object could’ve been rooted in desire one time, and the next time you trying to keep it from wandering could be rooted in desire or another hindrance.

Edit: This talk addresses this topic.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-24 14:04:14 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So one’s contemplation should always be centered on the present defilement/pressure? For example, if there is aversion arisen in my experience, I should be contemplating on aversion and its nature (not on desire, for example)? And if there is desire present, the contemplation should be on investigating its danger? And perhaps if there is just a slight restlessness

and a sense of “what exactly should I be doing/contemplating now??” - one contemplates on the phenomena of doubt?

Broadly speaking yes, but the caveat is that you won't be able to catch when those defilements are there reliably in the beginning. You will inevitably be at times thinking that there is a desire you need to address when in reality the true driving force is the pressure of restlessness, and at other times you will be trying to avoid the restlessness but will as a result not be working diligently enough to abandon the desire. Or, if there isn't anything particular that the mind is preoccupied with, you might either fall into a muddled stupor or end up trying to take up some unnecessary mental activity out of restlessness.

“Bhikkhus, suppose a foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook were to present a king or a royal minister with various kinds of curries: sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, sharp, mild, salty, bland.

“That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the sign of his own master's preference: ‘Today this curry pleased my master, or he reached for this one, or he took a lot of this one, or he spoke in praise of this one; or the sour curry pleased my master today, or he reached for the sour one, or he took a lot of the sour one, or he spoke in praise of the sour one; or the bitter curry ... or the pungent curry ... or the sweet curry ... or the sharp curry ... or the mild curry ... or the salty curry ... or the bland curry pleased my master ... or he spoke in praise of the bland one.’

“That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not gain gifts of clothing, wages, and bonuses. For what reason? Because that foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the hint of his own master's preference.

“So too, bhikkhus, here some foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he dwells contemplating the body in the body, his mind does not become composed, his defilements are not abandoned, he does not pick up that sign. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings ... mind in mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. While he dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, his mind does not become composed, his defilements are not abandoned, he does not pick up that hint.

“That foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu does not gain pleasant dwellings in this very life, nor does he gain mindfulness and clear comprehension. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu does not pick up the hint of his own mind.

—SN 47.8

This means one cannot reliably know for oneself when the same contemplation (say, of the “beating heart” mentioned above) is purifying the mind rightly, because one does not see what the “dirt” is to begin with. So it remains a hit or miss, and for that reason

the defilements will ultimately not be abandoned. They can never go away by luck or by accident.

That's why grasping the sign of the mind is indispensable for the Right View, and for the entire Noble Eightfold Path by extension. sammāsati is not just "doing" the four satipaṭṭhānas correctly in their *content*, in which case you *wouldn't* need to be a sotāpanna to meditate rightly; what makes it right is that one now knows clearly (or has "grasped the sign of") what and where craving actually is. Until then, one is just groping in the dark.

So one just has to keep in mind that one *cannot* recognize the defilements fully and then work on improving *that*, until eventually grasping the sign of what craving in the utmost generality is and getting the Right View. As opposed to taking one's present ability to recognize unwholesome as unwholesome for granted and thinking it's just a matter of doing these contemplations now to address whatever one "guesstimates" the defilements are (like the foolish cook preparing the dishes *he thinks* the king will enjoy).

(All this is what I was pointing to in the latest essay).

This seems to me like what is meant in the Bhaddekaratta Sutta about seeing every presently arisen state? One contemplates practically and concretely on the phenomena arisen HERE AND NOW.

Correct. But that doesn't mean you try to block out the past and future and "just be here and now". Contrary to popular belief, your "here and now" is not just the "raw data" from the 5 senses like your bodily sensations (trying to have just that is like trying to reduce your mind into that of an animal, and conflating that with a pure mind). The "here and now" includes the entire situation of your five aggregates/six senses, so *anything* you might be thinking about, regardless of its particular content, is also part of that "here and now" that your contemplation is directed at.

The problem is when that's *overlooked*.

So for example. if you catch yourself being worried about something that will happen in the future, instead of trying to *get rid* of that thought, which would ironically still entail craving for the future and against the present ("when will **this** [which I'm bothered by] go away?"), you set up the "right order" again and see that this thought is also within exactly the same "here and now" (the given situation of your 6 six sense base/body) that you have been contemplating as liable to death, etc.

Counterintuitively, that's how you would be solely concerned with whatever is *already* present, as opposed to trying to have only *your* preconceived expectation of a "present moment"—longing for a phenomenon that you don't have and reinforcing the sense of ownership in the end.

## Question on Suffering as not self.

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Heuristicdish 2024-01-21 16:00:06

I don't see with my own faculties how suffering is not self. It seems to me that the very nature of suffering is appropriation of form and impermanence against the grain of their qualities. Of the three marks, suffering is the most "personal." It has to do with the person. Although, I'm sure there are impersonal, psychologically invisible forms of suffering going on under the hood. To see suffering as not self must be liberation and related to sotapannas and above. To see it directly. I think Volition has a similar issue. Does anyone know of resources that treat this topic in terms of practice or study?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-22 07:10:45

To see suffering as not self must be liberation and related to sotapannas and above.

Seeing suffering *at all* is liberation and is what defines a sotāpanna and above.

What a puthujjana regards as suffering is necessarily superficial and mundane, insufficient to fit the bill of what the Four Noble Truths are about. So it's not like one starts out already seeing what *dukkha* is and then an extra step is necessary to turn that into *anattā*. Actually seeing suffering means seeing not-self right then and there, simultaneously.

For as long as *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* is there, the suffering inherent in phenomena has not been recognized.

For one who sees in what way, Bhante, is personality-view abandoned?

Bhikkhu, for one who sees the eye as suffering, personality-view is abandoned. For one who sees forms as suffering, personality-view is abandoned. For one who sees eye-consciousness as suffering, personality-view is abandoned. For one who sees eye-contact as suffering, personality-view is abandoned ... for one who sees whatever feeling—pleasant, unpleasant or neither—that comes with mind-pressure as suffering, personality-view is abandoned.

—SN 35.166

So the way out of the problem is to not take one's current view of what suffering is for granted and then try to look for something else that's missing, but to realize and get one-self to thoroughly admit that it's that very view, right as it may appear, that is the problem. Not doing that means starting off on the wrong foot—building on top of one's current understanding instead of demolishing the whole edifice which precisely makes one a puthujjana.

## Assuming Right View

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Anemone1k 2024-01-21 15:20:49

Whenever I see that I am taking something for granted, it's obvious that that thing was not included within the aggregates for as long as I was taking it for granted. Now that it



is recognized, it is automatically of the aggregates. Is this what Ajahn Nyanamoli means when I hear him say that assumption is not in the aggregates?

I ask, because I don't see how Right View could be anything but an assumption, because as soon as it is recognized it would necessarily be of the aggregates, subjected to change.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-22 10:43:50**

Whenever I see that I am taking something for granted, it's obvious that that thing was not included within the aggregates for as long as I was taking it for granted. Now that it is recognized, it is automatically of the aggregates. Is this what Ajahn Nyanamoli means when I hear him say that assumption is not in the aggregates?

There is some validity in what you're referring to here. Assumption or upādāna always occurs because certain things are being gratuitously regarded as outside of the aggregates. But the thing is, precisely because things can *always* be recognized as primordially being within the aggregates that this is the "right order" of how things actually are. Meaning, it never could have *actually* been "outside", so it's not like "now that you recognized it" it became so.

For example, giving in to sensuality can only be done by assuming the pressure or desire to act out as coming "first" and the experience of the pleasant object "second" (not "first" or "second" temporally, but in the sense of what is given *priority*). Thus, the assumption of sensuality is eventually undone by seeing that no matter how much pressure there is to pursue some pleasant object, that pressure is *second* to the experience of the pleasant object which arose on its own (the aggregates); it cannot be there without it.

So yes, in this case the one who is not free from sensuality will automatically experience that pressure as if it's "outside" of the aggregates, which is exactly why they will feel justified to act out of it. By repeatedly seeing that no matter how "outside" it feels, it still *has* to be within the aggregates, one is gradually restoring the right order, "wearing away" the assumption. And for this, one needs to be able to endure the pressure and not try to get rid of it, because craving against the discomfort of the pressure is precisely why the assumption (that there is an "outside" of it) is there ("with craving, assumption is").

I ask, because I don't see how Right View could be anything but an assumption, because as soon as it is recognized it would necessarily be of the aggregates, subjected to change.

There is some truth to this as well, but not in the sense that you're suggesting. It's true in the sense that for a puthujjana, it's impossible to even *conceive* of a view that would be anything but another assumption—otherwise they would not be a puthujjana.

But the Right View of sotāpanna is not a view in the way that a puthujjana knows views (which is always through their *diṭṭhi-upādāna*); it would be more correct to think that the Right View is the understanding of *all* views that makes assuming any view impossible. And that bears repeating: it's an *understanding* that makes one incapable of assuming

views whether one tries to have views or not; it's not a *choice* of "I will not hold any views" or "I believe there is no self", because *that's* a view that one would assume in exactly the same manner as "the self is eternal", etc. They're different only in their *content*, , and that's all most people can see, not their nature of being assumed.

Thus, not having the Right View means that *whatever* view one has will be wrong; it will still be affected with assumption. Wrong view is simply the lack of the Right View/sotapatti; it's not something you can "fix" by just adopting another view, even if its extracted verbatim from the Suttas. If it were like that, then indeed the Right View would just be another assumption, and also be subject to change as you say (you would lose it if you forgot everything you know about the Dhamma even in this life, whereas the true Right View survives for up to 7 wholly new births).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-26 06:25:10 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I hope I'm not coming across as an (annoying) broken record, but it seems that understanding/wisdom/discernment would have to be fully dependent upon that which is understood/discerned (how can there be understanding of that which I can't even fathom, unless of course we are making that-which-I-can't-even-fathom into a thing that we are fathoming, of course?). So the understanding of all views would have its roots in views being there in the first place. No views, no understanding of views. No understanding of views, no freedom from views. So even discerning nibbana requires the present absence of greed/lust/delusion, right? How can there be an unconditional freedom dependent on understanding that which is not there?

That's right. It's never about gaining a vision of some rarefied truth, but about the understanding of the same things you have and always have had in your experience.

And yes, if there were no things that could *serve as a basis* for passion, aversion, and delusion/muddledness in one's experience, there would be no way to distinguish what Nibbāna is. And most people's attempts at reaching Nibbāna consist of trying harder and harder to *suppress* those things that serve as a basis, so that the 3 defilements are thereby circumstantially sedated (and just to be sure, this is not even samatha practice either), ironically obstructing the possibility of Nibbāna.

One who has abandoned greed,  
is not greedy amidst that which incites greed.  
Greed just slips off from him  
like water drops from a lotus.

[...]

One who has abandoned aversion,

is not averse amidst that which incites aversion.

Aversion just slips off from him,

like a palm nut from its stalk.

[...]

One who has abandoned muddledness  
is not muddled amidst that which incites muddledness.  
He banishes all muddledness  
As the sunrise dispels the dark.

—Itivuttaka 3.39

With this I don't mean one should go seek out experiences that incite the defilements, but that once one has withdrawn from those outwardly through virtue and sense restraint, the *possibility* of those experiences arising needs to be addressed internally so that whether they come or not, one becomes perfectly certain that they will *not* be able to arouse the defilements that they are a *basis* for (and that total certainty is what Nibbāna, or even samādhi but temporarily, is). It's impossible to understand and address those possibilities while they are actualities (hence you need to have practiced *before* you get sick, old, and die, or before you encounter pressuring things in order to have any chance of not being overwhelmed by them).

Maybe I can ask it like this: is the understanding that a chariot builder has of chariots, for example, the same understanding an arahant has of the way out of suffering (same understanding, different things being understood)?

The Buddha once gave that simile alluding to how he'd be able to provide accurate answers even in his sleep, like a master chariot-builder who's questioned about his craft.

But the crucial difference is that it must not be misconceived as *information* that one has accumulated. Even if you were to completely wipe an Arahant's memory, unlike the chariot builder, it wouldn't in the least bit affect his knowledge of the way out of suffering; he'd only lose the tools he used to explain it to others.

So I wouldn't really use that simile because for most people that's precisely the view they need to abandon: that the understanding of the Dhamma is just information and things they know from mere faith, tradition, learning or consideration, along the lines of "when it's like this you do that, and when it's like that you do this", abstract notions about liberation and "ultimate truth" that they find intellectually pleasing, "special" *sense perceptions* of irrelevant phenomena confused with knowledge of the three characteristics, or a mix between these.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-27 05:43:15 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is the knowledge that I would lean away from painful experience/toward pleasurable experiences whether or not my memory was wiped on the same level of knowledge you are describing here?

Ultimately there is nothing “on the same level” as that knowledge that a puthujjana can relate to. If anything, it’s a noble disciple who would know that their mind can still lean towards or away from things, which is why in a next life they would never be able to overlook that they still have defilements if they were to ask themselves that question, while a puthujjana can most certainly dupe themselves into thinking that they *won’t* crave for or against experiences, since they don’t actually know what craving is even when they think they do.

Is it always crystal clear for the stream enterer that even though they may still have residual leanings toward pleasure/away from pain that there is an expiration date on those leanings?

Not explicitly, but they are inherently incapable of regarding anything as permanent implicitly.

How would you describe that “turning point” for someone who has yet to discern it?

The realization beyond all doubt that one can no longer suffer amidst suffering even if one tries and no matter how careless one gets, which doesn’t depend at all on something you “learned” and could forget—or on some “practice” you do—but on suffering having arisen.

## **How to make the best out of a dark retreat?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Hinek 2024-01-18 09:13:56

Hello everyone!

I just found this community and am very glad I did because I have been following the teachings of Ajahn Nyanamoli for quite some time (although I don’t think I haven’t made any bigger progress on the path of gradual training) and it’s good to know there is so many other people benefiting from it!

I would like to ask for any opinion regarding a “dark retreat”. This is basically provided as a stay in a completely dark (and almost completely silent) room with basic stuff like bed, shower and a toilet, and food being brought in once a day (unless you opt in for a fast).

I have very limited possibilities regarding periods of seclusion in my householder life and last month I found out about these retreats being available not far from where I live, so I went ahead and booked a 7-day stay in the second week of February.

I'm planning to use this valuable - albeit arguably extreme - opportunity to do the hard work of observing the unpleasant state of mind caused by a lack of sensory stimulation. Ajahn Nyanamoli often talks about the boredom and subsequent existential dread that sets in when there is no distraction available. I think this setting would be the ideal opportunity to get a taste of that.

I would be very happy for any feedback on this endeavor, especially the following points:

- Is it okay to go head in and try this form of seclusion? I do have some experience with periods of seclusion, but not for very long and not this extreme.
- Is there any particular topic/teaching to keep in mind during this time to make the best use of this retreat? My current hope is that the lack of sensual stimulation would allow me to reach more transparency/honesty to realize subtler motives behind sensory craving. I would like to pursue sensory restraint in my daily life in much higher degree, but it's easy to slide back into sensuality without a deeper understanding of its causes.

I am prepared for discomfort and willing to do the hard work during my stay but at the same time I would like to clear out any misunderstanding, such as this not being particularly conducive to the goal I set for myself or to Dhamma practice in general.

Any insight/advice is very welcome. Thank you.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-18 17:43:20**

Is it okay to go head in and try this form of seclusion? I do have some experience with periods of seclusion, but not for very long and not this extreme.

If you haven't been developing virtue and sense restraint to an impeccable degree beforehand, then the extent to which you manage to keep your sanity throughout that experience is the extent to which you're not actually "secluded" in the true sense, meaning you're still finding some form of distraction on some level (which would include "the practice" when done with subtle motivations affected with craving). Wholesome mental development (as opposed to mental instability) on account of solitude is only possible when the Gradual Training has been well adhered to.

A much more effective first step toward true seclusion would be to address the shortcomings in your restraint that you're already aware of. Abandoning the ways in which you still delight in the pleasures that you encounter in your everyday life. That's what sense *restraint* is; sense *deprivation* is something else altogether, and the Buddha never encouraged that. Generally nowadays, "meditation" retreats and such are about the latter rather than the former, which is why the whole concept is utterly flawed.

Suppose there were a wet sappy piece of wood lying in water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: 'I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.' What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by taking the upper fire-stick and rubbing it against the wet sappy piece of wood lying in the water?"

“No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is a wet sappy piece of wood, and it is lying in water. Eventually the man would reap only weariness and disappointment.”

“So too, Aggivessana, as to those recluses and brahmins who still do not live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has not been fully abandoned and suppressed internally, even if those good recluses and brahmins feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good recluses and brahmins do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the first simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before.

—MN 36

If you put the sticks next to a bonfire for a few days to dry ASAP only to get them just as wet as they were before, it's basically as if you didn't do anything at all.

Is there any particular topic/teaching to keep in mind during this time to make the best use of this retreat? My current hope is that the lack of sensual stimulation would allow me to reach more transparency/honesty to realize subtler motives behind sensory craving. I would like to pursue sensory restraint in my daily life in much higher degree, but it's easy to slide back into sensuality without a deeper understanding of its causes.

It's a common view that when this sort of thing is over with you'll have a greater understanding of your own mind, most popularly with the help of the mindless repetition of some meditation technique. But even if that's not involved at all, it's still a misunderstanding of how the “dust in one's eyes” that prevents one from recognizing one's craving is to be cleared up.

The development of the mind can only take place when, to use an analogy, you were used to hiking with 5kg on your back and now you commit to carrying an extra 5-10kg **every single day, 24/7 with no “breaks” whatsoever**, rather than when you take on 20kg for several hours only to go back to 5kg in the end.

That is to say, you would become clearer about what craving is by taking on a greater but less extreme amount of renunciation but *for the rest of your life*. Becoming celibate, for example.

If the thought of that scares you more than doing this retreat, it's a testament to how *that's* what would actually “hit the spot” and force you to face your true demons, whereas this superficially seemingly greater amount of renunciation is not really challenging the mind's attachments because it knows it will go back to the status quo at *some* point.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-19 12:29:22 (in reply to a comment not included)**

but there is still a lot of territory where I don't intuitively feel any danger in indulgence. I can force myself to deliberately perceive it as dangerous if I happen to have enough awareness at that moment, but I guess the goal is not to have to even think about it, is that correct?

Yes, not having to think about it is how one knows that the true danger has been recognized (i.e. the mind is permanently free from sensuality), but that stage will never be reached if one doesn't make the effort to think about it.

The danger in indulgence must to some extent be recognized on an external level and through reasoning initially, as discussed in MN 13. Seeing how, on account of being dependent on these pleasures, there is this whole delicate environmental setup that you need to work to protect and maintain, coupled with a perpetual possibility that something might go wrong and you will lose those things *while* you were dependent on them, causing you a great deal of suffering.

Clarifying the danger intellectually on that level should be enough for one to start increasing one's withdrawal from sensuality to the point of the 8 precepts so that now one *lives* according to that intellectual perception of danger. It is only once the mind has become used to celibacy most of all that you would be able to "feel" the danger in sensuality on a less abstract level. You would start to sense in a very palpable way how, whenever a desire to break the virtue arises, the safety and degree of peace that you have been used to for some time is at risk.

You would then be able to easily recognize desire as the sign of an incoming illness and thus as totally unwanted *because* you have been less ill (due to restraint in body and speech at least) and experienced that relief for a while, whereas, before that, you had no strong reference point since you had always have been equally sick (having not only mental desires but acting out of them on top of that).

I am able to gradually remove some of it - and later realize that it was completely unjustified in the first place

So this is how it always works. You will realize the true extent of its unsatisfactoriness and futility beyond the level of mere theory once you have been, on account of faith and reasoning, not engaging with it.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-20 12:48:35 (in reply to a comment not included)**

You can see that as a symptom of the degree to which the danger of sensuality has not truly sunk in for the mind. It means the practice is still to some extent about consciously restraining (which you can only do when you're awake) rather than uprooting the delight.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-23 03:20:14 (in reply to a comment not included)**

This seems to say that well established virtue and sense restraint are necessary PRIOR to seclusion. However, I'm sure you can find quite a number of suttas that run along the lines of a certain bhikkhu requesting the Blessed One to instruct him so that he may dwell secluded, ardent, and resolute, and the Blessed One saying

That's correct. However, we're not obliged to interpret that as meaning the monks who were given that instruction were cutting themselves off from all human contact for days on end, locking themselves to a single space, and fully dark to boot. In fact, not seeing people at all would largely be impossible as a monk back then, as they had to go on alms round daily (and a monk with less than 5 vassa shouldn't be away from a teacher/senior monk ideally; within that period they should already have the right view if they were actually and properly trying).

The phrase "dwell secluded, ardent, and resolute" could simply mean that they ramped up their efforts (e.g., extra restraint regarding unnecessary speech, less engagement in duties, etc.) while living in a monastery like Jetavana where they would spend the majority of the day alone in their kuti or similar.

In AN 10.99, the Buddha tells Upāli that one shouldn't frequent *remote lodgings in the forest* (strict solitude) until one has attained samādhi, but it's a given that one will never attain (right) samādhi without living "diligent, ardent, and resolute" to free the mind from sensuality and hindrances with less than full solitude (and without the right view of course). So when he tells him "stay with the Saṅgha", he's obviously not saying that socializing and delighting in the company of the other monks will somehow result in samadhi.

In other words, physically distancing oneself from all interaction with spiritual companions is optional and should be done with care and preparation, ideally never without having attained the Noble Eightfold Path; minimal engagement with those who are *not* spiritual companions, not delighting in company, avoiding distractions, and restraining one's speech is indispensable to even *attain* the path and should be done by everyone, as it is a primary facet of virtue. So by dwelling "diligent, ardent, and resolute" in this sense, one *would* be developing virtue.

Then, on the basis of that virtue and the Right View (because the former properly developed should result in the latter), practicing the four satipaṭṭhānas would be possible (SN 47.15), be it in moderate or in extreme isolation.

Quite often, desire for the latter (which would also include modern "intensive meditation retreats" even though you're not alone) is rooted in either fear and aversion to disturbances, or wrong views about enlightenment being reached by setting up the right environment where you can practice concentration (i.e. un-mindfulness) without any external factors to remind you of the place where suffering actually arises, both of which are obvious obstacles to the Right View.



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-23 03:42:52 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I sense this is a dumb question, but this is where I am right now in my journey – I am wondering how this is any different from taking on a diet or exercise regime, for example, and thinking, “I feel so much better, I’m going to do this for the rest of my life!” and a year later, you’re back to being lazy and eating junk?

It won’t be very different from that if one doesn’t get the Right View indeed. But at that point one will at least have a direct “feel” as to how non-virtue is suffering. By developing oneself further on the basis of that, to *understand* why non-virtue is suffering for example, one would get the Right View, and only then going back to non-virtue would be impossible.

If one hasn’t experienced the joy of virtue/renunciation for oneself, any contemplation of the danger in unwholesome behavior and what it is that makes it unwholesome will be abstract and thus insufficient to see the Four Noble Truths. It is in *this* sense that samādhi (that “joy of renunciation” which is a prelude to the first jhāna) is necessary for knowledge and vision to arise, not in the sense of states of absorption, where the joy comes from something else.

And that right type of joy is what enabled people to get the Right View in the Suttas every time.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-25 15:15:00 (in reply to a comment not included)**

So even though one may not reside physically distanced from others, staying alone in one’s kuti as much as possible/most of the day + restraint of speech should be enough “seclusion” for the Right View?

Well, depends what you mean with “physically distanced”. In the best case scenario one *should* be away from others to a minimum degree—namely, free from the *possibility* of unexpected interaction and from even hearing or feeling-like-one-might-hear the speech of others nearby, which automatically puts the mind in “social” mode (or never allows it to come off it in the first place).

What I was referring to was more the idea of “lone-dweller” (ekavihāri), which is more like you don’t see or talk to *anyone* for days or weeks on end, and don’t live with other monks. That’s what’s referred to as “remote dwellings in the forest” in AN 10.99 and elsewhere. It’s not explicitly stated, but reading between the lines it seems pretty clear that it was the exception rather than the rule (e.g., those monks were the ones who wouldn’t have had an Uposatha meeting). It was one of the ways of “going the extra mile” like wearing only rag robes, eating only what’s received during alms round, etc. Most monks probably lived more similarly to those in serious forest monasteries today, where you will inevitably be seeing each other daily for the meal and practical duties, while still having your own “empty hut”.

Could you clarify what is meant here by spiritual companions, Bhante?

As in, anyone who happens to be in robes or claim interest in the Dhamma? Or as in people who seem to be those who might actually be able to help one progress on the Path? In which case, “physically distancing oneself from all interaction w spiritual companions” may not be that optional at all. One may just happen to live where there are no Ariyas around, to put it bluntly.

It can go both ways. For example, the Buddha himself decreed that a junior bhikkhu can't be living without dependence (nissaya) on a teacher, even if that teacher is a complete puthujjana. There is genuine benefit in having to live with others in robes, especially if they're senior to one, despite disagreeing with their views and that they're not an example to follow when it comes to Dhamma and the training. For one thing, it reveals forms of conceit, obstinacy, and attachment to views that would otherwise go unnoticed, and it prevents you from falling for a distorted idea of “peace” that depends on things going the way you want.

(But this only applies when one is living full-time in a community that keeps the 8 precepts. As a layperson in society, contact with other ordinary laypeople that are not even virtuous should be minimized, because even with a reclusive attitude one will, in most cases at least, *already* be rubbing elbows with others past the threshold where it's beneficial).

In the other sense of “spiritual companion”, for as long as one is a puthujjana at least, there is no benefit in cutting oneself off from one's source of Dhamma, including the Suttas (although one should certainly know where to stop, i.e., putting it aside when one's study and learning is starting to be rooted in restlessness, doubt, or pointless intellectual curiosity and satisfaction for example).

Why would modern intensive retreats be considered extreme isolation, Bhante - despite the crowds of people? Would it be due to the vows of silence, vows of not looking at anyone, vows of avoiding/lack of access to Dhamma material (books and so on) etc.?

Well yes, strictly speaking it's not “isolation”, and it's most certainly terrible in terms of seclusion. I meant it in the manner of “sense deprivation” and running away from things hoping that that's how enlightenment will be found, which is the same reason why some might choose to lock themselves in a cave for 3 months instead. Fundamentally it's the same sort of attitude.

(Also, it's good to note that the Buddha *forbade* vows of silence for monks. It absolves you from doing the work of constantly discerning based on your background intention what is beneficial and unbeneficial speech, which ironically is infinitely closer to “mindfulness” than what you would do in such retreats).

## Pleasant enclosed within the unpleasant

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** TubularScrapple 2024-01-16 21:10:50

I was listening to a talk earlier, and thinking and pondering about how it applies. But I thought it might be an interesting discussion point since a brief search didn't show up many exact results.

Am I considering things on the right track, *or* to what extent am I wrong:

Whenever I am pressured by a thought, for example: '*there is this game I could play, that would be pleasant, it would be my escape from this other feeling*' the viewing of that idea, that thought as pleasant, and delighting in it *is* the gratification. The mechanism by which it is not seen as dangerous, is the failure to see that it is enclosed within the unpleasantness of the pressure, which is present at the same time. For me as a putthujana, there's already suffering there, at the same time. And the danger, is in the selective attention to the pleasant, and the delight, whereby passion is strengthened, and *things for me* is strengthened/maintained.

Keen to hear thoughts.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-17 18:38:58**

the viewing of that idea, that thought as pleasant, and delighting in it *is* the gratification.

Not exactly.

*'there is this game I could play, **that would be pleasant**, it would be my escape from this other feeling*

*That* is the gratification.

The pleasure and happiness that arise on account of these five kinds of sensual stimulation: this is the gratification of sensual pleasures.

—MN 13

“Bhikkhus, (1) if there were no gratification in the world, beings would not become enamored of it; but because there is gratification in the world, beings become enamored of it. (2) If there were no danger in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with it; but because there is danger in the world, beings become disenchanted with it. (3) If there were no escape from the world, beings would not escape from it; but because there is an escape from the world, beings escape from it.

—AN 3.105

The pleasure derived from sensuality is real, and your renunciation will be imperfect (though still much preferable to indulgence of course) if you try to deny that to stop yourself from wanting it. That's pretty much inevitable in the beginning, but one must be clear that that's still not the middle way.

and the danger, is in the selective attention to the pleasant, and the

delight, whereby passion is strengthened, and *things for me* is strengthened/maintained.

Sense pleasures are dangerous **because** they are so very delightful, plain and simple, not because such and such happens when you attend to it like this or like that. If your perception of danger depends on ceasing to acknowledge the agreeability of something, it's not anymore a sense *pleasure* whose nature you are recognizing.

When the danger of sensuality is known on the right level, the more pleasant feelings something arouses, the sharper the perception of danger is, simultaneously and to the same extent. That's when there is no need to suppress or run away from any feelings that arise (apart from not breaking the precepts and basic sense restraint), because when sense pleasure suggests itself to the mind, no matter to what extent, it *brings with it* the recognition of danger, and that right there is the escape which requires you to "do" nothing whatsoever.

And that is how you genuinely start to see *the same phenomenon* as a "charcoal pit", as a very tasty but poisonous drink, instead of (inadvertently) altering the initial pleasure so that it's not *really* pleasure anymore.

This is exactly why virtue and sense restraint are absolutely indispensable for this acute and liberating recognition to even be possible: if your behavior is not well purified way beforehand so that no matter how much pressure arises, you never act out of it, you won't be able to have the full extent of sensual gratification vis-à-vis without yielding to the actions it pushes you to make—and as soon as the pressure turns into action, any perception of its danger, let alone realization of the escape is impossible.

Edit: There's a talkon this topic, and a transcript.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-18 12:58:45 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

To be clear the agreeability is obvious to me. I am not trying to deny that things are agreeable, or that there wouldn't remain agreeable aspects, but I guess my mistake was in trying to pay attention to other feelings that are also present, which is probably just replacement/management is it?

It could be. There are essentially infinite ways for management to take place; ultimately it depends not on what you're attending to and how, but *why*. If you're trying to recognize that the arisen pleasure is enclosed within displeasure so that it ceases to be pleasant (which is something you'd need to keep an eye on; those little attitudes sneak in precisely because one overlooks them), that would be management. But if you recognize the suffering of desire while *enduring* the pressure of pleasure, it would be going in the right direction.

'Oh let me instead pay attention to an unpleasant feeling' and then rationalising it as a larger context of the same thing. But still just ends up being switching of the object of attention.

Right, it shouldn't be "rationalizing". It should be such that if you were to completely forget everything you've learned and heard, you would still recognize "danger" whenever pleasure is there on account of a sense object, without even having to think about it. That's because you are *already* feeling the subtle but decidedly real "burn" from the mere presence of the pleasant perception; if you need to be groping around on the level of ideas to find "why" it is *dukkha*, you are *ipso facto* overlooking where it is. The pain of sensuality is so "close" and immediate that one automatically looks past it, due to the beginningless habit of ignoring it and focusing on the secondary agreeability of objects.

It is impossible to see the danger on the "right level" right off the bat, but by doing one's best, over time one realizes to what extent there was still a subtle degree of management in those attempts. Then one does the same with that "better" level, rinsing and repeating until the true right level is reached, and the actual assumption of sensuality as pleasant is permanently overcome.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-18 13:16:00 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

So would it be correct to say that I've understood the right view at least to that extent, and now all I would need to do to further clarify and develop the path is more of the same, further refine the basis of sila, see the danger in the slightest fault, stop the habits of giving into distraction etc. in subtler ways and keep purifying the mind by the same principle until there is nothing left?

Sometimes I still get caught up in distractions, also because there seems to be this "resistance" as I wrote in my other comment. And there is also still this idea or habit that I have missed some extra information and I need to keep checking my understanding and get more information, re-listen to dhamma talks etc.

But maybe by now I should really stop getting lost in distractions and simply do more of the thing I have already understood, at least to that extent?

This sounds like a more accurate understanding of the danger in sensuality, which is the only tool necessary to purify the mind from hindrances. The Right View must be kept separate from that, but of course the chief obstacle to not having it is still being submerged in the regarding of sensuality and craving as *not* suffering.

So yes, you would need to start discerning the "bait" and how you "pick it up" in the context of any other hindrance, such as seeking information when it is clearly rooted in wanting to get rid of the discomfort of doubt, or giving in to distractions. Every other hindrance shares exactly that same principle: not being able to help taking one or another form of bait whenever it's presented, and the whole thing is overcome by enduring the pressure of the bait through nothing but the reflection on its danger and the repercussions of any engagement with it.

One or another "bait" will always be there for as long as the senses/five aggregates exist;

the difference is whether the mind has been trained to stay composed or if it still jumps at it eagerly.

## Any known list of suttas finishing with the arising of right view?

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** iurileo 2024-01-15 18:31:15

Hello, everyone! Does anyone know of a list/compilation of suttas in which the listener develops right view by the end of it?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 05:45:12

This should show all instances.

It wasn't part of the question, but it's a good opportunity to point out the following (which was the topic of this talk):

It will become apparent that a specific pattern recurs throughout all of these instances

Then the Blessed One gave Sīha the general a progressive discourse, that is, a talk on giving, virtuous behavior, and heaven; **he revealed the danger, degradation, and defilement of sensuality and the benefit of renunciation. When the Blessed One knew that Sīha's mind was pliant, softened, rid of hindrances, uplifted, and confident**, he revealed that Dhamma teaching special to the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Then, just as a clean cloth rid of dark spots would readily absorb dye, so too, while Sīha the general sat in that same seat, there arose in him the dust-free, stainless Dhamma-eye: 'Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.'

What enabled these people to see the Four Noble Truths was *not* what is generally thought of as the forerunner of supramundane insight ("concentration"). It was a joyful state of mind on account of *dispassion for sensuality*, born of nothing but recognizing its inherent danger, and seeing its relinquishment as peaceful.

"Honorable Ānanda, we are laypeople who enjoy sensual pleasures. **We like sensual pleasures, we love them and take joy in them. But renunciation seems like an abyss.** I have heard that in this teaching and training there are very young mendicants whose minds are secure in renunciation; they're confident, settled, and decided about it. They see it as peaceful. Renunciation is the dividing line between the multitude and the mendicants in this teaching and training."

[...]

Before my awakening—when I was still unawakened but intent on awakening—I too thought, ‘Renunciation is good! Seclusion is good!’ ***But my mind wasn’t secure in renunciation; it wasn’t confident, settled, and decided about it. I didn’t see it as peaceful.*** Then I thought, ‘What is the cause, what is the reason why my mind isn’t secure in renunciation, and not confident, settled, and decided about it? Why don’t I see it as peaceful?’ Then I thought, ‘I haven’t seen the danger of sensual pleasures, and so I haven’t cultivated that. I haven’t realized the benefits of renunciation, and so I haven’t developed that. That’s why my mind isn’t secure in renunciation, and not confident, settled, and decided about it. And it’s why I don’t see it as peaceful.’ Then I thought, ‘Suppose that, seeing the drawbacks of sensual pleasures, I were to cultivate that. And suppose that, realizing the benefits of renunciation, I were to develop that. It’s possible that my mind would become secure in renunciation; it would be confident, settled, and decided about it. And I would see it as peaceful.’ And so, after some time, I saw the drawbacks of sensual pleasures and cultivated that, and I realized the benefits of renunciation and developed that. Then my mind became secure in renunciation; it was confident, settled, and decided about it. I saw it as peaceful.

Quite separated from sense desires, separated from unbeneficial qualities, with thinking and with pondering, with joy and ease born of separation, I dwelt having entered the first jhāna.

—AN 9.41

This is a very different type of joy than that of sensuality, which is the same joy that comes from meditation for most people. **The joy of sensuality is self-contained:** it’s pleasant because it’s pleasant, period. Whether it’s sexual intercourse, delicious food, or the blissful states that result from breath observation or any other techniques, both of them have in common that they simply “feel good”.

Contemporary meditation practices provide a source of pleasure that doesn’t in itself demand renunciation. It is required only to the extent that the overt pursuit of worldly pleasures disrupts the sheltered setting necessary to craft the artificial mental space you want, which is what provides a temporary escape from suffering. From their point of view, sensuality must be abandoned because it’s a “distraction” to this *other* pursuit, not because its intrinsic danger has been internalized; much like drugs and partying are easily forgone when you really want to focus on making money and “self-improvement” instead. And this is why, for those who enjoy sensual pleasures, this type of pleasure does *not* “seem like an abyss”, and they juggle between their meditation practices and sensual engagements as if they’re perfectly compatible—sometimes reinforcing each other, even.

The pleasure of renunciation, on the other hand, is born of the *relief* of having given up something that was not for one’s benefit (and thus it is inextricably tied with understanding things as they are). It is not pleasant ***because of itself*** unlike sensual pleasure, but because of a value judgment that determines what has been abandoned as absolutely un-

desirable (“good riddance”). This is exactly why this pleasure *begins* as pain: how it will be felt is solely determined by the current value judgment, which is in favor sensuality and the world by default.

“Forms, sounds, tastes, scents, bodily contacts and ideas which are agreeable, pleasant and charming, all these, while they last, are deemed to be happiness by the world with its devas. But when they cease, that is agreed by all to be unsatisfactory. By the Noble Ones, the cessation of ownership is seen as happiness. This is the reverse of the outlook of the whole world.

—Suttanipāta 3.12

The way to work towards this is joy of renunciation is, unsurprisingly, getting used to renunciation—virtue and sense restraint. The point must be reached where that which initially felt “like an abyss” as said in the Sutta above, is now a source of joy. The extent to which there are things that are “too dear to be given up”, is the extent to which the mind is not confident in renunciation, and to which, to use the same simile, the cloth will not take the “dye” because it’s soiled.

Firstly, a bhikkhu has not dispelled passion, desire, fondness, thirst, burning, and craving for sense pleasures. This being so, his mind doesn’t incline to ardency, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the first shackle of mind he hasn’t cut off.

[...]

When a bhikkhu has not given up these five obstinacies and cut off these five shackles of mind, it’s impossible for him to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching and training.

—MN 16

Laypeople back in the day did not have to go through this development because, as is clear from the texts, all it took for their minds to reach that pliable state was *hearing* about the danger of sensuality (this is what it means to have “little dust in one’s eyes”). Their minds were thus able to regard renunciation as pleasant even though they were probably not even keeping the precepts before encountering the Buddha.

Nowadays, on the other hand, when the giving up of worldly pleasures and attachments is talked about to most of us, let alone undertaken, the opposite of joy is the result. It is therefore necessary to *live out* renunciation as much as possible until **that same** “missing out” on things—which initially gave rise to anguish—becomes the greatest and only worthwhile source of happiness, independent of anything at all except continuing to “miss out”, for if were to hinge on doing this or that [practice], it would just be another mundane pleasure.

At that point, how the absence of craving is the ending of suffering is being experienced firsthand, and there is no way *not* to see the Four Noble Truths if one knows them intellectually—that’s how knowledge would cease to be merely intellectual, not by having a “transcendental meditative experience that you can’t put into words”, of which there



was never any mention whatsoever before stream entry in the Suttas, and there is no reason to believe that these people, like General Siha in AN 8.12 or King Bimbisāra and his ministers, very busy men, were engaging in what today is generally regarded as cultivation of the mind, let alone that it was what enabled their breakthrough.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 13:37:02 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

it clearly shows that the people of that time were much closer to animals in their understanding of morality than any ordinary person from a modern more or less developed country.

This is a common misunderstanding. “Morality” is relative and sometimes goes against the Dhamma; virtue is timeless and universal, and is always aligned with the principles of the Dhamma, which are non-greed and non-aversion. The Buddha stated that the baseline level of virtue in the world steadily decreases as time goes on, it never increases, and if one knows where to look, this is as obvious as it gets. Mundane advances on the other hand do and certainly have increased the baseline of morality across the world, which is irrelevant to the Dhamma. Morality is mostly based on herd mentality and peer pressure rather than individual responsibility, authenticity, and mundane right view, which are the foundation for wisdom.

Besides, the fact that monks or nuns, and the ancient Indian populace in general, would have committed actions that go not only against “morality” but against virtue itself has little to do with what I’m referring to.

“Suppose a man would drop a lump of salt into a small bowl of water. What do you think, bhikkhus? Would that lump of salt make the small quantity of water in the bowl salty and undrinkable?”

“Yes, Bhante. For what reason? Because the water in the bowl is limited, thus that lump of salt would make it salty and undrinkable.”

“But suppose a man would drop a lump of salt into the river Ganges. What do you think, bhikkhus? Would that lump of salt make the river Ganges become salty and undrinkable?”

“No, Bhante. For what reason? Because the river Ganges contains a large volume of water, thus that lump of salt would not make it salty and undrinkable.”

“So too, bhikkhus, some person here has created trifling bad kamma yet it leads him to hell, while some other person here has created exactly the same trifling kamma yet it is to be experienced in this very life, without even a slight [residue] being seen, much less abundant [residue].

“What kind of person creates trifling bad kamma that leads him to hell? Here, some person is undeveloped in body, virtuous behavior, mind, and wisdom;

he is limited and has a mean character, and he dwells in suffering. When such kind of person has created a trifling bad kamma, it leads him to hell.

“What kind of person creates exactly the same trifling bad kamma and yet it is to be experienced in this very life, without even a slight [residue] being seen, much less an abundant [residue]? Here, some person is developed in body, virtuous behavior, mind, and wisdom. He is unlimited and has a lofty character, and he dwells without measure. When such a person has created exactly the same trifling bad kamma, it is to be experienced in this very life, without even a slight [residue] being seen, much less abundant [residue].

—AN 3.100

“Bhikkhus, these five people are found in the world. What five?

One person transgresses and regrets it. And they don’t truly understand the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom where those arisen harmful, unbeneficial states cease without anything left over.

One person transgresses and doesn’t regret it. And they don’t understand ...

One person doesn’t transgress yet still feels regret. And they don’t understand ...

One person neither transgresses nor regrets. But they don’t understand ...

One person neither transgresses nor regrets. And they do understand the freedom of mind and freedom by wisdom where those arisen harmful, unbeneficial states cease without anything left over.

—AN 5.142

As the Buddha said, delusion is more blameworthy than greed. Delusion is in the views a person holds, in this case their unwillingness to see renunciation as worthwhile, and refusal to acknowledge that spiritual development and sensuality are mutually exclusive. There was, for example, the case of Sarakāni who was a stream-enterer addicted to alcohol; to some extent, unwholesome actions can be done despite right views being there. The difference is that there would always be a sense of compunction, whereas someone who doesn’t see the danger of sensuality feels fully justified in their actions (which is most commonly the case today, and any suggestion that there *is* harm in those actions is met with backlash).

In general, society held all kinds of philosophy and development of the mind in high esteem.

That in itself is not significant, because as evidenced by the accounts in the Suttas, most of that philosophy was missing the mark by a longshot, so that’s not what was contributing to there being less dust in the eyes of those people. It is *what* that philosophy was about,

and the majority of the time it involved renunciation as a core tenet. The fact that people were even *open* to adopt that as an ideal on such a large scale—to the point where large numbers of ascetics could live purely on alms and be respected and admired, showing society’s widespread support of those values—is evidence to how much less delusion they carried in this respect.

In contrast, in modern times it is clear how even in other religions, as time goes on, less and less renunciation is expected from their adherents even on a very mild lay level, and those who still advocate it are regarded as “extremists” or “fundamentalists”.

There was the Buddha as the supreme teacher who had the ability to know directly what to say, how to say it, and when to say it, so that the listener would have a chance to accept and understand the truth.

There was the Buddha himself and all the many aryas whom he recognised as the unquestionable authorities and sources from whom one could hear the right view and be absolutely sure that it was the right view.

This is no doubt a factor. But it actually serves to reinforce the argument rather than refute it: since there *isn’t* a Buddha nowadays, there needs to be *even less* dust in one’s eyes to stand a chance to see the Four Noble Truths. Every bit to which even the thought of renunciation makes the mind afraid instead of peaceful is that much more of a liability.

The cloth needs to be even cleaner because the expert dyer is no longer there.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 16:54:01 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

You’re right, thanks for pointing that out. It must have been that very Sutta I was referencing from memory.

Still, it’s quite obvious that this is not the period of increase:

The ten ways of doing skillful deeds will totally disappear, and the ten ways of doing unskillful deeds will explode in popularity. Those people will not even have the word ‘skillful’, still less anyone who does what is skillful.

And anyone who disrespects mother and father, ascetics and brahmins, and fails to honor the elders in the family will be venerated and praised, just as the opposite is venerated and praised today.

There’s no denying that we’re closer to this than we were even 100 years ago, for example. And if we’re taking the historicity of the Suttas as a given, back then a number of people managed to live up to 120 years (AN 3.52; SN 3.22; MN 91).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 22:18:06 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The very fact that the Buddha had to lay down rules against, for example, murder and theft shows that such rules were not widespread in society at that time. Today, people can live their whole lives and not only not become victims of brutal violence, but not even witness such crimes.

But that doesn't have anything to do with people nowadays being more virtuous on average. Such crimes are not witnessed simply because laws are much more tightly enforced than back then, and punishment is harder to escape. It's virtually impossible to get away with murder now, whereas back then it was surely way easier.

The greater amount of baseline virtue I'm referring to would be measured by how many people would kill, steal, lie, or commit adultery if they had a 100% guarantee of never being caught. This number has to be greater now than it was then.

What people do or don't do per se is influenced by circumstances, and this is the level of morality. The virtuous person is the one who abstains from bad actions on account of *internal ideals* regardless of what everyone else does and whether there is a penalty or not.

Hence:

But not only have standards of morality become higher, crimes themselves, which used to be normal and natural and not always considered and condemned as crimes, have become rare. Doesn't that mean nothing from the point of view of the Dhamma?

No. If anything, the fact that the societal standard of morality back then was poorer **and yet** there was a significant portion of society that upheld standards of good conduct out of their own free will (and often received more praise the higher those standards were) is precisely what would qualify them as more virtuous ("Others will be cruel/kill/lie, etc., but here we will not be cruel/kill/lie., etc." , MN 8). Again, modern people who wouldn't do the same under similar circumstances (including becoming the ascetics of other sects) are easier to find.

I also seems like you might be exaggerating the severity and prevalence of those "crimes". I doubt they would've had the equivalent of our mass shootings.

So you mean that the mere fact that Buddha had to teach monks and nuns, for example, not to kill, says nothing about the degree of development of people at the time?

All those who abstain from that today do so also because they were told, coupled with severe threats to boot.

If a Buddha were to arise today for example, rules would've quite likely needed to be laid down from day 1 unlike then. In our time, his mere talking about craving and sensuality being the root of suffering, the aggregates being impermanent, etc. wouldn't have been enough for every newly ordained bhikkhu to behave like a renunciate well enough. The

equivalent of Sudinna and thereby the first proclamation of a rule would've arisen much earlier (assuming he would reveal or admit to his offense at all).

In addition, the crimes that are less prevalent today are not on the same level as the offenses monks committed. The Vinaya stories don't show monks becoming bandits and assaulting people on the street or becoming corrupt monarchs, but things like greed for requisites, unsuitable relations with women, and doing things that jeopardize communal harmony. None of which a modern person is any less likely to do if there were no rule forbidding it; quite the opposite if I had to guess.

In other words, the fact that the Buddha speaks to followers of other teachings in essentially the same terminological language, that they understand each other without the need to define every term and concept used ...

It's not the intellectual understanding of the terminology that allows one to see the Dhamma, but the extent to which one can see what "the body is not yours" means in one's own experience, for example. Even if one accurately uses modern and relatable terminology to express the same thing, people nowadays are less likely to understand it in the way that actually frees the mind no matter how much it "makes sense" on the surface.

So the fact that people supported ascetics and teachers of a huge number of completely different, often completely opposite, views and values suggests that there was less delusion? Isn't that the case now? Isn't there the same widespread support for all kinds of religious cults and movements? So maybe it's not a question of the degree of delusion, otherwise people wouldn't support so many different cults, but simply of ordinary religiosity - of the very same ignorance and delusion?

My point was about the fact that no matter how completely different those beliefs back then were, they often shared the relinquishment of the world as a core tenet, and more people were actually *doing* it. The amount of people who are ready to forgo pleasure and comfort in the name of their religion, *whatever* that may be, is lower today than it was back then (or even 100 years ago I'm willing to bet).

There is ultimately delusion in whoever does not see the 4NT, but the prerequisite for seeing the Dhamma is a thorough internal acceptance that sensuality is suffering and renunciation is peaceful (the stepping stone to seeing the same with craving and non-craving in general). The lack of acceptance of this entails a much more obstructive kind of delusion than whether you pray to this deity or that deity, or perform this or that ritual every morning. The latter delusion can be given up simply through sound logic and reasoning; giving up the former delusion requires undoing one's mistaken but deeply rooted attitude towards existence and would take years to achieve.

But is virtue alone enough, no matter how perfect it is? Is the level of a person who strives to observe the five precepts and not to break them even in thought not enough to attain right view?

It's not that keeping precepts is enough; the point is much more nuanced. The mind needs

to feel peace at the thought of giving up everything that's dear to it (which is a nascent first *jhāna*, if you will). If that state is not already there, becoming accustomed to keeping precepts and celibacy *as the primary outlet for valuing renunciation*, not as a way of following some external code of conduct that such and such said is required, is the way to train toward it.

Because what we see here is that people are trying to wash the cloth without understanding where to stop and really start dyeing it, or they don't even know how and what colour to dye it, or they are trying to hide their ignorance and delusion on account of their real lack of knowledge and understanding of the Dhamma behind their immersion in the zeal of washing. Some, in their zeal, go so far as to wash the fabric down to the holes.

Yes, that's because they're not actually renouncing things correctly. They're giving sensuality up with an underlying zeal to attain some other pleasure, and that's just as wrong—it's self mortification and denial, equally rooted in craving. So they need to become aware of that underlying defilement and do away with it in order for their attempts to do less harm than good. You can abandon all your family and possessions and go live under a bridge, but if there's desire for some other pleasure behind that, and an impulsive *aversion* as opposed to dispassion toward the things you gave up, that's not renunciation, and it's still a subtler form of desire.

Things need to be given up because you see for yourself that sensuality is like a poisonous drink with a heavenly taste. Not because the Buddha said so, or because you long and crave for enlightenment to be bestowed upon you in exchange for your house and family, nor because you *hate* sensuality now, which is what most people inadvertently fall into (the second deer herd in MN 25).

Is the reason why people who strive to observe at least five precepts and not to break them even in their thoughts have not yet attained the right views not that they lack virtue, not that their cloth is not clean enough, but that they simply either do not have the correct theoretical knowledge of the Dhamma or do not know how to actually apply it, that is, they do not know how and what colour to dye their already clean enough for now cloth?

Well, there is a genuine possibility of having the wrong dye, which is when your views overtly contradict the Dhamma. But in those who have a reasonably accurate understanding of the Suttas that's not biased to justify some specific gimmicky technique—which seems to be the majority of people I've come across on this forum including those who choose to disagree—that wouldn't be the major obstacle.

It's the extent to which they either (1) feel the opposite of pleasure at just the *thought* of renunciation (2) are convinced that development of mind is about something else (which is often the byproduct of the first) or (3) value renunciation on the surface but with craving in fine print, meaning the hindrances of longing and restlessness are ultimately still there and not even seen.

Lastly, the knowledge of the Dhamma is not something you "apply"; it's knowledge of the

universal nature of any and all experiences that only becomes apparent when the mind is dispassionate towards the entire world, and even the next world (heavens) as the passages show (without having had to drift off into an imaginary different world to achieve that dispassion).

This, not “concentration” in any shape or form, is what is to be understood when it’s said that without abandoning the five hindrances, supramundane understanding is not possible.

## Understanding not-self in not-self

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-01-15 09:51:47

After learning that the aggregates were there on their own for that sense of self to be there, I started thinking this body and this mind aren’t mine, but rather that “I” is theirs.

But I also learned from Ajahn Nyanamoli that one should see “not-self in not self” and not “self in not self”, and at the light of the Puṇṇamasutta or Mūlapariyāyasutta for example, I’m thinking what I expressed in the previous line might be wrong view also.

Puṇṇamasutta SN 22.82:

Here, bhikkhu, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form. He regards feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view comes to be.

Mūlapariyāyasutta MN 1:

He perceives the sensed as the sensed. Having perceived the sensed as the sensed, he conceives himself as the sensed, he conceives himself in the sensed, he conceives himself apart from the sensed, he conceives the sensed to be ‘mine,’ he delights in the sensed. Why is that? Because he has not fully understood it, I say.

He perceives the cognized as the cognized. Having perceived the cognized as the cognized, he conceives himself as the cognized, he conceives himself in the cognized, he conceives himself apart from the cognized, he conceives the cognized to be ‘mine,’ he delights in the cognized. Why is that? Because he has not fully understood it, I say.

There is seeing “in not self” which are the aggregates that are their on their own, but then there also is a need to not see the I-element in this not-self, or otherwise it would be seeing self in not-self, it would be attavada, right? Even if this is only a sense of self?

So is it wrong to think that because there are those aggregates that were already there on their own, that's why this sense of self arose, in the sense that it is "generated" by those aggregates that come together and are "working" together? I feel like this is not seeing "self in [aggregate]" but rather "because aggregates, sense of self", or "self in the sensed/cognized" but rather "because sensed/cognized are there, sense of self is there".

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 06:10:48

It will be clear that when there is avijjā there is avijjā in both parts of our experience, the immediate and the reflexive; for though, in reflexion, experience is divided within itself, it is still one single, even if complex, structure. The effect of this may be seen from the Sabbāsavaṣutta (Majjhima i,2 <M.i,8>) wherein certain wrong views are spoken of. Three of them are: Attanā va attānam sañjānāmi ti; Attanā va anattānam sañjānāmi ti; and Anattanā va attānam sañjānāmi ti. ('With self I perceive self; With self I perceive not-self; With not-self I perceive self.')

A man with avijjā, practising reflexion, may identify 'self' with both reflexive and immediate experience, or with reflexive experience alone, or with immediate experience alone. He does not conclude that neither is 'self', and the reason is clear: it is not possible to get outside avijjā by means of reflexion alone; **for however much a man may 'step back' from himself to observe himself he cannot help taking avijjā with him. There is just as much avijjā in the self-observer as there is in the self-observed.**

[...]

Simply by reflexion the puthujjana can never observe avijjā and at the same time recognize it as avijjā; for in reflexion avijjā is the Judge as well as the Accused, and the verdict is always 'Not Guilty'. In order to put an end to avijjā, which is a matter of recognizing avijjā as avijjā, it is necessary to accept on trust from the Buddha a Teaching that contradicts the direct evidence of the puthujjana's reflexion.

[...]

Thus it will be seen that avijjā in reflexive experience (actual or potential) is the condition for avijjā in immediate experience. It is possible, also, to take a second step back and reflect upon reflexion; but there is still avijjā in this self-observation of self-observation, and we have a third layer of avijjā protecting the first two. And there is no reason in theory why we should stop here; **but however far we go we shall not get beyond avijjā.**

Avijjā is non-knowledge of the four noble truths. Sammāditthi is knowledge of the four noble truths. But sammāditthi is part of the four noble truths. Thus avijjā is non-knowledge of sammāditthi; that is to say, non-knowledge



of knowledge of the four noble truths. But since sammāditthi, which is knowledge of the four noble truths, is part of the four noble truths, so avijjā is non-knowledge of knowledge of knowledge of the four noble truths. And so we can go on indefinitely. But the point to be noted is that each of these successive stages represents an additional layer of (potentially) reflexive avijjā. Non-knowledge of knowledge of the four noble truths is non-knowledge of vijjā, and non-knowledge of vijjā is failure to recognize avijjā as avijjā. Conversely, it is evident that when avijjā is **once recognized anywhere in this structure it must vanish everywhere**; for knowledge of the four noble truths entails knowledge of knowledge of the four noble truths, and vijjā (‘science’) replaces avijjā (‘nescience’) throughout.[n]

—§25, A Note on Paṭiccasamuppāda, Ñāṇavīra Thera

But I also learned from Ajahn Nyanamoli that one should see “not-self in not self” and not “self in not self”

Therefore, it’s not like one “should see not-self with not-self”, as if it’s a matter of choice. One needs to start by recognizing that one is by definition unable to do that until one is a sotāpanna. Acknowledging that is the only way to have a chance to see what “self” actually is.

Otherwise, one is automatically taking one’s present conception of the problem for granted, even if one is approaching it through the Suttas on paper. That means that whatever is seen to be “not-self” will still involve a subtler form of ownership that manages to elude one’s insufficient threshold of recognition for what “self” is.

The “regarding” and “conceiving” referred to in the Suttas you quoted are not at all something that can simply be figured out and then stopped. Rather, any attempt to figure out how to stop it is happening within the experience that is on some level regarded as self right then and there.

The only direct choice one can make that could eventually make the sense of self apparent is that of not acting out of hindrances when they are recognized to be the motivation behind one’s action, in this case the attempt to figure out the principle in question.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-18 07:07:27 (in reply to a comment not included)**

The application of the “wrong order” of things is an active (albeit subtle) ongoing activity, and if I’m understanding this correctly, the oft-mentioned “appropriation”/“ownership” that a puthujjana perpetrates, so to speak, is the act of “assuming” followed by “maintaining” that assumption from moment to moment that Bhikkhu Ninoslav Ñāṇamoli is talking about here.

Yes, it is an “activity” in the sense that they’re responsible for it, and that it can ultimately be brought to an end. But there is no way for them to just “stop it”, for that would require

them to be *aware* of the activity, and it's precisely because of their inability to even know its presence that the activity is there.

Also, it's not like the assumption is being maintained "moment to moment", implying that you could "catch" it and temporarily be free from assumption. That's exactly why we translate it as "assumption" (which is also etymologically accurate) rather than "clinging". You can choose to not cling and then later on end up clinging to the same thing again, but the abandonment of an assumption is a permanent, one-shot deal.

There cannot be a single instant, from the moment the puthujjana begins to practice the Dhamma up to when they become a sotāpanna, that the assumption of self was not present.

## Question regarding right and the wrong interpretations of mindfulness, according Nyanamoli.

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** meshinthesky 2024-01-14 16:59:18

I recently read *The only way to Jhana*, and found it really useful in order to further appreciate the whole teachings Buddha asked us to commit in order to attain right view.

So, I have been reading a bit about the interpretations of Nyanamoli on the suttas, specially on how to practice meditation. It's quite clear that he regards most of nowadays Buddhism meditation techniques as not being aligned with Buddha's teaching for the main reason of not getting right what Buddha meant by mindfulness.

Yet, I fail to see the why such meditation techniques are wrong in their understanding mindfulness (according Nyanamoli view). From its Peripheral Awareness, we've got this description of right mindfulness

We need to stress that this is something that requires development. It's not something that can be just "figured out", or read once and made sense of. It requires a diligent repetition of "stepping back" when over-attending one's experience as a whole. And then "stepping in" when ignoring it (under-attending it, forgetting about the background). So, it takes time and effort in order for it to be correctly discerned and recognized.

The problem with common practice of meditation is that people are encouraged to get "absorbed" into the particular "meditation object". The practice becomes a form of focusing on the foreground at the expense of everything else. And not just that, people end up focusing on the objects twice as hard. This is because their view of meditation is to look and perceive the "momentary" foreground (the whole idea of "observing 'sensations'"). Then within that they try to perceive even more particular things. So it's not just the domain of the foreground, but the content proliferates further too. In cases like this, the 'background', as a foundation of mindfulness that needs to be understood, is even further obscured

[...] this type of mindfulness of the background that's simultaneous with the presently arisen phenomenon, results in the establishment of mind.

For instance, in the anapana method taught by Goenka (my only experience with Buddhism-tagged meditation), one is asked to follow the breath and be aware of the touch of the breath in the area around the nostrils.

[This meditation is not what it is described in the anapanasati sutta. Yet,] In such meditation, isn't the breath the background/anchor we are asked not to lose sight of, while the particulars sensations of the breath is the foreground/arisen phenomenon we are asked to contemplate upon, while not reacting, not classifying them according our tastes, and so on.

Why such meditation (and other similars) are not the right mindfulness? As per my understanding, it fits into Nyanamoli right mindfulness definition and description. What I am missing?

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-15 05:26:40**

Why such meditation (and other similars) are not the right mindfulness? As per my understanding, it fits into Nyanamoli right mindfulness definition and description. What I am missing?

Under that Buddha's own definition, meditation (bhāvanā), be it Anapanasati or anything else is the cultivation of the 7 enlightenment factors, and these exist only for a stream-enterer.

So in the end, the problem is not **what** a person is practicing per se. The point is not that if you do AN's "method" instead, you will be practicing properly. If only it were that easy.

Meditation is the further development of the cessation of suffering that person has already understood. Thus, if they don't see the cessation of suffering, it follows that whatever meditation they're doing will be about something else (managing\*,\* running away from suffering, or getting a separate pleasure to cancel it out). Whether or not they regard it to be in line with the Four Noble Truths or not is not a valid criterion, because the point is that they haven't seen those truths yet to begin with. In fact, an attempt to cultivate the 7 enlightenment factors when one still hasn't understood what enlightenment entails taking one's current idea of what enlightenment and suffering are for granted.

And that is really the issue. Anyone can do as many meditation techniques as they like, but for their own benefit, they shouldn't confuse that with the Buddha's teaching, because they will then not make the effort to find out what the Dhamma is. They will instead be obtaining various pleasant experiences and emotional reinforcement out of doing exactly what they've been doing before they took up the practice: seeking pleasure and shying away from displeasure. A noble disciple, on the other hand, meditates by *abandoning craving*, because they know and see what that is (and again, anyone can *think* that's what

they're doing, but that's where self-honesty about one's level of development comes in; if one truly has understood what craving is, one should be able to not suffer regardless of whether one meditates or not, in any situation whatsoever).

So what a person should do is not turn Ajahn Nyanamoli's instructions into another technique that they blindly follow, but strive to see for themselves what suffering is and the way out of it, and what wholesome is and why it is so, and what unwholesome is and why it is so. Only when that is seen internally beyond doubt is one able to abandon unwholesome states, which is what meditation is.

“There are, mendicants, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, mendicants, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: ‘Bad conduct of body, speech, or mind has a bad, painful result in both this life and the next.’ Reflecting like this, they give up bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection. *[this is what a person can do, so as to eventually partake in the below:]*

**And what, mendicants, is the power of development (bhāvanā)? In this context, the power of development is the power of the trainees (sekha).** Relying on the power of a trainee, you give up greed, hate, and delusion. Having abandoned them, you don't do anything unskillful, or practice anything bad. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers.”

**(next Sutta:)**

[...] And what, mendicants, is the power of development? It's when a mendicant develops the awakening factors of recollection, discernment of phenomena, effort, joy, calm, composure, and equanimity, which rely on seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripen in relinquishment. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers.”

—AN 2.11

**“And what, bhikkhus, is the method by means of which a bhikkhu who is a trainee, standing on the plane of a trainee, understands: ‘I am a trainee’?**

“Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who is a trainee understands as it really is: ‘This is suffering’; he understands as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering’; he understands as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering’; he understands as it really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’ This is a method by means of which a bhikkhu who is a trainee, standing on the plane of a trainee, understands: ‘I am a trainee.’ ...

—SN 48.53

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 04:02:49 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Yes, I know my reply didn't directly answer the question. The thing is,

To really understand what to do with awareness and attention

This is not the reason why one form of meditation is right and another is wrong. As I pointed out, it's not like if you direct your attention in "our" way instead of the others, you will be practicing right mindfulness. Without total self-honesty as to the motivation behind one's entire project of meditation, and without acknowledging that one's present understanding of things (with which any "way of attending" would be taken on) is precisely what's responsible for one's suffering, any instruction will be taken the wrong way, i.e. it will be just another one of the endless ways of trying to manage suffering. And that's why back in the Buddha's day there was no need to talk about "how" to direct one's attention; the level of self-honesty that they had, which is very rare nowadays, bypasses the need for any such instruction.

If you strip Ajahn Nyanamoli's teachings from this intrinsic context, there is no fundamental difference between it and basically any other practice person might engage in, and that's when "what works for me" becomes the criterion. Whether one focuses on their nostrils or practices a more "open/peripheral awareness" is not an ultimately relevant distinction, and there is ample room for self-deception and stable maintenance of wrong view in both.

Thus, the closest to an instruction that can be prescribed in an unqualified manner to any individual is to learn how to be aware of the intentions behind any action whatsoever, big or small. Instead of trying to "be aware of the breath as a peripheral context instead of a foreground object", or anything else talked about in the Suttas, which can very well be done for wrong reasons, a person should become aware of the motivation behind them wanting to be aware of anything at all, and learn to see whether there is passion, aversion, or muddledness in that intention.

To the extent that they can be aware of such inclinations, they will over time begin to recognize the true reason why they suffer, instead of performing this mindfulness or the other to lock the stable door after the horse was already stolen: deal with the suffering caused by the same unwholesome intentions that are being proliferated due to nothing but a simple overlooking of their presence—suffering that could've been *uprooted* instead of *managed* by recognizing those intentions and withdrawing from them from the very start.

One would then not have to even *try* to be at peace by doing this or that, because the root of any possible disturbance is gone.

Every single approach the Buddha taught, from the most rudimentary to the most refined states of samādhi, is about nothing other than recognizing intentions and abandoning them.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-16 07:16:15 (in reply to a comment not included)**

A side note, if you'll indulge me Bhante. I wonder if you can speak on the tendency now to translate lobha as passion?

“Lobha, dosa, moha” is actually less frequent in the Pāli; most often it is “rāga, dosa, moha”.

“Lobha”, which is “greed”, does have courser connotations of material possessions and such, and the Buddha is by far not the only one to speak in favor of abandoning “greed”. But the abandoning of \*rāga—\*for which “passion” is the literal translation, and which is much subtler and applies to the five aggregates in general (MN 109, *chandarāga* for the five aggregates)—takes way more than just “not being greedy”.

## **Moderation in eating**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** TubularScrapple 2024-01-14 07:09:23

Wonder what everyone's thoughts on this matter are.

As a non-monastic, who is keen to be virtuous. It has always struck me as a bit unnecessary that someone trying to keep ‘eight’ precepts at home should only eat before afternoon ‘at the proper time’. Is there any functional reason why I couldn't obtain the same benefits having say lunch and dinner, or breakfast and dinner (but nothing in between)?

It strikes me, that the timing is not all that important (in fact as a person living at home, I cannot see how it could be). But rather, the moderation aspect is what is important, and even more fundamentally, to not eat for pleasure. Then again, maybe I'm just trying to bargain with myself, because it is more convenient for me on some days to have an evening meal than a lunch, or because I do not have time for breakfast or a midday meal on some days.

I fully admit, I don't understand what is correct here. So keen to get some advice.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-14 10:33:06**

But rather, the moderation aspect is what is important, and even more fundamentally, to not eat for pleasure.

Yes, that's it. The custom of eating in the morning was shaped mainly by the environmental circumstances of the early Saṅgha. There are some practical benefits of doing it that way though, such as not having to think about food for the rest of the day. There might be some physiological benefits to it as well.

But ultimately, the most important thing is that at each meal is regarded as if it were one's only child on the plate, and the sole purpose of eating it is to survive—no enjoyment sought from it whatsoever.

That attitude is much easier to establish (and the wrong attitudes easier to pick up on) when one eats only once a day. All the potential desire and wrong reasons for eating get concentrated into one moment, and if they're there at all, it will be impossible not to see them.

Of course, there is also the aspect of simply putting up with physical discomfort, although that's only part of the picture, and that can be done for wrong reasons too. Otherwise, all-out fasting would be the recommendation.

“Now, bhikkhus, suppose that I had eaten, refused more, had my fill, finished, had enough, had what I needed, and some alms-food was left over to be thrown away. Then two bhikkhus arrived hungry and weak, and I told them: ‘Bhikkhus, I have eaten, refused more... had what I needed, but there is this alms-food of mine left over to be thrown away; eat if you like; if you do not then I shall throw it now where there is no greenery or drop into water where there is no life’; then one bhikkhu thought: ‘The Blessed One has eaten, refused more... had what he needed, but there is this alms-food of the Blessed One left over to be thrown away; if we do not eat it the Blessed One will throw it away... but this has been said by the Blessed One: “Bhikkhus, be my heirs in Dhamma, not my heirs in material things”: now this alms-food is one of the material things; suppose that instead of eating this alms-food I pass the night and day hungry and weak?’ and instead of eating that alms-food he passed that night and day hungry and weak; then the second bhikkhu thought: ‘The Blessed One has eaten... had what he needed, but there is this alms-food of the Blessed One’s left over to be thrown away... Suppose that I eat this alms-food and pass the night and day neither hungry nor weak?’ And after eating that alms-food he passed the night and day not hungry and weak. Now although that bhikkhu by eating that alms-food passed the night and day neither hungry nor weak, yet the first bhikkhu is more to be respected and commended by me. Why is that? Because that will for long conduce to his fewness of wishes, contentment, effacement, easy support and arousal of energy.

MN 3

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-14 10:41:32 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Sure. There is a whole talk on it in fact: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmYzJSvZ5jE>

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-14 13:36:49 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Which seems to me to also be what craving (the pressure to act of what is felt) is, am I wrong?

No—in fact, how both seem to be the synonymous shows that *paṭiccasamuppāda* is not a temporal “sequence”. All of these “factors” are present altogether, standing in support of each other, and it is impossible—as long as there is ignorance—to have pressure present without there being craving to *act* on account of it too. Only a noble disciple can be in that situation, whereas for a puthujjana, the only way not to crave is for the pressure/feeling to not be there (by either preventing it from the start or by means of some management strategy that dampens the pressure; this is what meditation is about for most people, and even virtue and restraint when taken wrongly). That’s where the recognition of “liability to suffering” comes in: you might have successfully dealt with the pressure *for now* through this or that “skillful means”, but the fact that pressure can arise unannounced in the future entails that, for a puthujjana, craving will do so too, and thus suffering automatically.

Does that mean that when there is the sense of ownership, phassa entails cravings by default?

Yes. If there *were* no craving to *act* out of the pressure, you couldn’t call it “pressure” or even “contact” anymore. In order for it to qualify as “pressure” in the first place, there needs to be craving in response to it, on account of a misguided ownership of things that arise on their own (ignorance).

So it goes both ways, pressure is determined as what it is by craving (which is always *already there*, 24/7; it doesn’t “arise” at some mysterious point), and conversely, craving could never be there if there were no pressure.

“Well then, friend, I will make up a simile for you, for some intelligent people here understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile. Just as two sheaves of reeds might stand leaning against each other, so too, consciousness is in dependence of name-and-form; name-and-form is in dependence of consciousness; the six sense base is in dependence on name-and-form... such is the production of this entire mass of suffering.

“If, friend, one were to remove one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall, and if one were to remove the other sheaf, the first would fall. So too, when name-and-form ceases, consciousness ceases; when consciousness ceases, name-and-form ceases; when name-and-form ceases, the six sense base ceases ... such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.



## Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-15 06:19:31 (*in reply to a comment not included*)

The greenery part is just due to a Vinaya rule that originated from ancient Indian culture regarding plants as sentient beings somehow, and criticizing the monks for not exercising the same care toward them. Of course, even a layperson should be careful not to knowingly throw water where there may be insects, etc., which may result in their death.

## Reflection on my personal hypocrisy

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-01-14 02:39:23

Before officially leaving a large portion of the internet for solitude and contemplation, I wanted to do a reflection first and get some advice here if possible.

I was pretty disappointed with my behavior in one post. I felt that the debate was getting too heated and aggressive, and that it would be beneficial if we could just stick to the Dhamma, so I created a post requesting if it'd be possible for the individuals to resort to DMs. But a poster rightly mentioned it wasn't my place to police speech, and if I recall correctly, they told me to reflect on why I want others to stop. This was correct so I deleted the request. But it's thanks to that person that this entire reflection is possible.

The uncompromising stance on virtue by the entire HH community and videos has been immensely helpful to me at all times; when I'm keeping virtue and when I'm not. I always knew I could turn to this community or the videos to be fired up and motivated with regards to keeping virtue. But to the extent I was relying on this community, or in fact, *anything*, my virtue would be, to that very same extent, *liable to change*. It's almost as if 'true' virtue has to go *beyond* phenomena; at which point, there is no longer any *doing* of virtue, rather, just being housed in it. This is at least what it feels like for the 5 + celibacy; I'm not *doing* them at all, they're just a natural abiding where I *know* stepping out of would just be for my own harm, though of course not having the right view, the recognition of the extent of the harm is questionable.

In the debate on pedagogy, it was this uncompromising stance on virtue that was at risk that I wanted to protect. And I felt that that put my very own virtue at risk, which was one among the many reasons for creating the post I deleted. But I after the poster (sorry, I wish I remembered their tag) told me to reflect on why I was requesting that, I realized, this is essentially the opposite of this attitude on a more general level:

*Not* depending on one's family for happiness, i.e., emotional abandonment of one's family, one *does not* expect them to *be* thus, *not be* thus; having abandoned any such expectations pertaining to change that are just expectations pertaining to things-in-the-world being in accordance to how one wants, there cannot be anger, there cannot *not* be gratitude towards one's family for what they've done

Except, this is "depending on this group for one's virtue" one wishes for things-in-the-

world to be thus, or not be thus. To the extent that dependence remains, there is desire, there is the *possibility* of anger and ill-will on account of not getting what *I* want. And ill-will was definitely one of the possibilities that could've occurred here had the debate persisted; there was a general irritable state of mind as the debate wasn't coming to a stop. Not only does the six-sense based body, i.e., the world, need abandonment, but there also needs to be abandonment of the dependence of virtue on anything but itself.

But I noticed this is clearly me being the very thing I was accusing others of: a hypocrite. I don't take a particular issue with this since I've made it clear to myself from the start, before the Dhamma, of my hypocrisy in life in general, and my inability to get out of that. Undoing hypocrisy and contradiction on the level of actions and undoing it on the level of one's theoretical system or understanding of the Dhamma are two very clearly different things. I've admitted so many times: the totality of my being is a contradiction, a hypocrisy. But I just can't seem to *ever* get out of it.

I distinctly remember far before my encounter with the Dhamma the nights of genuine despair encountering with epistemological nihilism – the fact that I can't seem to arrive at any definitive knowledge about anything, and its implication that my entire way of being and world-view is possibly a contradiction with what is or could be 'right', but is beyond my reach. That still remains. But with the addition of actual nihilism that has remained implicit in my way of interaction with the world since I started getting mental and physical problems.

Although virtue is being kept itself, I just came to these set of behaviors before my encounter with the Dhamma through seeing how much harm breaking it caused. I still have a permeating sense of meaninglessness that prevents me from undertaking more than 5+CL for longer than a month. Or rather, a more precise way to put it: the sense of meaninglessness is my excuse for not undertaking virtue further. But this sense of meaninglessness is actually itself a contradiction – a contradiction that encourages further hypocrisy in me. Why can this meaninglessness not be applied to not keeping virtue? Why is it that *keeping* virtue is meaningless, whilst *not keeping* virtue *isn't* meaningless? Why is there selectiveness?

There's a *huge* arsenal of excuses I use to prevent further development in virtue. Another big one is the fact that this minute development that I *have* made through encountering the Dhamma has already made me significantly incapable of suffering amidst things that would previously drive me to seriously contemplating suicide: pure OCD, chronic health problems that still persist, disagreements with others, consistently being alone, etc. Generally speaking, I've never been happier than this in my life, and keeping virtue robs me of that happiness, and so I ask myself "do I *really* need to keep this when I've already developed myself enough"?

But then I see posts such as this (putting aside pedagogical concerns of such kinds of writing):

Not taking the teaching with any level of personal seriousness, avoiding making any significant modifications to one's lifestyle and worldview is simply the perpetual delaying and putting off of the only truly effectual work. "I will put

an end to ignorance and craving...tomorrow.” But for the coward, tomorrow never comes. A coward either dies to their cowardice *today*, or they live forever in hell.

And all of a sudden, all sense of meaninglessness ceases, all questions of “do I *really* need to develop more?” cease, and this coward suddenly has the motivation to undertake all the precepts. But this is not everlasting. This is still virtue dependent on *something*, and that *something* will eventually come to an end; so will virtue, if it remains on it.

How does this coward develop virtue *not* dependent on anything? Where is there cessation of the inherently contradictory nihilism used to justify putting back development in virtue? Where is there cessation of the hypocrisy and contradictory nature of this coward?

I wish development in virtue were as simple as the press of a button – I would press it immediately.

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-14 04:44:17**

How does this coward develop virtue *not* dependent on anything? Where is there cessation of the inherently contradictory nihilism used to justify putting back development in virtue? Where is there cessation of the hypocrisy and contradictory nature of this coward?

I wish development in virtue were as simple as the press of a button – I would press it immediately.

That struggle, though it may not seem like it, is exactly where the development of the mind takes place.

Rather than trying to summon up a sense of “courage” that will make the virtue easy, which can only be done by holding on to an external motivation for keeping the virtue (“oral transmission, lineage, testament, canonical authority, logic, inference, reasoned contemplation, acceptance of a view after consideration, the appearance of competence, or the attitude “This is our teacher”—AN 3.65), it’s about not breaking the precepts despite the trepidation that arises. Only then are you learning to truly “be an island unto yourself”.

Trying to *get rid* of the mind’s apprehension to the training instead of being heedful *in spite of it* means “not enduring things on the right level”.

Thus, a true “coward” and “hypocrite” in the ultimate sense is one who is keen to suppress their (mental state of) cowardice because it’s unpleasant, instead of seeing it as something that has arisen on its own and that they should allow to persist without acting out of it. It’s still the appropriation of an arisen phenomenon in the end, and it’s a good example of how one can easily drift into denial and self-mortification in a subtle way, which is the natural, equally ignorant knee-jerk response to the remorse that comes from indulgence. It’s “hypocritical” because one is displaying heedfulness and a “sharp” sense of urgency

*on the surface* while deep down all of it is rooted in still resisting displeasure on a subtler level.

Virtue ceases to depend on anything when one understands as it is that the entire mind (including its unwillingness to keep the virtue) does not belong to one, and *that*, as opposed to having the mind the way one wants, is the cessation of suffering. And the way to that is to keep the virtue strictly while enduring whatever the mind feels. The former is certainly not easy, but it can be achieved by a lot of people (and for the wrong reasons too); the latter is where the true pitfall lies.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-15 06:58:40 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Yet this feeling of me as a person being negated and destroyed whenever anyone points out a mistake still persists.

That's because the true "identity" (i.e., self view) is in the craving for displeasure not to be there, not in whether being proven wrong displeases you or not and how much. For as long as you expect displeasure not to arise or to cease (and pleasure to arise or continue), regardless of on account of *what*, you are liable to being "negated and destroyed" in the *true* sense.

**[deleted by user]**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** None 2024-01-11 18:20:18

[removed]

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-11 20:33:49**

This passage essentially defines what qualifies as "early Buddhism" in HH teachings:

These books of the Pali Canon correctly represent the Buddha's Teaching, and can be regarded as trustworthy throughout. (Vinayapitaka:) Suttavibhanga, Mahāvagga, Cūlavagga; (Suttapitaka:) Dīghanikāya, Majjhimanikāya, Samyuttanikāya, Anguttaranikāya, Suttanipāta, Dhammapada, Udāna, Itivuttaka, Theratherīgāthā. (The Jātaka verses may be authentic, but they do not come within the scope of these Notes.) No other Pali books whatsoever should be taken as authoritative; and ignorance of them (and particularly of the traditional Commentaries) may be counted a positive advantage, as leaving less to be unlearned.

—Notes on Dhamma, Ñāṇavīra Thera

The list is widely agreed upon by modern scholars too. The Āgamas are also probably trustworthy, but the issue is there don't seem to be many English translations available,

and the existing ones are likely to be biased. There is less room for scrutiny of translations compared to Pāli and its texts which have been studied extensively for over a hundred years.

## Craving for being and non-being

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** GachiOnFire 2024-01-10 20:48:14

Hello, in MN 9 it is said:

And what is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of suffering.

Here, should one understand “craving for being, and craving for non-being” as only craving for *being* and *non-being*, or is it rather to be understood in the sense of craving for *being this*, or not *being that*, for example being smarter, or not being hypocritical?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-11 06:09:05

For a mind that is not free from sensuality, wanting to be this or not wanting to be that, which many people might take *not* to be sensual craving but the other two, is accompanied by the same type of craving that would be there toward coarse sense pleasures. *Every* single experience they have is enveloped within that.

On the other hand, for a mind that is free from sensuality, an intention-toward or intention-against the same things (excluding sexual intercourse and food) would be accompanied by craving for being or for non-being. For an Arahant, an intention-toward or intention-against the same things, excluding what is against celibacy and the precepts which they are incapable of, does not entail any craving at all.

For example, even things like the wish for others to respect them and not despise them would come within sensuality for a puthujjana, whereas for an anāgāmi, that *same intention* would always be the subtler type of craving for being and non-being, which is why the suffering they would experience on account of that vastly subtler craving is practically nil. So it's not, as is widely viewed, that some intentions are *in themselves* sensual (apart from what is abandoned through the precepts) and some are the other two, and that as a puthujjana you can have either one or the other. That would be the quintessential mistake of placing the defilements in the experiences rather than the mind beneath them. The defiled mind of one still subject to sensual craving follows every experience like a wheel follows the ox's foot (Dhammapada 1).

In the end, sensual craving is what *makes you human*. That's why the one who is free from that never returns to this world (the literal meaning of “anāgāmi”).

So instead of trying to abstractly conceive what the two other types of craving are, one

must strive to abandon one's human way of existing (kāmaḥava). One will then realize, *if* one is not an Arahant already, that there is a very refined form of non-indifference left, meaning craving for phenomena to be or not to be (or, alternatively, in terms of bhava instead of taṇhā, material being and immaterial being).

Edit: Life and death, often taken to be being and non-being, are in themselves phenomena, so that's only one of the things an anāgāmi would crave for or against respectively (though every other desire would be subordinate to that). For a puthujjana, the desire to live and not die is necessarily a sensual desire, and thus they experience that much more anxiety in the face of death, and that much more suffering when death actually comes.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-11 14:06:16 (in reply to a comment not included)**

I think I still have a bad habit of understanding “sensitivity” or “sensory pleasures” as “that of the flesh”, or “of the five senses”, but is what I'm missing : the fact that it includes the sixth sense that is encompassing craving towards anything of the flesh, and also anything of the mind

Yes, that's the common mistake. Craving for sensory pleasure should not be confused with craving for *physical* pleasure, which is not so difficult to abandon by anyone who takes on the 8 precepts and then develops even a modicum of understanding as a puthujjana.

so basically craving towards anything that makes you human?

What makes you human (i.e. a sensory being) is the *way* in which you crave in regard to phenomena, not specific phenomena you crave for. Apart from the craving for physical pleasure which is the coarsest level, sensory craving is more like an underlying context in regard to *anything*, and *that's* what makes you human. For example, it's the way in which you would care about what other people think about you—not the same way in which an anāgāmi would care, which causes almost no suffering in comparison (the other two types of craving). Or, again, the *way* in which you would crave to continue living and not die, all of which is due to the assumption of sensitivity (kāmaupādāna) that an anāgāmi is free from.

One must stop acting toward specific things like the obvious physical pleasures, but that's only so that the actual craving at its root can be recognized, which is much more general and deeply rooted than any particular sensory objects you restrain yourself from.

## **How to understand Ven. Nānavīra on PS in light of SN 12.2?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** 1hullofaguy 2024-01-08 18:13:56

Ven Nānavīra has a unique interpretation of PS that has been very influential, especially in the HH teachings. He rejects that jāti in the PS formula refers to rebirth, as the Theravāda tradition has classically understood it, and instead asserts it simply means birth. He explains the implications of this in his “Notes on Dhamma,” writing:

“The puthujjana knows that people are born and die; and since he thinks ‘my self exists’ so he also thinks ‘my self was born’ and ‘my self will die’. The puthujjana sees a ‘self’ to whom the words birth and death apply.[d] In contrast to the puthujjana, the arahat has altogether got rid of asmimāna (not to speak of attavāda—see MAMA), and does not even think ‘I am’. This is bhavanirodha, cessation of being. And since he does not think ‘I am’ he also does not think ‘I was born’ or ‘I shall die’. In other words, he sees no ‘self’ or even ‘I’ for the words birth and death to apply to.”

Thus, the cessation of these nidānā refer not to the cessation of literal birth and death, but rather the cessation of the attavāda which leads one to the view that they have a self which is subject to birth and death.

However, when we turn to the suttas, in the Paṭiccasamuppādavibhaṅgasutta we find a description of jāti and jarāmarana that seemingly describes quite literal birth, aging and death:

“And what, bhikkhus, is aging-and-death? The aging of the various beings in the various orders of beings, their growing old, brokenness of teeth, greyness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of vitality, degeneration of the faculties: this is called aging. The passing away of the various beings from the various orders of beings, their perishing, breakup, disappearance, mortality, death, completion of time, the breakup of the aggregates, the laying down of the carcass: this is called death. Thus this aging and this death are together called aging-and-death.

And what, bhikkhus, is birth? The birth of the various beings into the various orders of beings, their being born, descent into the womb, production, the manifestation of the aggregates, the obtaining of the sense bases. This is called birth.”

Vibhanga suttas such as this aim to definitively clarify the main terms of their subject. So, these descriptions should be viewed as quite significant and central to our understanding of PS. However, the seem difficult to rectify with Ven Ñānavīra’s interpretation of PS as they describe literal birth and death rather than the view of having a self which is susceptible to birth and death, as Ñānavīra claims.

I would greatly appreciate the help of those in this community who have greater knowledge and understanding of these matters than me in clarifying how to rectify these two texts.

My thanks ☸☸☸

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-09 05:38:18**

Thus, the cessation of these nidānā refer not to the cessation of literal birth and death, but rather the cessation of the attavāda which leads one to the view that they have a self which is subject to birth and death.

The starting point must be to not think that because this “makes sense”, one is in a position to either accept or reject what Ñānavīra is describing. At the starting point of ig-

norance, when one hears the expression “cessation of the view that there is a self [to whom birth and death apply]”, one is inevitably interpreting it through annihilationism (SN 12.15). It is impossible to even conceive what “cessation of self view” means without having understood *paṭiccasamuppāda* and having the Right View. For a puthujjana, cessation of *attavāda* is always necessarily misconceived as cessation of some kind of form, feeling, perception, intention, or consciousness, and never seen rightly as the cessation of *upādāna* regarding the aggregates (MN 109).

“But sir, is assumption (*upadāna*) the exact same thing as the five assumed aggregates? Or is assumption one thing and the five assumed aggregates another?”

“Neither. Rather, the delight and passion for the five assumed aggregates is the assumption there.”

—MN 109

What this means is that it’s more accurate as a puthujjana to think that the exact same birth and death one knows are still there when there is no self-view. But the free from self-view is not yoked, through their own misconceiving and ignorance, to that to which that same birth and death inevitably apply. Thus, they are not yoked to the suffering inherent in having been born and in dying, not that those things don’t *exist* anymore or that they are now somehow pleasant.

If they feel a pleasant feeling, they feel it unyoked.

If they feel an unpleasant feeling, they feel it unyoked.

If they feel a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, they feel it unyoked.

This is called a trained noble disciple who is unyoked from birth, old age, and death, from sorrows, lamentations, pains, dissatisfactions, and tribulations; who is unyoked from suffering, I say.

—SN 36.6

Vibhanga suttas such as this aim to definitively clarify the main terms of their subject. So, these descriptions should be viewed as quite significant and central to our understanding of PS. However, they seem difficult to rectify with Ven Ñāṇavīra’s interpretation of PS as they describe literal birth and death rather than the view of having a self which is susceptible to birth and death, as Ñāṇavīra claims.

They seem contradictory only when Ñāṇavīra’s points are misinterpreted.



Those passages are very well describing the phenomena of birth, aging, and death that a noble disciple is no longer subject to. Birth *is* the “descent into the womb, manifestation of the aggregates, etc.”, and one who sees the Dhamma is not *subject* to that (is “unyoked” from it as above) even though their birth (together with its inseparable liability to aging and death) is still there being *experienced*.

And of course, they will experience even more births, agings, and deaths if they don’t become an Arahant in this life. but none of that they are “yoked” to unlike the puthujjana who does have self view, who does wail and lament when the aggregates change in undesirable ways (SN 22.1).

Ñāṇavīra’s interpretation does not reject the wider context that applies across multiple lives—it *includes* it, and the application across multiple lives (which is still very different from the “three-life interpretation”) remains secondary to the actual principle, which is independent of time.

That is very different from saying that Ñāṇavīra’s PS *only* applies to the present life like some sort of secular Buddhism, which is how it’s often misapprehended.

## Where is the suffering

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** NAD1701 2024-01-07 13:35:45

Scenario: I’m having a discussion with a person and they say something that upsets me.  
1. I am angry. 2. The interaction is displeasing. 3. I am suffering.

Questions: 1. Where is the anger? Where is the unpleasantness? Where is the suffering?  
2. How would having Yoniso Manasikara not lead to some/all of these arising?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-08 15:36:16

1. Anger is a result of the underlying, unrecognized attitude of resistance against the unpleasantness of hearing something upsetting. Unpleasantness is in hearing something upsetting. Suffering is that very resistance against the unpleasantness (craving).

Thus, resistance is what is on you; unpleasantness arises on its own when the senses experience certain things (*what* things specifically is irrelevant and will depend on the individual).

2. An angry mental state is an indirect consequence of that which is on you (the resistance), so it should not be gotten rid of directly. Instead, you need to discern how it is that you are resisting the displeasure, and how to “endure it on the right level” instead (this is yoniso manasikāra). Then the anger will be indirectly deprived of its fuel and eventually fade, while the unpleasantness remains.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-11 07:19:33 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

It means to refrain from trying to get rid of the unpleasant feeling that arose on its own when you heard something upsetting, but also not acting out of it—by retorting angrily, for example. Only then can the resistance be abandoned, and the anger which was a *consequence* of that resistance eventually fades. It cannot be directly dispelled because that would be rooted in the same resistance, just now against the displeasure of experiencing anger instead of the displeasure of the upsetting words.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-11 14:21:48 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

Is it just a case of repeating this and eventually the anger will not arise, as I feel that I haven't resisted' the unpleasantness, but at some level I obviously have!

No, it's not "just a case of repeating it" because one starts out by not even knowing or recognizing what the resistance is (not seeing the Four Noble Truths). Only a stream-enterer can "just repeat" what they already know.

So the work really consists of dispelling one's wrong views about what that resistance/craving actually is and thus getting the Right View, not of just repeatedly cultivating what one presently thinks non-resistance is. It might make sense intellectually, but the very fact that there is still the issue of anger to any degree means non-resistance hasn't been understood on the right level. You can prevent yourself from acting out by body and speech as a matter of choice, but not acting out by mind is something much subtler that only comes with discernment, not volitionally.

## **Giving into pressure**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** Single-Collar1393 2024-01-04 20:12:05

I am here to seek help. I have been listening to HH for past 4 years. And for the past year, I have been constantly giving into pressures. I give into pressure even when I am fully aware that I'm making a bad choices and hate my self when giving into them. This has made me realize that every-time pressure arise, which it will everyday, I will give into them. Due to this, I am self-loathing and thinking about ending myself. What could I do?

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-05 16:13:22**

It's important to be clear that true abandonment of unwholesome habits and not acting out of pressures *has* to be unpleasant because it essentially comes down to freeing oneself from the most deeply rooted addiction of all. An addict who does not experience withdrawal symptoms is necessarily still taking the same drug in one form or another.

So instead of hoping to find a way for the undertaking of wholesome behavior not to be painful initially (which tends to be the reason behind the sense of “I can’t do this”), it’s about taking it on the pain to the degree that one can without being overwhelmed. If you still cannot keep the five precepts, you can work towards that goal one by one.

Also, one has to recognize the previous careless choices that make one end up being overwhelmed with pressure in the first place. A person can never accidentally find themselves with a mind so full of lust that (it feels like) they cannot help but give in; it’s always because, when the mind was not *as* lustful, they chose to go down a path where lust would increase. Restraining those easily ignored choices from the start would’ve been far less painful than restraining later once the mind has already gone far off the rails, which is when people usually care to remember the practice.

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-06 07:19:34 (*in reply to a comment not included*)**

The contradiction is because you seem to be interpreting “unwholesome habits” on a less fundamental level than what I was referring to. Ambition for instance is not on the same footing as passion, aversion, and delusion; it’s one of the many possible *side effects* of those root defilements (which are what I meant with “unwholesome habits and acting out of pressures”, “habits” probably not being the best term in hindsight, as it has connotations of superficiality).

A person who gives up their worldly ambitions upon recognizing how useless they are, if genuinely they don’t feel any discomfort on account of it, either didn’t actually have an addiction (passion/*rāga*) proper beneath that specific habit they gave up, or happens to still be carrying the same underlying defilement(s) but now in the form of some external motivation or ideal instead, in light of which such things are considered useless (e.g., their idea of the Dhamma and renunciation).

That doesn’t mean that one shouldn’t give habits up unless the pain of withdrawal is felt because, in this example, continuing to proliferate one’s worldly ambitions would further nourish the underlying defilements a lot more than clinging to (the right) virtue and duty, so the latter is undoubtedly the better alternative. But one should remember that until that withdrawal has been endured, the addiction—meaning the actual passion, aversion, and delusion; the tendency to act out of *pressure* in the most general sense—remains there, and only when that level is addressed is one truly purifying the mind instead of moving the problem to a better place, so to speak.

What I was referring to (“endurance on the right level”) is the only surefire way to abandon things, even superficial habits, let alone their roots, as ultimately one might not be able to re-direct one’s passion to an external ideal or goal so much that the relinquishment of the old bad behaviors doesn’t hurt anymore. That “assisted renunciation” should also not be encouraged, as it’s already all too likely to happen anyway, and it’s where the vast majority of people who have (duly) purified their behavior never manage to get out of (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*).

(And of course, if one starts relishing the pain of withdrawal and romanticizing the whole thing, that also becomes another opportunity for the passion to just “move” instead of being truly abandoned. The “weight” is not being felt on the right level anymore; the right level is where you can’t possibly delight in it, but you know the task that makes it be there has to be done all the same).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-06 21:09:53 (in reply to a comment not included)**

To take another non-physiological example: Someone might spend years battling a gambling addiction until — through the grace of some insight or instruction — they realize how much of their life has been wasted on this behavior. They likely knew that before, but on a purely intellectual level, the way a smoker “knows” that their habit is going to kill them someday. ***Once they apprehend that truth fully, though, it’s no longer just an intellectual understanding. They know it will kill them. And with that awareness, the behavior will correspondingly weaken its grip.*** (This approach to understanding is one of the most successful strategies in contemporary addiction psychology, but I recognize that such a claim may not be compelling in this context.)

But what is it that would have made them “apprehend that truth fully”? That cannot happen just “through the grace of some insight or instruction” as you put it because it would imply that every addict is just missing some piece of information or advice that all those who have recovered were fortunate enough to obtain, which obviously cannot be the case. As you wrote, any (slightly self-honest) addict already “knows” that their habit brings more harm than good, so it’s not really that they need to get a different kind of understanding that’s “more than intellectual” (which is a contradiction).

It’s only if they at least *came to terms* with having to put up with the pain of relinquishment awaiting them that what they deep down already knew from the start would’ve “clicked”. Their continued harmful behavior, in the case of someone who already acknowledged their predicament, could’ve only been enabled by “mental gymnastics” around the fact that the pain of not engaging in that behavior is not an excuse to continue engaging in it. Because of that impulse to shy away from the displeasure that they always took for granted, their already correct intellectual understanding was simply not applying “on the right level” (and that’s what makes it “true” understanding, not its ceasing to be intellectual). That’s why the ball is always in the addict’s court, in the end, although having heard good advice doesn’t hurt.

>But with their newfound understanding of its nature, it seems to me that this choice needn’t be felt unpleasantly any longer.

If they managed to stop resisting the pain of withdrawal having taken it on, then yes, the pain would’ve stopped “hurting” (unpleasant feeling can only be suffering for as long as there is aversion towards it). But if they never accepted that there *will* be pain and

were still concerned with finding a way that to get cured without any discomfort, then the underlying problem is still there.

>I can't see how unpleasant endurance, on this level as you say, should be an *obligatory* component of renunciation

Experiencing unpleasant feelings on account of rightly giving things up (that one was actually attached to) is obligatory; suffering on account of it is not (just as craving is not obligatory).

It also depends on how we define “renunciation”: if we take it to mean the undertaking of externally more restrained behavior then yes, that doesn't have to be unpleasant; the diminishing of *defilement*, on the other hand, always entails going “against the grain”, even for a noble disciple).

>I don't have an opinion on whether complete renunciation of craving, aversion, and delusion requires unpleasant endurance. At that ultimate level, I'm willing to take your word for it. But I have to assume your advice here — especially to people like OP, who are struggling with very coarse, mundane compulsions — isn't intended for anāgāmis.

That “ultimate level” is actually not just for anāgāmis. It's for everyone who wants to develop their mind so as to be at peace regardless of circumstances, as opposed to just having better circumstances. That can only be achieved by decreasing defilements as opposed to re-directing them to, as I said above, an external ideal or goal (“religion”, which applies to even the purest Dhamma just as well; whoever has *sīlabbataparāmāsa* is still “religious” by necessity).

Now, in the case of whether such advice is appropriate in OP's case, this is an example of how the Dhamma has to be at least *conveyed* so that it's (equally) good in the beginning, middle, and end. As in, it is a disservice to give advice that *aims* at less than the ultimate even to a total beginner. It's not like there is “casual Dhamma” and “hardcore Dhamma”, as many probably believe. When the Dhamma is morphed so as to be more appealing to those who are less committed, it ceases to be the Dhamma. So what one has to do is show them the “real” thing, and then they decide to what extent they want to take it on, if at all, and when. Knowingly failing to convey that is what would be truly inconsiderate on one's part.

There is no shortage of teachings that are not in accordance with the Dhamma, so if that's what a person is looking for, it should not be difficult to find it (and they would not be open to anything else anyway if they're truly satisfied with that). At some point, even that person might at least turn back and decide to try what they initially dismissed, which they wouldn't do if it was portrayed in a more “palatable” manner that makes it blend in with the rest.

>I can't see any evidence in the suttas or personal experience to indicate that renunciation of even serious compulsions, let alone superficial habits as you mentioned, need be experienced this way (particularly for someone post-sotāpatti, but even for others just

approaching the Dhamma). It feels like a profoundly dour view of a path which has otherwise been described as good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end.

What is “good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end” is the *Dhamma*, as the Suttas say. Meaning, “goodness” begins when the person gets the Right View (begins to partake in the Dhamma having seen it) and thus learns how to not crave against the discomfort of restraint, for example, making the pain of the practice not be suffering anymore. But it is not said at least in the Suttas that the *practice in general* has to be “good” in the beginning (if we interpret that to mean “pleasant”; of course it is always “good” in the sense of being for one’s welfare, it’s just that those two tend not to go hand in hand).

Also, see AN 10.217 on how there is no way to put an end to accumulated kamma, nor to suffering in general, without experiencing its results (“results” meaning the pain of renunciation, not external unpleasant events). >I appreciate all of the rigor this community has to offer. It’s refreshing. But I can’t help but feel these messages are unusually focused on negativity, in a way that doesn’t seem to characterize the Buddha’s own instructions.

I know what you mean, and I don’t doubt that here there is genuine negativity underneath sometimes, as there is ample room for misinterpretation of the teaching. But apart from that, it shouldn’t be forgotten that the “perversion of perception” is the starting point, meaning that what would be pleasant with the right set of eyes is bound to be seen as suffering (negativity), and vice versa.

>“Forms, sounds, tastes, scents, bodily contacts and ideas which are agreeable, pleasant and charming, all these, while they last, are deemed to be happiness by the world with its gods. But wherein they cease—that is agreed by them all to be suffering. By the Noble Ones, the cessation of personality is seen as happiness. This is the reverse of the outlook of the whole world.

>“What others call happiness, that the Noble Ones declare to be suffering. What others call suffering, that the Noble Ones have found to be happiness. See how difficult it is to understand the Dhamma! ...

—Snp 3.12

Lastly, just to be clear, I’m not saying people should only give things up when doing so is unpleasant. By all means, a person should give up all the coarse bad habits they can even if there’s some underlying (religious) motivation behind it, as that makes for a more pleasant life. It’s just that they should keep in mind that at some point, if they hope to truly purify their mind (including even the rare case of getting *jhānas* as a *puthujjana*), they will have to come face to face with the actual underlying tendencies without the aid of their “religion” (i.e., external ideal or motivation for practice which still goes “with the grain” of the underlying tendencies), and that cannot be pleasant (not that it’s this insufferable angst, misery and gritting of teeth always; just that there will be at least *some* dissonance involved that must be endured, increasingly subtle as the mind develops, when the defilements are truly wearing away).

**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-13 13:04:37 (in reply to a comment not included)**

In SN 12.2 Thanissaro has “From feeling as a requisite condition \*\*\*comes \*\*\*craving.”

Right, translators almost always present it as a “sequence” which is unjustified (see SN 12.67 where Sāriputta compares it to two sticks standing in dependence on each other). The view of it being a sequential process allows one (to one’s own detriment) to think that one can “stop” it momentarily somehow, whereas the only way is to abolish ignorance by getting the Right View once and for all. For as long as that hasn’t occurred, all these factors are *already there* all at once, always, because ignorance is and has always been there, with no first point of manifestation (AN 10.61).

Does it mean that there is a second, unmentioned, requisite condition that in an arahant is absent? Or does it mean that the “feeling” of an arahant is not the “feeling” of a puthujjana?

Both, in a sense. The absent requisite condition is, in the most obvious textbook answer, ignorance, without which *paṭiccasamuppāda* no longer applies. At the same time, an Arahant no longer has the five *assumed* aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandā*) but simply the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandā*). The assumption (*upādāna*) the puthujjana is enveloped in adds an extra dimension to every feeling that arises for them (the second arrow, SN 36.6). So one cannot categorically say that it’s the same feeling or that it’s a different one, because neither of those ways of thinking about it would do anything to solve the ignorance/assumption which is the root of the puthujjana’s problem: believing it’s the same feeling would make them undershoot the mark; believing it’s a different one would make them overshoot it.

Also, since a sotāpanna has understood the nature of assumption, they would also experience unpleasant feelings on account of renunciation, but without suffering on account of them.

## **Is there a comprehensive guide or system of the gradual training for lay people?**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** deus\_ex\_coffee 2024-01-03 00:38:12

I’m happy to have recently come across hillside hermitage and the teachings presented here. The content is quite dense to say the least so I’m wondering if there is a system or guide for those at day one? All the best .

### **Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-03 13:15:38**

A useful point to bear in mind is that there is no hope to correctly begin with any of the subsequent “stages” of the Gradual Training if the precepts have not been covered. So for example, a person would be better served addressing whatever is preventing them from becoming celibate than trying to practice sense restraint and abandonment of hindrances within non-celibacy. One cannot even correctly grasp what sense restraint is if the mind isn’t already settled in celibacy, because that “restraint” will all be about superficially denying something that one deep down still plans to give in to at some point—meaning, one is already “grasping the signs and features” of sensual objects by default, even when one actively tries to do the opposite.

Another thing worth mentioning that may not be apparent from the usual formulation of the Gradual Training is that even the first step of virtue is not just about keeping the letter of the precepts. The Buddha says it’s about “seeing the danger in the slightest fault”, meaning that even things that are not covered by the precepts one should be vigilant about. For instance, frivolous speech and carelessness in interactions with others is not prohibited by the precepts, but it certainly is a “fault” that comes within the training, a central one at that, given that there can be no restraint of mind without restraint of speech beforehand. In a lay setting that is even more important, as one is forced to interact with people that do not share one’s values of renunciation, and for whom speech is a central outlet for delight in pleasure and distraction.

Aside from that, the Gradual Training shouldn’t really be thought of as a “systematic process”, but as one thing that can be practiced on subsequent degrees of subtlety: not acting out unwholesomely by body, speech, and mind. A person who understands that “simple” instruction in its full scope fulfills all the “elements” of the Gradual Training all at once without explicitly thinking about them. In fact, even the first “step” of “seeing the danger in the slightest fault”, when refined to the utmost, already covers the entire practice all the way to samādhi. Abandoning mental “faults” (hindrances), which are just like bodily and verbal faults but on a subtler level, is the cultivation of samādhi; absorbing oneself on objects is unrelated to the Gradual Training and not right samādhi, because it has nothing to do with virtue except in some fabricated and tenuous ways (which is why people that haven’t even started the Gradual Training can get that “samādhi” too).

So overall, one can try to emphasize individual aspects of the overall picture of restraint and wholesome conduct that seem to require more work than others in one’s particular case, but ultimately one should be looking to extract the general principle of noticing when one’s mind is leaning towards things with craving, and then restraining accordingly.

That principle then underlies one’s entire life 24/7, and the specifics will be automatically covered.



**Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-03 17:10:49 (in reply to a comment not included)**

Bhante, if I am not misquoting, you (or in HH) said that someone without the right view does not actually know where the craving is.

Yes, that's true. I wrote that in colloquial terms, but ultimately what a person without the view can restrain will never be craving but a *result* of craving, on account of which the actual craving may one day be recognized.

So, for someone who does not know this - should they instead see what the presently enduring feeling is (as in pleasant, painful or neutral) to understand the direction of craving and then not act out there? Is this a way to understand craving too?

Yes, that's how one removes the obstructions for the knowledge of craving (the right view) to arise: not indulging in pleasant feelings, not resisting unpleasant ones, and not giving in to distraction in the face of neutral feelings.

But still, one also needs to upgrade one's understanding of feelings themselves, as even that is inaccurate as a puthujjana. Understanding feelings correctly means understanding craving by necessity.

## **The mechanism of doubt**

**Subreddit:** r/HillsideHermitage | **Posted by:** ReputationVarious311 2024-01-02 11:32:02

This morning I've tried to dig out certain HH video concerning the workings of doubt, the one, if I remember correctly, in which the resolution of doubts is said to be found in starving them out by not feeding (into) them. Basically, an interrogation of doubts was recognized as the food for their growth and sustenance.

Maybe I'm confabulating because the only HH's video on the topic I'm able to find now is the one with a nearly opposite account on it (the one titled "The Pain of Doubt") - Ajahn Nyanamoli advices there a thorough examination as a way for resolving any doubts.

In a sense I'm not only interested in recalling the name of the exact video in question (although I would be glad if someone could point me to it), but I would also like to hear some of the possible takes on these two seemingly different approaches dealing with doubt, especially since both seem very sound to me.

Should doubts be faced by interrogating them until nothing of them remains, or they should be seen as Mara's baits with which any contact necessarily leads to just further entanglements and more doubts?

### Comment by Bhikkhu\_Anigha on 2024-01-02 15:57:55

This morning I've tried to dig out certain HH video concerning the workings of doubt, the one, if I remember correctly, in which the resolution of doubts is said to be found in starving them out by not feeding (into) them. Basically, an interrogation of doubts was recognized as the food for their growth and sustenance.

Maybe I'm confabulating because the only HH's video on the topic I'm able to find now is the one with a nearly opposite account on it (the one titled "The Pain of Doubt") -

The topic of how taking doubts at face value and trying to resolve them can be unwholesome has been addressed so many times, including in talks whose main topic was something else, that it'd be hard to pinpoint a specific one based only on this description.

Ajahn Nyanamoli advises there a thorough examination as a way for resolving any doubts.

In fact, what was said in this video actually means the same thing: the examination is not about what *the doubt is about* but about one's present situation of a mind that craves for answers. That is the "level" where any examination that develops the mind has to apply; anything else will be just furthering one's knowledge and learning *about* the Dhamma (which can be useful, but should never be confused with the mental cultivation of not acting out of hindrances that eventually allows one to see the Dhamma).

Most of the time and for most people, the answers they already have are good enough if they have been not only learning about the Dhamma for a while but especially been clearing up the wrong views embedded in most of contemporary Buddhism. So there comes a point where one should start emphasizing putting what one already knows (that acting out of pressure of any kind is unwholesome and a hindrance to understanding) into practice rather than finding ever-better answers, as that is an endless task.

Fundamentally, the pressure to find a new answer, like any other pressure such as sensuality, is rooted in a *mental state* that is present and is unpleasant, so by descending into the content of one's thoughts, whether it's theoretical information about the Dhamma, thoughts of sensuality or ill will, one is automatically falling into the trap of craving against displeasure on that internal, more "ambiguous" level, whereas externally in the case of thinking about the Dhamma, it all might seem fully justified and wholesome to one's superficial examination.

A good test to see if it's better just to endure the discomfort of doubt rather than give in to it and look for the answer is to check how one would feel if no answer were to be found in the end. If the mere thought of it makes you feel anxious, most likely there is an underlying craving there that you better not act out of, because if you do, *there will be no satisfactory answer in the end for that very reason*. As in, even if you were to go to the Buddha himself and receive the best possible answer, it would still leave you unsatisfied because there is a *mental state* of dissatisfaction, plain and simple, underlying your entire

experience.

As a matter of fact, acting out of such seemingly “justified” pressures, as would become apparent over time, actually leaves you vulnerable to all the *other* pressures that were seemingly unrelated. For example, every sensual object you encounter will be that much more pressing and evocative of lust once you have given up on the quest for the answer, because you were *cultivating craving*, regardless of *what* it was directed toward. So then the same craving will now just rest upon the next thing that takes center stage, whether it be in the form of sensuality, aversion, laziness, or restlessness. (That’s why the hindrances are fundamentally five expressions of the same thing, they cannot be abandoned or managed one-by-one by repressing thoughts).

Should doubts be faced by interrogating them until nothing of them remains, or they should be seen as Mara’s baits with which any contact necessarily leads to just further entanglements and more doubts?

So, both, because the “interrogation” is on the level of the intention behind, your present situation, what is being ignored, etc. (and that’s where all the information about what craving is, why it’s the root of suffering, etc., would eventually be recognized as a truth rather than as an idea). Failing to interrogate oneself correctly on *that* level automatically leads to biting Māra’s baits, because lack of clarity about one’s mind state and overall situation here and now is all it takes to fall prey to those. One doesn’t have to *knowingly* bite the baits to get hooked; it’s more like the default state of ignorance means already biting them.

“Nothing of the doubts” will remain when you cease to resist the discomfort that pushes you to look for answers (without getting rid of it either). That is the only real “end” to doubt, as uncertainty and its concomitant discomfort is a natural element of all experience and it cannot, nor needs to be removed.

It should also be noted that not acting out of the pressure of doubt doesn’t mean ceasing to receive the utterance-of-another (Suttas, Dhamma talks, etc.). It means that one shouldn’t do it in cases when that “itch” that will just worsen upon scratching is the primary motivating factor, until the itch ceases. If the action is not a “scratch” to the itch and one knows it makes no difference to it, then it’s fine (and that applies to all other hindrances too).

Repeated instruction helps prevent one from inadvertently twisting what one has heard to fit with one’s wrong views.

