

YATHA-BHUTA

THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY



Guy Eugène DUBOIS

Foreword by dr. Herman K. T. de Jonge

YATHA-BHUTA

THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY

Dhamma
books

• *Sabbadanam Dhammadanam jinati—
The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts* •
(*Dhammapada, Gatha #354*).

• *Spiritual wisdom is a gift that should be shared with insight and compassion,
not exploited for crass personal gain. When wisdom is commercialized,
labeled as a marketable commodity, it loses its purity and subjects
profound insights to evaluation, thereby undermining their
transformative power.* •

(Guy E. Dubois)

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Guy Eugène DUBOIS
Foreword by dr. Herman K.T. de Jonge

*Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah —
May all beings be happy*

*• Those with nothing stored up,
who have understood their food,
whose domain is the liberation
of the signless and the empty:
their path is hard to trace,
like birds in the sky. •*

*Dhammapada, Gatha #92
Translation Bhante Sujato*

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FOREWORD

It was a Thursday afternoon in April 2020. I was sitting at my desk, looking for scriptures and texts about the Buddha's teachings. That's when I came across the book 'Dhamma' by Guy Dubois. It was written in Dutch, which was surprising in itself since the vast majority is usually in English or French. I had never heard of the man before, but he seemed to be already known as an expert in early Buddhism.

I was immediately captivated by his foreword. Finally, someone who wrote in a language that was clear to me and expressed a socially critical vision close to my heart.

Years before, I took a 10-day Vipassana course out of curiosity and because I encountered social structures, especially work-related ones, that I no longer understood and found increasingly difficult to deal with. Perhaps such a course could provide insight into how to cope with this or deal with it differently.

Before the course, I delved into the subject of Vipassana—'seeing things as they really are.' That was something profound. What did it mean? How? Was I perceiving things incorrectly? Did I see everything distorted? I had no idea how to interpret all this or what it meant exactly.

So, I headed to Bogor, Indonesia, because they still had some spots left. It was a very interesting experience. The silence, the Dhammatalks, the Dhamma hall, all the people around you from all directions—what was their reason for coming here? Not a word was spoken, except occasionally by the teacher.

I knew very little about Buddhism at the time—Sīla, samādhi, pañña. I had never heard of it before, along with all the other terms I had to learn during those 10 days.

Sitting for long periods of time was something I wasn't used to. In between 'sessions of strong determination,' meaning sitting for an hour without moving an inch, I experienced pain in my legs, pain in my back—it all seemed to last for-ever. After the 10 days of noble silence, the noise outside was overwhelming.

I came home somewhat distraught, having no idea how to proceed. Likewise, I searched for relevant literature on Buddhism.

Where do I start? Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, Zen, Pure Land Buddhism—what is the difference between all these traditions? Buddhism is Buddhism, right?

Guy showed me the way with his book 'Dhamma.' A beginning had been made with my journey through the Dhamma and through the history of Buddhism. I have purchased his other books and many more study materials.

Now before you lies his latest book. It is a beautiful book that clearly reflects the essence of the Dhamma in the Theravada tradition. The message is crystal clear, and the insights provide a lot of food for thought, for contemplation.

It is the first book in English by this erudite scholar of early Buddhism. This book makes his knowledge and insight into the Dhamma accessible to a large group of interested practitioners outside the Dutch-speaking area.

The book begins with an analysis of the first two suttas of the Pali Canon, after which the Buddha's insights are step by step further explored. The book is full of landmarks that do not need to be read chronologically. Open any page, read it, take it in, and let your thoughts wander. It is made clear again and again that this is a teaching that you must master yourself—a teaching based on insight into the Three Marks of Existence, but also on wisdom, non-violence, and loving kindness. A teaching that can set you free from your suffering—a teaching that has nothing to do with prayers or following rituals.

In the Tevijja Sutta, Digha Nikaya 13, there is a story about two Brahmins that go to the Buddha to settle a dispute about how to achieve union with Brahmā. The two Brahmins believe that praying and exhorting to rituals will achieve this union but are puzzled which of the Brahmins they consulted was right. In the sutta, the Buddha uses an example of somebody beckoning to the other side of a river, calling, 'Come here other side!' and expecting the 'other side' to come to them.

A clear example where the Buddha shows that praying, wishing, wanting, or longing for is never going to solve the desire to achieve something.

It is up to you, the reader, to practice, to learn, to absorb, to contemplate in order to finally be able to see reality as it really is—Yatha Bhuta.

The scriptures of the monotheistic religions but also Hinduism condone, justify, and even sometimes encourage the use of violence.

A quote from Ezekiel 35:

'So I, the Almighty Lord, promise you this, as surely as I live. I will allow your enemies to kill you. If you run away from them, they will chase you and kill you. You were happy to see an enemy kill my people, so an enemy will kill you also. I will make Mount Seir become like a desert where nobody lives. I will destroy anyone who travels through that place. Dead bodies will lie all over your mountains. The bodies of men who have died in battle will lie on your hills and in your valleys. I will make you a desert forever, and nobody will live in your towns. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'

Or as stated in the Quran:

'The words of the Prophet Muhammad will be fulfilled: Judgment Day will not come before the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Jews will hide behind the rocks and the trees, but the rocks and the trees will say: Oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'

In Buddhist texts, it's just the opposite. The Dhammapada, Gatha #130, reads as follows:

'All trembling at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.'

This principle of non-violence is consistent throughout the Pali Canon but stands in strong contrast to the recent violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar, driven by Ashin Wirathu, a Burmese Buddhist monk.

The teachings of the Buddha are very profound and not always easy to grasp. They are for everyone but are not suitable for fools or for the lazy. Without perseverance (P. adhitthana), you will not get there. All suttas, and everything the Buddha taught, are solely an upaya, a tool that shows you the way—a direction indicator. Ultimately, you have to walk the path yourself.

This book is also a tool, an upaya. It is filled with pearls of wisdom. But again, it is up to you, the reader, to take the path that might lead you to yatha-bhuta—to see the process of impermanence—to see the true nature of things.

Finally, this is not a book to read in one sitting—not if you want to absorb the material in a serious way. Read; put away. Read, think about it. Read it and let it satiate you. Read and apply it, practice. And keep practicing.

'To truly make an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the universe.' (Carl Sagan).

And what have I learned from all of this so far? Well,... I am now better able to deal with the vicissitudes of life—to deal with the ups and downs in life in a more patient way.

I am very, very grateful to Guy for that.

*Herman de Jonge
Berg a/d Maas, januari 2024*

Herman de Jonge, born in Jakarta, raised in Suriname, came to the Netherlands to study. Currently working as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

Due to my background, I have always been interested in the religions, history, and arts of the Far East. Passionate collector of tribal art from Africa, particularly Congo. Also, the publisher of the book: 'De Lunda en Tshokwe van Shaba'.

I live together with my love and four cats in South Limburg.

THE AUTHOR

Guy Eugène Dubois (born 1947) is the author of approximately twenty-five books on *Dhamma*.

He has also translated, illuminated, commented on, and annotated several early Buddhist *Pali* texts, including the *Atthakavagga* (The Buddha's Peace), the *Parayanavagga* (The Way to the Other Shore), the *Itivuttaka* (Thus it is said), the *Udana* (Inspired Sayings of the Buddha), the *Khuddakapatha* (Short Passages), the *Dhammapada* (The Way of Truth).

Additionally, he translated the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā* from Sanskrit to Dutch.

Through his translations and annotations, the author delves deeply into the roots of early Buddhism, showcasing profound insight and erudition. His articles, contributions, and comments are published on various websites, including Sutta-Central, the Buddhist Center Ehipassiko Antwerp/Mechelen, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, the Buddho Foundation, Samita, Boeddhisme (NL/BE), Buddhist Dharma Study, The Universal Sangha, The Vipassana Group, Buddhism Dharma Study, Teachings of the Lord Buddha, Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhism, Zen, Tao & Meditation and Buddhism Stack.

Guy is also the initiator and driving force behind the Ehipassiko Academy Yatha-Bhuta (<https://yatha-bhuta.com>), a gift from the Ehipassiko Sangha—the Buddhist Center Antwerp-Mechelen ©—to the worldwide Buddhist community.

All of his books and contributions consistently and coherently cover aspects that are essential to the *Pali* Buddhist canon. These core ideas form the foundation of the Doctrine, avoiding unnecessary embellishments and staying focused on the main points.

As a *yogi*, the author remains completely independent from any Buddhist tradition, lineage ¹, or structure. He interprets *Dhamma*—the Teachings of the Buddha—with a free-spirited self-awareness, emphasizing freedom and liberation. His understanding of *Dhamma* is personal, based on his own experiences and intense practice. His practice of *Dhamma*, as he sees it, experiences it, and practices it intensely, prioritizes insight over formal sensation. It is a practice without attachment to any conceptual framework.

In this sense, he is, quite literally, a 'homeless person,' a mendicant, a *bhikkhu* ², who interprets and practices in an extremely personal way.

According to Joop Hoek, the editor-in-chief of the Dutch newspaper, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, '*Guy E. Dubois is among the foremost experts on early Buddhism in the Dutch-speaking region. He combines a vigorous liberal outlook with a deep affection for the profound insights of the Buddha.*'

Paul Van hooydonck, Barcelona & Antwerp: *'I love his non-dogmatic attitude. His contrarian and independent mindset. I love his freedom-creating, non-assuming, self-evaluating, and investigative approach. Guy is a true freethinker. So rare. And so good to meet people like him.'*

Matt Hays, Gahanna, Ohio, USA: *'I think of it as the path outside the temple... The path of discovery... Thank you so much for this. It touches me deeply. It resonates and immerses me. So beautifully put... I am blessed and taught by you.'*

Douglas Scholtz, Chicago, Illinois, USA: *'The best I've read about the Dhamma in a long time. Sadhu. Sadhu. Sadhu.'*

Nob Chow, Surabaya, Indonesia: *'Thank you for posting those highly valuable articles of the Dhamma.'*

Francis Desilva, Colombo, Sri Lanka: *'Words of wisdom.'*

Jaap Slurink, Holland: *'Directly towards liberation (redemption) without detours. Beautiful, thank you.'*

Rajeev Rauniyar, India: *'Excellentee!'*

True to the Buddha's statement that *Dhamma* is the greatest gift, the author finds marketing Buddha's wisdom disgraceful and infamous. Therefore, all his books can be freely downloaded, reproduced, used, and distributed through any medium or file format, as long as the copyright license (CC0 1.0 Universal) from *Creative Commons Zero* is respected.

If you prefer to have a physical copy of the book, you can order it through regular bookstores or online. However, the author maintains his initial objective of not seeking any profit from *Dhamma*. *'Whenever anything of profit is generated, it will inevitably go to dana ³.'*

The author expresses his hope that his works contribute to a deeper insight into the teachings of the Buddha, guiding readers towards wisdom and compassion, and enabling them enter the stream. He considers himself fortunate if even one word from his texts can bring insight to a single person.



INTRODUCTION

In several *suttas* of the *Pali Canon*, the Buddha refers to the Taste of Freedom: ⁴

• *Just as in the great ocean there is but one taste—the taste of salt—so in this Doctrine and Discipline (P. Dhammavinaya),* ⁵ *there is but one taste—the taste of freedom. Whether one samples water taken from the surface of the ocean, or from its middle region, or from its depths, the taste of the water is the same — the taste of salt.* •

Similarly, in the Buddha's Teaching, a single flavor—the flavor of freedom (*P. vimutti-rasa*) ⁶—pervades the entire Doctrine and Discipline, from its beginning to its end, from its gentle surface to its unfathomable depths.

Whether one engages with the *Dhamma* at its more elementary level—in the practice of generosity and moral discipline, acts of devotion and piety, conduct governed by reverence, courtesy, and loving-kindness—or at its intermediate level—in the taintless supramundane knowledge and deliverance realized by the liberated *arahant*—in every case, the taste is the same: the taste of freedom.

If one practices the *Dhamma* to a limited extent, leading a household life in accordance with righteous principles, then one experiences a limited measure of freedom. If one practices the *Dhamma* to a fuller extent, going forth into the homeless state of monkhood, dwelling in seclusion adorned with the virtues of a recluse, contemplating the rise and fall of all conditioned things, then one experiences a fuller measure of freedom. And if one practices the *Dhamma* to its consummation, realizing in this present life the goal of final deliverance, then one experiences a freedom that is measureless.

At every level, the flavor of the Teaching is of a single nature: the flavor of freedom. It is only the degree to which this flavor is enjoyed that differs, and the difference in degree is precisely proportional to the extent of one's practice. Practice a little *Dhamma*, and one reaps a little freedom; practice abundant *Dhamma*, and one reaps abundant freedom. The *Dhamma* brings its own reward of freedom, always with the exactness of scientific law.

Dhamma cannot be divided into diversity. There is only one law of nature—the Eternal Law: Immeasurable, impersonal, and impartial. *Dhammo Sanantano*.

The *Pali* word '*sanantano*' refers to the characteristics of originality, perpetuity, fundamentality, and absoluteness. These are attributes that, in theistic systems, are reserved exclusively for the gods.

Here, the Buddha associates these characteristics with *Dhamma*—the natural law, the cosmic law. In this way, the *Bhagavat* ⁷ confers a completely divine status on the natural process that governs existence.

There is no essential distinction to be made among the multitude of Buddhist schools, sects, movements, and traditions.

Taigu says:

• *Buddhism is available in a variety of appearances to suit everyone's personal preference, with or without devotion, with bodhisattvas as real-existing supernatural beings or bodhisattvas as symbols or archetypes, with grace (Pure Land) or without, with or without karma and reincarnation, with or without esotericism (like tantra), with or without celestial realms in which buddhas hold their 'ultimate' teachings in readiness until human comprehension is ripe to receive them.* 9

Fortunately, Joseph Goldstein, a teacher of the Theravada tradition, writes in one of his books that you don't have to believe in Buddhist cosmology to participate in the liberating effect of the original insights that gave birth to Buddhism (the Four Noble Truths).

Historical and philosophical criticism is not a substitute for the personal experience of salvation; it is only a conversation partner, an inner voice that warns you of the power of self-deception and can keep you on the right course in the subtle play of form and emptiness.

You can give *Dhamma* another name. You can use a different method to interpret *Dhamma*. But despite all these so-called different experiences, the finality of the *Buddhasasana* 8 remains the same. Always.

This indicates that the various Buddhist schools are only skillful aids (*P. upayas*) 9 for awakening. They are vehicles (*P. yanas*) towards self-realization (*P. nibbana-sacchikiriya*) 10 — vehicles that can lead to *Dhamma*.

But let it be clear: in essence, they are not *Dhamma*, although they may pretend to be with firm conviction. All these Buddhist schools, tendencies, lineages, structures and traditions are like fingers pointing at the moon, but they are not the moon. A practitioner who considers them as the moon is guilty of sectarian dogmatism, running in wide curves around the essence of *Dhamma*.

Starting from the same source, all these Buddhist schools, tendencies, lineages, and traditions approach the *Buddhasasana* from different perspectives. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as the *dhammanuvatti* 11 clearly comprehends that they are interpretations of what the Buddha preached—different expressions of what *Dhamma* is and entails. In this way, an alert practitioner values them for their proper worth.

These different interpretations and explanations are a direct result of the free inquiry that the Buddha preached, as outlined in, among others, the *Kalama Sutta*. Viewed in this way, the various Buddhist tendencies not only provide insightful support but also contribute to the propagation of the *Dhamma* as carriers of the message. But no more than that.

It is mainly through rituals, religious practices, hierarchy, structures, and overarching organizational forms that they distinguish themselves.

The outer forms they use to represent the *Dhamma* do not touch the essence. Ceremonial pomp and pageantry do not lead to insight, nor are these formal representations a criterion for the magnitude of acquired insight. Moreover, they are in stark contrast to what the Buddha taught (*P. silabbata-paramasa*).¹²

Structures and lineages do not point to the teachings of the Buddha, who categorically refused to designate a successor. In various *suttas*, the Buddha emphasized personal responsibility to liberate oneself from *dukkha*, far away from structures and lineages.

As a practitioner, how do you deal with this discrepancy between *Dhamma* and the overwhelming decorum of rituals, religious practices, hierarchy, structures, and overarching organizational forms?

Only attentive observation offers solace—forensic observation, meditation, reflection. Without a head above your head.

Decoration and decorum¹³ don't help. The *dhammanuvatti* who sees through all this embellishment discovers the unity of *Dhamma*, the quintessence of the Doctrine—the aspects that truly matter, transcending decor and decorum, surpassing the dogmatic, the sectarian, the unintended, the misunderstood, the conditioned. In short, beyond the 'I'..

The teachings of the Buddha are simple for the practitioner who musters the courage to rid them of the nonsense of structures, interpretations, metaphysical speculations... Words and concepts only diffuse, woolly, and muddle the *Dhamma*.

Bhante Sumedho:

• *Suttas are not meant to be 'sacred scriptures' that tell us what to believe. One should read them, listen to them, think about them, contemplate them, and investigate the present reality, the present experience with them. Then, and only then, can one insightfully know the truth beyond words.* •

Only sustained practice leads to the experiential experience (*P. paccanubhoti*)¹⁴ of liberating insight. It comes down to determined practice (*P. adhitthana*)¹⁵. Meditation is the fuel that initiates the process of self-realization, i.e., the process of extinction—a contradiction in terminis.

The *buddhavacana*¹⁶—the word of the Buddha—represents the experiential insight of this process, the natural law, the cosmic law. Thus, *Dhamma* is wisdom *beyond* words and *beyond* concepts, *beyond* time, and thus *beyond* any manipulated historical interpretation and any socially opportunistic self-interest. *Buddhavacana* = *ekayana*. Universal *Dhamma*.¹⁷

Dhamma is experiential insight (*P. paccakkha-nana*)¹⁸. As a result, it cannot be confined within structures—neither in organizations, traditions, and lineages. These are merely interpretations of words and concepts, externalities without insight into *Dhamma*.

Therefore, do not identify yourself with structures. Walk away from them resolutely. They don't align with insight. They don't conform to the true nature of things. They don't correspond with *yatha-bhuta*.¹⁹

Don't give ignorance a chance. Don't get carried away by any dichotomy, never. Do not follow such loud shouters in the desert.

They do not follow the Buddha's way; they have a different agenda. A dogmatic, sectarian approach is not the Buddha's Path, is not the Middle Way.

Dhamma is one. *Dhamma* transcends every Buddhist school, every tradition, every lineage. *Dhamma* is not bound by words and concepts, nor by opinions, ideas, or viewpoints. *Dhamma* spontaneously reveals itself in every moment through the '*ten thousand things that arise*' (Ehei Dogen).

The distinction between a worldling (*P. puthujjana*) and a noble follower (*P. ariya-puggala*) is a matter of perception.²⁰

The worldling engages with the world—the '*ten thousand things*'—from the perspective of the self. Due to this narrow viewpoint, he remains in a state of perpetual ignorance (*P. avijja*).

The noble follower sees and knows (*P. janami passami*)²¹ the process of dependent origination that characterizes the '*ten thousand things*.' Through this open approach, the *dhammanuvatti* realizes himself.

Dhamma is one. *Dhamma* has only one taste: the subtle taste of liberation—*Vimutti*²².

Keep the Path undefiled, pure. Observe and experience how healing it is to look over the (artificial) walls, see what connects us. Don't argue about what (supposedly) separates us.

Verify for yourself if something contributes to your liberation from *dukkha*, if it is a skillful tool or just useless ballast. You decide, only you. No one else can do this for you. Practice, develop insight, trust only yourself.

Self-realization refers to the process of becoming aware of one's true nature, potential, or purpose in life.

Realize that self-realization must be taken literally: a personal achievement. It cannot be achieved by someone else on your behalf—emphasizing personal responsibility and agency in the journey towards self-discovery and understanding.

The introspective and transformative aspects of self-discovery and self-realization are inherently personal and must be undertaken by the practitioner themselves.

Someone else can't realize it for you, never ever.

In the *Saundarananda*,²³ the Buddha says:

‘... Among all tastes, the taste that really satisfies is that of internal sight. The highest happiness can only be found in yourself...’

Self-realization means 'insight,' seeing your 'original face' as you really are, not as you dream, wish, or just don't wish to be.

What is this 'original face'?

It means not being a duplicate of any god or *guru*,²⁴ not a docile follower of any religion or denomination, but one who gains insight like a master, a true Master, with quiet composure and strong determination, '*surpassing men, following the gods.*'

To realize ourselves—i.e. to liberate ourselves from *dukkha*—we meditate. We sit quietly on our *zafu*²⁵ because we realize that through this raft of *bhavana*,²⁶ we can see the flow and reach the Other Shore, enter the stream (*P. sotapatti*),²⁷ and experience the Ultimate Void.

In that blissful space, drenched in silence, we can discover 'our original face'²⁸ experience that we are the flow—an inherent part of the process of arising and passing away.

In the Buddhist worldview, the profound nature of reality is explored through key principles that shape the understanding of existence. These principles are encapsulated in the Three Marks of Existence (*P. tilakkhana*) and the concept of Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*). The fundamental aspects that define the true nature of reality are:

Impermanence (*P. anicca*): Impermanence underscores the dynamic and ever-changing nature of all phenomena. Everything, from tangible matter to mental states, is subject to continuous transformation. Embracing impermanence is crucial for comprehending the nature of suffering and fostering detachment.

Suffering or Unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*): *Dukkha* encompasses a spectrum of suffering, dissatisfaction, and the innate sense of unsatisfactoriness. Life is inherently marked by various forms of suffering, both physical and mental. Acknowledging the pervasive nature of *dukkha* is the foundational step in the Four Noble Truths.

Non-Self or No-Self (*P. anatta*): *Anatta* challenges the concept of a permanent, unchanging self or soul. According to Buddhism, there is no independently existing, permanent self within the aggregates of an individual. *Anatta* dismantles the illusion of a fixed and enduring self, emphasizing interdependence and conditioned existence.

Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*): Dependent Origination elucidates the intricate web of interdependence and conditioned arising of all phenomena. *Paticca samuppada* illustrates how one condition gives rise to another, perpetuating the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It serves as a roadmap to understanding the causes of suffering and the path to liberation.

Emptiness (*P. sunnata*): Emptiness does not denote nothingness but signifies the absence of inherent, independent existence in all phenomena. Recognizing the emptiness of inherent existence unveils the interconnectedness of all things. It is a pivotal insight for cultivating wisdom and progressing towards liberation.

In summary, the true nature of reality in Buddhism involves embracing impermanence, acknowledging the pervasive nature of suffering, dismantling the illusion of a fixed self, understanding interdependence through Dependent Origination, and recognizing the emptiness that transcends inherent existence. These insights form the foundation for the transformative journey toward liberation and enlightenment.

Guy
Beerzel, January 2024

YATHA-BHUTA

THE TRUE NATURE OF REALITY

DHAMMA EYE

I. The Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta

This chapter delves into the core of the Doctrine, the quintessence of the *Buddhasasana*, the essence known as the *Dhamma Eye*, or *Dhamma-cakkhu*.²⁹

The *Dhamma Eye* can be metaphorically likened to the 'eye' of a hurricane, a tropical cyclone. In the eye of such storm there is no wind, the air pressure is lowest and the sea level rise is greatest. It is a place of relative tranquility amidst an otherwise turbulent environment.

The sole intention the Buddha had, was to liberate us from our suffering (*P. dukkha*), freeing us from the permanent dissatisfaction that we, as humans, carry throughout our lives.

He defined this suffering (*P. dukkha ariya sacca*),³⁰ its cause (*dukkha samudaya ariya sacca*),³¹ its termination (*P. dukkha nirodha sacca*),³² as well as the Path leading to its termination (*dukkha nirodha gamini patipada sacca*).³³

These are the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*), or rather, the Four Truths or realities of the Noble Follower. This is the Teaching, the bequest of the Buddha—the core, nothing more, nothing less. Everything else attributed to the Buddha is explication, interpretation or mere decoration.

In this sense, the *Dhamma Eye* is where the *dhammanuvatti*—the practitioner who lives according to the *Dhamma*—enters the stream and becomes a noble follower (*P. ariya puggala*), a *sotapanna*.³⁴

The *Dhamma Eye* is the 'place' (better understood as the 'moment' or 'experience') where the *dhammanuvatti* attains liberation (*P. vimutti*) from suffering, from *dukkha*. It is the place where he gains insight into the true nature of phenomena, experiences, *dhammas*—*yatha-bhuta nana dassana*. With equanimity and acceptance of this insight, he finds inner peace.

In the *Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta*, the Buddha states:

• *And while the explanation of the Four Noble Truths was being given by the Exalted One, in the Venerable Kondanna appeared the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma Eye: Everything subject to arising is subject to decay.* •

The real reality is impermanence, variability, instability—*Anicca*.

The Buddha advises observing attentively the process of creation and the passing of all things, of all *dhammas*. Look at it rigorously, witness this process of arising and passing—a perpetual cycle to which all phenomena are subject.

Examine this permanent natural law of change, observe the continuous transformation and perpetual mutation, where nothing is ultimately lost—only undergoing permanent transition, metamorphosis.

Until the end of his life, the *Exalted One* ³⁵ continued to emphasize this wisdom:

• *Everything that is subject to creation is subject to decay.* •

In these ten words • *the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma Eye* • is summarized.

What matters is that the practitioner focuses his attention on the essential, unambiguously, and not on trivial matters. Do not focus on external decoration or sensory praxis, as they only distract the *dhhammanuvatti* from the Path and keep him trapped in the cycle of *samsara*, driven by ignorance, desire, and aversion. A practitioner goes straight for the 'goal' which, upon closer examination, is not a goal but an insight—an experiential experience—*Paccakkha-nana*.

In other words, a *dhhammanuvatti*, a 'noble person' (*P. ariya puggala*), takes the direct and unparalleled way—*Ekayana magga*—realizing the limited time he has.

In the *Sabbasava Sutta* ³⁶ the Buddha says the following:

• *The Dhamma Eye opens at the stream-enterer when it cuts the first three chains. The Dhamma Eye opens as he gains insight into the causal principles governing the genesis and decay of dukkha.*

By carefully observing [of the Four Noble Truths] he realizes within himself:

• *This is dukkha... This is the origin of dukkha... This is the cessation of dukkha... This is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha...* •

When he continues to observe this attentively, he destroys the first three chains: belief in personality (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*); ³⁷ doubt (*P. vicikiccha*) ³⁸ and attachment to rites and rituals (*P. silabbata-paramasa*). ³⁹

• *Thus the Dhamma Eye opens to the stream-enterer.* •

The Buddha's teachings are summarized in the first two sermons he gave to the Five Companions at Isipatana, the Deer Park, in Sarnath. ⁴⁰ These two lectures were delivered over a period of five days.

With the first recitation—the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* ⁴¹—the Buddha set the Wheel of the *Dhamma* in motion. The second lecture was the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* ⁴² illustrating the selflessness and instability of all phenomena, things, *dhammas*... but also their interconnectedness ⁴³.

In the last 45 years of his life, the Buddha crisscrossed the Middle Country (*P. majjhimadesa*)⁴⁴ to explain and clarify his teachings. This period was a time of explanation, interpretation and fulfillment.

But let there be absolutely no doubt about it. What has been said in the first two lectures is the essence of the *Buddhadhamma*. What is said here is the Doctrine. Nothing more, nothing less.

If there had been something more or different, the Buddha would have said it here, at this moment, at this place.

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

In his first lecture—the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*⁴⁵—the Buddha sets '*the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion*'.

The historical story is vividly depicted in colors and smells in this *sutta* of the *Pali Canon*. The text brims with verbal adoration, utilizing every element. However, even here, amidst the *summum bonum*, it is crucial to distinguish the essence from the decoration.

But before we delve into the analysis of the *sutta*, let us take a step back for a moment to maintain the proper perspective...

... After attaining Self-realization in Bodhgaya, according to tradition, the Buddha remained in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree for seven weeks. He contemplated how to convey his awakening through words and concepts, despite his firm conviction that truth can never be fully expressed in such forms.

He pondered on how to elucidate the profound realization of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) and the cessation of continuous 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), which inevitably leads to old age, disease, and death—hence, to *dukkha*.

After deep and extensive contemplation, the Buddha ultimately decided to share the insight he had gained with those '*who have little dust in their eyes*.'

Initially, the Buddha considered approaching his two former teachers, Alara Kalama and Udakka Ramaputta. However, both masters had passed away by that time.

He then journeyed west to Sarnath, situated to the north of Varanasi—the sacred city of India, located on the holy River Ganges. The journey from Bodhgaya to Varanasi encompassed approximately 260 km, traversing challenging terrain. The travel took place in daily segments of around 10 kilometers on average.

In Sarnath, the Buddha sought out the Five Companions (*P. Panca Vaggiya*)⁴⁶ with whom he had shared the ascetic path for five years in the caves of the Dugeswari Mountains.

The Deer Park (*P. Migadaya*) of Isipatana (Sarnath)⁴⁷ was the location where his former companions continued their pursuit of asceticism along their respective paths.

The *suttas* describe how the Five Companions who saw the Buddha approaching in the distance agreed among themselves not to greet him. They felt he had broken his promise by leaving the extreme path of asceticism.

However, as the Buddha drew closer, they were struck by the tranquility emanating from his eyes and his demeanor. According to the *suttas*, as if compelled by a force, they rose to pay him the customary homage.

The *sutta* continues as follows:

• *When the Buddha entered the gate of the Isipatana Park, the ascetic comrades were so impressed by his radiant demeanor that all five immediately stood up. It seemed as if the Buddha was surrounded by a garland of light. Kondanna ran over to him and took his begging bowl.*

Mahanama went to fetch water so that the Buddha could wash his hands and feet. Bhaddiya set a stool for him to sit on. Vappa found palm leaves and began to fan it. Assaji stood aside, not knowing what to do. After the Buddha washed his hands and feet, Assaji suddenly realized that he could fill a bowl with cold water and give it to him. The five friends sat in a circle around the Buddha who looked at them kindly and said, "My brothers, I have found the Way and I will show it to you." •

And then the Buddha began his first lecture. The orthodox doctrine assumes that after his awakening in Bodhgaya, the Buddha revealed the entire teaching in a straightforward and unambiguous manner. It is believed that he held nothing back, and this is not to suggest '*this mystical experience of Enlightenment, which surpasses ordinary thinking and rational understanding, gave rise to other or new formulations.*'

Let there be absolutely no doubt: this is the doctrine. What is being conveyed here is the *buddhasasana*. It is nothing more, but also nothing less. If there were anything additional or different, the Buddha would have expressed it here, using these words, in this very place.

But, *mutatis mutandis*, let's be serious: What is not said here is not worth making a doctrinal point out of. What is not said here is not the essence of *Dhamma*.

This first lecture consists of five topics (which I have numbered for simplicity). For each of these five topics, I will first provide my translation of the *Pali* text into English, followed by my analysis.

I. The Two Extremes and the Middle Path (P. majjhima patipada):

• *Monks, a bhikkhu—one who has renounced worldly life—should not indulge in the following two extremes.*

Which two?

The pursuit of happiness through sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects, which is base, vulgar, ignoble, unprofitable, and does not lead to well-being.

The pursuit of strict asceticism, which is painful, futile, ignoble, unprofitable, and does not lead to well-being.

The Blessed One has, by avoiding both extremes, awakened to the Middle Way, which produces seeing and knowing, leading to direct knowledge, inner peace, self-awakening, unbinding, and nibbana.

And what is this Middle Way—realized by the Tathagata ⁴⁸—that produces seeing, knowing, leading to inner peace, direct knowledge, self-awakening, unbinding, and nibbana?

It is the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

*Monks, this is the Middle Way that produces seeing and knowing, leading to inner peace, immediate understanding, awakening, and Nibbana. **

This is a clear text that, aside from the concept of the 'Middle Way' itself, requires little explanation but demands a lot of practice. The Middle Way refers to the Eightfold Path that leads to Awakening.

The Middle Way lies between indulging in physical and emotional desires on one hand and extreme asceticism on the other. Both extremes are equally destructive and do not lead to liberation from suffering (P. *dukkha*).

Regarding the meaning of the term 'Middle Way,' the *Majjhe Sutta* ⁴⁹ provides us with the answer. This ancient *sutta* presents six interpretations given by six *Thera-bhikkhus* of the Buddha's expression '*the middle*.' Since the six *Theras* do not arrive at a common definition, they consult the Buddha to determine which of the six positions is closest to the truth.

Upon hearing the six definitions, the Buddha affirms all six statements and resolves the monks' remaining doubts by explicitly reaffirming the first interpretation.

In summary, these six definitions can be condensed as follows: (a) termination of contact, (b) the present moment, (c) absence of displeasure or pleasure, (d) and (e) awareness (mentioned twice in the six interpretations), and (f) the cessation of personal existence.⁵⁰

Contact represents one extreme, the initiation of contact represents the second extreme, and the cessation of contact represents the middle.

The past signifies one extreme, the future signifies the second extreme, and the present signifies the middle.

Pleasure embodies one extreme, displeasure embodies the second extreme, and the absence of displeasure or pleasure embodies the middle.

Name represents one extreme, form represents the second extreme, and consciousness represents the middle.

The six senses embody one extreme, the six sense objects embody the second extreme, and consciousness embodies the middle.

Personal existence represents one extreme, the arising of personal existence represents the second extreme, and the cessation of personal existence represents the middle.

The Middle Way is the path of harmony, of being in balance, which the Buddha proclaimed he had followed to its conclusion, leading him to the cessation of suffering (*P. dukkha*).

II. The Four Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccāni*):

• *This, Monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (P. dukkha sacca): Birth is suffering. Old age is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. Sorrow, mourning, pain, sadness, and misery are suffering. Being with enemies is suffering. Being separated from loved ones is suffering. Not attaining what one desires is suffering. In summary, the five aggregates (P. khandhas) are suffering.*

And this, Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (P. samudaya sacca): It is the craving that leads to further existence, associated with sensual pleasure and lust, seeking gratification here and there. It can be succinctly described as the craving for sense pleasures (P. kama tanha), the craving for existence (P. bhava tanha), and the craving for non-existence (P. vibhava tanha).

And this, Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (P. nirodha sacca): It is the complete fading away and cessation of craving; the relinquishment, letting go, renunciation, and liberation from craving.

And this, Monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (P. magga sacca): It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

In summary:

The Noble Truth of Suffering (P. dukkha sacca)

The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (P. samudaya sacca)

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (P. nirodha sacca)

The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (P. magga sacca). ♣

This second topic gives the description of the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*). They are referred to as 'truths': *saccani* → *sacca* = 'truth.' These truths are followed by a noble person (*P. ariya-puggala*).

They are not esoteric truths. They are not dogmatic truths. They represent what is 'real,' what constitutes natural law—relevant in the past, in the present, and in the future. Therefore, truth can never be the exclusive domain of any changing and perishable religion or philosophy.

Truth requires no label. A label only obstructs the independent understanding of Truth. Labels create detrimental prejudices in the minds of individuals. The frequent religious conflicts among so-called 'universal' religions are the violent consequences of this. By its very nature, truth cannot be sectarian. This also implies that the *Dhamma* is unified, free from divisions, free from structures.

To comprehend the law of nature—the true nature of things (*P. yatha-bhuta*)—it is not even necessary to know whether the teachings come from the Buddha or from someone else. What matters is to perceive this truth, to know and understand what is true, and to experience this truth.

Stephan Bodian ⁵¹ expresses it as follows:

♣ *Truth is seeking to awaken to itself through you, to see itself everywhere through your eyes and taste itself everywhere through your lips.* ♣

What does this mean? We can understand it by breaking it down:

'*Truth is seeking to awaken to itself*': It means truth is not an external entity actively seeking. It implies an inherent quality of truth to be self-realizing or self-aware. It suggests that truth has the inherent capacity to reveal itself, and the process of awakening is more about individuals becoming receptive or attuned to this self-revelation.

'*Through you*': The statement emphasizes the individual, suggesting that each person has a role in the unfolding or realization of truth. It implies a personal and experiential dimension to the understanding of truth.

'*To see itself everywhere through your eyes*': This part of the sentence uses a metaphorical language. It suggests that as individuals become more attuned to truth, they gain a perspective that allows them to perceive truth in all things. The eyes, in this context, symbolize perception and awareness.

'*And taste itself everywhere through your lips*': Similarly, this part uses metaphor to convey a sensory experience. Tasting is associated with direct, personal experience. The idea is that, as individuals engage with truth, they 'taste' it in all aspects of life, suggesting a deep and intimate connection with truth.

The *Dhatu Vibhanga Sutta* ⁵² contains a remarkable story about the *samana* ⁵³ Pukkusati, who unexpectedly encounters the Buddha without recognizing him.

The Buddha suggests to Pukkusati that he explain the teachings, regardless of the outcome. It is evident from the story that when Pukkusati listened to the Buddha and understood his teachings, he had no knowledge that it was the Buddha speaking to him or whose teachings they were. Pukkusati saw only the Truth, and that is what truly matters. The messenger is inconsequential. It all comes down to the truth.

To use a metaphor commonly found in the *suttas*: if a medicine is effective, it can cure a sick person. It doesn't matter who invented or prepared the medicine or where the ingredients come from.

The Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*) form the foundation and essence of what the Buddha taught.

They are as follows: suffering must be understood; the origin of suffering must be released; the cessation of suffering must be realized; and the path leading to the cessation of suffering must be developed. ⁵⁴

Pay special attention to the verbs used in the translation above: understand → release → realize → develop. They clearly indicate the focus of the practice of the *dhammanuvatti*.

After the Buddha first delivered a brief discourse on the Four Noble Truths in the Deer Park of Sarnath, they are reiterated and extensively explained in numerous passages throughout the *Early Buddhist Suttas (EBS)* ⁵⁵.

From these frequent repetitions, references, explanations, and clarifications in the *suttas*, a consistent and coherent understanding emerges of what the Buddha meant by these truths.

The first Noble Truth provides the definition of suffering (*P. dukkha*). It pertains to suffering in general:

• *Birth is suffering. Old age is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering. Being with those you dislike is suffering. Being separated from loved ones is suffering. Not attaining what you desire is suffering. In summary, the five aggregates (P. khandhas) are suffering.* •

This suffering must be understood, must be fully comprehended. The practitioner must recognize that *dukkha* is pervasive, existing at all times and in all places. It arises repeatedly. Just as the ocean is made up of water, life is made up of *dukkha*: being born is *dukkha*; growing up is *dukkha*; experiencing illness is *dukkha*; aging is *dukkha*; dying is *dukkha*; being apart from loved ones is *dukkha*; being in the company of those you don't love is *dukkha*; even obtaining what you desire is *dukkha* (due to the fear of losing it); the five aggregates (*P. khandhas*) entail *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is inherent in life. ⁵⁶

Mathieu Ricard describes it as follows: ⁵⁷

• *The meaning [of dukkha] is perhaps best expressed as the unsatisfactory, dissatisfied, frustrating, conflict-prone, and painful nature of life. The invisible pain is latent, always and everywhere present as long as we are in ignorance, remain attached to ourselves, and perceive reality incorrectly.* •

The Buddha urges his followers to commit themselves to understanding human suffering as a universal characteristic in order to attain liberation from this reality.

After all, if we continue to avert our gaze from reality, we will keep forming expectations of people and things that can never be fulfilled, nor will they ever be.

In this manner, we persist in wandering like zombies in a completely illusory world.

Ajahn Brahm expresses it as follows: ⁵⁸

• *Suffering is asking the world for something the world can never provide you. Suffering is expecting and desiring impossible things from the world. It is desiring the perfect home and career. It is asking that all the things we work hard for happen perfectly at the right time and place.*

However, that is asking for something that can never be achieved. It is akin to requesting deep meditation and enlightenment, here and now. But that is not how

this universe operates. If you ask for something that the world cannot give, you must recognize that you are inviting suffering.

*The Buddha wants us to see with our own eyes that all phenomena are impermanent. They change in every moment. They are momentary. They are anicca—impermanent in all aspects. **

Realizing impermanence (*P. anicca*) is the key to liberation.

Vipassana Research Institute: ⁵⁹

** Change is inherent in all phenomenal existence. There is nothing animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic that we can label as permanent, as even when we affix that label on something, it undergoes metamorphosis.*

Realizing this central fact of life through direct experience, the Buddha declared:

** Whether a fully Enlightened One has arisen in the world or not, it still remains a firm condition, an immutable fact and fixed law that all formations are impermanent, subject to suffering, and devoid of substance.*

*Anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), and anatta (insubstantiality) are the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*) ⁶⁰ common to all sentient existence.*

*Of these, the most important in the practice of Vipassana is anicca. As meditators, we come face to face with the impermanence of ourselves. This enables us to realize that we have no control over this phenomenon, and that any attempt to manipulate it creates suffering. We thus learn to develop detachment, an acceptance of anicca, an openness to change, enabling us to live happily amid all the vicissitudes of life. **

Hence the Buddha said that:

** To one who perceives the impermanence, O meditators, the perception of insubstantiality manifests itself. And in one who perceives insubstantiality, egotism is destroyed. And [as a result] even in this present life one attains liberation. The comprehension of anicca leads automatically to a grasp of anatta and dukkha, and whoever realizes these facts naturally turns to the path that leads out of suffering.*

Given the crucial importance of anicca, it is not surprising the Buddha repeatedly stressed its significance for the seekers of liberation.

In the Maha Satipatthana Sutta—the principal text in which he explained the technique of Vipassana—he described the stages in the practice, which must in every case lead to the following experience:

(The meditator) abides observing the phenomenon of arising... abides observing the phenomenon of passing away... abides observing the phenomenon of arising and passing away. ♣

When we recognize that everything is impermanent, it naturally follows that they are unsatisfactory (*P. dukkha*) and devoid of substance, empty (*P. anatta*). They lack an independent core and do not possess eternity or a 'soul'. They are 'empty' of substance.

Anicca applies to all phenomena, all forms, and all types of structures—social, political, economic, financial, religious, including buddhist structures. The rigidity that characterizes structures and their pursuit of continuity is incongruent with the spontaneous nature of *Dhamma*. Upon closer examination, we discover that they are even the opposite.

Let it be unequivocally clear: structures do not represent the *Dhamma*—the natural law, the true nature of things, the truth. Never ever. Truth does not require representation.

Furthermore, *Dhamma* cannot be monopolized. Structures are not about *Dhamma*; they revolve around membership numbers, fees, appointments, and (future) subsidies. They involve regulations, procedures, inclusion, exclusion, interpretation, and ensuing manipulation. Structures serve to generate financial flows, secure positions of power, and often solely represent the egos of their administrators, leaders, and rulers.

Understanding *dukkha* means 'seeing and knowing' *dukkha*. In all phenomena, in all things. Observing the process of the *tilakkhana*—the three characteristics of existence—in every moment.

Bhikkhu Analayo expresses it as follows: ⁶¹

♣ *What the first noble truth makes clear is that all these forms of dukkha, on critical examination, can be traced back to the fundamental fivefold clinging to existence through the ranks [khandhas]. ♣*

The second Noble Truth indicates the cause (or origin) of suffering:

♣ *It is the desire that leads to further existence, is connected with pleasure and lust, and seeks pleasure here and there. It is brief: desire for sense pleasure (*P. kama tanha*), desire for existence (*P. bhava tanha*), and desire for non-existence (*P. vibhava tanha*). ♣*

Three distinct forms of desire are mentioned in the explanatory *suttas*:

➔ Desire for sensory pleasure (*P. kama-tanha*): This desire is characterized by grasping at an object with the intention of never letting go of it. *Kama-tanha* in-

volves the desire for and subsequent attachment to everything we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think.

Hence, the absolute necessity to station guards at the sense gates!

Frits Koster expresses it as follows: ⁶²

• *The immediate cause [of desire] is seeing pleasure or happiness in things that actually lead to addiction or dependence.* •

→ Urge to manifest and desire for eternal existence (*P. bhava-tanha*): This is the impulse for life and becoming (*P. bhava*) that permeates all existence. In reality, humans cling, out of sheer ignorance, to a life that is an ever-elusive, continuous process of constant creation and decay.

This applies to basic needs such as food, drink, shelter, protection against cold and heat, as well as higher needs on Maslow's hierarchy: the need for social contact, the need for appreciation and recognition, the need for self-fulfillment, and finally, the seemingly insatiable need for eternal existence.

We cannot, will not, and dare not accept our mortality and wish to exist eternally (in some ethereal form, although some religions even propose a 'resurrection' or 'reincarnation'). This becomes a major source of suffering. Pursuing such unrealistic ambitions inevitably leads to permanent dissatisfaction and unrest. ⁶³

→ Desire for non-existence (*P. vibhava-tanha*): This is the opposite, the desire not to have or to be: rejecting physical discomforts (illness, pain, sadness...) or desiring to end something that was once perceived as permanently acquired (marriage, money, career...).

The first two appearances of desire are attractive, alluring forces, while the third form contains a repulsive element.

These three manifestations of desire are the direct causes of human discontent, suffering, and *dukkha*.

If we are to free ourselves from the clutches of *dukkha*, we must let go of such desires.

Dukkha arises only when we resist accepting things as they are, desiring them to be different from how they present themselves to us.

The fundamental principle is that we experience *dukkha* from the moment we go against the natural flow of *Dhamma* (the natural law, the true nature of things, the truth, *yatha-bhuta*), when we perceive phenomena in a distorted ('ignorant') manner, different from their true nature (*P. svabhava*). ⁶⁴

Dukkha is the reality, the sole reality (as part of the *tilakkhana*). All other considerations—whether scientific or metaphysical—are imagined projections of our conditioned ('ignorant' and misguided) minds onto human existence. It is the task of the *dhammanuvatti*—the *Dhamma* practitioner—to put an end to this delusion.

By realistically revealing reality to the practitioner, the *Dhamma* equips them with the tools that lead to the cessation of *dukkha*, to liberation. This is achieved by freeing them from attachment and releasing them from their imagined and illusory hopes and delusions.

With this altered perception of reality, the practitioner naturally begins to live more in the present moment and to accept things as they truly are, detached from the stories and dramas created by his conditioned mind. The present moment is the only reality that exists.

The practitioner must confront this reality. There is nothing else. If he finds it disagreeable, his only choice is to remain seated on his meditation mat until clarity arises.

It is crucial to realize that *dukkha* can only maintain its power over us as long as we allow it to intimidate us.

Therefore, the practitioner should confront suffering directly, without averting his gaze. He must understand and accept *dukkha* as the inherent nature of life, as the law of cause and effect, dependent arising (*P. paticca samuppada*).

Ulrich Libbrecht: ⁶⁵

• *Whoever wants to escape this split world must leave the valley and look for a mountain. Not a mountain of the word, but a mountain of the heart—'ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens' (R. M. Rilke)—the mountain of direct experience.* •

Ajahn Brahm: ⁶⁶

• *Be aware that dukkha is the nature of things...*

... When you realize it's all just the nature of nature, just a process of cause and effect, you realize it's not your problem anymore. That you shouldn't worry about it.

You see that letting go comes from understanding the nature of the suffering in life: there's not much you can do about it, so leave it alone.

If you leave it alone, you develop the mental attitude that is aware and alert, that watches, but does not get involved.

... When we realize that our experiences are a purely natural process, we don't react by feeling scared, guilty, frustrated or disappointed. •

It's not our responsibility to ensure that things unfold according to our desires. Our role is simply to observe and recognize that everything is as it is. We must realize that clinging to such a fleeting, suffering, and inherently selfless world serves no purpose.

We need to learn to flow with the current. Those who attempt to avoid a high wave by the sea are inevitably thrown onto the shore. Conversely, those who dive into the crest of the wave are surrounded only by water.

Regard suffering (*P. dukkha*) like any other phenomenon: impermanent, incidental, and devoid of its own inherent identity. Observe attentively what unfolds, acknowledge it, and release *dukkha*. Embrace and accept *dukkha*.

We must release the craving for 'becoming' (*P. bhava*). Although this desire for 'becoming' may manifest differently for each individual, it undeniably exists within all of us.

Bhikkhu Thanissaro: ⁶⁷

• *Depending on how we view the world, our world will be different... A painter, a skier and a miner looking at a mountain... will see different mountains. If you're a painter, a skier, or a miner, you'll look at that same mountain in different ways, depending on what you want from it at any given time—beauty, adventure, or wealth... Each wish actually creates its own distinct world; and within all those worlds we assume different identities.*

The Buddha used a specific word for this experience which creates a separate world by having a separate desire. He called it 'bhava'... It is something that is produced by the activity of our mind. •

There is only one attitude that can help us break free from this deadlock: letting go of desire, abandoning this craving. Regard desire as a transient state of mind that arises and fades away due to specific causes and conditions, repeatedly.

By resisting the pull of desire, our ingrained pattern, and instead letting it go, desire ceases to exist. This is the liberation that the Buddha refers to.

Stephen Bachelor: ⁶⁸

• *The freedom of awakening is rooted in the cessation of desire... We are our own jailers. We keep ourselves unfree by clinging out of confusion or fear to a self that exists independently of all conditions.*

Instead of accepting and understanding things as they are, we try to become independent of them by inventing a separate 'self'.

Developing the path begins with truly seeing how changeable, coincidental, and creative we and the world are.

Osho: ⁶⁹

• *The yogi who 'understands' desire, discards it because he is aware of its painful nature. And the moment there is no more desire, the moment the mind is no longer disturbed by lust and it is looking for nothing more than, in that very moment, in that still and quiet moment, he experiences his real authentic being.* •

The root cause of our suffering, known as *dukkha*, lies in ignorance (*P. avijja*). It is the lack of understanding, the absence of a clear perception, or the complete failure to recognize the reality of what is happening in the present moment. We are unwilling to accept that we are an impermanent and interdependent process without a solid core or a soul. On the contrary, we mistakenly assume that we are the center of the universe, the ultimate creators of our own destiny, or at least closely associated with it as described in Genesis.

Avijja, pertaining to the reality of our own nature, signifies ignorance regarding the phenomenon of the self ('I'). We are unaware that our desires and aversions (*P. sankharas*) ⁷⁰ control us without our conscious knowledge. We do not understand why we react to our sensations, nor do we grasp the true nature of the objects we are responding to. Moreover, we remain oblivious to the impermanent and impersonal nature of our existence, and we fail to recognize that our attachment to this existence only leads to suffering. This waterfall of ignorance unconsciously enslaves us to our habitual patterns.

Ignorance can only be dispelled through wisdom (*P. panna*), which entails being equanimously aware of the emptiness—the personal realization that no phenomenon, especially the 'I,' possesses a fixed core, independent substance, or a soul.

In other words, the cause of *dukkha* is a state of mental and emotional confusion resulting from a misperception of the true nature of all phenomena (*P. dhammas*).

The genuine reality of our existence can be understood in two ways. Firstly, our reality is constantly changing from moment to moment, rendering stability elusive. Secondly, our reality—the 'I'—is composed of five components, referred to as the five aggregates (*P. khandhas*), which have come together under specific causes (*P. hetus*) ⁷¹ and conditions (*P. paccayas*), ⁷² and will eventually disintegrate under similar causes and conditions.

The cause of *dukkha* is expressed very clearly in the *Adittapariyaya Sutta* ⁷³, the Discourse on Fire. This discourse was delivered by the Buddha in the Gayasisa Mountains while he was on his way back from Sarnath to Rajagaha to explain his teachings to King Bimbisara of Magadha. ⁷⁴

The Discourse on Fire is the Buddha's third discourse, providing clarification on elements from both the first (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) and the second (*Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*) sermons. The Buddha delivered this discourse to the

Kassapa brothers, who were considered the leading spiritual fire-worshippers (*P. aggihutta*)⁷⁵ of their time.

According to the commentaries (*P. atthakatha*)⁷⁶ on the *suttas*, the Kassapas had gathered around them a multitude of followers numbering a thousand. While these ascetics had previously revered the fire day and night, the Buddha taught them that the sensory world was on fire. He conveyed that all phenomena, all occurrences, all things, all sensory-world phenomena are ablaze.

By using fire as a metaphor for desire, aversion, and ignorance, he made the understanding of the *Dhamma* visually apparent for the fire-worshippers. This discourse once again demonstrates the Buddha's skill as a brilliant debater. The Discourse on Fire is one of the highlights of the *Pali Canon*.

The third Noble Truth indicates how suffering can be brought to an end:

• *It is the complete disappearance and destruction of desire; the relinquishing, abandoning, letting go, distancing from it. The liberation from desire.* •

The third Noble Truth addresses the cessation of *dukkha*; the end of pain; the end of imperfection; of irritation; of suffering in the broadest sense. The end of *dukkha* is inner peace. *Nibbana*.

The *dhammanuvatti* attains *nibbana* when all desire is eliminated, when, in other words, they transcend their feelings, sensations, and emotions (*P. vedana*)⁷⁷ and are no longer provoked by them.

Through the realized insight into the *tilakkhana* of phenomena and the equanimous acceptance of them, the practitioner experiences tranquility and peace. This is the liberation (*P. vimutti*) to which the Buddha points. Liberation and self-realization are here. Nearby. In this body. In this moment.

The Fourth Noble Truth identifies the Path one must follow to end suffering:

• *It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.* •

This is the Path that must be cultivated to stop *dukkha*.

The Buddha teaches that the *dhammanuvatti* should not focus on the symptom (suffering) but on the causes of suffering, namely, desire, craving, longing, and attachment.

The Fourth Noble Truth provides the practitioner with the way to break free from the cycle of *samsara*, that is, to overcome *dukkha*, arising from craving and

attachment, through awakening, by becoming aware, by enlightenment, namely by gaining insight into the true nature of things. *Yatha-bhuta nana dassana*.

The Eightfold Path can be summarized as a comprehensive path of learning and practice, going from morality (*P. sila*) → respectively: right speech, right action, right livelihood; through meditation (*P. samadhi*) → respectively: right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration; to wisdom (*P. panna*) → respectively: right understanding and right intention.

The better the morality, the better the concentration will be. And the better the concentration, the better the insight will become.

However, it is not that these eight steps must be developed separately. It is an integrated path where each individual factor fertilizes and improves the other factors.

Very briefly, but very useful as a reminder, I present here the practical content of the eight aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path:

- Right understanding: understanding the reality of the Four Truths
- Right intention: applying this understanding in life
- Right speech: speaking according to this understanding
- Right action: acting according to this understanding
- Right livelihood: no professional activities conflicting with this understanding
- Right effort: directing efforts according to this understanding
- Right mindfulness: focusing full and permanent attention on this understanding
- Right meditation: reflection deepening this understanding

This Eightfold Path leads to harmony and insight. It is precisely this insight (into the true nature of phenomena) that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*.

The Eightfold Path must therefore be considered as the practical path to follow and the process of awareness leading to self-realization. It is the roadmap to *nibbana*.

Frits Koster: ⁷⁸

• *If meditative insight is deep enough and if the practitioner and the situation are ripe for it, a very specific and purifying experience can occur at a certain moment, called 'enlightenment'.*

In Buddhist writings, the experience of enlightenment is often approached through denials or negations, explaining what it is not.

*It is generally described as a 'state of highest happiness and peace' (*P. santi*), detached from all (impermanent) worldly experiences, as 'safe' (*P. khema*), or as 'liberating' (*P. vimutti*).*

This experience of enlightenment is not permanent. It is akin to a moment of briefly seeing the sun on a cloudy day.

According to the Buddha and practitioners who have experienced it, this experience is particularly liberating because at that moment previously obstructive and problem-causing forces, such as desire, hatred, and ignorance, are completely extinguished. 9

III. the Three Rotations and Twelve Aspects

• *Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:*

"This is the Noble Truth of Suffering." [P. pariyatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This suffering, a Noble Truth, is to be fully understood." [P. patipatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This suffering, a Noble Truth, is fully understood." [P. pativedha]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This is the Noble Truth about the cause of suffering." [P. pariyatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This cause of suffering, a Noble Truth, must be let go." [P. patipatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This cause of suffering, a Noble Truth, has been completely let go." [P. pativedha]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This is the Noble Truth about the cessation of suffering." [P. pariyatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This cessation of suffering, a Noble Truth, must be realized." [P. patipatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This cessation of suffering, a Noble Truth, has been realized." [P. pativedha]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"This is the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the cessation of suffering." [P. pariyatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

"The Path leading to the cessation of suffering, a Noble Truth, must be cultivated." [P. patipatti]

Concerning what I had never heard before, Monks, seeing appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, understanding appeared, light appeared in me:

*"The Path leading to the cessation of suffering, a Noble Truth, has been cultivated." [P. pativedha] **

According to the Buddha, each of the Four Noble Truths must be practiced in three phases or rotations: the theoretical phase (*P. pariyatti*), the practical phase (*P. patipatti*), and the phase of realization (*P. pativedha*).

Through this approach, twelve states or combinations arise, known as the Twelve Aspects of the Four Truths.

As a result, the Four Noble Truths transcend a mere dogmatic or doctrinal system, as observed in certain Buddhist religious movements. Instead, they become a dynamic process that involves fully comprehending *dukkha*, letting go of its cause, realizing its cessation, and cultivating the Eightfold Path that leads to the end of suffering.

Only when the Four Noble Truths have been experientially understood in these three aspects can true liberation (*P. vimutti*) be achieved.

Without this experiential understanding, the Four Truths remain a sterile philosophical system, lacking wisdom and becoming mere intellectual exercises. The system of the Three Rotations and the Twelve Aspects may seem intellectually simple, but its practice is a different story altogether.

Broadly speaking, it means that each aspect is intellectually known and accepted (the theory), then diligently put into practice, and finally fully realized by the practitioner.

This four-step plan, with its three corresponding sections, is not merely a theoretical or intellectual construction. It is an extensively developed plan, carefully analyzed from theory to practice, and ultimately leading to complete self-realization.

A brief analysis:

1. the Truth of *Dukkha*

• *Idam dukkham ariyasaccam... parinneyam... parinnatam — This Noble Truth of Dukkha... must be experienced... is fully experienced.* ♣⁷⁹

→ 'This is *Dukkha*': The initial stage is theoretical—purely intellectual—recognition and acknowledgement of suffering. This forms the starting point, known as *pariyatti*. It involves recognizing and determining suffering on an intellectual level.

→ '*Dukkha* must be understood': The second step is the practical aspect, involving contemplation of *dukkha* in all its forms and aspects during meditation. It is an exploration of the vast terrain of *dukkha*, experiencing the universal presence of suffering.

This experience, being a witness to *dukkha* without judgment or attachment to personal stories and dramas, should encompass the full range of *dukkha* (*P. dukkha parinneyam*).

By examining the complete range of suffering, we eliminate the possibility of any aspect remaining unaffected by *dukkha*. This process is achieved through sustained and repetitive meditation practice.

Thus, *dukkha* is understood as a totality: we experience *dukkha* in everything and in all its aspects. This direct, experiential understanding is referred to as *patipatti*.

→ '*Dukkha* is understood': Finally, the third step (*P. parinnatam*) is the culmination. Once *dukkha* is understood, we need to realize its presence within ourselves and transcend it.

This means moving beyond *dukkha*, leaving it behind and transcending its influence. This can only be achieved by progressing through the subsequent steps of the Four Noble Truths. Only then can we truly claim to have understood *dukkha* and transcended its limitations. The process of going beyond *dukkha* is known as *pativedha*.

2. the Truth of the Cause of Dukkha

• *Idam dukkham samudayam ariyasaccam... pahahatabbam... pahinam — This Noble Truth of the cause of dukkha... must be destroyed... is utterly destroyed.* 80

-> 'This is the cause of *dukkha*': recognition and determination that desire (*P. tanha, lobha*) is the cause of *dukkha*, of our misery. This recognition and determination—on an intellectual level—is excellent but does not propel us further toward liberation. This is *pariyatti*.

-> 'The cause of *dukkha* must be released': the cause (= the desire) must be annihilated (*P. pahahatabbam*) through meditation practice. This is *patipatti*.

-> 'The cause of *dukkha* has been released': but this destruction in itself is not enough. Only when the roots (*P. mulas*) of desire (*P. pahinam*) are eradicated and nothing remains of them, does *dukkha* come to an end. This is *pativedha*.

3. The Truth of the Termination of Dukkha

• *Idam dukkhanirodham ariyasaccam... sacchikatabbam... sacchikatam... — This Noble Truth of the Termination of dukkha must be realized... has been realized.* 81

-> 'This is the cessation of *dukkha*': *dukkha*, our misery has come to an end. We reach the stage of *nibbana*. This is the intellectual recognition and determination that—by destroying desire to the root—we liberate ourselves. This is *pariyatti*.

-> 'The cessation of *dukkha* must be realized': But the mere intellectual recognition and determination that there is a level beyond our body/mind structure is not enough. It must be certified (*P. sacchikatabbam*) through our meditation practice: we must work on this realization. This is *patipatti*.

-> 'The cessation of suffering is realized': Only when the cessation of *dukkha* is *de facto* realized are we free. This is *pativedha*.

4. The Truth of the Path That Leads to the Termination of Dukkha.

• *Idam dukkhanirodhagamini patipada ariyasaccam... bhavetabbam... bhavitam... — This Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Termination of dukkha... must be cultivated... has been cultivated.* 82

-> 'This is the path that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*': this is the intellectual recognition and determination that this is indeed the path that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*. This is *pariyatti*.

-> 'This path must be cultivated': this is the intellectual decision that we must cultivate this path (*P. bhavetabbam*). This can only happen through practice. This is *patipatti*.

-> 'This path is cultivated': The cessation of *dukkha* and the liberation resulting from it are facts only when all the elements of the path are developed, i.e., when all eight aspects of the path are directly, experientially experienced and realized. This is *pativedha*.

Only when the Four Truths, in the differentiated three levels, are experienced and realized experientially, can there be real liberation (*P. vimutti*). Otherwise, the Four Noble Truths remain merely a philosophical system. Unfortunately, that is often the case.

Reread the above. As much as necessary. And practice it this way. It is the heartwood. It is a verbal description of how the Four Noble Truths are to be realized. How the 'Highest Awakening' was achieved by the Buddha. *Sammāsambuddhassa*.

IV. the Buddha's Personal Wisdom

• *Monks: As long as my seeing and knowing about these Four Noble Truths as they really are—with their three rotations and twelve states—was not thoroughly clear, I did not claim to have attained the Supreme Awakening: the correct Full Awakening that is unsurpassed in this world with its gods, its Maras and Brahmas, with its generation of monks and priests, with its kings and subjects.*

But ever since my understanding and insight into these Four Noble Truths, with their three cycles and twelve aspects, became profoundly clear, I do claim that I have attained the Supreme Awakening: the complete and unsurpassed Awakening in this world with its gods, Maras and Brahmas, generation of monks and priests, kings and subjects.

Seeing and knowing appeared in me: My liberation of spirit is unshakable; this is the final birth; now there is no further state of existence. ♪

In this section, the Buddha declares that he has attained the Supreme Awakening (*P. sammāsambuddhassa*) by 'seeing' and 'knowing' (*P. janami passami*) the Four Noble Truths 'as they really are—with their three rotations and twelve aspects.'

• *Seeing and knowing appeared in me: my liberation of spirit is unshakable. This is the last birth. Now there is no further state of existence. ♪*

This is the exclamation (*P. udana*) of the *Sammāsambuddha*⁸³—the self-awakened Buddha who, without any assistance from others, rediscovered the natural law through his own power after it had been lost.

It is the proclamation of the fully awakened *Bhagavat* who realizes within himself the liberating universal *Dhamma* and clearly and distinctly proclaims it to the world.

It describes the Buddha's experience of *nibbana*, surpassing ignorance, desire, and aversion, where he transcends the realm of defilements, remaining untouched by the sensory world.

It is the complete destruction of *dukkha*. It describes the path that all Buddhas have walked before Him.

It is always the same unwritten path leading to self-realization, achieved by overcoming the five hindrances (*P. panca nivarana*),⁸⁴ establishing the four foundations of mindfulness (*P. satipatthana*),⁸⁵ and cultivating the seven factors of awakening (*P. sambojjhanga*).⁸⁶

This is the path that leads to the attainment of the highest awakening (*P. anuttara samma sambodhi*). This Teaching of all Buddhas is succinctly summarized in the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*).

V. The Dhamma Wheel in Motion

• *And the Five Companions were pleased and rejoiced at the words of the Exalted One. And while the explanation of the Four Noble Truths was given by the Exalted One, in the Venerable Kondanna*⁸⁷ *appeared the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma Eye: "Everything subject to arising is subject to decay."*

And when the Dhamma-Wheel was set in motion by the Exalted One, the spirits of the earth exclaimed:

"In the Deer Park of Isipatana, near Varanasi, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Dhamma-Wheel, which no monk, priest, god, Mara, Brahma, or anyone else can stop!"

And the Gods of the Four Great Kings heard that cry of the earth spirits, and they uttered this cry:

"In the Deer Park of Isipatana, near Varanasi, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Dhamma-Wheel, which no monk, priest, god, Mara, Brahma, or anyone else can stop!"

And in this manner also the Tavatimsa gods, the Yama gods, the Tusita gods, the Nimmanarati gods, and the Paranimitavasavatti gods heard this cry, and they repeated that cry after hearing it:

“In the Deer Park of Isipatana, near Varanasi, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Dhamma-Wheel, which no monk, priest, god, Mara, Brahma, or anyone else can stop!”

And the Brahma gods heard that cry of the Paranimmitavasavatti gods, and they uttered the following cry:

“In the Deer Park of Isipatana, near Varanasi, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Dhamma-Wheel, which no monk, priest, god, Mara, Brahma, or anyone else can stop!”

Thus, in that very moment, the cry reached even the Brahma worlds. The ten thousandfold world system quaked, trembled, and shook, and a brilliant and boundless light radiated, surpassing the brilliance of the gods.

And then the Blessed One uttered these inspired words: “Do you understand, Kondanna? Verily: Kondanna understands, Friends!”

And thus the Venerable Kondanna obtained the name “the Knower”—he who understands; he who knows.”

After Kondanna was the first to understand the Doctrine, the other Four Companions soon followed: seeing and knowing arose in them and they uttered the following udana:

• *Our liberation is unshakable. This is our final birth. Now there is no more birth.* •

This text holds immense significance, surpassing ordinary repetition.

• *While the Exalted One expounded the Four Noble Truths, in Venerable Kondanna arose the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma eye: “Everything subject to arising is subject to decay.”* • ⁸⁸

The ‘pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma Eye’ is *anicca*—the only genuine reality, the true nature of things (*P. yatha-bhuta*)—impermanence. Instability.

The Buddha advises: observe the process of creation and passing of all things. Witness it. Contemplate this eternal process to which all phenomena are subject. Observe this eternal, universal law of nature (*P. Dhammo Sanantano*) of change, of mutation, where nothing is lost; only a permanent transformation occurs. ⁸⁹

Emphasizing its importance: Observe *anicca*. See how “Everything that is subject to creation is subject to decay.”

This is the pure and undefiled knowledge of the *Dhamma Eye*.

A crucial note: Just before his passing, the Buddha reiterates this message. *Anicca* serves as both the prologue and epilogue of Buddha’s teachings.

His last words:

• *Monks, listen carefully, I tell you: Let only the Dhamma-Vinaya [the Doctrine and the Discipline] that I have taught you be your Teacher. Everything that animates man is subject to transience. Strive unceasingly!* •

The Buddha emphasizes limiting oneself to what he has taught. Observe it as he taught. No need for personal interpretation. Simply scrutinize attentively and evenly what has been imparted. That suffices.

The Buddha directly points to the essence:

• *Vaya dhamma sankhara, appamadena sampadetha—I tell you, everything that animates man is subject to impermanence. Strive unceasingly!* •

Clearly stated: observe *anicca* + realize this process in yourself. Realizing implies recognizing (*P. pariyatti*), acknowledging through practice (*P. patipatti*), and becoming one with it (*P. pativedha*).

Relentless striving involves utilizing all available tools. The Buddha provides a wonderful instrument for this: *satipatthana* = the Four Fields of Mindfulness. The Buddha calls this 'an unparalleled way' (*P. ekayana magga*).

Following this, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* provides a lyrical description (later added) of how the Dhamma Wheel, set in motion by the Buddha, • *cannot be stopped by any monk, priest, god, Mara, Brahma, or anyone. And at that very moment, that cry reached as far as the Brahma worlds. The ten thousandfold world system shook, trembled, and quaked, and a beautiful limitless light appeared in the world, far surpassing the brilliance of the gods.* •

And then the Blessed One uttered these inspired words:

• *Do you understand, Kondanna? Verily: Kondanna understands, Friends!* •

Thus, Venerable Kondanna earned the name 'the Knower'—he who understands, he who knows.

After Kondanna comprehended the Doctrine, the other four companions soon followed: seeing and knowing arose within them, and they exclaimed:

• *Our liberation is unshakable. This is our final birth. Now there is no more birth.* •



II. The Anatta-lakkhana Sutta

The Buddha preached the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta* ⁹⁰—the Discourse on the Not-Self Characteristic—on the fifth day after initiating the turning of the Wheel of *Dhamma* with his first discourse (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*) ⁹¹ and after Kondanna, one of the Five Companions and the first disciple, had entered the stream (*P. sotapatti*). ⁹²

I have integrally translated the *sutta* text from *Pali* into English.

Why do I use the term 'integrally'?

Because most *suttas* contain repetitive text. That is also the case here. It is a remnant of the oral tradition during the first five centuries after the Buddha's death (*P. parinibbana*). ⁹³ This repetition of words was a means of accurately memorizing the texts and transferring them as faithfully as possible to the next generation.

This *sutta* can be divided into four different topics. Such division, marked with Roman numerals, is not part of the original text, but aids in reading.

Here is the complete translation:

• *Once the Blessed One resided in the Deer Park of Isipatana in Sarnath, near Varanasi. There he addressed the Five Companions as follows:*

"Monks!"

"Lord," the monks replied. The Exalted One spoke as follows:

I. Non-Self because one has no control over it

"Monks, physical form (body - P. rupa) ⁹⁴ is without a self. If physical form had a self, one would not be troubled by it. Then it would be possible to determine the nature of physical form: "Let my physical form be like this, or let my physical form not be like this."

It is precisely because physical form is devoid of self, Monks, that one is troubled by it. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the nature of physical form: "Let my physical form be like this, or let my physical form not be like this."

"Monks, sensations (feelings - P. vedana) ⁹⁵ are without a self. If sensations had a self, one would not be disturbed by them. Then it would be possible to determine the nature of sensations: "Let my sensations be like this, or let my sensations not be like this."

It is precisely because sensations are devoid of self, Monks, that one is troubled by them. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the nature of sensations: "Let my sensations be like this, or let my sensations not be like this."

"Monks, perceptions (P. sanna) ⁹⁶ are without a self. If perceptions had a self, one would not be bothered by them. Then it would be possible to determine the nature of perceptions: "Let my perceptions be like this, or let my perceptions not be like this."

It is precisely because perceptions are devoid of self, Monks, that one is troubled by them. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the nature of perceptions: "Let my perceptions be like this, or let my perceptions not be like this."

"Monks, mental formations (P. sankharas) ⁹⁷ are without a self. If mental formations had a self, one would not be troubled by them. Then it would be possible to determine the nature of mental formations: "Let my mental formations be like this, or let my mental formations not be like this."

It is precisely because mental formations are devoid of self, Monks, that they are troubled. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the nature of mental formations: "Let my mental formations be like this, or let my mental formations not be like this."

"Monks, consciousness (P. vinnana) ⁹⁸ is without a self. If consciousness had a self, one would not suffer from it. Then it would be possible to determine the nature of consciousness: "Let my consciousness be like this, or let my consciousness not be like this."

It is precisely because consciousness is devoid of self, Monks, that one suffers from it. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the nature of consciousness: "Let my consciousness be like this, or let my consciousness not be like this."

II. Everything is changeable, unsatisfactory and selfless

"What do you think, Monks? Is physical form constant or changeable?"

"Changeable, Lord"

"And what is changeable, is it unsatisfactory or satisfying?"

"Unsatisfactory, Lord"

"And that which is changeable, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it appropriate to regard it as: "This is mine, this is I, this is my self?"

"No, Lord"

"What do you think, Monks? Are sensations (feelings) constant or changeable?"

"Changeable, Lord"

"And what is changeable, is it unsatisfactory or satisfying?"

"Unsatisfactory, Lord"

"And that which is changeable, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it appropriate to regard it as: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'"

"No, Lord"

"What do you think, Monks? Are perceptions constant or changeable?"

"Changeable, Lord"

"And what is changeable, is it unsatisfactory or satisfying?"

"Unsatisfactory, Lord"

"And that which is changeable, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it appropriate to regard it as: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'"

"No, Lord"

"What do you think, Monks? Are sankharas constant or changeable?"

"Changeable, Lord"

"And what is changeable, is it unsatisfactory or satisfying?"

"Unsatisfactory, Lord"

"And that which is changeable, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it appropriate to regard it as: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'"

"No, Lord"

"What do you think, Monks? Is consciousness constant or changeable?"

"Changeable, Lord"

"And what is changeable, is it unsatisfactory or satisfying?"

"Unsatisfactory, Lord"

"And that which is changeable, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, it is appropriate to regard it as: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'"

"No, Lord"

III. Everything must be considered utterly selfless

"Therefore, Monks, regarding any physical form: whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near:

All physical forms should be contemplated with right understanding, in accordance with truth, as follows: "This is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself."

"Regarding any sensations (feelings) whatsoever: whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near:

All sensations should be contemplated with right discernment, in accordance with truth, as follows: "This is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself."

"Regarding any perceptions: whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or fine; inferior or superior; far or near:

All perceptions should be considered with right understanding, in accordance with truth, as follows: "This is not mine, this is not me, this is not myself."

"Regarding any mental formations: whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or fine; inferior or superior; far or near:

All mental formations should be contemplated with right understanding, in accordance with truth, as follows: "This is not mine, this is not me, this is not myself."

"Regarding any consciousness: whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or fine; inferior or superior; far or near:

All consciousness should be contemplated with right understanding, in accordance with truth, as follows: "This is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself."

IV. The Result of Right Understanding

"A well-instructed noble disciple, who regards all of this with right insight, becomes disenchanted with physical form, disenchanted with feelings, disenchanted with perceptions, disenchanted with mental formations, and disenchanted with consciousness. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, his mind is liberated. With liberation, there comes the knowledge that he is liberated."

He understands:

"Birth has been eradicated, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of existence."

Thus spoke the Exalted One.

And the Five Companions rejoiced and were delighted with the words of the Exalted One. As this discourse was being delivered, the hearts of the Five Companions were liberated from the defilements through detachment."

This concludes the complete text of the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*.



In the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, the Buddha describes how he 'saw' with his divine eye (*P. dibbacakkhu*)⁹⁹ that nothing possesses an unchanging core.

Everything is incredibly transient and insubstantial. He 'saw' that all phenomena are 'empty' (*P. sunna*) of their own independent self, highlighting the empty and insubstantial nature of all phenomena.

Sunnata represents the profound reality that underlies all phenomena. No 'self' can be found in any phenomenon because every phenomenon arises, exists, and ceases due to numerous causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*).

Paradoxically, this 'emptiness' also encompasses the infinity of all things. It encompasses the eternal process that permeates and saturates all forms.

D.T. Suzuki:

• *The outside world of form-and-name and the inner world of thought and feeling are both no more than the construction of the mind, and when the mind ceases, the weaving-out of a world of particulars is stopped. This stopping is called emptiness or no birth, but it is not the wiping out of existence, it is, on the contrary, viewing it truthfully unhampered by discriminative categories.* *

The *dhammanuvatti*, who realizes the emptiness within himself, truly sees the *Dhamma*. His awakening reveals *anatta*—the absence of inherent existence in phenomena—in its complete splendor. It becomes clear to him that nothing is separate from everything else. Recognizing that all phenomena share this nature of 'non-being' engenders deep compassion (*P. karuna*)¹⁰⁰ towards others and everything that surrounds them.

Since all beings are subject to the same universal law in this existence, one should never judge or condemn anyone, nor reject or exclude anyone. *Karuna* is, in fact, the sense of solidarity with all that exists. Without compassion, every practice is futile, barren, and meager. It does not deserve the label of 'practice.'

Karuna manifests itself in refraining from causing pain, hatred, anger, and animosity towards others, just as one does not inflict such emotions on their own limbs.

Building a praxis upon anger is impossible. Like *Avalokiteshvara*,¹⁰¹ when one is willing to truly observe, suffering in all its forms becomes clearly visible.

Willingness to look implies being willing to confront that pain and endeavor to alleviate it. Just as *Avalokiteshvara* compassionately reveals his eleven faces and thousand arms.

By awakening, the practitioner's existential fear dissipates: life is intertwined with death, and death is intertwined with life. Being and non-being mutually dissolve. The *dharmmanuvatti* who experiences this insight embraces complete acceptance of all that is.

The absolute truth (*P. sacca* = that which is true) of *anatta*, evident everywhere in the world, forms the foundation of the *Dhamma*. *Anatta* is the reason why the Buddha's teachings, the *Buddhadhamma*, is often perceived as pessimistic.

However, this is a misconception.

The Buddha simply provided a realistic view of reality, presenting and describing it as it truly is, not as we would like or wish it to be. The Buddha revealed the nature of reality (*P. yatha-bhuta*) as it is, without distortion or personal preferences.

The *Buddhadhamma* does not promise its followers heavenly realms or paradises with angels and cherubs (referred to as *Gandhabbas* in *Pali*).¹⁰² Nor does it burden its followers with guilt and remorse or impose imaginary hereditary sins and penance.

Instead, the *Buddhadhamma* objectively and precisely elucidates the true nature of things and the essence of existence. It shows the path to liberation from suffering (*P. dukkha*) and inner peace (*P. santi*) in this present life.

Existence is characterized by duality: health and disease, youth and old age, happiness and misfortune, wealth and poverty. As human beings, we naturally prefer pleasant experiences and have aversions to unpleasant ones (or rather, what we individually perceive as pleasant or unpleasant).

However, the source of our suffering lies in our lack of control over realizing our preferences. All worldly phenomena are unsatisfactory due to their impermanent and uncontrollable nature.

The Buddha develops a similar line of thought in the *Samyutta Nikaya*: Liberation from *dukkha* is only possible when we truly recognize things as they are (*P. pariyaṭṭi*), acknowledge this understanding through practice (*P. patipatti*), and attain deep realization with equanimity (*P. pativedha*).

Pativedha is the all-pervading insight into the true nature of all conditioned things, namely the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*). When these three characteristics are seen, with the same penetrating insight, the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya sacca*) are fully understood in a single moment. This is crucial for complete liberation (*P. vimutti*). While intellectual understanding is very important, the penetrating insight (*P. pativedha*) operates at a much deeper level than conceptual understanding. Most people approach everything with their minds, thinking that they can comprehend everything with the mind. However, the mind is very limited, and what is limited cannot encompass the limitless.

This is the only pathway to liberation from our discontent, from *dukkha*. We must relinquish our illusion of permanence and control, recognizing our conditioned delusions as falsehoods and untruths.

Letting go of this illusion, no longer being interested in it, sobering up about it, experiencing disillusionment—the feeling of '*j'en ai marre*'—is known as *nibbida* (*P.*)¹⁰³.

We must recognize that clinging, the constant fire of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), the perpetual fueling of our desires, is futile because it is the nature of this universe—the reality—that impermanence, suffering, and selflessness are ever-present. Everything is an eternal process of creation and decay, over which we have no control whatsoever.

Ajahn Brahm states:

• *When you contemplate life, you realize it is complete chaos. And there is no need to worry about this chaos that you cannot control anyway.* •

It is crucial to understand that when we cut off the fuel of becoming, our ignorance also dissipates. This is enlightenment, awakening, true realization.

When we comprehend *nibbida*, all sense objects (material and mental) lose their significance.

Nibbida leads to *viraga*, the fading away of things; desirelessness; being without desire. *Viraga* leads to *upasama*, an inner state of stillness, tranquility, and peace. And *upasama* leads to *nibbana*.

Schematically, it can be represented as: *Nibbida* → *Viraga* → *Upasama* → *Nibbana*

This scheme represents a progression of stages or qualities in the path to liberation or enlightenment in Buddhism. Breaking down each term makes the scheme easy:

- *Nibbida* refers to a sense of dispassion or disenchantment with the conditioned existence, including the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*P. samsara*). It arises as a result of recognizing the unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*) and impermanence (*P. anicca*) inherent in all conditioned phenomena. *Nibbida* signifies a turning away from attachment and craving for worldly pursuits and a growing sense of spiritual urgency.
- *Viraga* represents the state of detachment or dispassion that follows *nibbida*. It is the diminishing or complete absence of craving, attachment, and aversion towards worldly experiences. In this stage, one develops a sense of inner freedom and non-reliance on external conditions for happiness. *Viraga* is often associated with the cultivation of tranquility, mindfulness, and equanimity.
- *Upasama* refers to the state of calm or tranquility that arises as a result of the practice of meditation and the gradual purification of the mind. It is a deepening of serenity, stillness, and inner peace. *Upasama* involves the pacification of mental disturbances, the temporary suspension of mental defilements, and the experience of mental clarity. It is a necessary condition for the next stage.
- *Nibbana* is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. It is a state of complete liberation, the extinguishment of all suffering, and the cessation of the cycle of rebirth. *Nibbana* is characterized by the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion, and the realization of the true nature of reality (*P. yatha-bhuta*). It is beyond conceptualization and is often described as the unconditioned, peaceful, and timeless state of enlightenment.

In summary, the progression from disenchantment (*P. nibbida*) to detachment (*P. viraga*) to calmness (*P. upasama*) leads to the attainment of liberation/enlightenment (*P. nibbana*).

These stages reflect the transformative journey of the practitioner as they gradually let go of attachment, cultivate inner tranquility, and ultimately free themselves from the cycle of suffering.

The only alternative (if it can even be called an option) to this understanding is to run away from *dukkha*, to hide from reality, to seek refuge in various distractions, to take various escape routes such as fantasizing, working, entertainment, traveling, talking, drinking, drugs, and so on.

These activities are seen as ways in which individuals try to avoid or temporarily forget about the inherent unsatisfactoriness in life.

Most of the 'worldlings' (*P. puthujjanas*) are exceptionally skilled in this regard. However, it does not make any difference. It does not offer a solution to the problem of *dukkha*. No matter how skilled one becomes in avoiding *dukkha*, it does not ultimately solve the problem.

Ajahn Brahm states:

• *You don't have to fix your mind on the breath to meditate; you don't have to let go of the past and the future; you don't have to silence the thinking mind. Just contemplate dukkha and understand it. In the present moment, through every experience, with that insight, you will discover that the world disappears.*

The world in which you used to play diminishes in importance. You no longer even want to visit that playground. The playground of your senses, of the past and future, of sex and dreams, will fade away.

This is not happening because you make it happen, but because running away is the mind's natural response when it encounters dukkha. And as everything fades, meditation takes its place.

You don't 'become' a meditator. Meditation simply happens. It is a path, a journey, with signposts and landmarks along the way where everything becomes empty and comes to a stillness. This is what occurs when you let go. Let go. •

The sentence • *Birth has been eradicated, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of existence* • reflects the Buddha's realization of *nibbana*, the cessation of suffering, and the attainment of liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth. It is a profound statement that encapsulates the culmination of the Buddha's spiritual journey:

- "*Birth has been eradicated*": This suggests the eradication or cessation of the cycle of birth and rebirth, known as *samsara*. In Buddhism, the cycle of birth and rebirth is characterized by suffering (*P. dukkha*), and attaining liberation involves breaking free from this cycle.

- "*The holy life has been lived*": The 'holy life' refers to the life of a fully ordained monk or nun who has dedicated themselves to the practice of the *Dhamma* (Buddha's teachings) and the *Vinaya* (monastic discipline). In the context of this sentence, it signifies the Buddha's own life of renunciation, meditation, and ethical conduct leading to enlightenment.

- "*What had to be done has been done*": This implies that the necessary actions or practices for attaining enlightenment and liberation have been successfully completed. The Buddha fulfilled all the requirements, including the development of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental cultivation.

- "*There is no more coming to any state of existence*": This is a declaration of the end of the cycle of rebirth. The Enlightened One has transcended the rounds of

birth and death and attained *nibbana*, a state *beyond* the cycle of existence. It signifies the liberation (*P. vimutti*)¹⁰⁴ from the continuous process of becoming and the end of suffering.



DHAMMA SEEDS

Buddha's Wisdom

The *Buddhasasana* is about 'Seeing & Knowing.'

This isn't the ordinary seeing and knowing of a worldly person (*P. puthujjana*). It is the 'Seeing & Knowing' of a Buddha, representing the profound and enlightened aspect of the *Bhagavat*'s perception and understanding. *Janami passami*.

Such 'Seeing & knowing' aligns with the recommendations in the *Parayanavagga* — one of the oldest *suttas* of the *Pali Canon*:¹⁰⁵

• *Passami nam manasa cakkhuna*—Try to see the Buddha in your mind as if it were with your eyes. •¹⁰⁶

See the Buddha in all phenomena, in all things, in all *dhammas*. Encounter him everywhere: in the unsuspecting eyes of a child, in the incoming waves of the sea, in the change of seasons and, above all, in the emptiness of your selfless self. In this way, enter the stream (*P. sotapatti*).

See the Buddha. See the *Dhamma*. See the *Sangha*. See the process of arising and passing away, the process of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*). Observe the unity of this process.

The Buddha says: • *Ehipassiko*.•

Come and look at the *Dhamma*—the law of nature. *Dhammo sanantano*. Observe things as they really are, *yatha-bhuta*. Do this with equanimity (*P. upekkha*). Not as you want or desire them to be. Not as you don't want or desire them to be. See with equanimity the unfolding reality at every moment—from moment to moment.

The Buddha invites everyone to come and see. To see his timeless truth, and to realize this truth—recognize, acknowledge, and become one with the *Dhamma*.

In the *Kalama Sutta*¹⁰⁷, the Buddha describes how we should 'see' and what our basic attitude should be when we 'see'. This *sutta* is an unseen ode to free investigation.

The Buddha speaks as follows:

• Now, *Kalamas*, don't go by reports (*P. itikira*)¹⁰⁸, by legends (*P. anussava*)¹⁰⁹, by traditions (*P. parampara*)¹¹⁰, by scripture (*P. pitaka-sampadana*)¹¹¹, by logical conjecture (*P. takka-hetu*)¹¹², by inference (*P. naya-hetu*)¹¹³, by analogies (*P. akara-parivitakka*)¹¹⁴, by agreement through pondering views (*P. ditthi-nijjan-*

akkhantiya)¹¹⁵, by probability (*P. bhabba-rupataya*)¹¹⁶, or by the thought, that 'This contemplative is our teacher' (*P. samano no garo*)¹¹⁷.

When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; that these qualities are blameless; that these qualities are praised by the wise; that these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness'—then you should enter & remain in them. ♪

The Buddha clearly instructs his followers here: Investigate. Verify. Experiment. Let yourself be guided by free empirical research, with meticulous precision and trial & error. Assess the path (*P. magga*). Taste the fruit, its result (*P. phala*). Free of ritual. Free of dogma. Without theology. Without philosophy. Without bias. With *dhammavicaya*.¹¹⁸

In the *Dhammapada*¹¹⁹, the Buddha explains why you have to look for yourself, why you have to see with your own eyes. Because you—and you alone—are your own protector:

• *Atta hi attano natho—Each is his own protector. ♪*

This verse emphasizes that the best teacher is inside each of us. Let the spiritual light within be our teacher. Everything we need is hidden within ourselves. We just have to bring it up, discover, mine, and excavate. We can never realize the truth through anyone else. Even the Buddhas can only point to the truth, pointing towards the direction we need to look. Where we need to 'see' for ourselves. Not through the eyes of others.

Whether we receive praise or criticism in our quest is not important. What matters is that, with pure intention (*P. samma sankappa*)¹²⁰, we let the law of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) be our witness.

This 'seeing' is a personal assignment, a personal point of concern. It's a verb. No one else can do this for us.

Therefore we have personally peel off the thick shells that permanently envelop, conceal, obscure, and hide the truth. Every moment we have to prune like a gardener, an accomplished gardener, like a *hortulanus*, in the thickets that surround and proliferate us.

When we don't, we lose ourselves in the jungle of our thoughts, feelings and conditioning.

And how to peel that onion, the Buddha clarifies in the *Maha Satipatthana Sutta*.¹²¹ In this lecture he provides us with a 'technique'.

And what is this technique?

He asks us to draw our attention ¹²² towards four places, towards four fields (*P. gocara*): attention to our body (*P. kaya-nupassana*); to our feelings/sensations (*P. vedana-nupassana*); to our mind (*P. citta-nupassana*), and finally to the objects of mind, on all phenomena (*P. Dhamma-nupassana*).

The Buddha called this ‘technique’ a ‘direct path’ (*P. ekayana magga*) to liberation:

• *Monks, this is a (unique = exceptional/direct/unparalleled) road ¹²³ which leads to purification of the beings; to transcend sorrow and worry; ¹²⁴ to end dukkha and fear; and to obtain the right method for the realization of nibbana.* •

We need to diligently work on these four ‘fields’ with perseverance (*P. adhitthana*) ¹²⁵. This effort will not only lead us to the stream, but will also allow us to enter it and reach the Other Shore ¹²⁶.

So, we must focus our attention on those four fields with special emphasis—extraordinary attention—with *atapi*, *satima*, *sampajanna* and *vineyya loke abhijjha domanassa*, as emphasized in het *Maha Satipatthana Sutta*:

- *atapi*: Meticulous, diligent, fiery, with great effort.
- *satima*: With penetrating attention, a perceptiveness that goes to the depths of one's inner reality.
- *sampajanna*: With clear understanding and deep insight into the impermanence of things.
- *vineyya loke abhijjha domanassa*: Free and detached from worldly desire and aversion.

In concrete terms, we will enter the stream through attention and equanimity. Because of the unique combination of *sati* and *upekkha*. This is *vipassana*. This is seeing things as they really are. *Yatha-bhuta*.

And how are things? What is their real nature?

All experiences, phenomena, things, *dhammas* are impermanent, unsatisfactory and empty of any fixed existence (*P. tilakkhana*).

In his first lecture ¹²⁷, the Buddha says to the five companions:

• *Everything that is subject to arising, is subject to passing away.* •

In these 11 words, the Buddha's teaching is summarized. Here the *Bhagavat* clearly states: nothing is certain; everything is impermanent; everything will come to an end.

So: recognize, acknowledge, and realize this process of arising and passing away. Accept this process with equanimity. This is the nature of things as they really are, not as they are sold to us, artfully packaged throughout our lives. Accept them with equanimity when you've seen how things really are.

Thus, we must 'see' to know the truth—authenticity versus perception. *Yathabhuta* versus *sanna*. We need to see what's true (*P. sacca*)¹²⁸ and also recognize fabrication, misinterpretation, ignorance (*P. avijja*).

Spiritual transformation is about reducing what is false, what is not right, what is conditioned, to establish and accept what is true, what is right, what is unconditioned.

What is true?

A correct definition of truth looks like this: Truth is what was true in the past, what is true in the present, and what will be true in the future. This definition excludes illusion, leaving out perception or fabrication. It uproots mischief and blindness. In this way, all gods and religions are immediately left out. No god carries a core of eternity: all the gods that have ever been created have perished. This is also the fate of all present and future gods. *Mutatis mutandis*, this applies to all religions.

What is fabrication?¹²⁹

Fabrication = ignorance (*P. moha, avijja*)¹³⁰. Ignorance refers to the illusion, deception, the wrong idea (*P. miccha ditthi*) that there is an 'I' or a 'self' (*P. atta*). An 'I' that exists separately from the Whole. The illusion that there is a unique, fixed, stable core in each of us that is separate from everything else—a 'soul,' 'something' fixed, however minimal, a blade of grass to cling to us cramped and helplessly. This is Edvard Munch's scream of desperation and the primal scream of Gilgamesh in the eponymous Mesopotamian epic.¹³¹

This illusory 'I' is just a stream, a flow of thoughts and feelings that arise and pass away at any moment and from moment to moment.

This 'I' illusion is the root (*P. mula*)¹³² of all evil. Fabrication—ignorance—is the most important poison causing our suffering, leading to desire (*P. lobha, tanha*) and aversion (*P. dosa, vyapada*).

When the sense of a permanent and imperishable personal core is gone, attachment and desire automatically come to an end. As a result, the chain of persistent 'becoming' (*P. bhava*) stops, and the cycle of *samsara* ends.

Ignorance, desire and aversion are poisons (*P. kilesas*)¹³³ that blind us, preventing us from seeing the 'world of forms' as it really is: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty (*P. tilakkhana*).

'Fabrication' occurs in various degrees and capacities. Fabrication is a peculiar beast: at best, fabrication is 'decorum' (making something more beautiful than it really is); sometimes it is something that is (by interpretation) manifestly incorrect; at worst, it's a blatant lie.

History and hagiography/legends are incredibly malleable. I'll give a few examples of this 'malleability' and leave it to each of you to form an opinion about them.

First example: incorrect (but in this case harmless) information.

The Buddha never uttered the words 'Buddhism' or 'Buddhist'. Even more explicit: throughout the *Pali Canon*, there is no trace of both concepts.

The word 'Buddhism' is a concept of recent date. It is an umbrella term that the British colonizers in the 19th century used for the multitude of traditions they encountered in the various colonized countries, rooted in the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha called his teachings '*Buddhadhamma*' or '*Buddhasasana*' (→ the teachings of the Buddha); *Buddhavacana* (→ the word of the Buddha); or '*Dhamma*' for short.

He did not call his followers 'Buddhists' but *Dhammi*; *Dhammattho*; *Dhammanuvatti*; *Dhammiko*; *Dhammacari* and *Dhammavihari*.

Second example: downright false, deliberately misleading information and representations.

You all know the historic city of Ghent, with its beautiful old medieval core, the city centre, with its three towers (Saint Bavon Cathedral, the Belfry, and the Saint Nicolas Church), the Gravensteen—the Castle of the Counts—and the historic harbour with the Graslei and Korenlei.

How would you feel if I told you in all seriousness that this 'historic' center is, for the most part, a romantic reconstruction of a medieval city, a 'decor,' a Disneyland *avant la lettre*, which was built by the industrious Ghent ancestors following the Ghent World's Fair in 1913?

In other words, much of what became and is presented as 'authentic' to unsuspecting spectators is not. It's not even a historically responsible reconstruction. It is a reconstruction that is just over a century old and does not even approach reality. It is simply an interpretation by romantic architect-dreamers who built and adapted a city decor as they imagined it, without a commitment to historical documents.

The same metamorphosis that took place in Ghent 100 years ago has occurred in the birthplace of the Buddha over the last 50 years. Lumbini, located in the

Terai Plain at the foot of the Himalayas, has become a modern creation. Upon critical examination, it is currently a significant part of Nepal's tourism. This, in itself, is not to be criticized, as long as it benefits the people who need it most. The place where the Buddha was once born was rediscovered at the end of the 19th century, after remaining a hidden and meaningless plain for centuries.

Today's Lumbini is nothing more than a carefully created perception: the beauty and harmony of a distant past exist only in the fantasized Buddhist stories and in the imagination of inspired pilgrims ¹³⁴. The same applies to the historical sites of Kapilavatthu (the capital of the Sakya Republic), Bodhgaya (where the Buddha came to awakening), Savatthi (the Jetavana), and Kusinara (the place where the Buddha died) ¹³⁵.

Decor and decorum are more the rule than the exception. We humans are masters at creating dream worlds.

2,600 years lie between the period when the Buddha lived and our current time—almost an eternity. This encompasses not only time but also deep differences in culture, interpretations, and transmission.

Although the *Pali Canon* is the oldest surviving writing of Indian literature, it's crucial to remember that the lectures (*P. suttas*) were not immediately written down after being pronounced by the Buddha. Instead, they were transmitted orally for 500 years 'from ear to ear' by special groups of specially trained monks (*P. bhanakas*). The written *Pali Canon* was compiled in the year 32 BCE. The chances that the *Pali Canon* is the original reflection (as a copy compliant) of what the Buddha said are therefore nil.

In other words, the Buddha's message has not directly come to us. Before the texts of the *Pali Canon* were written down, they underwent a long, complicated—and in some places not always clear—oral evolution.

How do we deal with this discrepancy between what the Buddha actually said and what was ultimately handed to us?

The answer is simple: due to the large number of *suttas* that have survived in the *Pali Canon*, it is possible to clearly indicate the general meaning of Buddha's teachings.

In practice, it comes down to always being aware of the general tenor of the *Pali Canon* on a certain theme.

Consistency and coherence are the keys to separating the wheat from the chaff. By doing this, we walk the path of the Buddha: the Buddha presented consistency as a criterion for truth in his teaching. When we take the first two discourses of the Buddha in Sarnath and his last lecture as a touchstone, we will not end up far from the original teaching.

Better than focusing on isolated passages in the *Pali Canon*, which are usually the result of later developments or adaptations to changing circumstances, consistency and coherence should be the criteria for interpreting the Buddha's original teachings.

Another point of attention is the use of metaphors and allegories. The *suttas* are full of imagery. Caution should be exercised in their interpretation, especially since the Buddha redefined many Vedic metaphors to integrate them into his *Dhamma* message after this redrawing.

In the last chapter of the *Dhammapada*, for example, the Buddha redefined the concept of 'brahmin' in a brilliant way. This is an excellent example of the rhetorical talent of the *Bhagavat* to reorient a teaching from a well-known concept.

Let me return to the imagery that is often used in the *suttas*. And the caution that must be exercised in their interpretation.

A subtle example: in several places in the *suttas*, the Buddha refers to his personal odyssey that is opposite to knowledge of others and wisdom that stems from 'hearsay.' He urges his followers to walk this personal path themselves. He does this with a metaphor and says, • *Monks, follow my example and make the same (spiritual) journey I made.* •

One can also interpret this recommendation of the Buddha literally. And then a spiritual recommendation suddenly becomes a material, formal, almost mercantile affair, in the sense of 'visit the important places that played a major role in my life.'

Both interpretations are plausible. It is up to us to interpret the Buddha's intention.

This is an easy example, but this is less the case for other concepts, such as rebirth (*P. bhava*).

Another point I would like to bring to your attention concerns the translations of the *Pali Canon*. First of all: nuances are lost with every translation. This implies that when you are able to read a text in the original *Pali* language, it brings you closer to the Buddha. You can't get any closer. I feel and experience every word from the *suttas* as a meditation. Secondly: when you read a translation from *Pali*, it is extremely important to know the capacity and intention of the translator. In concrete terms, the bottom line is that if the translator is a 'scientist' without Buddhist practice, he cannot possibly convey the original message of the Buddha. Then he will translate the texts as a 'translation machine' without any sense of experience. Then the teaching will not come to life. Then the concept will remain abstract. And not transform into a spiritual path. When the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha are not experienced, there is only 'knowledge' left. Insight has disappeared.

If we want to gain insight into the essence of the *Dhamma*, it is crucial to strip both the representation of the historical Buddha as well as his teachings, of unnecessary decoration, of the décor, and of the decorum by which both the Buddha and his teachings were and are surrounded.

Both elements are inseparable. The teaching cannot be separated from the Buddha. The Buddha said:

• *He who sees me sees the Dhamma. Anyone who sees the Dhamma will see me.*•

Who was Siddhattha Gotama, the One who was called the Buddha (The Enlightened One) after his Awakening?

Together we know the life story of the Buddha as it is described in the *suttas*. Currently, the devotee decorum can be found everywhere around us.

The Buddha is often portrayed by his followers as an extremely amiable person who, for everyone and for everything, was completely accommodating and understanding. A friendly grandpa, as it were. In other places—especially in the Mahayana *suttas*—he is presented as a kind of ‘Übermensch’ while in some Vajrayana traditions, he is almost presented as divine.

But this is in stark contrast to reality.

The Buddha never claimed that his awakening was a moment when all kinds of divine mysteries were revealed to him. Describing his awakening to the Five Ascetics in Sarnath, he said that he had discovered a great freedom of heart and spirit: the complete liberation of the suffering (*P. dukkha*) that desire (*P. tanha*) entails. And this liberation he called ‘*the taste of Dhamma.*’

He did not claim to have had an experience in which he had a privileged esoteric knowledge of the essence of the universe.

It was only as Buddhism evolved into a more organized religion that these kinds of enormous pretensions were linked to his awakening. And, not surprisingly, this esoteric character turns more intense as more time passes between us and the historical Buddha.

Who was this Siddhattha Gotama who was born in Lumbini 2,600 years ago?

The *suttas* of the *Pali Canon* differ substantially from the historical context. If we summarize it briefly, we can say that Siddhattha belonged to the administrative elite of the (relatively small) Sakya tribe (with 20,000 to 25,000 tribe members), that he—as ksathriya—was excellently trained and knew the administrative system of the Sangha well. However, asserting that he was a ‘king’s child’ seems a bit too far-fetched.

Much more important and much more magnificent than his origin is the life journey Siddhattha made. He broke free from his learned conditioning, personally searched for truth and freed himself from suffering, from *dukkha*.

The historical Buddha must be seen as a free man, a libertine researcher, a provo, a *samana*, who radically rejected the existing social, religious and philosophical ideas of the Brahmin society and envisioned a liberated New Man, as well as a new culture.

In his own words, he says that his path—and anyone who wants to follow that path—must be *patisotagami*. *Patisotagami* has been literally translated to (and interpreted exclusively in this way): ‘*against the current*.’ Against the tide of ignorance, greed and hatred. ^{136 137}

It is not surprising that he went against the prevailing norms:

- He denied faith in God as a creator and as a guiding principle.
- He put people first by showing a path to liberation, to personal liberation. A path of a free thinker who is not constrained by any dogmatic power.
- He rejected the existing caste system.
- He rejected any discrimination, especially women’s discrimination.

Because of his teachings and tenacity, he had therefore resistance both within and outside of the *Sangha*. For example, the *suttas* of the *Pali Canon* mention four assassination attempts on the Buddha: three by his nephew Devadatta and one of Angulimala.

The Buddha was a researcher who pragmatically sought what could liberate mankind from his permanent dissatisfaction (*P. dukkha*). He was looking for the ways that would help to bring a human being to self-realization, to awakening, to inner peace. What was useful to free mankind from his ignorance, his desire, and his loathing.

If we want to judge the Buddha, we should not look at the décor and decorum in the first place, but at his real greatness, namely his wisdom and his compassion. *Panna* and *karuna*. And then no god appears. But a human being. A great man. A *Mahapurisa*.

What did the Buddha teach?

Regarding the practice, the Buddha transparently tells anyone who wants to hear his message: if you want to free yourself from *dukkha*, you must follow my example. He says: come and see (*P. ehipassiko*) how I did it. But don’t limit yourself to ‘hear’ alone (*P. sutta-maya panna*). Nor limit yourself to intellectually understanding what I have done and said (*P. cinta-maya panna*), but realize within yourself how my teaching leads to liberation and inner peace (*P. bhavana-maya panna*).

The *Buddhadhamma*—the teachings of the Buddha—does not stand for blind faith. Nor for sectarianism. His teachings are not built on commandments, prohibitions, and rules. Not on an obscure, menacing, idiosyncratic, tyrannical god who expels and punishes.

The *Buddhasasana* is the teaching of a human being. The teaching of a noble, awakened man. It's a human teaching. For people. For all those who want to see things as they really are. This is a teaching for those who want to achieve self-realization by 'looking' at the phenomena with equanimity.

If we want to grasp the essence, it will certainly help if we manage to find the greatest common denominator among the largest existing Buddhist movements. And that common ground does exist. This is the Walpola Rahula Declaration of December 1981:

• *Whatever our sects, denominations, or systems, as Buddhists, we all accept the Buddha as our Master who gave us the Teaching. We all take refuge in the Triple Jewel: the Buddha, our Teacher; the Dhamma, his teaching; and the Sangha, the Community of enlightened practitioners. In other words, we take refuge in the Teacher, the Teaching, and the Taught.*

Whether Theravada or Mahayana, we do not believe that this world is created and ruled by a god at his will. Following the example of the Buddha, our Teacher, who is the embodiment of Great Compassion (P. mahakaruna) and Great Wisdom (P. mahapanna), we consider that the purpose of life is to develop compassion for all living beings without discrimination and to work for their good, happiness, and peace; and to develop wisdom leading to the realization of Ultimate Truth.

We accept the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha, namely, Dukkha, the fact that our existence in this world is in predicament, is impermanent, imperfect, unsatisfactory, full of conflict; Samudaya, the fact that this state of affairs is due to our egoistic selfishness based on the false idea of self; Nirodha, the fact that there is definitely the possibility of deliverance, liberation, freedom from this predicament by the total eradication of the egoistic selfishness; and Magga, the fact that this liberation can be achieved through the Middle Path which is eight-fold, leading to the perfection of ethical conduct (sila), mental discipline (P. samadhi), and wisdom (P. panna).

We accept the universal law of cause and effect taught in the Paticca samuppada (Skt. pratityasamutpada; Conditioned Genesis or Dependent Origination), and accordingly, we accept that everything is relative, interdependent, and inter-related, and nothing is absolute, permanent, and everlasting in this universe.

We understand, according to the teaching of the Buddha, that all conditioned things (P. sankharas) are impermanent (P. anicca) and imperfect and unsatisfactory (P. dukkha), and all conditioned and unconditioned things (P. dhammas) are without self (P. anatta).

We accept the *Thirty-seven Qualities conducive to Enlightenment* (*P. bodhipakkhiyadhamma*) as different aspects of the Path taught by the Buddha leading to enlightenment, namely:

- *Four Forms of Presence of Mindfulness* (*P. satipatthana*) ¹³⁸
- *Four Right Efforts* (*P. sammappadhana*) ¹³⁹
- *Four Bases of Supernatural Powers* (*P. iddhipada*) ¹⁴⁰
- *Five Faculties* (*P. indriya*) ¹⁴¹
- *Five Powers* (*P. bala*) ¹⁴²
- *Seven Factors of Enlightenment* (*P. samma-bojjhanga*) ¹⁴³
- *Eightfold Noble Path* (*P. ariyamagga*). ¹⁴⁴

There are three ways of attaining Bodhi or Enlightenment according to the ability and capacity of each individual: namely, as a disciple (*P. Savaka*) ¹⁴⁵, as an Individual Buddha (*P. Paccekabuddha*), and as a Perfectly and Fully Enlightened Buddha (*P. Sammasambuddha*). We accept it as the highest, noblest, and most heroic to follow the career of a Bodhisattva and to become a Sammasambuddha in order to save others. But these three states are on the same Path, not on different paths. In fact, the *Sandhinirmocana Sutra* ¹⁴⁶, a well-known important Mahayana sutra, clearly and emphatically says that those who follow the line of Savaka (Vehicle of Disciples) or the line of Paccekabuddha (Vehicle of Individual Buddhas) or the line of Tathagatas (Mahayana) attain the supreme nibbana by the same Path, and that for all of them, there is only one Path of Purification (*P. visuddhi-magga*) and only one Purification (*P. visuddhi*) and no second one, and that they are not different paths and different purifications, and that Theravada and Mahayana constitute One Vehicle, One Yana (*P. ekayana*) and not distinct and different vehicles or yanass.

We admit that in different regions there are differences with regard to the ways of life of Buddhist monks, popular Buddhist beliefs and practices, rites and rituals, ceremonies, customs, and habits. These external forms and expressions should not be confused with the essential teachings of the Buddha. ♪

If this is the essence, the greatest common denominator of what the Buddha taught (fully reflected in the Buddha's first two readings at the Deer Camp in Sar-nath), the question arises: How should we consider the decorum that shapes everyday 'Buddhism'?

As the Buddha's teachings spread around the world, they adapted to the cultures of those countries, resulting in numerous and diverse external forms: variations in art and architecture, statues of the Buddha, robes of the *Sangha* members, and celebrations and ceremonies—from Tibet in the North to Sri Lanka in the South, from India in the West to Japan in the East.

Despite the significance of these differences, they are only 'formal' differences (*P. Buddharupa*). They don't touch the core of the teaching. In terms of content, the *Dhamma* remains the same as the original experience that the Buddha received in Bodhgaya, a truth similarly experienced by all stream-enterers (*P. sotapannas*).

The experiential understanding of the *Dhamma*, the realization of the truth (*P. paccanubhoti*), remains consistent.

The fact remains that for the majority of less instructed and less advanced practitioners, superficial beliefs, outward forms, and observances are a central part of their practice. Without looking down on these forms of devotional worship, which can certainly be emotionally comforting to many people, we should be aware that this was not the original teaching as preached by the Buddha.

A striking example is that the first Buddha statues only appeared 500 years after the *parinibbana* of the Buddha. When one wanted to depict the Buddha, they did so using symbols: depicting the bodhi tree, a stupa, a fleeting footprint in the sand, or the image of an empty throne.

Attachment to external observances and rituals (*P. silabbata-paramasa*) is viewed as an impurity, a bond, a chain (*P. samyojana*) from which the advanced practitioner automatically frees himself as he progresses on the Buddha's path leading to the realization of ultimate truth, to *nibbana*.

We must also be aware that not only attachment to observations, rites, and rituals, but also attachment to ideas, concepts, beliefs, and theories (*P. dhammatanha*)¹⁴⁷ hinders one's mind from seeing things as they are (*P. yatha-bhuta*).

Attachment to popular Buddhist ceremonies, rites, and rituals, or 'formal expressions of devotion' (*P. Buddharupa*), hinders self-realization. But equally important is that it hinders achieving harmony and peace among all people.

Dhamma transcends any distinction, every divergence. *Dhamma* does not possess ethnic customs, habits, or customs that differ from one country to another. Understanding the *Dhamma* does not rely on formality, *Buddharupa*, decor, or decorum.

To illustrate: When we 'look' carefully (with *Buddha*-eyes), our ignorance will automatically disappear, and we will recognize the phenomena as they really are.

When we realize the true nature of the phenomena within ourselves (recognize, acknowledge, and become one with them), the phenomena will no longer delight us. On the contrary, they will bore us and disappoint us because they completely escape our control.

Thus, all phenomena will lose their importance (*P. nibbida*). *Nibbida* leads to *viraga*, the extinction of things; to be without desire. *Viraga* leads to *upasama*, an inner state of silence, calmness, and inner peace. *Upasama* finally leads to *Nibbana*. Thus, the road to liberation (freedom from suffering) and enlightenment can be summarized in four words: *nibbida* → *viraga* → *upasama* → *Nibbana*.

According to the Early Buddhist Texts (EBT's), 'awakening' ('waking up,' 'enlightenment,' 'self-realization'...) is a step-by-step, gradual process of mental cleans-

ing with a profound and sudden spiritual transformation as an apotheosis. The Buddha metaphorically called this experiential experience 'stream-entry' (*P. sotāpatti*). This marks the point of no return, the moment (*P. gotrabhu*) when the 'worldling' (*P. puthujana*) transitions to become a 'noble follower' (*P. ariya-puggala*).

When the *dhhammanuvatti* destroys the illusion of the 'I' (the belief in a personal essence) (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*), there is no rebirth anymore.

When there is no more 'I,' all rituals, rites, rules lose their importance (*P. silābata-paramasa*). The *dhhammanuvatti* realizes that these are only worldly conventions. All skeptical doubts (*P. vicikicchā*) about the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha* are lost. And what's that doubt? Did the Buddha explain it correctly? Did the *Sangha* hear right? And did I get it right?

Furthermore, sensory desires (*P. kama-raga*), anger and aversion (*P. vyapada*) are gradually diminished and ultimately destroyed. Then desire for fine-material (*P. rupa-raga*) and fine intangible (*P. arupa-raga*) existence disappears. Due to the dissolution of vanity (*P. mana*) and restlessness about the past (*P. uddhacca*), he experiences inner peace. Finally, through the destruction of ignorance (*P. avijjā*), he establishes himself in truth (*P. dhammapadhana*)¹⁴⁸: he realizes the *tilakkhana* in himself, the truth of *Dhamma*.

• *Everything that is subject to arising is subject to pass away.* •

Awakening doesn't have to be postponed to the next life. Waking up, entering the stream, is accessible in this life, in every meditation, in every moment, with every breath, with every exhalation. It happens to you when the causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*) are present for it.

Awakening does not happen with decor and decorum, not with baroque grandeur. Awakening is not an esoteric matter, no secret initiation. And the road to awakening is not the same for everyone. Each has its own path and its own pace to achieve enlightenment.

Awakening is sudden, spontaneous, total, and manifest¹⁴⁹—an irreversible experience without bells or whistles. Awakening represents spiritual transformation by gaining insight into reality. Awakening stands for 're'-creation through the realization of *silā*, *samadhi*, and *panna*.¹⁵⁰ In this life. In the here-and-now. In the NOW. NOW is the only place where the *dhhammanuvatti* can awaken. The here-and-now is the place where the practitioner frees himself from *dukkha*. There's only this current moment. This moment. Everything else is deception, desire, and aversion. Decor and decorum. Don't fall for that sensory trap. Meditate attentively and equanimously. You will walk with the Buddha in wisdom and compassion.



Free Inquiry

Regardless of one's past, the *dhammanuvatti* remains personally responsible for their liberation. The Buddha encourages each practitioner to examine the object of their faith (*P. saddha*)¹⁵¹—the three jewels (*P. tiratna*)¹⁵²—and test it for truth. *Saddha* can never conflict with the spirit of free inquiry.

Free research from a Buddhist perspective is the personal, experiential, penetrating investigation into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless (unstable) nature of all phenomena (primarily of the *khandhas*: our body, our consciousness, our perception, our sensations, and our conditioned reactions).

The *Kalama Sutta*¹⁵³ is an ode to this free research. Nothing sounds more convincing than this.

In the *Cula Saccaka Sutta*¹⁵⁴, the Buddha says:

• *Rupam aniccam; vedana anicca; sanna anicca; sankhara anicca; vinnanam aniccam—The body is impermanent; sensations are impermanent; perceptions are impermanent; sankharas are impermanent; consciousness is impermanent.* •

Only forensically free research can substantiate this thesis. As a result, this free research finally grounds the faith (*P. saddha*) of the *dhammanuvatti* in the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*.

Saddha can only arise when all doubt is gone, when the follower has thoroughly examined and practiced the teaching, and when the correctness of the teaching has been experienced and realized within oneself. Forensic examination of all phenomena (*P. dhammas*) is strongly encouraged by the Buddha. The faculty of faith (*P. saddha-indriya*) must always be in harmony with the faculty of wisdom (*P. panna-indriya*). This statement underscores the importance of cultivating both faith and wisdom on the Buddhist path and ensuring that they work in harmony to support the practitioner's spiritual development.

While doubt is a mortal sin in all religions, doubt is the starting point for the Buddha to come to insight. Only when doubt is removed can the practitioner awaken. Wake up.

It is not correct to translate *saddha* as 'belief'. *Saddha* is not a synonym for blind, dogmatic 'belief'. There is a world of difference between 'belief' and 'faith'.

Dogmatic belief is not a synonym for reality. Dogmatic belief arises when one cannot, will not, or dares not reconcile themselves with reality as it presents itself. When one cannot, will not, or dares not accept that '*all that arises also perishes*,' they start making up stories that are not based on facts. And they humbly adhere to and support religious and philosophical systems that propagate these fabrications. There is nothing wrong with this—*die Gedanken sind frei*—as long as we agree that these chimeras do not correspond to reality.

In the *suttas*, the Buddha always emphasizes 'seeing,' 'knowing,' and 'experiencing' the teachings, not 'belief.' Belief arises when there is no 'seeing.' When 'seeing' arises, 'belief' disappears, and faith arises—*Saddha*.

Saddha is an important aspect on the road to self-realization. Without *saddha*, the *dhammanuvatti* will never reach the deeper layers of *Dhamma*. It is the experience, the intuitive feeling that what the Buddha preached is 'right,' 'pure,' 'true'—*Samma*.

The *Buddhadhamma* always revolves 'seeing' and 'knowing,' about 'experiencing.' Never about 'belief.' The *suttas* repeat over and over again that the follower of the Buddha who lives according to the *Dhamma*—the *dhammanuvatti*—must see the truth; experience the truth; must satiate themselves with truth; immerse themselves with truth until they are thoroughly convinced and finally become truth itself. Transformation happens by 'seeing' things as they really are, *Yatha-bhuta*. This is seeing with eyes steeped in wisdom (*P. nana dassana*).¹⁵⁵ Seeing with Buddha-eyes (*P. Buddha-cakkhu*). Not through wishful eyes full of belief.

The Buddha defined free inquiry in the *Vimamsaka Sutta*¹⁵⁶, as follows:

• *Akaravati saddha dassanamulika—Well thought out and rooted in clear understanding.* •

And in the *Pubbarama Sutta*¹⁵⁷, the Buddha states:

• *A monk with clear understanding establishes his trust in accordance with that clear understanding.* •

After which, in the *Agganna Sutta*¹⁵⁸, the apotheosis follows:

• *Whoever has established their faith in the Tathagata, firmly grounded, unwavering, unshakable to ideas proclaimed by a monk or Brahmin, by a god, by Mara, Brahma, or by anyone else in the world, can proclaim to me with full conviction: 'I am a true disciple of the Buddha, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir of Dhamma, a dhammanuvatti.'* •

In no uncertain terms, the Buddha emphasizes to his followers the importance of devoting themselves to their own liberation. For everyone possesses the ability to free themselves from all bondage through personal effort and wisdom.

This illustrates the huge discrepancy that exists between *Dhamma* and organized religions. The Buddha only teaches *Dhamma*, the law of nature, the cosmic law, the so-ness, the suchness of things. *Tathata*.¹⁵⁹ He teaches what *dukkha* is; the cause of *dukkha*; the cessation of *dukkha*, and the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.

This is the path—the Middle Path—that gives the *dhammanuvatti* harmony, liberation, and inner peace. In this life. Not in the mists of a distant, mystical future.

Wisdom is a personal achievement. It cannot be imparted—neither by a teacher, nor by a prophet, nor by a creator, nor by the Grand Architect of the Universe.

The penetrating question the Buddha asks us in the *Dhammapada* ¹⁶⁰ is to answer this:

• *Atta hi attano natho; ko hi natho paro siya—Everyone is their own protector. After all, what other protector could there be?* •



Verify for Yourself

• *Verify for yourself*, • the Buddha said to his followers, • *whether what I teach corresponds with the truth*. • He condensed this into one word: *Ehipassiko—Come and See*.

Things are not 'true' because the Buddha says so. They are 'true' because they correspond with the truth, with *Dhamma*. And they correspond with the truth if they correlate with the natural law, with the suchness of things—*Tathata*.

Dhamma is the truth about how things really are (*P. yatha-bhuta*). It is the reality of the arising and decay of all things, seen as experiential experience (*P. paccakkha-nana*)¹⁶¹. The words and concepts of the *Pali Canon* describe and represent this reality, but they are not this reality itself. They are just 'signposts,' fingers pointing to this reality, but reality itself they are not. They are tools (*P. upayas*).

Dhamma transcends every Buddhist movement, every tradition, every 'lineage'¹⁶². *Dhamma* is not bound by words and concepts, nor by opinions, ideas, points of view. *Dhamma* spontaneously reveals itself at any moment 'in the ten thousand things that present themselves' (Ehei Dogen) to those who 'look.'

Dhamma does not need external authority to establish itself. *Dhamma* has no need for structures, hierarchy, external legitimations, and reinforcements. Neither for lineages, transmissions, nor traditions.

Verify for yourself whether something contributes to your liberation from *dukkha*, whether it is a skilled tool or useless ballast. See for yourself. You decide. You alone. No one else can do this in your place. Protect yourself.

According to the words of the Master himself in the *Dhammapada*¹⁶³:

• *Atta hi attano natho—Each is his own protector*. •

Waking up—Awakening—is a personal task, something that must be cultivated by the practitioner. As the word indicates, self-realization is something that you may not/cannot leave to others.

The words of others alone cannot bring the *dhammanuvatti* to *nibbana*. *Dhamma* cannot be realized solely by what others say. The words and teachings of others are only meant to show the practitioner the way.

Let this be clear: 'hearsay' is only knowledge; it is not deep wisdom, not insight. Knowledge and wisdom are not synonyms. Information without personal insight may lack reliability or depth. Always keep in mind that 'hearsay' should never or can never be an argument.

Dhamma can only be realized by the practitioner himself, by himself, by herself, by themselves, through personal experience, through *paccakkha-nana*.

The Buddha, despite his immense wisdom and insight, is 'only' a signpost. Realize that even the teaching of a *Sammāsambuddha* does not pave the way for self-realization for the practitioner.

Ajahn Chah once compared this in one of his *dharmata*lks to a salesman selling a plow to a farmer to work the field. It is an illusion to think that the seller is going to plow for the farmer. That is part of the farmer's job. The farmer cannot expect the seller to do this for him. Once the sale is closed, the seller collects the money and leaves. On to the next customer. In an analogous way, the Buddha shows the practitioner the way. But he is not the one who does the realization for him/her/ them. That is the work of the practitioner himself.

Ajahn Chah paraphrased this as follows:

• *The Buddha said that he only shows the way. He teaches you how to swim. But he doesn't swim for you. If you want the Buddha to swim for you, you can only drown.* •

Consider the Buddha's words as signposts, word after word. But don't turn them into dogmas. Don't make it a doctrinal hassle. The Buddha speaks about liberation (*P. vimutti*). He speaks about liberation from *dukkha*. In this moment. And from moment to moment. And about the way to realize this liberation. That is what he wants to teach us. This is his 'goal'. Don't build structures around it. Give it room to breathe. Look for meanings that make sense and are useful for practice, adapted to this moment in time (after all, *Dhamma* is timeless).

In other words, look through them ethereally and recognize with growing curiosity and penetrating mindfulness the underlying truth they represent. Like lighthouses, as beacons of light, on your path to self-realization. Your Personal Path. Every step you take yourself makes everything clearer...

Waking up is a verb, something the *dharmmanuvatti* does not merely acquire. It's something you have to do yourself. Merely wishing for things to happen doesn't make them happen. Just talking about *Dhamma* or listening to *dharmata*lks doesn't end your defilements. Awakening is a path of action. Waking up—Awakening—is a task that the practitioner must perform personally, with perseverance (*P. adhitthana*). It is his life's task. Self-realization should be taken literally: realizing oneself, walking the ascending path of morality, meditation, and wisdom itself.

Consequently, in order to wake up, the practitioner must look for himself, hear himself, smell himself, taste himself, feel himself, and think for himself. He has to 'use' his senses in a special way, spontaneous, unconditioned, clearly mindful, with deep insight into the true nature of things, with *sampajanna*, without adding personal stories and dramas, pure. There is nothing to covet or reject. After all, things just 'happen,' with or without 'his' approval or disapproval.

Only when the practitioner perceives things without reacting to them, as a witness, do the impurities in his mind lose their power and can no longer guide and overwhelm him.

Only when he accepts the phenomena—pleasant, unpleasant or neutral—that present themselves to him equanimously, without desire and without disgust, free of attachment, will he realize himself.

In other words, your practice does not end with the Buddha showing you the path and saying, * *Here is the way to liberation. Walk this path.* * The Buddha does not help you walk. You have to do that yourself. Only when you walk the path yourself and practice *Dhamma* will you see the *Dhamma* and realize it within yourself. You will gain insight—seeing and knowing (*P. janami passami*)—that goes far beyond what you can imagine at this moment.

Individual responsibility for personal liberation is a central principle for the Buddha. As a *dhammanuvatti*, you have to gain insight into the real nature of things, *yatha-bhuta nana dassana*. This is only possible when there is no head above your head, when you are your own master. And as a master, you must examine the correctness of things before you make them yours. This way you will go *beyond* all doubt (*P. vicikiccha*)¹⁶⁴.

Only true masters—real Masters—enter the stream.



The Suttas, Dhamma and Insight

I read an article by Bhante Sujato, the founder and inspiration behind *Sutta-Central*. In this article, Bhante Sujato shares his insights on how he reads and interprets the *suttas* and emphasizes the importance of personal experience.

He explains how reading the *suttas* from the *Pali Canon*, even 2,600 years after the Buddha's *parinibbana*, allows a practitioner to truly walk alongside the Buddha. This text not only feels like coming home but is a homecoming itself.

How to read the *suttas*:

• *Since I started practicing Buddhism, I have found the suttas to be an invaluable refuge. They contain immense wisdom and countless amazing teachings—an inexhaustible treasure trove of Dhamma. I encourage all Buddhists to make a habit of reading the suttas daily, or at least weekly.*

The suttas may not immediately captivate you. They can be repetitive and mundane at times. However, their beauty lies in their subtlety: the balance, form, reasonableness, and the Buddha's serenity and wisdom in every imaginable situation.

It is best to read the suttas in small portions. One Middle-length Sutta is ideal for a single session. Read it slowly and attentively. Notice if there are things you don't understand, but be cautious of what you believe you already comprehend.

After finishing a sutta, refer to footnotes or other guides for better comprehension. Avoid excessive analysis—instead, try to absorb the essence of the teachings as a whole. If you read a sutta before meditation, it can uplift and inspire your mind, and its meaning will become clear.

[In case you cannot read the suttas in Pali] Remember that you are reading a translation. Do not get fixated on specific connotations of terminology as they are the choices of the translator.

Gradually become familiar with the Pali/Sanskrit terms that underlie all Buddhist teachings, one word at a time. However, be cautious about over-interpreting individual words. The true meaning of a spiritual text emerges from context and experience, not solely from etymology.

Pay attention to your own response to the text: what inspires you, what feels dull, what raises doubts. Your personal responses belong to you and not solely to the text.

Be mindful of the critical mind that seeks to criticize the text. While I believe in the importance of text-critical studies myself, this understanding comes after

many years of study and reflection. It takes time to develop a sense for these matters.

Approach the text with compassion. Read it with kindness, as if you were listening to a beloved friend. Remember that it was composed in an oral tradition from a distant time and place.

It is a miracle that it exists at all, and we should not be discouraged if some of the expressions seem unfamiliar to us.

*Perhaps a bigger challenge is the desire to literalize or insist on a particular reading. The suttas have a term for this: *idasacca-abhinivesa* ¹⁶⁵ — the insistence that 'this alone is the truth'.*

Any text is open to different interpretations and emphases. It is easy to find cases where modern teachers or traditional schools teach things that differ from the suttas. However, it is more valuable, albeit more difficult, to understand why these variations arose and what aspects of Dhamma are at stake.

If you find yourself in doubt, remember the poised attitude described in the suttas: "Neither accepting nor rejecting, I will inquire about the meaning."

In Buddhism, we are not expected to believe every detail of the scriptures literally. However, if we approach them with a fault-finding mindset, we will never truly grasp their essence.

Whether it is meditation, philosophy, ethics, or inspiring stories—nothing compares to the real experience. Take the text and live it. Put it into practice and observe its impact on your life. Meditate on it. I have been doing this for 18 years, and I have never been disappointed. Any faults I have are solely due to my own shortcomings in living up to the Dhamma, not because of the Dhamma itself. ♪



Dhamma in plain English

Dukkha, which can be understood as pervasive unsatisfactoriness or inherent dissatisfaction, permeates all beings in every aspect of their existence. It attributes the root cause of suffering to *avijja*, representing ignorance or the inability to understand and accept the true nature of existence.

Avijja represents the state of being unable, unwilling, or hesitant to perceive, comprehend, or accept the reality of existence. This reality is characterized by impermanence (*P. anicca*) and emptiness, indicating the absence of any enduring 'self' (*P. anatta*).

This profound ignorance gives rise to desire (*P. tanha, lobha*), the craving and attachment to pleasurable experiences, and aversion (*P. vyapada, dosa*), the rejection and avoidance of unpleasant experiences.

The term '*profound ignorance*' refers to a deep-rooted lack of understanding or awareness of the true nature of reality—*yatha-bhuta*—according to Buddhist philosophy. It suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the impermanent, interconnected, and ultimately unsatisfactory nature of existence.

In the sphere of Mara, the sphere of the ignorant mind, our minds take root and become affixed to a small subjective cognitive world. We encapsulate ourselves in a narrow range of likes and dislikes and we see the world through the dark glasses of egocentric biases of 'for' and 'against.' The world that is attached to becomes only a dualistic 'right' versus 'wrong' world and our suffering and alienation on many levels appear and crystallize. We do not stop discriminating long enough to open and enlarge 'our' world. This alienation, isolation, and suffering only vanish when our minds become clear, pure, and empty in the true sense and we find the Buddha's joyous world that All is interconnected and co-arising. Through emptying the mind, we shall realize the undisturbed mind.

This profound ignorance gives rise to desire, which refers to the craving and attachment to pleasurable experiences. This desire arises from the mistaken belief that the pursuit and acquisition of pleasant sensations or objects will bring lasting happiness or satisfaction.

Furthermore, this profound ignorance introduces the concept of aversion. Aversion represents the rejection and avoidance of unpleasant experiences, whether they are physical sensations, emotions, or challenging circumstances. It arises from the aversion to discomfort, pain, or anything that disrupts one's sense of stability or pleasure.

Buddhism considers *sankharas* of desire and aversion as primary expressions of attachment. They are both sources of suffering and discontent (*P. dukkha*).

In Theravada Buddhism, *sankharas* are seen as conditioned mental and volitional formations, often arising from desires and aversions. These *sankharas* are con-

sidered one of the links in the chain of Dependent Origination, ¹⁶⁶ leading to suffering and unsatisfactoriness in life.

The Buddha taught that clinging to desires and pushing away aversions perpetuates the cycle of craving, leading to further suffering.

The Buddha referred to ignorance, desire, and aversion as '*the three poisons*' (*P. mula kilesa*). These three poisons serve as the source from which all other defilements (*P. asavas*) ¹⁶⁷ arise.

It is crucial to cultivate mindfulness and insight to overcome these unwholesome tendencies, preventing their influence from taking hold. By doing so, one can attain liberation and free oneself from the cycle of suffering.



Dhamma is Spontaneous

'Spontaneous' is the antonym of 'ingrained,' the opposite of 'conditioned,' 'manipulated,' leaving nothing standing of what the *dhammanuvatti* ¹⁶⁸ perceives in his delusion as 'fixed.' 'Spontaneous' is space: shapeless, nameless, timeless, without dimension, unsullied. Without a past, without a future, without desire, without revulsion, without attachment.

'Spontaneous' is the fullness of the present. The here-and-now. The sudden deep recognition of the essence of what manifests itself. It is the sacredness of impermanence in every moment. The arising and decay as a perpetual, continuous process.¹⁶⁹ Arise and decay (*P. udayabbaya*) ¹⁷⁰. Everything becomes one in impermanence. In conjunction with everything else. Everything intertwined. Holistic. The large manifests itself within the small, and the small manifests itself within the large. Unborn. Deathless. Experiencing this is waking up spiritually. Awakening. Being intimate with all things. Perfect wisdom.

'Spontaneous' means 'following the current,' going with the flow, with the law of nature. It means being open to the process ¹⁷¹. Perfectly open to *Dhamma* ¹⁷².

'Spontaneous' is 'being in non-time, non-place, non-form, non-movement, and non-thought, while observing what is observed when there are no observations' ¹⁷³.

'Spontaneous' means putting our usual way of responding 'on hold.' Pause and look intently and equanimous at what is going on in the now ¹⁷⁴. Being open to the now makes us more spontaneous. Free.

'Spontaneous' is looking as just looking. Hearing as hearing. Smelling as smelling. Tasting as tasting. Feeling as feeling. Considering thinking as mere ephemeral ¹⁷⁵ thoughts. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking, in itself—'an sich'—is the real reality of the moment. Sensory experiences without content ¹⁷⁶. Without preference. Without revulsion. Without judgment ¹⁷⁷. Without opinion. Without any personal additive. Without words and without concepts. So that the letter of the *Dhamma* does not become more important than its spirit—that the essence of the *Dhamma* should not be overshadowed or overlooked by a strict adherence to its literal or written form.

Understanding the *Dhamma* requires no words, no visualization, no speculation, no imagining (faith). Understanding the *Dhamma*, the 'seeing' of the process (*P. paticca samuppada*) ¹⁷⁸, is not acquired by worshipping Buddha statues ¹⁷⁹, neither by performing endless series of prostrations, nor by the circumambulation of *stupas* ¹⁸⁰.

When insight does not lead to spiritual transformation and liberation for the *dhammanuvatti*, it completely ignores the essence. Only what is essential is worth it. Everything that is second-hand or hearsay eventually exposes itself as false

and unreal and is not worth the name 'insight.' Insight is the key. Transforming attachment to insight.

Insight is gained by recognizing, acknowledging, and realizing the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena (*P. tilakkhana*). In this way, sobering up and detachment are developed (*P. nibbida*), passionlessness (*P. vira-ga*) is unfolded, calmness (*P. upasama*) is created, and inner peace (*P. santi*) established.

Constant mindfulness (*P. sati*) on the *tilakkhana* is the only practice that leads the *dhammanuvatti* to final liberation: enlightenment is seeing the impermanence of all things. And the equanimous acceptance of this insight. Only through permanent meditation does the *dhammanuvatti* realize these characteristics within himself as intrinsic insights (*P. paccakkha-nana*)¹⁸¹: all phenomena are composed¹⁸², changeable and impermanent; there is no happiness without suffering; everything that exists does not exist in itself but only in interrelatedness.

'Spontaneous' is thinking without thoughts. Thinking is a function; thinking is not synonymous with being. From thinking 'an sich,' the *dhammanuvatti* does not become wise. Wisdom can only arise when the practitioner goes *beyond* thinking—even if his limp, conditioned (manipulated) psychophysical structure can only realize this for a few seconds. Wisdom is spontaneously created by experiential experience (*P. paccanubhoti*)¹⁸³. When the *dhammanuvatti* manages to release his flow of thought (*P. vinnanasa*), everything becomes one: everything flows; everything vibrates; everything pulsates. There is only emptiness there¹⁸⁴. Brightness. Space. The limitless, all-encompassing space.

At that moment without thinking—what in Zen is called '*hishiryō*'¹⁸⁵—the *dhammanuvatti* reaches his original self. He realizes himself. This original nature is a reality that is not 'labeled.' It is pure. Without the addition of personally charged dramas and stories. When, on the other hand, the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking of the practitioner are obscured by his preferences and his rejections, he builds 'his' world. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking versus the perception of what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, felt, and thought make the distinction between absolute reality (*P. paramattha*)¹⁸⁶ and phenomenal, conceptual reality (*P. pannati*)¹⁸⁷.

Perceived reality is subjective, unreliable, inaccurate, unstable, distorted (*P. sana-vipallasa*)¹⁸⁸. It is a sham world that is permanently created by the *dhammanuvatti*¹⁸⁹. An illusion (*maya*).

When the 'I,' 'me,' and 'mine' appear, spontaneity disappears. When the 'I' presents itself, the defilement begins: desire, hatred, and ignorance. From that moment on, the practitioner is isolated from the whole thing. The *dhammanuvatti* becomes a separate particle: identification with its 'I' is the source of selfishness and is the direct cause of *dukkha*¹⁹⁰. He becomes a small satellite that fills space with delusion: I see; I hear; I smell; I taste; I feel; I think. He systematically builds up his 'world' about what he thinks or wants (or just doesn't want) to be. He is

snowballed by ideas and concepts. He identifies. He is committed to this existence, desiring it more and more (*P. tanha*), which increases his attachment to existence as long as it grows. He is 'born' over and over again. Reborn from moment to moment. He permanently creates and recreates his own world. And he becomes an integral part of the cycle of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*)¹⁹¹. Samsara's noose.

In the *Dutiyabhaddiya-Sutta*¹⁹², the Buddha articulates the awakening of the dwarf Bhaddiya as follows:

• *He has broken the cycle*¹⁹³ *and freed himself from his desires*¹⁹⁴. *This river has dried up: it no longer flows*¹⁹⁵. *Broken, the cycle has come to a standstill*¹⁹⁶. *Just this is the end of dukkha*¹⁹⁷. •

In reality, all aggregates (*P. khandhas*) that compose man are subject to the *tilakkhana*. They're without a core of existence. They are without 'self'; Without 'I.' That is their 'nature' (*P. sabhava*)¹⁹⁸, their 'characteristic' (*P. lakkhana*).

However, the fact that they are 'empty' of any essence is a great opportunity: their instability enables spontaneous transformation. After all, things can only transform if they do not possess a persistent core. *Anatta*—the understanding that nothing exists on its own and that nothing persists—forms the exquisite antidote to attachment (*P. upadana*)¹⁹⁹ and the disruptive emotions that result from it.

In the *Anattalakkhana-Sutta*²⁰⁰, the Buddha says:

• *Monks, form* (*P. rupa*) *is without itself. Monks, feelings* (*P. vedana*) *are without self. Monks, perceptions* (*P. sanna*) *are without self. Monks, formations* (*P. sankharas*)²⁰¹ *are without self. Monks, consciousness* (*P. vinnana*) *is without self.* •

Anything that is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless should be considered as:

• *This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.* •

This is the result of correct insight (*P. samma-ditthi*). Anything that is not yours, which you are not, which is not 'self' cannot be taken away from you; you should not secure it, not justify it. This creates selflessness. An existence without pride. Modest. Non-assertive. Without 'I.'

This is how all the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking of the *dhammanuvatti* becomes 'spontaneous'. Free. Unbound. Not colored by personal premises, hypotheses, approval and disapproval, likes and dislikes.

So the *dhammanuvatti* 'sees and knows' reality as it really is and not as he wants reality to be. *Yatha-bhuta nana dassana*.²⁰²

By looking at things as they really are, the *dhammanuvatti* awakens. He wakes up. He does not come to self-realization by striving for the divine, for the other-worldly. Nor by looking away from reality, but by considering reality objectively with alert mindfulness. And accepts this objective reality.

• *Therefore, a well-taught noble disciple who considers this with perfect insight, grows disenchanted with physical form, with sensations with feeling, with perception, with sankharas and with consciousness.*

Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate, and his mind (P. mana) ²⁰³ is liberated. His mind liberated, there arises the knowledge that his mind has been liberated.

He understands: Birth has been destroyed, the holy life has been lived (P. magga brahmacariya) ²⁰⁴ what had to be done is done (P. katam karniyam) ²⁰⁵ and there is no further rebirth in any state of existence (P. naparam ithhattaya) ²⁰⁶. •



What is vipassana?

Vipassana literally means: 'seeing things as they really are'.

This 'seeing' requires clear understanding of the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhaṇa*) of all conditioned phenomena, namely: insight into the impermanence/transience (*P. anicca sammasana nana*)²⁰⁷; insight into the unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha sammasana nana*)²⁰⁸ and insight into the selflessness (*P. anatta sammasana nana*)²⁰⁹ of all phenomena.

Anicca, *dukkha* and *anatta* are the three fundamental elements of the *Buddhadhamma*—the teachings of the Buddha. They are the cornerstones to achieve self-realization.

Of the three, *anicca* is the essential factor in this awareness process. It is the *passe-partout* with which the two other gates of insight open.

In order to unlock *anicca*, the practitioner (*P. dhammanuvatti*) must walk the Noble Eightfold Path (*P. magga sacca*)—the Fourth Noble Truth of the Buddha—intensively.

This path is divided into three—progressive ascending—steps, namely ethics/morality (*P. sila*), concentration (*P. samadhi*) and wisdom (*P. panna*).²¹⁰

Sila—which stands for a virtuous life—forms the basis for *samadhi*, which means concentrating the mind in such a way that one-pointedness (*P. ekaggata*)²¹¹ is achieved. To put it more clearly, if the practitioner is to achieve an excellent concentration of mind—*samadhi*—it is necessary that his/her *sila* must be pure, since *samadhi* is founded on *sila*.

Only when the *dhammanuvatti* has refined his concentration in such a way that he becomes one (the so-called absorption) with his meditation object can wisdom, *panna*, arise.

Again, the same reasoning applies: in order for the practitioner to achieve an excellent *panna*, it is necessary that his/her *samadhi* must be pure, since *panna* is built on *samadhi*.

Let this be clear: *sila* and *samadhi* are the basic conditions for developing *panna*.

Without (excellent) morality and without (excellent) concentration, no (excellent) wisdom is possible. The more perfect the morality or concentration, the more perfect the wisdom will be.

And it is precisely this (perfect) wisdom that enables the practitioner to clearly understand *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* through the practice of *vipassana*. By practicing *vipassana*, he/she can 'see' things as they really are.

In *vipassana* meditation, the object of meditation is the impermanence (*P. anicca*) of all things that present themselves. The method of *vipassana* thus boils down to the fact that the *dhammanuvatti* must strive to realize *anicca* in himself (i.e., recognize, acknowledge and become one with it) ²¹². Once *anicca* is realized, he/she will understand *dukkha*, and then see *anatta* as the ultimate truth.

Only through this insight does the *dhammanuvatti* understand the misery that permeates and saturates his entire existence (*P. dukkha sacca*) ²¹³; he releases the cause of *dukkha* (*P. samudaya sacca*); realizes the termination of *dukkha* (*P. nirodha sacca*) and cultivates the path that leads to the termination of *dukkha* (*P. magga sacca*) ²¹⁴

Realizing *anicca* means that the *dhammanuvatti* recognizes the impermanence within himself. He becomes one (*P. ekaggata*) with his impermanence, which means that he experiences personal impermanence in his deepest self and accepts this impermanence equanimously. In this way, the practitioner attains a state of internal and external peace and aligns himself and his energy with all of existence.

The experience of *anicca* can only be acquired by the practitioner on condition that he develops proper attention (*P. samma sati*) ²¹⁵. *Samma sati* is our original nature, but our attention is contaminated and manipulated by our conditionings.

Sandy Boucher: ²¹⁶

• *Waking up, being awake, should be the normal human condition. After all, self-realization expresses the deepest truth of our nature, our unity with the energy of the universe. We study, meditate and practice to penetrate this consciousness.* •

For this, the *dhammanuvatti* draws his analytical attention to the four fields of mindfulness (*P. satipatthana*). ²¹⁷ Through constant meditation practice of *satipatthana*, the *sattatimsa bodhipakkhiya dhamma* ²¹⁸ is triggered in the practitioner.

Through this constant, concentrated attention (*P. sati*), his equanimity (*P. upek-kha*) is developed by experiencing the law of *anicca* experientially. *Sati* and *upek-kha* form the two wings that make up *vipassana*. The balanced combination of both realizes wisdom (*P. panna*).

After all, the *dhammanuvatti* has come to understand that everything that arises will eventually decay. That everything that is created decays; that everything that arises conditioned finally decays.

Dhammapada: ²¹⁹

• *Sabe sankhara anicca—All conditioned things are impermanent.* •

Mahāparinibbāna Mantra: ²²⁰

• *Anicca vata sankhara, uppada vāya dhammino. Uppajjitva nirujjhanti tesam vupasamo sukho—All conditioned things are impermanent; when one is born, decay is inherent. With arising, they cease: their stilling is true happiness.* ♪

These phrases emphasize the universal characteristic of impermanence in all conditioned phenomena. In Buddhism, understanding of impermanence (*P. anicca*) is considered fundamental to developing wisdom and insight. It reflects the idea that all things in the world, both mental and physical, are in a constant state of flux—arising, changing, and passing away. Recognizing impermanence is crucial for overcoming attachment and craving, seen as sources of suffering (*P. dukkha*).

This wisdom doesn't arise in the *dhammanuvatti* on an intellectual basis, but through direct experiential knowledge. It's directly experiential, realized insight. (*P. paccakkha-nana*). ²²¹

This wisdom, this insight is the direct way to *nibbana*.

The preceding text provides the theoretical foundation and explication for *vipassana* meditation.

Practically, the *vipassana* technique means that the *dhammanuvatti* focuses his concentrated attention on his mind/body complex—specifically on the four fields (*P. gocara*) ²²² of mindfulness (*P. satipatthana*): the body; the sensations and feelings; the mind and the content of the mind (the so-called 'objects of the mind').

It doesn't matter whether the *dhammanuvatti* focuses his attention on the whole (the four fields together) or only one of the partial aspects. Whatever choice the practitioner makes, he will always be reminded of the essence by the *satipatthana* refrain:

• *Thus the monk persists in observing the process of arising (of the body respectively; the sensations; observe the mind or contents of the mind); he continues to observe the process of decay (of the body respectively; the sensations; the mind or the contents of the mind); or continues to observe both the process of arising and the process of decay (of the body respectively; the sensations; the mind or contents of the mind).* ♪

He makes this observation diligently (*P. atapi*) the *sutta* instructions; clearly conscious and with deep insight into impermanence (*P. sampajanna*); with penetrating attention (*P. satima*); and free and detached from every worldly desire and dislike (*P. vineyya loke abhijjhadomanassa*).

In whatever way the *dhammanuvatti* directs his reflection, the conclusion will always be that everything he observes is impermanent; unsatisfactory and selfless.

The Buddha in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*: ²²³

• *Sabbe sankhara anicca. Sabbe sankhara dukkha. Sabbe sankhara anatta—All phenomena are impermanent. All phenomena are unsatisfactory. All phenomena are selfless.* •

Vinaya: ²²⁴

• *Of all the conditioned phenomena, the Bhagavat has pointed to their origin as well as to their decay. This is the teaching of the great Samana.* •

By establishing concentrated attention on the *satipatthanas*, the *dhammanuvatti* will clearly understand how his entire physical structure; how his whole mental structure; how the combination of his physical and mental structure works. The whole of existence is a process of arising and decay—an eternal process of constant change. In the whole physical and mental structure, nothing is stable; nothing fixed; nothing independent to find. Everything is in constant change. And this constant change is not a fault of nature. Change is the way things are—*Yathabhuta*. Change is the law of nature; the cosmic law. *Anicca* is the only constant in all of existence. *Dhammo sanantano*. ²²⁵

Through his constant attention (*P. sati*) to the constantly changing nature of physical and mental sensations, the *dhammanuvatti* profoundly develops his faculty of equanimity (*P. upekkha*). Attention and equanimity are the two wings of *vipassana*.

Sati + upekkha = vipassana.

Attention leads the *dhammanuvatti* to clear knowledge/understanding of the three characteristics of the phenomena (*P. tilakkhana*). Equanimity leads him to their acceptance. In other words, impermanent is the fate of man. If he realizes this fact in himself (recognizes, acknowledges and becomes one with it) and fully accepts it, he will know inner peace in this life.

The path to the realization of wisdom briefly outlined above is described in detail in the *Visuddhimagga* ²²⁶ of Buddhaghosa, who got the essence for this from Upatissa, a Buddhist monk who lived in Ceylon in the 1st century AD and who was the author of the *Vimuttimagga* ²²⁷.

A more recent, but equally in-depth book was written by the Burmese monk Mahasi Sayadaw. ²²⁸ Here too, the path of the seven purifications (*P. satta visuddhi*)—just like the work of Buddhaghosa—is the common thread throughout the book.



For the attentive practitioner, I will now recap the terminology used above:

Clear understanding

Clear understanding, truly seeing, presupposes realization within ourselves: recognizing; acknowledging and becoming one with them; experiencing the phenomena directly; intuitively (*P. paccanubhoti*) 'as they really are' (*P. yatha-bhuta*).

So not as we think or would like them to be or would not want them to be, and this equanimous, i.e., without giving any reaction (without interaction on the playground of our mind: without the stories; without the dramas, without our sankharas of desire and of disgust). Seeing like the reflection of a mirror. To obtain this 'seeing,' right attention (*P. samma sati*—*cfr. infra*) is needed.

Sayadaw U Pandita: ²²⁹

• *True insight only occurs in the presence of a nonthinking, bare awareness of the passing away of phenomena in the present moment.* •

In the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena (*P. tilakkhana*)

These three characteristics are: changeability/impermanence/transience (*P. anicca*); suffering/unsatisfactoriness/misery (*P. dukkha*) and non-self (*P. anatta*). In order to make progress in *vipassana*—the 'seeing' of things as they really are—the *dharmmanuvatti* must remain aware of *anicca* (as continuously as possible).

The Buddha's advice is short and to the point: the practitioner should try to keep perceiving the *tilakkhana*. In fact, this advice goes to the heart of the Buddha's teachings. As this understanding grows in the practitioner, so does his understanding of the real nature of the phenomena.

Of the physical and mental structure

The whole physical and mental structure and the combination of both i.e. the integral physical and mental structure; the complete flow of existence. This whole structure is conditioned, i.e., bound to causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. pac-cayas*) for arising, existence and decay.

Obtained by right attention (*P. samma sati*)

This proper attention can only be obtained through analytical meditation. This attention is of an exceptional, all-encompassing, penetrating quality.

Sayadaw U Pandita: ²³⁰

• *We are not talking here about ordinary mindfulness, but about mindfulness of an extraordinary, exceptional quality. This is about an intense, sustained mindful-*

ness. When the object appears, the mind's attention immediately turns powerfully to the object. This happens without hesitation, without thinking, without reflection, without analysis. In other words, the object must be 'grasped' so that the observing mind fully encompasses the observation object, spreads over the entire object, encloses it in its entirety. The object must be fully observed, from the beginning, over the middle, to the end.

In practice, this means continuously observing and observing all emerging objects. Every moment of mindfulness must be connected to the following. In every moment. And moment by moment. The observation of the objects should therefore have no gaps, but should have a continuous character. When an object appears, the mind must be immediately directed at the object with powerful effort. •

This right attention possesses four crucial qualities or characteristics for contemplating, contemplating, meditating on it; for its concentration and awareness, namely:

- diligent, passionate, with fire, with passion (*P. atapi*)
- with penetrating ('as an arrow') [non-reactive] mindfulness (*P. sati*)
- clearly conscious and with deep insight into the permanent impermanence of all phenomena (*P. sampajanna*)
- equanimous, free and detached from worldly desire and disgust (*P. vineyya loke abhijjha-domanassa*)

On the four fields of mindfulness (*P. satipatthana*)

The body; the sensations (physical) and feelings (mental), either on the whole or on one of the partial aspects of the *satipatthanas*, i.e.,:

- Mindfulness/contemplation/concentration/consciousness on the body (*P. kayanupassana*)²³¹ namely: attention to breathing; to the basic and secondary postures of the body; to the impermanence of bodily actions; to the repulsiveness of the anatomical components of the body; to the elements, and finally, to the corpse.
- Mindfulness/contemplation/concentration/consciousness on the sensations (*P. vedana-nupassana*): attention to physical sensations and mental feelings.
- Mindfulness/contemplation/concentration/consciousness on the mind (*P. cittanupassana*): attention to the states of mind, i.e. on the mental states of the mind.
- Mindfulness/contemplation/concentration/awareness on the *dhammas*, phenomena, things (*P. Dhamma-nupassana*). In particular it is about:

- the five hindrances (*P. panca nivarana*) ²³²
- the five aggregates of clinging (*P. panca upadana khandha*) ²³³
- the six inner and six outer sensory spheres (*P. salayatana*) ²³⁴
- the seven factors of enlightenment (*P. satta-bojjhanga*) ²³⁵
- the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya sacca*) ²³⁶

Through the sustained and persistent meditation practice of satipatthana, first the five hindrances (*P. panca nivarana*) are destroyed. Then, after the analytical observation of the *khandhas* and the *salayatana*, the seven enlightenment factors (*P. satta bojjhanga*) are practiced and developed by the *dhammanuvatti*.

Finally, the practice and development of these enlightenment factors lead the *dhammanuvatti* to a clear understanding (*P. samma ditthi*) of the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya sacca*).

Satipatthana

Literally: '*sati*' = giving attention to the now; '*patthana*' or '*upatthana*' = firmly anchored; intensive; continuous. *Satipatthana* is—according to the Buddha himself—the unparalleled way (*P. ekayana magga*) to purify the mind (*P. sattanam visudhiya*) and to achieve enlightenment/self-realization (*P. nibbana*).

Maha-Satipatthana Sutta: ²³⁷

• *Monks, this is the (only/direct/unparalleled) way that leads to purification of beings; this is the way to transcend sorrow and worry; to the end of dukkha and fear; to mastering the right method for realizing nibbana, namely by establishing the fourfold foundations of mindfulness.* •

Satipatthana is the meditation practice necessary to purify the *dhammanuvatti*; to transcend his sorrows and worries; to destroy *dukkha* and to teach him the method necessary to realize his self-realization. In other words, the observation resulting from *satipatthana* leads the meditator to *nibbana* in a unique way.

As mentioned above, there are various 'techniques' or 'methods' to bring *sati-patthana* into one's life; i.e., to practice *satipatthana*. Some of these techniques emphasize one aspect of the four fields or foundations, while other techniques use all the fundamentals.

In the complete *Satipatthana-Sutta*, the Buddha extensively describes more than 50 exercises.

Equanimity (*P. upekkha*)

Not reacting to sensations, even a single one (*sankhara* = 'that which animates us'). Equanimity stems from the practitioner's experiential knowledge ²³⁸ that everything changes every moment, is fleeting, and utterly unstable.

Wisdom (*P. panna*)

The realization (recognizing; acknowledging and becoming one with it) of the ego-less, i.e., deep insight into the illusion of a separate, stable, eternal 'I' that is separate from the whole. The Buddha formulated this wisdom in his last words: ²³⁹

• *Impermanence is inseparably linked to all existing things. Strive diligently for your enlightenment.* •

This wisdom is the path that leads to *Nibbana*.

Nibbana

• *There is, monks, a sphere were there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air. No sphere of unlimited space, no sphere of unlimited consciousness, no sphere of nothingness, no sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Neither this world, nor any other world, nor both: neither sun nor moon. Here, monks, I say, there is no coming, no going, no staying, neither disappearing nor rising. This sphere is not stationary, not moving, without any conditional ground. This is indeed the end of suffering.* • ²⁴⁰

7 Purifications & 16 phases

The path to *nibbana* includes 7 purifications (*P. satta visuddhi*) ²⁴¹ and 16 insights (*P. solana nanas*). ²⁴²



Exclusion

Dhamma advocates for the inclusion and equality of all living beings. The teachings of the Buddha emphasize that all individuals, irrespective of their backgrounds, possess the potential to attain enlightenment. The concept of exclusion contradicts this principle and goes against the ethical foundations of Buddhism.

In Buddhist teachings, there is frequent mention of the importance of *metta*, or loving-kindness, as a fundamental attitude. *Metta* involves developing compassion and nurturing goodwill towards all living beings, without any form of discrimination. This includes avoiding exclusion or prejudice based on race, gender, social status, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

Dhamma recognizes that all people, regardless of their backgrounds, experience suffering and strive for happiness and liberation. The goal of Buddhist practice is to understand and overcome this suffering and to support others in this process. This means that everyone is welcome to study and practice the teachings, regardless of their social, economic, or demographic status.

Of course, cultural, historical, and social influences can affect the way *Dhamma* is practiced in different communities. In some cases, there may be local traditions or customs that encourage segregation or exclusion. However, it is important to remember that this is not inherent to the Buddhist teachings themselves but rather a result of interpretations or cultural beliefs that have become intertwined with them.

Let it be clear that *Dhamma* actively strives for inclusion, compassion, and equality, rejecting exclusion and discrimination in favor of a broad vision of universal brotherhood and compassion. The term 'strives' indicates an ongoing effort or pursuit, suggesting that *Dhamma* is continuously working towards achieving its goals. In this case, the goals are inclusion, compassion, and equality.

Therefore, be discerning in choosing your friends. Do not let hatemongers and deceitful people taint your mind. Stay alert and do not lend them your ear. It is not the loudest shouters who proclaim the truth. Only in deep silence does truth take shape.



Impermanence (*P. anicca*)

Impermanence is the key to understanding: recognizing that it is not our impermanence that causes suffering, but rather our craving for permanence. Moreover: It's not just craving permanence that causes suffering, it is *expecting* it and then suffering when the expectation is not met.

The *dhammanuvatti*, a follower of the teachings, must acknowledge that desire lacks substantiality. It arises and ceases. True insight, true wisdom, lies in the realization that all experiences, without exception, are subject to change. They are impermanent, insubstantial and transitory—*Anicca*.

True insight involves perceiving that nothing is eternal. The understanding of impermanence extends to the realization that nothing possesses eternal or everlasting qualities. All conditioned phenomena arise due to the interplay of the four material elements (*P. rupa dhatus*)²⁴³ and are dependent on them. The entire universe is an unceasing manifestation of energy. There is no fixity or stability. Everything is fluid, constantly flowing and evolving. It's a spontaneous process, a flux.

Deep awareness of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*),²⁴⁴ the understanding of how phenomena arise in dependence on causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*), is portrayed as the means to dispel delusion and gain true insight.

By recognizing the interdependent nature of all things, one can transcend misunderstandings and attain a clearer perspective on reality.

The Buddha stated in the *Maha Nidana Sutta*:²⁴⁵

• *Whoever comprehends dependent origination truly sees the Dhamma.* •

The quote attributed to the Buddha emphasizes the significance of comprehending dependent origination as a profound understanding of the *Dhamma*, the Teachings and the Ultimate Truth taught by the Buddha.

This sentence implies that through understanding dependent origination, one gains a direct and transformative perception of the *Dhamma*. It suggests that this understanding goes *beyond* theoretical knowledge and leads to a deep experiential understanding of the interconnectedness and nature of existence, considered a profound realization that brings insight into the fundamental truths of Buddhism.

By emphasizing the relationship between comprehending dependent origination and truly seeing the *Dhamma*, this quote emphasizes the transformative potential of understanding the interdependent nature of all things.

It suggests that this understanding is pivotal in attaining profound wisdom and liberation from suffering.



Uppada Sutta

The Uppada Sutta, found in the *Anguttara Nikaya*,²⁴⁶ holds great significance within Buddhist literature. Allow me to recite the *Pali* text:

• *Uppada va, bhikkhave, tathagatanam anuppada va tathagatanam, thitava sa dhatu dhammatthitata: sabbe sankhara anicca; sabbe sankhara dukkha; sabbe sankhara anatta.* •

My translation of this passage is as follows:

• *Monks, whether or not a Tathagata arises in the world, the nature of the Dhamma remains steadfast: all conditioned things are impermanent; all conditioned things are unsatisfactory; all conditioned things are not-self.* •

This *sutta* carries immense significance.

In this teaching, the Buddha does not position himself above the natural law or the process of existence. Instead, he exemplifies the very essence of the process, just as each one of us does.

The only distinction lies in the Buddha being a *Mahapurisa*—a highly evolved human being endowed with exceptional spiritual attainment and qualities—a noble person who has reached advanced stages of spiritual development and realization.

In Theravada Buddhism, a *Mahapurisa* is often associated with the attainment of enlightenment, specifically that of an *Arahat* or a fully awakened being.

An *Arahat* is one who has liberated themselves from the cycle of rebirth and has fully extinguished defilements and attachments. They have directly realized the Four Noble Truths and achieved the ultimate goal of *nibbana*—the cessation of suffering.

The qualities attributed to a *Mahapurisa* in Theravada Buddhism are centered around their spiritual achievements and virtues. A *Mahapurisa* possesses profound wisdom, clarity of insight, and an unwavering understanding of the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena. Their knowledge is not merely intellectual but arises from direct experiential realization.

A *Mahapurisa* exemplifies the highest levels of ethical conduct and virtue. They embody the moral principles of the Buddhist path, including refraining from harming living beings, practicing generosity, observing the precepts, and cultivating wholesome qualities such as loving-kindness (*P. metta*), compassion (*P. karuna*), sympathetic joy (*P. mudita*)²⁴⁷ and equanimity (*P. upekkha*). These four wholesome qualities are called the *Brahmaviharas*.²⁴⁸

However, it is essential to note that they are fundamentally human beings, just like the rest of us. They are not deities, creators, or grand architects of the universe. Moreover, the concept of a *Mahapurisa* in Theravada Buddhism is not reserved for a select few individuals.

While rare, the potential for becoming a *Mahapurisa* is believed to exist within every individual. The path to becoming a *Mahapurisa* requires dedicated practice, a deep understanding of Buddhist teachings, and the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path—the path leading to liberation.

While the Buddha possesses extraordinary qualities as a *Mahapurisa*, he remains fundamentally human and does not hold the status of a divine being.

In this way, the *Pali* text highlights the Buddha's teaching on the enduring nature of the natural law, regardless of the presence or absence of a Buddha in the world. It emphasizes the universal truths of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness that apply to all phenomena.

Furthermore, the text emphasizes the Buddha's embodiment of the natural law and process of existence, rather than his elevation above it.

Overall, the passage sheds light on the timeless wisdom contained within the *Uppada Sutta* and clarifies the Buddha's role as an enlightened teacher and guide within the context of the natural order.



Dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*)

When the Buddha expounded on 'dependent origination,' he would, at times, commence at different points in the chain. This unique approach conveyed the profound idea that there is no distinct starting point or ultimate end. Instead, it emphasized the cyclical nature of existence, contrasting with a linear perspective.

In the *Upanisa Sutta*,²⁴⁹ the chain of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) is presented in a different sequence.

The description of the Buddha teaching dependent origination from different points in the chain reflects the flexible approach that the Buddha employed when instructing his disciples. Such an approach highlights the interconnectedness of the various factors in the chain and the absence of a distinct starting point or ultimate end, emphasizing the cyclical nature of existence.

It unfolds not from ignorance (*P. avijja*) leading to suffering (*P. dukkha*), but rather from suffering to joy (*P. piti*), happiness (*P. sukha*), concentration (*P. samadhi*), and wisdom (*P. panna*), ultimately culminating in liberation (*P. vimutti*) and awakening (*P. nibbana*).

This teaching is sublime, evoking a sense of grandeur akin to the musical term 'maestoso.' It reflects the profound insights and comprehensive understanding of an exceptionally brilliant mind, befitting a *Sammāsambuddha*—a fully awakened Buddha. It represents an incomparable level of understanding, unparalleled insight, and noble wisdom.

Furthermore, an attentive *dharmānuyatti*, a follower of the teachings, has brought to my attention that there exists one linear sequence of conditionality: the one that leads from *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth) to *nibbana* (the state of liberation from suffering).

In summary, this highlights the flexible approach the Buddha employed when teaching dependent origination, emphasizing the cyclical nature of existence. It discusses an alternate presentation of the chain in the *Upanisa Sutta*, showcasing the path from suffering to liberation.

The language used in this *sutta* expresses once more the profound admiration for the Buddha's wisdom, marking it as a testament to his extraordinary understanding and insight.

Finally, it acknowledges the existence of a linear progression from *samsara* to *nibbana*, shedding light on the ultimate goal of liberation in Buddhist philosophy.



Wisdom (*P. panna*)

Wisdom does not rely on words or conceptual thinking; rather, it emerges from silence, untouched by the noise of verbal and conceptual reasoning. In essence, true wisdom manifests itself only in profound silence.

Thich Nhat Hanh:

• *Silence is essential. We need silence, just as much as we need air, just as much as plants need light. If our minds are crowded with words and thoughts, there is no space for us.* 9

This suggests that through the cultivation of deep silence, a *dhammanuvatti*—a disciple dedicated to the *Dhamma* life—can apprehend the genuine nature of things as they truly exist. This involves knowing and seeing (*P. janami passami*) the authentic nature of all conditioned phenomena, referred to as '*yatha-bhuta*.'

This understanding of the authentic nature of things is known as the '*tilakkhana*,' a constant and universal presence. The term implies that the *tilakkhana* is persistently present and universally applicable, transcending specific moments, circumstances, or individuals. Instead, it encompasses the entirety of existence, persisting from moment to moment.

'*Tilakkhana*' denotes the three marks of existence in Buddhism: impermanence (*P. anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*P. dukkha*), and non-self (*P. anatta*). These marks unveil the fundamental nature of all phenomena, offering insight into the true nature of reality.

The first emphasized aspect is impermanence (*P. anicca*), acknowledging the ever-changing and transient nature of all things. This understanding recognizes that nothing in the world is permanent or fixed, and everything undergoes constant flux and transformation, encompassing physical objects, emotional states, thoughts, and even the self.

The second aspect is unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*P. dukkha*), acknowledging the inherent unsatisfactoriness and dissatisfaction characterizing human existence. This understanding recognizes that attachment and craving for impermanent phenomena ultimately lead to suffering, embracing the imperfection and dissatisfaction pervasive in our lives.

The third aspect is non-self (*P. anatta*), challenging the notion of a fixed, enduring, and independent self or soul. This understanding recognizes the absence of a permanent, unchanging essence or entity within individuals and phenomena. It emphasizes the interconnected and interdependent nature of all things, viewing the 'self' as a constructed concept rather than an inherent reality.

By underlining the universality and continual presence of these three aspects, insight into the *tilakkhana* implies that it should be recognized and contemplated

in every moment. This allows individuals to deepen their insight into the true nature of reality and cultivate wisdom. Realizing this process is considered the embodiment of wisdom.



Words and Concepts

In the realm of Theravada Buddhism, a fundamental distinction exists between 'knowledge' and 'wisdom'.

'Knowledge' and 'wisdom' are not interchangeable terms; they diverge in essence. While knowledge may be advantageous, it is not a prerequisite for wisdom. In fact, in many instances, knowledge and wisdom are inherently contradictory.

Consider the following examples:

- Knowledge is rooted in the past, whereas wisdom perpetually manifests in the present.
- Knowledge gratifies the ego, whereas wisdom dismantles it.
- Knowledge is acquired from external sources, handed down through others—a second-hand endeavor. In contrast, wisdom arises internally, originating from one's own insights and is inherently original.
- Knowledge is associated with measurement, IQ, and the sensory realm. Wisdom, on the other hand, pertains to insight, compassion, and the transcendence of conditioned existence.

Self-realization is not attained through borrowed knowledge acquired from others (*P. suta-maya panna*)²⁵⁰ or through logical and rational yet conditioned thinking (*P. cinta-maya panna*).²⁵¹ True self-realization is achieved solely through direct empirical experience—a wisdom derived from personal insight (*P. bhavana-maya panna*)²⁵².



Wisdom & Consciousness

Sariputta in the *Maha Vedala Sutta*: ²⁵³

• *One who possesses wisdom understands what dukkha is, comprehends the cause of dukkha, understands the cessation of dukkha, and comprehends the path that leads to the cessation of dukkha.*

One who does not possess wisdom does not understand what dukkha is, does not comprehend the cause of dukkha, does not understand the cessation of dukkha, and does not comprehend the path that leads to the cessation of dukkha. •

The goal of wisdom is direct experiential insight (*P. paccakkha-nana*). The goal is penetrating insight. The goal is triumph.

The two mental states, wisdom and consciousness, are interrelated. They cannot be separated from each other.

What one perceives (understands), one is conscious of (experiences). What one is conscious of (experiences), one perceives (understands).

The distinction between these two mental states is that wisdom is developed, and consciousness is to be considered.



Desire (*P. tanha, lobha*)

Desire is utterly disloyal to its seductive promise. It often entices us with the prospect of pleasure, gratification, happiness, and contentment, but ultimately delivers only suffering and disappointment. Fulfilling one desire merely begets the emergence of another craving, perpetuating an endless cycle.

The nature of desire is to cling: the more we desire, the more we become frustrated; the greater our desire, the greater our misery. Through craving, longing, and hankering, we can never realize liberation (*P. vimutti*) or inner peace (*P. nibbana*).

We only lose what we cling to.

This statement encapsulates an essential teaching in Buddhist philosophy, offering deep insights into the nature of attachment, impermanence, and the causes of suffering.

At its core, the sentence suggests that our experience of loss is intimately connected to our attachments. It implies that when we tightly cling to things, people, ideas, or circumstances, we create conditions in which loss becomes inevitable. The more we grasp onto something, the more susceptible we become to experiencing loss when that thing changes or departs from our lives.

This teaching is rooted in the Buddhist concept of impermanence (*P. anicca*). Buddhism recognizes that all conditioned phenomena, including material possessions, relationships, and even our own identities, are subject to change and eventual dissolution. Nothing in the world is permanent or lasting. Therefore, clinging to transient and impermanent phenomena ultimately leads to suffering. There is no other exit.

The phrase '*We only lose what we cling to*' implies that our attachments and clinging create a sense of ownership, possessiveness, or dependency. We may believe that certain objects, relationships, or experiences define our happiness or sense of self. However, this clinging mindset becomes a source of suffering when those attachments are challenged, disrupted, or inevitably come to an end.

Liberation can only be realized through non-desire (*P. alobha*). Each craving proliferates, multiplying exponentially. The collateral damage is immense. This is the vicious circle of *samsara*.

Unless we gain insight into the essential—and the essential has no desire—the same process will repeat over and over again. In this way, we keep '*walking in circles*': doing the same thing repeatedly and silently hoping for a different result.

This is the eternal 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), which is, of course, an illusion. Ultimately, every 'rebirth' ends in a new 'death'. And without final extinguishment (*P. soti-bhava*), ²⁵⁴ each death initiates a new beginning—*samsara*.

The concept of *samsara* refers to the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, in which beings are trapped until they attain liberation. Liberation and inner peace can only be attained through non-desire, by letting go of desires and gaining insight into the essential nature of existence.

Breaking free from desire and the cycle of samsara is seen as the path to true liberation.



Liberation of the Mind (*P. cittavimutti*)

What the 'worldling,' the average person (*P. puthujjana*), is presented with (and fervently and enthusiastically believes, praises, and embraces) are often hallucinations, mere fantasies of the mind. These are described as manifest and deliberate falsehoods, a show or illusion in which the average person is immersed and enslaved by society.

This path is 'fake' and 'deceptive,' emphasizing its focus on worldly pursuits such as fame, money, success, and power. None of these 'things' lead to fundamental satisfaction, liberation, or inner peace. It is a path of enslavement and alienation, symbolized by *Mara*, the embodiment of delusion and temptation in Buddhism.

Seeing things as they truly are—*yatha-bhuta nana dassana*—presupposes 'seeing' all 'phenomena' (*P. dhammas*) in relation to their three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*), namely impermanence (*P. anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*), and selflessness (*P. anatta*).

Yatha-bhuta is the path to liberation. Those who choose this path will possess an excellent quality that goes against conditioned habit patterns. The Buddha referred to this as *patisotagami*,²⁵⁵ meaning going against the tide. It involves a lack of blind faith in power and rulers, fostering alertness, vigilance, and resistance to conditioning.

This quality should be learned and developed from an early age, requiring personal effort, firm conviction, and persistence (*P. adhitthana*). Those in power are unlikely to provide the means to unveil the truth.

The reasons therefore are obvious: Individuals or institutions in positions of power may be motivated to maintain their authority and control. Revelations of certain truths might challenge the existing power structures, leading those in power to resist the dissemination of information that could threaten their position.

Power structures rely on the status quo for stability. Truths that challenge established norms and practices could disrupt the existing order. Those in power might resist unveiling such truths to prevent social upheaval or challenges to the established hierarchy.

Access to information is a powerful tool. Those in power may control the dissemination of information to manipulate public perception and maintain their authority. Revealing certain truths may undermine their ability to control the narrative.

The disclosure of certain truths might lead to public discontent, protests, or even revolutions. Individuals or institutions in power may fear the consequences of widespread dissatisfaction and choose to suppress or manipulate information to prevent social unrest.

Those in power often have specific agendas and ideologies that they aim to promote. Unveiling certain truths might contradict these agendas, leading to a reluctance to acknowledge or share information that goes against their pre-established narratives.

Do not bind yourself to any sect, association, political party, organization, or institution. Resolutely and explicitly deny any (pseudo) religious and civic authority, any physical or legal entity, the right to arrogate to itself the monopoly to represent and bind the *Dhamma* in a personal name.

It is an arrogant self-overestimation to assume that overarching structures (can and may) represent the *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* does not develop out of structures. That is not just a compulsive thought; it is simply a wrong starting point. Structures are not even tools (*P. upaya's*), but rather will-o'-the-wisps.

Overarching structures are imaginery walls that consistently prevent the sun from covering the entire field. Look at structures for what they really are: mere forms, not content. Do not identify with structures. They do not conform to the true nature of things. Walk away from them. They do not align with insight.

This statement is a cautionary reminder to individuals to take an active role in seeking truth and questioning information, especially when it comes from authoritative sources. Individuals must take responsibility for their own awakening.

This is the path of the Buddha, known as a Rebel and a *Samana* (a term for an ascetic or spiritual seeker). It leads to 'becoming cool' (*P. sitibhuto*), which involves letting go of desires and expectations, detachment, and gaining insight into the impermanence of all things. It also entails accepting the process of change (*P. anicca*) and finding contentment with a simple life. *Sitibhuto* represents finding inner peace (*P. santi*),²⁵⁶ liberation of the mind (*P. cittavimutti*),²⁵⁷ and self-realization (*P. nibbana*).²⁵⁸

The *dhammanuvatti* who resolutely follows the path of the Buddha breaks the chains of conditioning, developing wisdom (*P. panna*) and compassion (*P. karuna*). That is why the Buddha refers to such a disciple as an *ariya-puggala*, an epithet for a stream-enterer, a *sotapanna*.

In Theravada Buddhism, a *sotapanna* is someone who has attained the first stage of enlightenment and has gained an irreversible insight into the Four Noble Truths. This stage is characterized by a deep understanding of the nature of suffering, the impermanence of phenomena, and the absence of a permanent self.



Hearsay...

What the Buddha proclaims in the *Kalama Sutta* ²⁵⁹ is evident: why would you believe someone else's word? Why continue based on what you know only by 'hearsay'? Why take a position or defend a view that you have not thoroughly investigated yourself? Why would you assume something solely based on the social position or function of the person saying it? Always remember that 'hearsay' should never be considered as an argument if you want to avoid deceiving yourself or being deceived.

Knowledge (*P. panna*) is not a matter of belief (*P. saddha*) or mere 'hearing'; instead, it is about 'seeing' and 'insight.' The distinction between knowledge and belief in Buddhism is rooted in the importance placed on direct experiential insight (*P. paccakkha-nana*) ²⁶⁰. Explore why knowledge is considered a matter of 'seeing' and 'insight' rather than belief or mere hearing:

- Direct Experience and Observation (Seeing): Knowledge in Buddhism is not merely an intellectual understanding but involves direct experience and observation. It's about seeing things as they really are, *yatha-bhuta*. This direct seeing is not through hearsay or relying on others but is a personal, experiential understanding gained through one's own mindful observation and contemplation.
- Insight (*Panna*) vs. Faith (*Saddha*): While faith or belief (*saddha*) may be a starting point for many on the spiritual path, Buddhism encourages practitioners to move beyond blind faith to personal insight (*P. panna*). Insight is a deeper, experiential understanding that arises from direct observation of the nature of reality. It involves seeing the impermanence (*P. anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*), and selflessness (*P. anatta*) of all phenomena.
- Questioning and Inquiry: The *Kalama Sutta* underscores the importance of questioning, inquiry, and personal investigation. It discourages blind acceptance based solely on hearsay or authority. By encouraging individuals to observe themselves and the world around them, Buddhism promotes an active engagement with the teachings, fostering a deeper understanding that goes *beyond* passive belief.
- Cultivation of Wisdom: Wisdom (*P. panna*) in Buddhism is considered a quality that arises from a combination of mindfulness, insight, and understanding. It is not something bestowed by external authorities but cultivated through one's own efforts. The Buddha himself urged his followers to be discerning and not to accept teachings blindly. He encouraged them to examine, inquire, and gain personal insight into the nature of existence.

In summary, the emphasis on 'seeing' and 'insight' rather than 'hearing' or 'belief' in Buddhism underscores the commitment to direct experience and personal understanding. It motivates practitioners to actively engage in their spiritual

journey, question assumptions, and cultivate a profound insight into the true nature of reality.

Therefore observe yourself carefully. Intentional self-observation leads to 'direct seeing,' transforming the practitioner into a 'noble follower' (*P. ariya puggala*). This is an insight into the true nature of things: their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness. Recognizing *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta* within yourself is only attainable through direct experiential knowledge (*P. paccakkha-nana*).

The teachings found in the *Kalama Sutta* highlight several key points:

Questioning authority: The text encourages the *dhammanuvatti* to question and not blindly accept someone else's words or beliefs. It prompts them to consider why they should believe something without personal investigation.

Avoiding biases: The text discourages taking positions or defending views solely based on hearsay or the social position of the person making the statement. It emphasizes the importance of impartiality and independent inquiry.

Knowledge through insight: The text distinguishes between insight (*P. panna*) and belief (*P. saddha*). It suggests that true knowledge comes from direct observation, insight, and personal experience rather than relying on faith or listening to others.

Self-observation: The text encourages the *dhammanuvatti* to observe themselves carefully, intentionally, and directly. Through this self-observation, they can gain insight into the true nature of things (*P. yatha-bhuta*), including their impermanence (*P. anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*), and selflessness (*P. anatta*).

Direct experiential experience: The text asserts that understanding *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta* in oneself is only possible through direct personal experience. This implies that genuine comprehension comes from experiencing these qualities firsthand rather than through theoretical or second-hand knowledge.

Overall, the *Kalama Sutta* emphasizes the importance of personal investigation, direct experience, and insight in understanding the true nature of existence, as taught by the Buddha. It encourages the *dhammanuvatti* to avoid blind belief, biases, and relying solely on external authorities, and instead urges them to cultivate their understanding through direct observation and experiential knowledge.



Wisdom

Wisdom requires no words. Wisdom arises from silence, not from the dualistic noise of your conceptual thinking.

From silence, you experience the true nature of things. Knowing, understanding, and seeing the true essence of all conditioned phenomena. The true nature as it is. *Yatha-bhuta*.

Wisdom is the experience of the continuous process of arising and ceasing in every moment, from moment to moment. The coming and going. Being born and dying. Recognizing and knowing the impermanence of all things (*P. janami passami*) and accepting it with equanimity is wisdom.

Realizing this insight (*P. paccakkha-nana*) is the end of suffering (*P. dukkha*).



Anicca (1)

Everything is transient. Each phenomenon has its allotted time, place, and space. Inherent impermanence is inevitable. The eternity you ardently long for comes to an end in an instant.

Observe this reality. Accept it. Live it. Realize it. Liberate yourself.



Anicca (2)

The comprehension of the arising and cessation of conditioned phenomena is crucial for realizing *nibbana*. By deeply understanding impermanence and the cause of suffering, one gains insight into the unconditioned nature of *nibbana*, which transcends the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*). This realization leads to the end of suffering and the attainment of ultimate liberation.

This understanding is grounded in the concepts of dependent origination, impermanence, and the Four Noble Truths. Let's break down the process step by step:

- Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*): This fundamental teaching in Buddhism elucidates the causal interdependence of all phenomena. It describes how the arising of one condition leads to the arising of another, and the cessation of one condition leads to the cessation of another. Typically illustrated through a twelve-link chain of causation, that starts with ignorance and ends with birth, old age, and death.
- Impermanence (*P. anicca*): Another key concept in Buddhism, it asserts that all conditioned phenomena are subject to change and impermanence. Nothing in the conditioned world is stable or everlasting. Impermanence is one of the three fundamental characteristics of existence (*P. tilakkhana*), along with suffering (*P. dukkha*) and non-self (*P. anatta*).
- Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*): These form the foundation of Buddhist teachings, outlining the reality of suffering (*P. dukkha sacca*), the cause of suffering (*P. samudaya sacca*), the cessation of suffering (*P. nirodha sacca*), and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*P. magga sacca*).

Now, let's connect these concepts to the realization of *nibbana*:

By observing the arising and cessation of conditioned phenomena, one deeply understands impermanence. This insight leads to a profound understanding that everything in the conditioned world is transient and subject to change. Nothing can provide lasting satisfaction or happiness.

As one understands impermanence and observes the continuous arising and passing away of conditioned phenomena, they also come to understand that attachment and craving for these impermanent things are the root cause of suffering. Trying to hold onto or cling to what is impermanent only leads to dissatisfaction and suffering (*P. dukkha*).

Through a deep understanding of dependent origination, impermanence, and the cause of suffering, one gains insight into the nature of reality and the conditioned mind. This insight eventually leads to the realization that *nibbana*, the cessation of suffering, is also real and attainable. *Nibbana* is unconditioned, *beyond* the cycle of birth and death, and is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice.

Finally, the understanding of the arising and cessation of conditioned phenomena helps one realize that *nibbana*, being unconditioned, does not arise or cease. Unlike conditioned phenomena, *nibbana* is *beyond* birth and death, *beyond* arising and passing away. It is the ultimate liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth (*P. samsara*).

Note: A *dhammanuvatti* asked if it is possible to directly gain insight into the unconditioned nature of *nibbana*, which is *beyond* arising and cessation, and transcend the cycle of birth and death, rather than contemplating the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena.

In traditional Buddhist teachings, the path to realizing the Unconditioned (*P. nibbana*) typically involves a gradual progression of insight and understanding. It is not common for individuals to go straight from an ordinary state of mind to directly perceiving the Unconditioned without first developing a foundation of understanding through the observation of the Three Characteristics (Impermanence, Suffering, Non-self) of conditioned phenomena.

The reason for this gradual progression lies in the nature of our minds and the deep-rooted attachments and misconceptions that cloud our perception of reality. The practice of contemplating the Three Characteristics of conditioned phenomena helps to break down these attachments and delusions, leading to a clearer understanding of the nature of reality. By understanding the conditioned and the impermanent, one develops the insight necessary to realize *nibbana*.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that individual experiences in the realm of spirituality can vary widely. Some exceptional practitioners or enlightened beings might have unique and direct experiences of the Unconditioned. Still, such cases are considered rare and extraordinary within the context of traditional Buddhist teachings.

For the vast majority of practitioners, the gradual approach of cultivating wisdom and insight by observing the Three Characteristics is considered the most practical and effective way to progress on the path towards *nibbana*. It helps to build a strong foundation of understanding and mental clarity, which can ultimately lead to the direct realization of *nibbana*.



Anicca (3)

Impermanence is the key to understanding: it is not our impermanence that causes suffering, but rather our desire for permanence. The *dhammanuvatti* must realize that desire lacks substantiality; it arises and ceases. True insight and wisdom lie in recognizing the impermanence of all experiences—*anicca*.

Realize in every moment that nothing is eternal, that all conditioned phenomena are composed of the four elements (*P. dhatus*), and that they depend on the interplay of countless causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*). Understand that the entire universe is an uninterrupted manifestation of energy, devoid of fixity.

Everything is in constant motion, a process, a flow, a flux. Deep and clear awareness of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) uproots and cuts through every delusion.

The Buddha proclaimed in the *Maha Hatthipadopama Sutta*:²⁶¹

• *One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma. One who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination.* •

In summary, the text emphasizes the importance of recognizing impermanence and understanding the role of desire in causing suffering. It highlights the interplay of causes and conditions, the flowing nature of existence, and the profound insight that arises from understanding dependent origination. The quote from the Buddha affirms the significance of perceiving dependent origination as a gateway to understanding the *Dhamma*.



The Temples of Bagan

The 4,400 temples of Bagan, located in Myanmar, the former Burma, offer an impressive visual representation of the Buddhist concept of '*anicca*,' referring to the impermanence of all things. These temples, dating from the 11th to the 13th century, embody the idea of impermanence in various ways.

Firstly, the architectural styles and materials of the temples bear witness to the transience of everything in material existence. Over the centuries, the temples have been subject to natural forces such as earthquakes and erosion, leading to collapses, reconstructions, and restorations. The constantly changing physical state of the temples illustrates the fleeting nature of all things, as emphasized in the concept of *anicca*.

Additionally, the iconography inside the temples reflects the idea of impermanence. Murals and sculptures often depict scenes from the life of Buddha, including his birth, enlightenment, and death. These stories highlight the cycle of life, the impermanence of youth, health, and ultimately, death. This reminds the observer of the constant change and inevitable finitude of earthly existence.

Finally, the abandoned temples themselves illustrate the principle of *anicca*. Some temples are deserted and left in ruins, while others are still actively used. This contrast emphasizes the temporality of every human activity and the ongoing evolution of the environment. The natural surroundings, combined with human intervention, demonstrate that everything is subject to change, and no object or structure remains the same forever. Do not crave it, do not cling to it.

In essence, the temples of Bagan represent the doctrine of *anicca* on various levels, urging us to understand and accept the impermanence of life. Understanding and accepting *anicca* is the key to liberation from *dukkha*.



Ignorance (*P. avijja, moha*)

Ignorance implies having an incorrect perception of things—failing to see their true nature. It's not about being able, daring, or willing to do so. Ignorance is not synonymous with intellectual unknowing but with knowing wrongly; with misleading knowing.

Ignorance and '*miccha ditthi*' are related concepts in Buddhism, but they are not synonymous. ²⁶²

Avijja is the act of identifying ourselves with processes and phenomena that manifest outside of ourselves. It's identifying with things over which we have no impact whatsoever.

Avijja is becoming lost in illusory stories and dramas. Ignorance forms the primary cause of *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth, life, and death; of passion, desire, and delusion that leads to pain and suffering. We cannot, will not, or dare not comprehend who we are, what we are doing here, and why phenomena occur.

Due to our ignorance, we project illusory ways of existence onto ourselves and others. Nervously seeking some certainty in an environment entirely made of change and impermanence, we are constantly walking on thin ice but fail to see the danger in it. The crucial question remains: how is it possible to be so attached to our minds and bodies, whose primary characteristic is constant change? Our delusion is so profound that we believe all phenomena have a substantial core, existing independently of everything else.

This delusion inevitably leads to craving (*P. tanha*) ²⁶³ and clinging (*P. upadana*) ²⁶⁴ ²⁶⁵ because we assume that these phenomena (*P. dhammas*) will bring us permanent happiness. When this illusion is shattered (which is the nature of every delusion), we develop hatred and aversion.



Right Understanding (*P. samma ditthi*)

In the *Mahavedalla Sutta*,²⁶⁶ the Buddha states that two conditions must be fulfilled for the arising of perfect understanding (*P. samma ditthi*): listening to the *Dhamma* (*P. dhammasavana*) and systematic attention (*P. yoniso manasikara*). These are the two conditions that give rise to perfect understanding.

But what does the Buddha mean by this?

In this *sutta*, the Buddha indeed speaks about two conditions that must be fulfilled for the arising of perfect understanding:

— Listening to the *Dhamma* (*P. dhammasavana*): This involves actively and attentively listening to the teachings of the Buddha. It is not just superficial hearing but a profound understanding of the Buddha's teachings. It is essential to be open to the teachings and to comprehend them not only with the ear but also with the heart.

— Systematic attention (*P. yoniso manasikara*): This refers to thoughtful and profound contemplation of the *Dhamma*. It is not merely superficial reflection on concepts but a systematic and thorough examination of the teachings. It also means understanding the causes and effects of phenomena and developing insight into the deeper nature of existence.

The saying '*understanding the causes and effects of phenomena and developing insight into the deeper nature of existence*' needs more attention. This sentence can be broken down into two main components:

- Understanding the Causes and Effects of Phenomena:

Causes: Refers to the factors or conditions that lead to the existence or occurrence of a particular phenomenon. In Buddhism, the concept of dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) emphasizes the interconnectedness of all phenomena²⁶⁷ and how they arise due to specific causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*).

Effects: Refers to the results or outcomes that arise as a consequence of the causes. Recognizing the causal relationships helps in understanding the impermanent and interdependent nature of all phenomena.

- Developing Insight into the Deeper Nature of Existence:

Insight (*Vipassana*): In a Buddhist context, insight refers to a deep and direct understanding of the true nature of reality. It involves seeing things as they really are, beyond superficial appearances. This insight is often gained through contemplative practices, meditation, and a profound examination of one's own experiences.

Deeper Nature of Existence: Points to the fundamental aspects of existence that go *beyond* surface-level appearances. It involves recognizing the impermanence (*P. anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*P. dukkha*), and non-self (*P. anatta*) nature of all phenomena. Understanding the deeper nature of existence is central to Buddhist teachings and leads to wisdom and liberation.

In summary, the saying suggests the importance of delving into the interconnected causes and effects of phenomena to gain a comprehensive understanding of their nature. Additionally, it emphasizes the development of insight, a profound and direct understanding that goes beyond surface-level observations, leading to a deeper comprehension of the fundamental nature of existence according to Buddhist principles.

Back to square one: The two conditions that must be fulfilled for the arising of perfect understanding are closely connected. By actively listening to the *Dhamma*, one gains the foundational information. Subsequently, *yoniso manasikara* is applied to deeply understand and internalize this information. It is a process of profound contemplation and reflection where one not only intellectually understands but also develops a deeper understanding that leads to insight.

In summary, it is essential to actively listen to the teachings and contemplate them deeply to develop perfect understanding. This process of listening and contemplation leads to a deeper understanding of the *Dhamma* and contributes to the path of spiritual development according to the Buddha's teachings.



Perfect attention (*P. yoniso manasikara*)

After the *dhhammanuvatti* has heard, carefully researched, and truthfully verified the true Dhamma, he must, according to the Buddha's instructions, examine (*P. vicaya*), ²⁶⁸ unravel (*P. vijjati*), ²⁶⁹ and contemplate (*P. bhavana*) ²⁷⁰ the *Buddhadhamma* with perfect attention.

What is the meaning of perfect attention (*P. yoniso manasikara*)? ²⁷¹

Perfect attention refers to attentive and systematic research that prompts the practitioner to discern and analyze. Through *yoniso manasikara*, the *yogi* recognizes the true nature of phenomena, i.e., the process of their origination and passing.

In concrete terms, this results in insight into the *tilakkhana* and *paticca samuppada*. *Yoniso manasikara* leads straight to the experiential understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*—the three characteristics to which all conditioned phenomena are subject, as well as the understanding of dependent origination. Understanding both concepts—*tilakkhana* and *paticca samuppada*—is the core of the *buddhasasana*, of which the Buddha said:

• *This teaching is profound, hard to see, hard to understand, serene, subtle, beyond the supremacy of reasoning [of knowledge]. This teaching can only be experienced by sages; not by fools.* •

Yoniso manasikara makes it clear to the *dhhammanuvatti* that striving for permanent sensory happiness through conditioned phenomena is an aberrant delusion.

The antonym of *yoniso manasikara* is *ayoniso manasikara*. In the *Vibhangapakarana*, ²⁷² it is described as • *perceiving anicca as nicca, dukkha as sukha, and anatta as atta.* •

In concrete terms, this means that *ayoniso manasikara* expresses the inability of the worldling (*P. puthujjana*) to see reality as it really is (*P. yatha-bhuta*).

The text emphasizes the importance of *yoniso manasikara*, translated as 'perfect attention' or 'wise reflection'.

It provides the following explanations:

Research and contemplation: The *dhhammanuvatti* (a follower of the teachings) is advised to carefully investigate, verify, and truthfully understand the true *Dhamma*. Following this, the practitioner is instructed to examine, unravel, and contemplate the *Buddhadhamma* with perfect attention.

Meaning of *yoniso manasikara*: *Yoniso manasikara* involves attentive and systematic research that enables the practitioner to discern and analyze the true nature

of phenomena. It includes understanding their origin, passing, and the process by which they come into existence.

Insight into impermanence and dependent origination: Engaging in *yoniso manasikara* leads to insights into the *tilakkhana* (the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self) and *paticca samuppada* (dependent origination). This direct experiential understanding helps the practitioner recognize that all conditioned phenomena are subject to *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*. It is also crucial for understanding dependent origination.

Profound nature of the Buddha's teaching: The Buddha described his teachings as profound, difficult to perceive and understand, serene, subtle, and beyond ordinary reasoning. He emphasized that these teachings can only be truly experienced by wise individuals, not by fools.

Contrasting *ayoniso manasikara*: *Ayoniso manasikara*, the opposite of *yoniso manasikara*, represents a distorted perception of reality.²⁷³ It involves perceiving impermanence as permanence, unsatisfactoriness as happiness, and non-self as self. This reflects the inability of worldlings (ordinary individuals) to see reality as it truly is (*P. yatha-bhuta*).

In summary, *yoniso manasikara* involves careful research and contemplation of the *Dhamma*, leading to insights into the true nature of phenomena, impermanence, and dependent origination.

Engaging in *yoniso manasikara* helps the practitioner act with wisdom (*P. panna*) and recognize the delusion of seeking permanent sensory happiness through conditioned phenomena.

On the other hand, *ayoniso manasikara* represents a distorted perception of reality held by those who cannot see things as they truly are.



Choiceless Awareness (*P. yoniso manasikara*)

Choiceless awareness (*P. yoniso manasikara*) holds significance within the context of mindfulness meditation and the cultivation of insight. Choiceless awareness is not limited to formal meditation practice. It is encouraged as a way of being in daily life, extending mindfulness beyond the meditation cushion.

By cultivating choiceless awareness, the *dhammanuvatti* develops a deepening sense of presence, open-heartedness, and clarity, enabling skillful responses to the challenges and joys of life.

It's worth noting that while choiceless awareness is a valuable practice, Theravada Buddhism recognizes the importance of directed attention in developing concentration and tranquility (*P. samatha*). Both choiceless awareness and focused attention are complementary aspects of meditation practice, contributing to the holistic development of mindfulness and insight.

The practice involves sitting down and observing whatever presents itself to you. Look, hear, smell, taste, feel. Bring intentional and continuous attention to your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and external phenomena—observe thoughts and emotions carefully without getting entangled in them. The focus is on maintaining a state of non-attachment and not adding stories or dramas to the mind. Any pre-conceived judgments should be left behind. The practice involves sitting in an ordinary and quiet manner, solely engaging in observation, refraining from other activities (*P. sati*).

The next instruction is to direct your mind and attention in a skillful and appropriate manner, investigating the nature of phenomena with wisdom and discernment (*P. yoniso manasikara*).

This involves observing and reflecting on the three characteristics of existence—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self (*P. tilakkhana*), understanding the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*), and developing insight into the nature of reality (*P. yatha-bhuta*).

Perceive both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, as well as neutral ones. See both beneficial and unwholesome aspects, as well as those that are neither beneficial nor unwholesome. The key is to remain undisturbed (*P. upekkha*) by whatever is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, felt, or thought. The mention of Buddhas smiling at all *dhammas* suggests an attitude of equanimity and acceptance towards all phenomena.

When you see it sitting, you see it when you're not sitting: the observer sees their true nature while sitting, and they also have the potential to recognize it in other moments when they are not engaged in formal sitting practice. This implies that the insights gained through observation can extend beyond the meditation cushion into everyday life.

Note: an attentive *kalyanamitta* observes that 'choiceless awareness' does not fully capture the essence of '*yoniso manasikara*'.

He is correct: Indeed, there is an important nuance. I highly appreciate his intervention and hereby add this addendum:

Yoniso manasikara is often translated as 'wise attention'; 'appropriate attention' or 'right attention' in the context of Buddhism.

While 'choiceless attention' is not an incorrect translation in a general sense, it doesn't fully capture the specific nuance and significance of *yoniso manasikara* in the Buddhist context.

'Choiceless attention' may imply a state of mind without preferences or discrimination, but *yoniso manasikara* refers to a more deliberate and discerning quality of attention.

In Buddhism, *yoniso manasikara* is one of the aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, considered the path to liberation from suffering and the realization of enlightenment. It is often associated with the factor of 'Right Thought' (*P. samma sankappa*) and 'Right View' (*P. samma ditthi*) in the Eightfold Path.

Yoniso manasikara involves applying careful and skillful attention to our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. It is the ability to direct our attention wisely, to discern the true nature of things (*P. yatha-bhuta*), and to understand the causes and conditions behind our experiences. It encourages investigation and inquiry into the reality of life rather than simply accepting things at face value.

In contrast, 'choiceless attention' might imply a more passive or non-selective mode of observing experiences, whereas *yoniso manasikara* actively engages the mind in discerning what is beneficial and skillful, leading to a deeper understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the cessation of suffering.

In summary, while both '*choiceless attention*' and '*wise, appropriate, or right attention*' contain aspects of mindfulness and non-judgmental awareness, *yoniso manasikara* emphasizes the discerning and skillful aspect of attention, essential in the context of Buddhist practice and the path to enlightenment.

In this regard, also read the following article.



Mindfulness versus Choiceless Awareness

In Theravada Buddhism, a distinction exists between mindfulness (*P. sati*) and choiceless awareness (*P. yoniso manasikara*). While these are related concepts, they serve different purposes and have distinct focuses in the practice of mindfulness and insight.

—*Sati*, often translated as 'mindfulness' is the quality of non-judgmental awareness and clear comprehension of the present moment. It involves intentionally and continuously bringing attention to one's thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and external phenomena.

Sati is cultivated through various meditation practices, such as mindfulness of breathing or body scan, and it is central to the development of insight and liberation.

Sati directs attention to the direct experience of what is happening in the present moment, without judgment or clinging. It involves observing the arising and passing away of phenomena, cultivating a deep understanding of their impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature (*P. tilakkhana*).

Sati helps practitioners develop a clear and non-reactive awareness that can lead to insight and liberation from suffering.

—*Yoniso Manasikara* can be translated as 'wise reflection' or 'proper attention'. It refers to the quality of investigating and contemplating phenomena with wisdom and discernment.

Yoniso manasikara involves directing the mind in a skillful and appropriate manner, exploring the causes (*P. hetus*), conditions (*P. paccayas*), and nature (*P. svabhava*) of phenomena.

Yoniso manasikara is a deeper level of reflective inquiry and investigation. It involves wise discernment and careful attention to the nature of experience, leading to a deeper understanding of the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*) and the three characteristics of existence (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self).

Yoniso manasikara supports the development of insight and the cultivation of wisdom.

In summary, the main difference between *sati* and *yoniso manasikara* is their focus and function.

Sati emphasizes present-moment awareness and direct observation of experience, while *yoniso manasikara* focuses on reflective inquiry and wise investigation.

Sati is the foundation of mindfulness practice, while *yoniso manasikara* deepens understanding and supports the development of insight and wisdom. Both qualities are essential for the path of mindfulness and insight in Theravada Buddhism.



Piti & Sukha

In the profound journey of Buddhist meditation, practitioners often traverse mental states known as *jhanas*.²⁷⁴ These states, characterized by deep concentration and absorption (*4th jhana*), provide a transformative experience. Two key components (*P. jhanangas*) in this transformative process are '*piti*' and '*sukha*.'

Piti: The Rapture of Joy

Piti, often translated as 'rapture' or 'joy,' is a dynamic and energetic quality that permeates the mental landscape during meditation. It is not a fleeting, sensory pleasure but rather a mental exhilaration that arises from profound concentration. Imagine it as the bubbling up of an intense delight, a joyous undercurrent coursing through the concentrated mind. It is not dependent on external stimuli or sensory pleasures, but an inner quality that emerges from the concentrated mind.

The nature of *piti* is diverse, ranging from subtle, gentle waves of joy to more pronounced and even ecstatic sensations. Meditators may experience tingling vibrations, a buoyant lightness, or a palpable surge of energy. This joyous quality is instrumental in sustaining concentration, acting as a magnetic force that draws the mind deeper into a focused and tranquil state.

As practitioners progress through the *jhanas*, the manifestation and intensity of *piti* may evolve. In the initial stages, it might be a vibrant and effervescent experience, while in deeper states, it transforms into a more refined and harmonious quality.

Sukha: The Serenity of Happiness

Sukha, often translated as 'happiness' or 'bliss,' complements the dynamic nature of *piti*. It represents a serene and tranquil pleasure that arises from the stability of a concentrated mind. If *piti* is the enthusiastic spark, *sukha* is the calming and soothing balm that follows, creating a balanced and sustainable meditative state.

The characteristics of *sukha* include a subtle sense of comfort, ease, and contentment. It is the gentle undercurrent that pervades the mind, fostering a peaceful atmosphere conducive to deep concentration. While *piti* provides the initial impetus, *sukha* ensures a harmonious balance, preventing the meditation from becoming overly energetic or agitated.

The Dance of Piti and Sukha in Jhana Practice

Piti and *sukha* are not isolated phenomena but are often mentioned together, highlighting their interconnectedness. They form a dance of joy and tranquility, working in tandem to create an optimal meditative environment. *Piti* initiates the

journey with its energetic and uplifting qualities, and *sukha* follows, tempering this dynamism with a serene and stabilizing influence.

This synergy plays a crucial role, especially in the first *jhana*, where *piti* and *sukha* are prominently featured. As practitioners advance through the jhanic states, these qualities may continue to evolve, becoming subtler and more refined while still contributing to the deepening of meditative absorption.

In essence, *piti* and *sukha* represent the harmonious interplay of joy and tranquility in the meditative landscape. As practitioners cultivate these qualities through focused mindfulness, they pave the way for profound insights and transformative experiences on the path to enlightenment.



From Understanding Arising and Passing to Liberation

In his inaugural discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavātana Sutta*, the Buddha addressed the Five Companions with these words:

• *Everything that is subject to arising is subject to passing away.* •

In these ten words, the essence of the *Dhamma* is succinctly captured. The Buddha asserts that everything that comes into existence is bound to cease. This concise declaration encapsulates the *Dhamma*, portraying the true nature of all things. It is known as *yathā-bhūta*, the law of nature, or the Eternal Law, *Dhammo sanantano*.

This process of impermanence—arising and passing, coming and going—applies universally to each one of us. No one and nothing is exempted. This is *anicca*.

Furthermore, there is no 'I'; everything that encompasses the 'I'—the *khandhas*—is 'empty' of substance, selfless. The Buddha teaches that there is no inherent, permanent self ('I'). The aggregates (*P. khandhas*) that form one's personal identity are devoid of substance and lack a fixed self. This is *anatta*, the characteristic of selflessness.

Liberation from suffering (*P. dukkha*) can be achieved through clear understanding and deep insight (*P. sampajanna*)²⁷⁵ into *anicca* and *anatta*, achievable only through personal experiential understanding. This comprehension arises as a direct result of sustained practice (*P. paccanubhoti*).

In summary, this text conveys the essential teachings from the *Dhammacakkappavātana Sutta*. It underscores impermanence as the fundamental characteristic of existence, emphasizing the universal nature of impermanence and the selflessness of all phenomena. The text also stresses the importance of clear understanding and deep insight into impermanence and selflessness as a path to liberation from suffering.



No twilight zones in the Sangha

There is no room for ambiguity within the *Sangha*. It must be a sanctuary where everyone feels secure, without exception. The *Sangha* should embody an inclusive space that envelops our existence—a realm of light where the integrity of each *kalyanamitta* is fully and unequivocally safeguarded.

This attitude is a direct outcome of our practice, not a consequence of any code of ethics or an imposition by an external organization. It naturally arises from the spiritual level achieved through the practitioner. It is the fruit of a practice firmly rooted in conscious attention (*P. sati*) towards morality (*P. sila*) and deep reflection (*P. samadhi*). This is further reinforced by a healthy sense of trepidation (*P. hiri*) and reticence, ensuring that no harm is caused to anyone, even unconsciously (*P. ottappa*).²⁷⁶

This protection is not just a right; it should be the duty of all *kalyanamittas* to uphold it. This responsibility falls upon the teachers, their attendants, the administrators, as well as the *Sangha* members themselves. It should be the standard within the *Sangha*—an innate way of interacting with respect for others and for oneself.

This is what the Buddha meant in the *Dhammapada*:²⁷⁷

• *The morality found in all the precepts can be summarized in three simple principles: 'To avoid evil, to do good, to purify the mind.'* This is the advice given by all the Buddhas. •

The key points are as follows:

—Safety and inclusivity: The *Sangha* should be a place where everyone feels safe and included, applying to every individual without exception.

—The spiritual basis of attitude: Safety arises directly from the practitioner's spiritual practice. It is not merely based on external codes of ethics or obligations imposed by external organizations. This attitude is the result of a practice rooted in conscious attention, morality, and deep reflection.

—Trepidation and reticence: A healthy sense of trepidation (*P. hiri*) and reticence (*P. ottappa*) within the *Sangha* is important. Practitioners should be cautious and considerate, striving not to cause any unrest or harm to others, even unintentionally.

—Duty of all *kalyanamittas*: *Kalyanamittas* refer to spiritual friends or companions within the *Sangha*. It is the duty of everyone, including teachers, attendants, administrators, and *Sangha* members themselves, to ensure the protection and safety of all individuals within the *Sangha*.

—Standard of interaction: A standard should be established within the *Sangha*, characterized by spontaneous interactions rooted in respect for others and oneself. It should be an inherent and self-realized way of conducting oneself within the *Sangha*.



Be A Mountain of Wisdom and Compassion

Quoting the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*: ²⁷⁸

• *Atta hi attano natho. Ko hi natho paro siya?—You are your own protector. After all, what other protector would there be?* •

Observe closely, scrutinize, and be your own authority. Strive to become a noble disciple, an *ariya*—a practitioner on the path to enlightenment. Aim to become a *bodhisattva*, destined to achieve Buddhahood—a *buddhankura*, a mountain of wisdom and compassion.

This text introduces a verse from the *Dhammapada*, a collection of teachings attributed to the Buddha. The verse and subsequent statements convey the following meanings:

—Self-protection: The verse emphasizes the idea that individuals are their own protectors, suggesting that relying on oneself is essential, as no other protector can truly safeguard one's well-being.

—Self-authority: The text encourages individuals to observe attentively, scrutinize, and rely on their own discernment. It suggests the importance of developing one's understanding and becoming an authority in matters of spiritual practice.

—Path to enlightenment: The text urges individuals to aspire to become noble disciples, *ariyas*, who are practitioners on the path to enlightenment. It further emphasizes the aim of becoming a *bodhisattva*, someone dedicated to attaining Buddhahood, characterized by profound wisdom and boundless compassion.

—*Buddhankura*: The term '*buddhankura*' refers to a practitioner likened to a mountain, symbolizing vast wisdom and compassion. It signifies the growth and development of these qualities within oneself as one progresses on the spiritual path.

In summary, the text highlights the importance of self-reliance, self-authority, and personal growth on the path to spiritual awakening. It encourages individuals to become their own protectors, to observe attentively, and to aspire to noble discipleship and the realization of enlightenment. The term '*buddhankura*' represents the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, symbolized by a mountain-like presence within oneself.



Blind is this World

In the *Dhammapada*, ²⁷⁹ the Buddha declares:

• *Blind is this world. Few see things as they really are. Like birds escaping from a net, only a few reach the Other Shore.* •

In this verse, the Buddha underscores the limited understanding of the world, noting that only a few individuals perceive it as it truly is (*P. yatha-bhuta*). Those who have cultivated their inner world, developed their *Dhamma Eye* (*P. Dhamma-cakkhu*), and properly recognized and realized the world of forms can acknowledge its impermanence, dissatisfaction, and selflessness. These practitioners are referred to as stream-enterers (*P. sotapannas*), eventually reaching the Other Shore.

The Buddha emphasizes the importance of paying meticulous attention to the arising and passing away of all phenomena, leading to '*the opening of the eyes.*'

This careful observation, coupled with accepting equanimity, allows one to perceive how reality unfolds. It encourages practitioners to live in the present moment, letting go of self-centered concerns and attachments, and entering a state of non-attachment and mindfulness.

This metaphorically represents entering the '*homeless life*,' where one genuinely sees the process of arising and passing away for themselves, rather than blindly following what they have been told. By doing so, they can avoid deception and recognize how conditioned reality can create an illusory haze over the world. It is through this understanding that liberation can be achieved.

In the Buddhist context, the term '*homeless life*' is often used to refer to the lifestyle of a monk (*P. bhikkhu*) or nun (*P. bhikkhuni*) who has renounced worldly attachments and has taken up the monastic life. When the Buddha encouraged his followers to lead a '*homeless life*,' he meant for them to adopt a life of simplicity, renunciation, and dedicated practice aimed at attaining enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*). The monastic life involves living in a community, following a code of ethical conduct (*P. vinaya*), and engaging in practices such as meditation, study, and service.

Key aspects of the '*homeless life*' include:

- Renunciation: Monastics renounce worldly possessions, familial ties, and other attachments to lead a life of simplicity and focus on the spiritual path.
- Ethical Conduct: Monastics adhere to a set of ethical guidelines (*P. vinaya*) that govern their behavior, ensuring a harmonious and virtuous community life.

- Meditation and Study: The monastic life provides an environment conducive to meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings. Monks and nuns dedicate themselves to understanding the nature of reality and the mind.

- Service and Almsgiving: Monastics rely on alms for their sustenance, emphasizing humility and dependence on the generosity of lay supporters. In return, they offer teachings, guidance, and spiritual support to the lay community.

The '*homeless life*' is considered a path of profound spiritual commitment, allowing practitioners to focus wholeheartedly on the pursuit of enlightenment. It represents a departure from the distractions and entanglements of ordinary worldly life, providing a conducive environment for spiritual growth and awakening.

However, while the term '*homeless life*' is commonly associated with the monastic lifestyle of monks and nuns, the essential principles underlying it—renunciation, simplicity, ethical conduct, and a dedicated focus on the spiritual path—are not exclusive to monastics. Lay practitioners can also embody the spirit of the '*homeless life*' to varying degrees.

Lay followers are encouraged to observe ethical precepts, practice generosity, and engage in meditation and mindfulness. They may choose to live a life that reflects simplicity, contentment, and mindfulness, even while maintaining their household and familial responsibilities.

Key points regarding the '*homeless life*' for lay practitioners are:

- Renunciation of Excess: Lay practitioners can adopt a lifestyle that involves renouncing unnecessary material possessions and excessive worldly pursuits. Simplifying one's life can create a conducive environment for spiritual practice.
- Ethical Conduct: Lay Buddhists are encouraged to observe ethical precepts — such as the Five (*P. panca sila*)²⁸⁰ or Eight (*P. attha sila*)²⁸¹ Precepts—that guide them in leading a virtuous life. Ethical conduct is a fundamental aspect of the '*homeless life*.'
- Generosity and Service: Engaging in acts of generosity, service to others, and practicing compassion are integral components of the '*homeless life*' for both monastics and lay practitioners.
- Mindfulness and Meditation: Lay individuals can incorporate mindfulness and meditation into their daily lives. Regular practice cultivates mental clarity, concentration, and insight, aligning with the spiritual goals associated with the monastic '*homeless life*.'



Disarm your Thoughts

Observe your thoughts without becoming attached to them.

Practice mindfulness and discern the nature of your thoughts: 'desire,' 'anger,' 'laziness,' 'stress,' 'doubt,' etc. Regardless of the labels you use, the key is to recognize their impermanent and impersonal nature.

By understanding and labeling your thoughts, you diminish their power of attachment and aversion. Through this process, you create space between your thoughts. This space reflects your inherent, true nature (*P. sabhava*)²⁸²— your original face.²⁸³ It represents the pure state before you become entangled in opinions, habits, perceptions, expectations, words, and concepts.²⁸⁴

Your true nature embodies clear insight—an empty, unconditioned awareness that is always present but often concealed by layers of ignorance. This 'awareness' or 'pure consciousness' manifests as the eternal process of arising and passing away, encompassing the entirety of existence.

The goal of Theravada practice is to develop insight (*P. vipassana*) into the true nature of the aggregates (*P. khandhas*) and to realize the Three Characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*) of existence: impermanence (*P. anicca*), suffering (*P. dukkha*), and non-self (*P. anatta*). Through understanding the nature of consciousness and the aggregates, practitioners aim to overcome attachment and ignorance, leading to liberation (*P. nibbana*).

In Buddhist terms, this process is referred to as 'the Unborn' (*P. ajata*), 'the Deathless' (*P. amata*), or 'the Unconditioned' (*P. asankhata*). It can also be described as 'Ultimate Reality,' 'the Absolute,' 'Emptiness,' 'Space,' or by various other names. At this level, however, the limitations of words and concepts fade away, and only direct experiential understanding (*P. paccakkha-nana*) holds significance.

Those who genuinely identify with this profound process transcend *samsara*, where beings continue to wander in the realm of impermanence, suffering and non-self.

The Unborn, the Deathless, the Unconditioned—this is your true nature. Not the illusions of a self ensnared in the sensory world, unable to find peace.



Practice

Our practice does not involve attempting to suppress or control our thoughts; instead, it centers on attentively observing the genuine unfolding of experiences in an equanimous manner—in this moment, in every moment, from moment to moment.

As you engage in the practice, observe with attention, and you will discern the ephemeral and essenceless nature of thoughts. They arise swiftly and pass away, appearing from nowhere and dissolving into the same void.

When one thought collides with another, the attempt to construct a stable world upon them only results in chaos and illusions.

Always remember, you are not identified with those thoughts. They do not define your true nature.



Thoughts

Never let thoughts dominate your meditation practice. Meditation is not about preventing thoughts from arising, as that is an unrealistic expectation. Instead, recognize the nature of the mind and thoughts without clinging to them or becoming entangled in the drama of desire and aversion.

During meditation, your primary task is to mindfully observe when a thought arises and disappears. Strive to remain aware of everything in the present moment, recognizing impermanence from moment to moment. Nothing remains in a stable existence for even an instant. Everything undergoes constant change, and perceiving this continuous change can be viewed as a transformative understanding of 'rebirth.'

Observe the fleeting and futile nature of your thoughts. Witness the process of their arising and passing away. Resist the urge to chase after these thoughts, for in doing so, you become enslaved by them. Instead, follow the natural process of their emergence and dissolution, akin to bubbles rising and vanishing, each one 'different' from the last.

Do not be overwhelmed by thoughts. Keep the steering wheel firmly in your hands, exercising control through right effort (*P. samma vayama*)²⁸⁵. Right effort involves cultivating appropriate and balanced effort to achieve spiritual progress and overcome destructive mental and emotional patterns. This requires a personalized, individualized approach.

This is how you develop inner strength and become your own Master and Protector.

In the words of the Buddha:

• *Atta hi attano natho, ' ko hi natho paro siya; Attana hi sudantena, natham labhati dullabham. —One is one's own refuge; what other refuge can there be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a refuge hard to gain. •*

In this verse the Buddha emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and self-mastery. It suggests that each individual is ultimately responsible for their own well-being and liberation. By exercising self-discipline and self-control (*P. sudantena*),²⁸⁶ one can attain a refuge (*P. natham*)²⁸⁷ that is considered hard to gain.

In the broader context of Buddhist teachings, this verse encourages practitioners to take responsibility for their own spiritual progress and liberation. It underscores the idea that external factors or dependencies cannot ultimately provide the lasting refuge that comes from understanding and transforming one's own mind. This teaching aligns with the emphasis on personal effort, mindfulness, and ethical conduct on the path to enlightenment.

In summary: Be your own light. Be your own island, impervious to the tsunamis of ignorance, desire, and aversion toward the sensory world. To become a Master, you do not necessarily need external masters.



Purified Dhamma

Purified *Dhamma* transcends rituals, religious practices, hierarchical structures, and organizational forms. Outer expressions do not authentically capture the essence of the *Dhamma*; they serve primarily as adornments and guides for proper conduct. Hence, their use should be limited to what is genuinely necessary. One should refrain from excessive attachment or identification with these forms, as such attachments hinder one's practice and obstruct the development of insight.



Enter the Stream

Sit down with the steadfastness of a mountain. Quiet your mind and observe with precision what arises within it. Witness the constant cycle of creation and dissolution, recognizing the impermanence inherent in all phenomena. Release any sense of rigidity or unwavering stability, as it contradicts the nature of things. Embrace the spontaneous process of arising and passing away, experiencing it fully. Accept this unfolding with equanimity, entering the stream of awakening.



You are the Stream

You are the stream. Keep the Path untarnished, pure, and clear. Examine for yourself whether something contributes to your liberation from *dukkha*. Determine if it is a skillful aid or merely unnecessary baggage. You decide. You alone. No one else can undertake this for you. Your inner voice is the only guide.

Practice, foster, and cultivate insight. Trust only in your own efforts. You are the stream.



Your Time is Precious

Your time is precious and limited. Do not waste it on trivial pursuits. Seek not salvation in the sensory world; true liberation cannot be found there, only fleeting sensory gratification.

Avoid dwelling in the past, for it is infertile ground, devoid of merit, and not conducive to progress. It is no field of merit, no *gocara*.²⁸⁸ Every past moment is a swamp where ignorance, desire, and aversion thrive. It does not reflect how things truly were; rather, it is a collection of perceptions—how we currently think, wish, or do not wish it to be. *Sanna*.²⁸⁹

Do not place hope in a hypothetical afterlife. The misty veils of a distant, undefined mystical future are not a valid option. They are mere daydreams, pure speculation.

Keep it simple. Sit on your meditation cushion and observe. Be alert, mindful, and reflective. Contemplate your body, feelings, sensations, mind, and objects of your mind. Be attentive and equanimous.

In the healing silence of this practice, discover what truly matters. Realize that *nibbana* is here, within yourself, in this very moment and from moment to moment.



Arguing, Disputing, and Discussing the *Dhamma*

In the *Atthakavagga*, among the oldest Buddhist texts in the *Pali Canon*, the Buddha devotes several verses to the activities of arguing, disputing, and discussing the Teachings. He concludes that participating in such discussions does not lead to greater insight; instead, they tend to inflate the egos of those involved.

The verses emphasize that these discussions often result in confusion and division, hindering spiritual growth rather than contributing to it.

Here are some verses from the *Atthakavagga* that illustrate this point:

• *The glory achieved in disputes is trivial, insufficient to bring peace. I tell you: disputes bear only two fruits: praise and blame. One who perceives this will stay far from debates and consider non-debating as the foundation of peace.* ♪ (Verse 896)

• *The Wise One who knows does not engage in personal opinions. Why would someone who has let go of everything involve themselves in this? The Wise One does not delight in what is seen or heard.* ♪ (Verse 897)

• *The Wise One who has freed themselves from the chains of the world does not succumb to any stance in a debate. Amidst those who are not peaceful, they illustrate peace. They remain equanimous. Thus, they do not grasp for what others are grasping for.* ♪ (Verse 912)

The verses of the *Atthakavagga* underscore the importance of inner silence, meditation, and understanding the truth over constantly fueling and engaging in futile disputes and discussions about the Teachings. They highlight the essence of the spiritual path and stress the importance of avoiding fruitless speculations and heated debates.



The Unborn, the Deathless, the Unconditioned.

Touching the 'Unborn,' the 'Deathless,' the 'Unconditioned' suddenly grants the stream-enterer (*P. sotapanna*) a spontaneous, total insight. This is a breakthrough, a manifest, clearly identifiable but indescribable experience. An encounter that he never loses. In the *Pali suttas*, this is called *Gotrabhu*.²⁹⁰

From that moment on, he will never perceive himself as a separate being, as an 'I,' as a physical 'entity' born only to perish at the end of his illusory linear timeline. The backdrop and decorum of rites and rituals completely pass him by. And all doubts about the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha* lose their grip.

Thus, the first three chains that held the practitioner in *samsara* are destroyed.

The practitioner who now enters the stream (*P. sotapatti*) knows that everything was, is, and will remain inseparably connected to the cyclical Whole. Everything transforms, mutates, but ultimately, nothing is lost in this 'space' (*P. acala*) where forms arise and pass away. He realizes within himself that all things (primarily himself) arise and pass away. But that he is not this 'I,' this 'mine,' this 'myself.' *Anatta*.

The 'Unborn' (*P. ajata*), the 'Deathless' (*P. amata*) and the 'Unconditioned' (*P. asankhata*) refer to the constant awareness of this 'space.' The 'Being.' Not being 'something.' The continuous 'feeling' of this stream. Of this flow. The permanent 'experience' of this space where the process of arising and passing away takes place. Being part of this 'blissful space' (*P. acalam sukham*) from which things arise and in which they disappear. Interbeing. Indra's net. Seeing and knowing this—*janami passami*—is liberation.



Awakening

Awakening is the profound act of letting go, dissolving, evaporating, and dismantling the ingrained habit pattern in which we perceive ourselves as a separate 'I' and identify with our objects. It is the pattern in which we attach ourselves to our 'story' and become entangled in our individual personal 'drama,' thereby constructing and perpetuating an illusory world.

Enlightenment is the experience of the Unborn (*P. ajata*), the Deathless (*P. amata*), and the wholeness of the natural process governed by the Law of Nature, or *Dhamma*. It involves recognizing the spaciousness that underlies existence—the space from which things arise and into which they disappear. It is the direct perception of the indescribable openness that reveals itself in every moment of this continuous mechanism of arising and passing away.

The Buddha expressed his Awakening in the *Dhammapada* in an extraordinary manner:

Gatha #153:

• *Through many births I have wandered on and on, searching for but never finding the builder of this house. To be born again and again is suffering.* •

Gatha #154:

• *House-builder, you are seen! You will not build a house again! All the rafters are broken, the ridgepole destroyed; the mind, having gone to the Unconstructed, has reached the end of craving!* •

These are the sublime words of a *Sammāsambuddha*.



Concerning Words and Concepts, And the Essence of True Significance...

Words and concepts frequently lead to misunderstandings, unintended interpretations, and erroneous perceptions. This is equally applicable to the terminology used in describing the *Dhamma*. In such cases, instead of aiding understanding, words and concepts can obstruct genuine insight.

However, with mindful attention (*P. sampajanna*),²⁹¹ insight into the *Dhamma* and the teachings of the Buddha is never far away. In one of the oldest *suttas* in the *Pali Canon*, the *Parayanavagga*,²⁹² the Bhagavat addresses Upasiva in the following manner:

• *Anyone who has come to rest can no longer be 'measured.' They no longer possess anything that can be 'described.' When all phenomena have been eradicated, all forms of speech are eradicated as well.* •

For those who transcend the cycle of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), there is no longer any sensory criterion that can indicate their attainment. The Unconditioned cannot be captured or conveyed through words. When all phenomena have been eradicated, all forms of speech cease.

It is a dimension that surpasses words and concepts, transcending phenomenal reality. It is a realm where words and concepts completely vanish. It is a 'space' (*P. acalam*) that can only be 'experienced.' *Paccanubhoti*.



Observe Carefully

Observe with precision. Stay attentive. Perceive all phenomena in their essence, recognizing their appearance as minuscule parts of the Whole.

Avoid confining your observation to a sheltered world—a small condominium, a limited space where you can evade responsibility and effortlessly hide behind others.

Observe the underlying truth, as well as the delusion and falsehood. Do not turn away. Be courageous in your thoughts, speech, and actions.

Think, speak, and act from the heart, liberated from the conditioned patterns of desire and hatred.



The Wisdom of the Buddha

The Buddha encapsulated profound wisdom in his final words:

• *Vaya dhamma sankhara, appamadena sampadetha—Behold, monks, I urge you: All conditioned things are subject to decay. Strive diligently!* •

The quote emphasizes that all compounded or conditioned things are subject to decay and eventual disappearance. It underscores the universal nature of impermanence, highlighting that nothing conditioned is permanent or enduring.

This wisdom serves as a guiding principle on the path to *nibbana*, emphasizing the significance of recognizing impermanence and the necessity for committed practice to transcend the cycle of suffering and achieve liberation.

The Buddha's exhortation to the monks is to strive diligently and with earnestness. This underscores the importance of dedicated effort and commitment on the spiritual path.



The Actions of a Noble Disciple

The foundation of the Truths for a Noble Follower (*P. ariya-puggala*) rests on four verbs: Understand, Let go, Realize, Cultivate.

The First Truth: *Dukkha* must be *understood*.

The Second Truth: The cause of *dukkha* must be *let go*.

The Third Truth: The cessation of *dukkha* must be *realized*.

The Fourth Truth: The path leading to the cessation of *dukkha* must be *cultivated*.

Allow these words to work within you. Recognize them, acknowledge them, and become one with them in every experience. Realize their significance and let them flourish. Let them manifest in their twelve aspects: *Pariyatti* (theoretical understanding), *Patipatti* (practical application), and *Pativedha* (direct realization).



Don't Stain Your Mind

Avoid staining your mind. Refrain from inflating your ego with anger, hatred, and rage, driven by misunderstood self-esteem or a fictitious sense of 'public' interest. Guard against self-deception and the contamination of your mind by past grudges, present animosity, or unwholesome intentions for the future.

The Buddha recognized the strong connection between anger, hatred, and attachment to the concept of 'I.' In the *Dhammapada* ²⁹³ he offers this admonition:

• *Give up anger, abandon conceit, and break free from every bondage. Suffering does not befall one who possesses nothing, who does not cling to name and form.* •

Free yourself from ignorance, liberate yourself from aversion. Transcend anger through acts of kindness. Open your heart. Embrace peace. Cultivate loving-kindness, metta. Strive to become a Noble Follower, a *Dhammanuvatti*, an *Ariya-puggala*, a Stream-enterer.

In summary, this text advises against nurturing anger, hatred, and rage while cautioning against egoic attachment. ²⁹⁴ It references the Buddha's teachings on letting go of anger and conceit, emphasizing the importance of freedom from attachment to name and form. This text encourages overcoming negativity through kindness and cultivating peace and loving-kindness.

Finally, it encourages practitioners to aspire to become Noble Followers on the path to enlightenment.



The process

In essence, everything is interconnected through countless causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*).

Within the unwavering calm, expanding equanimity, and penetrating mindfulness of awakened consciousness, there is no space for birth, nor is there space for death. Only the natural unfolding of things—the Process as it is. It is the manifestation of the Natural Law, the Cosmic Law—*Dhammo sanantano*.

Therefore, do not immerse yourself in the cycles of birth and death. Birth and death are not opposing forces; they are different aspects of the same natural process. There is no fixed starting point, nor is there an ultimate end. Only the continuous flow of the 'process'—*Yatha-bhuta*.

Remain vigilant. Stay aware of this eternal process and free yourself from *dukkha*. Enter the stream of liberation. Death itself is not the problem; it is birth that poses the challenge. It is the perpetual cycle of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*)—the illusory sense of 'I,' the phantom 'Self.'



Self-realization

As the word implies, self-realization is something that cannot be delegated to others. It is a personal journey that one must undertake themselves. Awakening or self-realization cannot be transferred or bestowed upon someone else. It is a task that the *dhammanuvatti*, the practitioner of the *Dhamma*, must undertake personally. It is their life's purpose and birthright, akin to the sacred cord, *yajnopavita*.²⁹⁵

Self-realization, or the attainment of *nibbana*, does not involve esotericism. Esotericism is not a characteristic of the *Dhamma*. Instead, self-realization represents a transformative process in the life of the practitioner. This transformation arises from gaining insight into the true nature of phenomena, appearances, and *dhammas*. It is a transformation that follows the principles of Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) and arises due to specific causes and conditions.

Therefore, self-realization is attainable for everyone, provided the necessary conditions are fulfilled. It is accessible at any time in this very life. It is available to anyone unburdened by ignorance or delusion.

Self-realization can only be experienced in the present moment, in the here and now. It requires focusing one's attention solely on the present. In meditation (*P. bhavana*), one should direct their attention to the present moment. Through this practice, perfect insight (*P. samma ditthi*) is developed. Perfect insight leads to the relinquishment of desire, hatred, and ignorance. It validates one's existence and liberates them. By letting go of desire, hatred, and ignorance, one finds true freedom.



Is Buddha a god?

Buddhism vehemently rejects belief in a creating deity. According to the Buddha, the origin of the world can be traced back to cause and effect, specifically to Dependent Origination, *Paticca Samuppada*.

Buddhism is an agnostic philosophy that views the Buddha as a historical figure who attained awakening and taught humanity the path to realizing enlightenment for themselves.

The Buddha is revered as an inspirational Master and an exemplar of spiritual consciousness but is not considered a god with supernatural powers or the creator of the world.

The Buddha is regarded as a *Mahapurisa*—an exceptionally Great Being. However, he remains a 'human,' not a 'god.'

In the *suttas*, the Buddha himself explicitly denied being a god in various places.

In the *Tatīyananattitthiya Sutta*,²⁹⁶ the Buddha clearly states:

• *Humanity is attached to the belief that the 'self' is the creator. Or to the belief that 'another' is the creator. Those who do not understand the delusion of this do not see the arrow. But those who have seen and pulled out this arrow understand that the 'self' is not the creator. Nor is 'another' the creator. Humanity is possessed by arrogance, bound by conceit, trapped in self-opinion. By airing arrogant views, humanity cannot transcend samsara!* •



On Pure and Ordinary Consciousness

Pure Consciousness essentially means considering the world as a unity. It represents the Self, embodying the concept of One/Not-two. In the verses of the *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā*, Pure Consciousness is portrayed as the original, unchanging, and eternal essence of the Self.

It constitutes the fundamental nature of existence and is recognized as the source of all creation. Pure Consciousness is also denoted as the Absolute, the Universal Self, or Brahman.

This Consciousness permeates everything, giving rise to all phenomena, sustaining their existence, and serving as their ultimate dissolution. The Self is characterized as impersonal and immutable, transcending the dualities of existence. Pure Consciousness is independent of our senses, emotions, or thoughts and remains ever-present.

In contrast to Pure Consciousness, there exists ordinary consciousness. This is the consciousness that arises from our senses, thoughts, and emotions—experienced in our daily lives and reliant on our physical bodies and sensory perceptions. This consciousness is limited and constantly fluctuates, influenced by our experiences and conditioning. It becomes problematic when viewing life and the world as dual or fragmentary—composed of 'pieces.'

The 'purpose' of the human mind is not to lead humanity to truth but to ensure survival within the constraints it faces. To achieve this, the human mind employs various tricks to create an illusion of reality.

Much of human knowledge emerges from associating things and forming disjointed images and memories to explain, conceptualize, and classify an objective reality. However, this process does not lead to 'truth' or 'sacca'—that which is true.

The human mind is not capable of remembering everything, and what remains in memory is often incomplete, influenced by desire, aversion, and preoccupations. Modern psychology even suggests that people can reprogram their memories to distort the past or create comforting myths for self-esteem, giving rise to illusions and 'self-created truths,' each delusion surpassing the other.

This presents a significant obstacle to the *yogi* in their quest for the true nature of existing reality... for *yatha-bhuta*.



Becoming Whole

Awakening, the process of becoming awake and whole, involves rediscovering your original state—a state you have always essentially been but have become hopelessly lost due to conditioning. It is a journey back to the space from which you originate.

Awakening is akin to coming home to the natural state of timeless silence, where desires and aversions cease to exist, leaving behind inner peace.



No Perspective

In the realm of existence, there is no fixed perspective, no ultimate goal—only the continuous process of arising and passing away, the perpetual cycle of creation and decay.

Any form of spiritual seeking is not only entirely unnecessary but also serves as an obstacle to liberation, hindering the realization of the Self.

The liberation from *dukkha* that every *dhammanuvatti* seeks need not be pursued. Liberation is inherent in every unfolding experience—an ongoing process within each sensation and feeling in this eternal NOW.

Simply observing is enough—bearing witness, being present, recognizing, and accepting. It is not about 'searching.'



Equanimity (*P. upekkha*)

Equanimity, or *upekkha*, is not a mere abstract concept; it embodies a lifestyle grounded in a non-reactive, non-identifying approach. It reflects a mind in balance, harmonized with the unfolding process and aligned with the *Dhamma*. This state of inner peace shields consciousness from turmoil arising from gain/loss, honor/dishonor, praise/blame, or pleasure/pain.

Upekkha manifests when the practitioner (*P. dhammanuvatti*) refrains from reacting to sensations (*P. vedana*): no craving (*P. lobha*) for pleasant sensations, no aversion (*P. dosa*) to unpleasant sensations, and no ignorance (*P. moha*) regarding neutral sensations.

Equanimity is rooted in the profound wisdom that everything is in constant flux and highly transient (*P. anicca*). As all things eventually come to an end, the real significance of our endeavors and concerns comes into question.

Total acceptance of impermanence characterizes equanimity, prompting us to regard all experiences—pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant—as well as all conditioned phenomena, as inherently equal. It is an acknowledgment of reality—*Yatha-bhuta*. Our (imagined personal) standpoint or belief holds no importance or value.

Equanimity observes the senses, sense objects, and sense consciousness without judgment. The eye merely sees, the object is just a form, and consciousness is solely visual consciousness. All are impermanent, including the eye, object, and consciousness. This holds true for the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

When we get entangled in the narrative, passing judgments on the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral nature of an experience, we lose our ability to maintain distance and perceive the reality. Equanimity shatters this illusion, revealing the transience inherent in every experience.

Considered the highest of the *brahmaviharas*,²⁹⁷ equanimity incorporates the other three—loving-kindness (*P. metta*), compassion (*P. karuna*), and sympathetic joy (*P. mudita*).

True equanimity arises when we can accept the eight worldly *dhammas* without being overly swayed by strong emotions: gain and loss, praise and criticism, fame and slander, happiness and unhappiness—desiring the former and seeking to rid ourselves of the latter.

Cultivating equanimity leads to freedom. *Upekkha* and *vimutti* (liberation) are intricately connected, forming an exceptionally beautiful combination.



Look with the Eyes of a Child...

Do not limit the establishment of attention (*P. satipatthana*) to your daily meditation session. Be consistently attentive in every moment, from moment to moment. Observe calmly, spontaneously, receptively, and alertly, maintaining an open gaze.

Experience your world with the eyes of a child, with the eyes of a beginner, with the gaze of a novice. In this way of looking, stream-entry is within reach. Consider impartially what is happening. Experience unconditionally what you see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and think. Be a vigilant observer, a silent witness, simply bearing witness.

Treat 'seeing' as just seeing, 'hearing' as hearing, 'smelling' as smelling, 'tasting' as tasting, 'feeling' as feeling, and 'thinking' as thinking. Do this without content, without preference, without aversion, without judgment, without opinion, without any personal additives, words, or concepts.

Experience the fleeting, ephemeral, and impermanent nature of all your sensory impulses. Experience the unstable, 'empty,' and 'soulless' nature of all things. Intensely observe how everything arises and passes away. No moment remains the same; every moment transforms, mutates from moment to moment. Witness this eternal process, recognize its repetitive nature, and accept it as it is—*Yathabhuta*.

See the interdependence of things. Reflect on how the arising of one phenomenon leads to the passing away of others, how the passing away of one thing forms the condition for new things—*Paticca samuppada*.

Experience the oneness of everything, the non-duality. Buddhanature, ²⁹⁸ that non-dual oneness or nothingness, is the attainment of the highest form of awareness. See the symbiosis between birth and death, equanimous and without fear, especially fear of death. Transcend 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), transcend rebirth, transcend *samsara*. Taste the Unborn (*P. ajata*) and the Deathless (*P. amata*). Enter the stream.

Understand and realize the words of the Buddha in their deepest essence:

• *One who sees the interdependence of things sees the Dhamma.* •



On Words, Concepts, and Silence

Words and concepts typically do not lead to wisdom, let alone insightful wisdom or transformative insight. In many cases, words cloud the field of vision, exacerbating existing confusion and chaos. In such instances, 'silence' appears more communicative and productive. Not 'silence' as a word or concept, for then duality inevitably arises. Instead, 'silence' in the sense of 'not-knowing'—'silence' as a 'space' of blissful openness and wonder in which the practitioner is willing to continuously look beyond their conditioned sensory limitations.



About the Three Characteristics...

Question:

An advanced *kalyanamitta* presents the following question to me: "There is always talk about the three aspects: *dukkha*, *anicca*, *anatta*. However, it seems to me that the last two are fundamental qualities of existence: everything changes and is interdependent (without self), while *dukkha* seems to be more of a consequence than a fundamental nature. Misunderstanding or misrelating to *anicca* and *anatta* leads to *dukkha*. Or am I seeing it incorrectly, and is suffering also an inherent property of existence and not a result of how one relates to the other two characteristics? Or, to put it differently, *anicca* and *anatta* are unavoidable due to being inherent to existence, and *dukkha* is avoidable if one relates to *anicca* and *anatta* in a certain way..."

Answer:

Your question presents a comprehensive reflection on the Buddha's teachings concerning the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*) of all conditioned things: impermanence (*P. anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*P. dukkha*), and selflessness or non-self (*P. anatta*). Your understanding not only accurately summarizes these principles but also aligns with correct practice.

Let's closely dissect the definitions of the three characteristics:

— *Anicca* signifies the inevitable impermanence of all phenomena. Nothing in the world is permanent; everything undergoes constant change. This is intrinsic to existence and cannot be avoided.

— *Anatta* denotes the absence of a permanent, unchanging 'self' within phenomena. According to the Buddha, there is no essential, eternal self (a 'fixed,' 'stable' core, a 'soul') behind the changing phenomena. Selflessness is an inherent characteristic of all conditioned things.

— *Dukkha* refers to the unsatisfactory nature or suffering inherent in clinging to impermanent and selfless phenomena. The Buddha suggests that one can avoid *dukkha* by relating to *anicca* and *anatta* in a specific way. Practitioners are encouraged to cultivate equanimity (*P. upekkha*), meaning accepting things 'as they are,' without clinging or attachment. By 'seeing things as they are' (*P. vipassana*), transcending desire and aversion, and accepting things as they are (*P. yathabhuta*), the practitioner can reduce and ultimately transcend suffering.

In essence, while *anicca* and *anatta* are inherent in existence and unavoidable, *dukkha* can be reduced and overcome through correct understanding (*P. samma ditthi*) rather than wrong understanding (*P. miccha ditthi*). This involves adopting an equanimous attitude towards these characteristics, particularly by transcending desire and aversion.

In the *Buddhasasana*, everything forms a coherent and consistent unity. Regarding 'wrong understanding' or 'wrong knowing,' the Buddha states in the *Sammaditthi Sutta*:

• *And what is ignorance, what is the cause of ignorance, what is the cessation of ignorance, what is the path that leads to the cessation of ignorance? It is not knowing what dukkha is, not knowing the cause of dukkha, not knowing the cessation of dukkha, and not knowing the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.* •



The Stream

A recurring metaphor found in the *suttas* of the *Pali Canon* is that of the flood, the tidal wave, the stream, used to depict the nature of existence.

This metaphor symbolizes the relentless stream of birth, old age (decay), and death; of sorrow and lamentation; of suffering and misery. It represents the ceaseless cycle of arising, passing away, and perishing—a figurative expression for the eternal cycle of ignorance, desire, and aversion known as *samsara*.

The aim of practicing the *Dhamma* is to find a crossing beyond this stream—beyond this impermanence (*P. anicca*), beyond this unsatisfactoriness (*P. dukkha*), beyond this selflessness (*P. anatta*).

It is a quest for the secure refuge of the Other Shore, leading to an unparalleled island found only within ourselves. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*) is considered a significant step toward attaining liberation from *dukkha*. The Triple Gem is seen as the ultimate refuge for followers on the Buddhist path.

The Buddha, as the enlightened teacher, provides the guidance and example for practitioners. The *Dhamma* represents the teachings or the truth that leads to the end of suffering. The *Sangha* refers to the community of enlightened beings, both monastic and lay, who support and inspire others on the path.

Taking refuge in the Triple Gem signifies a commitment to the path of understanding and realizing the Four Noble Truths, which include the acknowledgment of *dukkha*, the understanding of its origin, the possibility of cessation, and the practice leading to the cessation of suffering. Ultimately, the aim is to achieve *nibbana*, the state of liberation and freedom from the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*), thereby bringing an end to *dukkha*.

Attaining this unparalleled island, reaching this Other Shore, is synonymous with Self-realization. The Buddha referred to this as the Unborn (*P. ajata*); the Deathless (*P. amata*); the Unconditioned (*P. asankhata*). These terms are synonyms for *nibbana*.



The Ineffability of Realization

The *suttas* within the *Parayanavagga*, among the earliest sections of the *Pali Canon*, illuminate a noumenal reality of profound subtlety—an ethereal pinnacle experienced by the adept yogi. However, due to its cryptic descriptions, this reality may seem deeply unreal to the *putthujana*, the unenlightened worldling.

The *Parayanavagga* indeed delineates a reality that lies *beyond* the grasp of the worldling. To be direct, in their 'ignorant,' sensory state, it remains entirely unattainable.

The verses (*P. gathas*) of the *Parayanavagga* portray a reality where words falter, and concepts tilt. In this realm, the path of the yogi, who attains realization, becomes untraceable, '*like the flight of birds in the sky.*'

This immanent state of emptiness (*P. sunnata*) and liberation (*P. vimutti*)—our primordial nature—is described by the *Bhagavat* in the *Parayanavagga* as follows:

• *One who has come to rest can no longer be 'measured.' He possesses nothing that can be 'named.' When all phenomena are completely stilled, the path of words comes to an end!* •



Be your Own Lamp

Find refuge within yourself; seek no refuge outside of your own being. Be your own lamp, your own island. The source of illumination resides within you and must be sought there alone. Be your own master, your own protector.

In the *Dhammapada* ²⁹⁹ the Buddha declares:

• *Atta hi attano natho—Everyone is their own protector.* •

Rely solely on your own experience. Do not proceed uncritically based on the words of others, regardless of their stature, greatness, or perceived power. *Nullius in verba.* ³⁰⁰

Do not confine yourself to lineages, currents, or structures. They are not the essence; they do not lead to awakening. They are mere manifestations, interpretations, opinions, and external embellishments. Regardless of their motives, be it pastimes or ordinary egotism, they are worldly defilements.

They are not *Dhamma*. They cannot be *Dhamma*. Nowhere in the Buddha's discourses or *suttas* is there mention of lineages, structures, financing, subsidies, administrative mandates, appointments, or representativity.

On the contrary, the Buddha speaks of '*leaving the house*,' embracing homelessness, renouncing the sensory world, practicing detachment, taking personal responsibility, and cultivating insight.

Stick to the essentials. Focus on what truly matters: understanding *dukkha*, eliminating the cause of *dukkha*, experiencing the cessation of *dukkha*, and cultivating the path leading to the destruction of *dukkha*—the Four Noble Truths of a Noble Being, an *ariya-puggala*.

In *Dhammapada*, ³⁰¹ the Buddha emphasizes:

• *One who considers the unimportant as essential and the essential as unimportant will never discover the essence; the intention is wrong.*

One who considers the essential as the essence and the unimportant as unimportant will attain the essence; the intention is correct. •



Bearing witness (1)

Seeing as mere seeing. Hearing as mere hearing. Smelling as mere smelling. Tasting as mere tasting. Feeling as mere feeling. Thinking as mere thinking.

Pure seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking represent the genuine reality of this moment, of each moment, from moment to moment. It is an experience that is pure, unblended, and uncontaminated—devoid of content, preference, aversion, judgment, opinion, or any personal additives. Without the constraints of words and concepts, observe the acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking in complete equanimity.

This practice aims to ensure that the essence of the *Dhamma* is not overshadowed by its literal interpretation, emphasizing the spirit of mindfulness and direct experiential awareness.



Bearing witness (2)

Bearing Witness (*Skr. sākṣīn*) means '*being in alignment with your true nature*': Pure Consciousness. It is a state not confined by identification with the body or the mind. The 'true Self' represents the eternal, unchanging consciousness that observes all experiences and transcends identification with the body and the mind.

Close your eyes and attempt to locate the witness within yourself. With persistent practice, you will eventually discover it.

Discovering the witness and cultivating the ability to be a pure observer, free from judgment, reaction, choice, and emotion, marks the initial step in developing witness consciousness. This experience may not manifest when engrossed in worldly activities, actions, or pursuits. Instead, it reveals itself deep within, emerging when you calm your mind and senses, achieving a state of inner stillness and tranquility.

Be a silent, thoughtless witness—an alert, objective observer. In this state, you will perceive seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking as they truly are—devoid of excess baggage, uncovered from concealment, and liberated from artificial embellishments.

In your 'seeing,' let there be only seeing. In your 'hearing,' let there be only hearing. In your 'smelling,' let there be only smelling. In your 'tasting,' let there be only tasting. In your 'feeling,' let there be only feeling. In your 'thinking,' let there be only thoughts. Without narratives. Without dramas. Without conditioned perception. Without fantasy. Without the veil of automatic prejudices and learned habitual patterns. Free from conditioning. Free from reaction. Spontaneous. Like a Master.



Bearing witness (3)

The concept of 'bearing witness' holds a specific significance within the meditation process, particularly in the context of *vipassana* meditation. *Vipassana* is a form of meditation focused on gaining insight into the true nature of reality, understanding the subtleties of suffering and liberation, as taught by the Buddha.

In *vipassana* meditation, 'witnessing' refers to the practice where individuals observe their own experiences—thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions—in an objective and unbiased manner.

The technique involves closely observing the continuous flow of consciousness, which presents itself to the practitioner without identification or judgment. Essentially, this entails observing the emergence and dissolution of this stream of consciousness—without a discernible beginning or end.

In this manner, awareness is cultivated non-verbally, with direct experience taking precedence. By being a witness to thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions without reacting or clinging to them, practitioners gain insight into the impermanent, conditioned, and impersonal nature of all experiences.

This insight leads to a profound understanding of the nature of suffering and eventual liberation (*P. nibbana*) through the relinquishment of desires and attachments.

Practically, 'bearing witness' in *vipassana* meditation is a process of self-observation and self-inquiry that fosters spiritual growth and insight into the nature of reality.

Vipassana constitutes a pivotal aspect of Buddhist meditative practice. It aids the practitioner in discerning, on one hand, the illusion of a fixed, unchanging self and, on the other hand, recognizing the suffering stemming from attachment to self-images.



A Constantly Changing Process

Ekhnath Easwaran: 302

• *Instead of observing life as a constantly changing process, we insist on viewing life the way we want it to be: as a sequence of things and experiences that have the power to give us satisfaction.*

Instead of seeing our 'self' as it is, namely as an impermanent process, we cling to what we want it to be, namely as something that truly exists, as something separate from the rest, as something eternal. •

This short text by Ekhnath Easwaran expresses profound insights that resonate with fundamental concepts in Theravada Buddhism:

- Impermanence (*P. anicca*): The text underscores the significance of comprehending impermanence as a vital step in understanding the true nature of the mind and reality. Everything in the universe, including our minds and the physical world, is subject to change and lacks permanence.
- Suffering (*P. dukkha*): Clinging to temporary things, attachment to material possessions, ideas, or relationships is identified as the cause of human suffering and dissatisfaction.
- Detachment (*P. viraga*): Detachment is crucial to liberate the mind from the burden of desire and reduce suffering. Letting go of desire, craving, and attachment to the material and temporary is an essential step in the Buddhist path.
- Inner peace and freedom (*P. santi & vimutti*): By cultivating detachment, the practitioner can experience inner peace and freedom.
- Enlightenment and liberation (*P. nibbana*): Understanding impermanence and cultivating detachment are essential elements to achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment and liberation from the cyclical nature of birth and death (*P. samsara*).



Anicca: Distinguishing 'Subject to Change' from 'Constantly Changing'

In Buddhism, '*anicca*' refers to impermanence—the understanding that all things are in a state of continuous flux and change. The term is often translated as 'impermanence,' 'transience,' or 'inconstancy.'

Comprehending *anicca* is a foundational aspect of Buddhist philosophy and constitutes one of the three marks of existence, alongside suffering (*P. dukkha*) and non-self (*P. anatta*).

When we state that things are 'subject to change,' we imply that they possess the potential or susceptibility to undergo change. This phrase encapsulates the essence of *anicca* in Buddhism, conveying that nothing in the material or mental realms is permanent or everlasting.

Conversely, asserting that things are 'constantly changing' emphasizes the continuous, unceasing nature of the change process. It suggests that change is not a one-time event but rather a dynamic and perpetual characteristic of all phenomena. A dynamic, perpetual process of change. *Anicca* encourages practitioners to understand and accept this Process, fostering a perspective that reduces attachment and suffering.

In the context of *anicca*, there is no substantial difference between being 'subject to change' and 'constantly changing.' Both expressions convey the idea that everything in the phenomenal world is characterized by impermanence and exists in a state of constant flux. The emphasis lies in recognizing the dynamic, ever-changing nature of existence rather than any enduring or permanent quality in things.



Anicca

It sometimes surprises me how intellectual our world is. We always seek intellectual explanations. Yet, all it takes is to observe, to look around, to look inside—no matter how hard we try to hold onto things, they will change. Nothing is stable, nothing is permanent. We live in a state of constant flux.

It is quite simple to recognize this. Sometimes people may think '*anicca*' is some profound philosophical theory. However, it's right here, in the changing of seasons, in the shifting of emotions, in the transformation of your reflection in the mirror.

Anicca—this is what life is, constant change.



The Three Rotations and the Twelve Aspects

In his inaugural discourse at the Deer Park in Sarnath, where he set the Wheel of *Dhamma* in motion, the Buddha emphasized that each of the Four Noble Truths must be practiced in three phases (or rotations), namely theoretical (*P. pariyatti*), practical (*P. patipatti*), and through realization (*P. pativedha*).

Schematically, this progression moves from intellectual understanding through practical application to realization.

This approach results in twelve states or combinations known as the Twelve Aspects of the Four Truths.

Thus, the Four Noble Truths—more accurately translated as the Four Truths that characterize a Noble Being—do not crystallize into a mere dogmatic, doctrinal system. Instead, they transcend into a dynamic process, involving fully understanding *dukkha*, letting go of the cause of *dukkha*, realizing the cessation of *dukkha*, and cultivating the Eightfold Path that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*.

True liberation (*P. vimutti*) occurs only when the Four Noble Truths, in their distinct three aspects, have been experientially realized by the practitioner. Otherwise, they remain a sterile philosophical system—knowledge without wisdom, an academic exercise.

While the system of the Three Rotations and the Twelve Aspects may seem intellectually simple, the practice of it presents an entirely different challenge. The realization of it is the *summum bonum*.

In essence, each aspect must be intellectually known and conceptually accepted (the theory). This theory is then deeply practiced, and finally, the practitioner fully realizes the result within themselves, becoming one with it.

This four-step plan with its three respective segments is not merely a theoretical, intellectual construct. It constitutes an extremely careful, analytically developed plan—from theory, through practice, to complete realization—toward complete Self-Realization.



Udayabbaya

Origination and cessation (*P. udayabbaya*) are inherent aspects of existence. Initially, this insight may bring disillusionment and sobriety (*P. nibbida*). However, simultaneously, it reveals that illness, old age, and death need not instill fear. *Nibbida* renders one passionless (*P. viraga*), leads to tranquility (*P. upasama*), and extinguishes the persistent cycle of 'becoming' (*P. nibbana*).

Therefore, there's no need to fixate more on death than on other facets of this cyclical process. Observe all phenomena with the same penetrating attention and acceptance. Practice diligently, cultivate systematically, persevere, and witness the constant transformation and mutation of things. Recognize their futility and fleeting nature, accepting this process with equanimity.

Avoid clinging to metaphysical narratives, as they hinder rather than facilitate understanding; they are 'obstacles' (*P. nivarana*), akin to curtains blocking light from entering a room. Direct your gaze to the 'process.' Observe everything changing while nothing is truly lost. Experience the Unborn (*P. ajata*) and the Deathless (*P. amata*).

To achieve this, 'simply' engage in two things: observation and acceptance—*Sati* and *Upekkha*. The combination of both constitutes *vipassana*, seeing things as they truly are and accepting this insight with equanimity.

The Buddha referenced this practice in the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*:

• *An unsurpassed way (P. ekayana magga) leading to the purification of beings; to the transcendence of sorrow and concerns; to the cessation of dukkha and fear, and to acquiring the correct method for realizing nibbana.* •

By keeping your practice simple and persistently cultivating it, you will understand *dukkha*, eliminate the cause of *dukkha*, realize the cessation of *dukkha*, and cultivate the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.



Awakening

Awakening, the state of becoming aware, reflects our inherent and natural state of being. Our unity with the energy of the universe reveals the profound truth of our nature. Through meditation and practice, we seek to explore and embrace this blissful consciousness.



When the Mind Appears, Reality Disappears

Bodhidharma says:

• *When the mind appears, reality disappears. When the mind disappears, reality appears* •.

But what does he mean by that?

Bodhidharma's statement addresses the intricate relationship between the mind and reality, a concept emphasized in various philosophical and spiritual traditions, including Theravada Buddhism and the Zen tradition.

The phrase '*When the mind appears, reality disappears*' suggests that when our mind is active, filled with thoughts, concepts, and perceptions, we lose the direct experience of reality. The mind creates a filter or veil of concepts that obscures our perception of reality. In this state, we view the world through the lens of our thoughts and biases, rather than experiencing it directly.

Conversely, '*When the mind disappears, reality appears*' can be understood as an aspiration for a state of mental clarity and silence. When the mind becomes calm, free from thoughts and distractions, the direct experience of reality becomes prominent. Essentially, without the constant mediation of the thinking mind, we can perceive reality in its purest form.

In the context of our practice, this saying encourages the cultivation of an awareness that is free from mental hindrances and conceptual constructions. It prompts us to strive for a direct, immediate experience of reality, without the distorting influence of thoughts and mental processes. Ultimately, it involves examining the nature of the mind and understanding how it shapes our perception of reality.



The Place Where You Enter the Stream.

Direct your attention to the breath, observing each inhalation and exhalation. Experience the joy (*P. pīti* → 1st *jhana*) and happiness (*P. sukha* → 2nd *jhana*) arising from your practice. Cultivate equanimity (*P. upekkha* → 3rd *jhana*) and one-pointedness (*P. ekaggata* → 4th *jhana*) in your focus. Allow yourself to become fully absorbed in your meditation object. While enjoying the profound states of meditative absorption known as the *jhanas*, maintain a sense of non-attachment. Understand that even these blissful experiences do not lead to final liberation.

As taught by the Buddha in the *Latukikopama Sutta*:³⁰³

• *This level is not enough. Abandon it and go beyond. This is not the ultimate goal. These stages of meditation, the jhanas, are merely a pleasant abiding.* •

Therefore, open the gate of wisdom by observing your thoughts. Notice how they arise and pass away, emerging from nothingness and dissolving into emptiness. Recognize their ephemeral, futile, and ultimately meaningless nature. Observe the process of dependent origination and experience, known as *paticca samuppada*.

Now, pay attention to the gaps between thoughts. Observe how these spaces expand. Recognize the boundless, spaceless state of *acala*, where the concept of 'self' (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*) dissolves, along with notions of external rules and attachments (*P. silabbata-paramasa*) and doubt (*P. vicikiccha*).

In that moment, you perceive reality as it truly is. With deepening insight, you discern what truly matters in life at the fundamental level.

This penetrating insight arises suddenly, spontaneously, and unexpectedly, yet it is vividly clear and explicit. This is the point where you enter the stream, becoming a noble follower, an *ariya puggala*.



Observe Without a Head above Your Head

Observe without a fixed identity looming over you. The *Dhamma* unfolds spontaneously, embodying the eternal and enduring law of nature—*Dhammo sanantano*. It represents the continuous flow of existence, symbolizing spaciousness, clarity, and simplicity, free from confusion and artificial rigidity.

Dhamma is the Universal Truth, not confined to Buddhism but belonging to the entirety of the Universe. It embodies universal spirituality, accessible and applicable to anyone. The Buddha's teachings serve as a path for training and developing the mind towards Awakening—a state that provides insight into the true nature of existence. This practical doctrine avoids metaphysical speculations about the origin of existence and eschews theistic contemplations: there is no worship of a god. The Buddha's teachings aim to liberate sentient beings from *dukkha*, the inherent suffering in life.

Dhamma encapsulates the essence of existence, independent of external institutions and structures that shape our perceived reality. Despite promises, these constructs often act as fortresses of power, self-interest, and ego. Refrain from viewing them through the lens of greed and attachment.

Turn your attention inward, cultivating an inner island (*P. dipa*) untouched by the turbulent waves of ignorance, desire, and aversion. Engage in attentive observation with an equanimous mind, possessing deep insight (*P. sampajanna*) into the true nature of things. Observe without the burden of a fixed identity. Embrace a state akin to a *samana*, a renunciant who is their own master.



Absolute Reality versus Relative Reality in *Dhamma*

The ultimate, absolute, noumenal reality (*P. paramattha*)³⁰⁴ is that which truly exists, as it is—*Yatha-bhuta*. It encompasses what was in the past, is in the present, and will be in the future. This reality holds no esoteric elements; it is not a fantasy or daydream.

Instead, it is the reality hidden behind the sensory world of phenomena observed by us. Despite the unknowability of the noumenal world to the average person, its existence remains undeniably real.

In contrast, there is the relative reality that many perceive as the sole and highest good. This sensory reality manifests when one or more of the six sensory gates are stimulated. However, this phenomenal reality is subjective, and our reactions to it are highly conditioned.

Sensory, conventional reality (*P. sammuti*)³⁰⁵ is a compelled existence—desiring what we find pleasant, disliking what we perceive as unpleasant, and turning away from what is true. This relative reality is an illusion, a concept, a convention, a misconception arising from the operation of our minds.



Wisdom (P. Panna)

Wisdom can only arise when the circumstances are ripe, meaning when the necessary causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*) are present for the *dhammanuvatti*.

Insight, the direct perception of reality as it truly is, is a profound moment akin to the sun breaking through the clouds. It signifies the transformation of an ordinary person (*P. puthujjana*) into a noble disciple (*P. ariya-puggala*).

In the doctrine, this transformative moment is known as '*gotrabhu*,' the opening of the '*Dhamma Eye*'. It marks the attainment of the first stage of awakening, known as stream-entry (*P. sotapatti*). The stream-enterer (*P. sotapanna*) reaches this level by breaking the first three fetters (*P. samyojanas*) that bind them to the cycle of *samsara*: the belief in a personal self (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*), skeptical doubt (*P. vicikiccha*), and attachment to rituals and practices (*P. silabbata-paramasa*).

Stream-entry signifies a significant milestone in the practitioner's life, marking their point of no return. They are reborn into a noble lineage (*P. gotha*) and emerge as a true heir of the noble ones (*P. ariyas*). As a stream-enterer, they can no longer regress to a lower level of existence but can only progress forward, having crossed the point of no return.



We are all wanderers

Impermanence is tangibly present everywhere and at all times for those who 'see.' But are we aware of it? This is precisely what the Buddha advises us: to awaken, to wake up.

When one perceives impermanence (*P. anicca*), one also recognizes dissatisfaction (*P. dukkha*), instability, and the selflessness or 'emptiness' of all phenomena (*P. anatta*). These are the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*) of all conditioned things, with the 'I' at the forefront.

As wanderers, we all make choices, but are we conscious or subconscious in our decisions? The power lies within each of us.

The Buddha said in the *Dhammapada*:

• *Atta hi attano natho* — 'Everyone is their own master.' •



Not-self Leads to Wisdom and Compassion

In the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, the Buddha recounts how, through his divine eye, ³⁰⁶ he observed the absence of an immutable core in everything—*Anatta*. All phenomena are profoundly transient and insubstantial. The Buddha realized the 'emptiness' (*P. sunna*) inherent in all *dhammas*—the vacant and insubstantial nature of all phenomena.

Anatta represents the profound reality underlying all phenomena. No 'self' can be found in any *dhamma*, as each phenomenon relies on numerous causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*) for its arising, existence, and decay.

Paradoxically, a careful observation of this 'emptiness' unveils the infinite nature of all things. Emptiness reveals the eternal process of change permeating all forms.

The *dhammanuvatti* who realizes this emptiness sees the *Dhamma*. They awaken. They enter the stream. They 'see' what is actually happening. They 'experience' what is unfolding before their eyes—the way it truly is, *yatha-bhuta*.

Awakening reveals *anatta*—the essence of phenomena in its full glory. It clarifies that nothing is separate from all other things, emphasizing interbeing and Indra's net.

The clear realization and deep insight (*P. sampajanna*) that all phenomena possess the nature of 'non-being' foster deep compassion (*P. karuna*) for others and everything that exists. It extends to everything that surrounds them.

Recognizing that all beings are subject to the same eternal natural law (*P. Dhammo sanantano*), it would be profoundly arrogant to judge, condemn, repel, or exclude anyone.

Karuna, indeed, is the sense of solidarity with everything that exists. Without compassion, any practice is useless and meaningless. It is not even worthy of the term 'practice.' Practice cannot be built on anger.



Insight

Understanding *Dhamma* transcends verbalization, visualization, imagination, speculation, or blind belief. True comprehension of *Dhamma*, involving the profound 'seeing' (*P. janati*) of the Process of Dependent Origination (*P. paticca samuppada*), does not arise through mere rituals such as worshipping Buddha images (*P. buddharupa*),³⁰⁷ endless prostrations,³⁰⁸ or circumambulating *stupas*.³⁰⁹

When a practitioner's efforts fail to yield spiritual transformation and liberation, they miss the essence of *Dhamma* entirely.

Insight blossoms through the recognition, acknowledgment, and realization of the transient, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of phenomena. This journey leads to disenchantment and detachment (*P. nibbida*), the unfolding of passionlessness (*P. viraga*), the cultivation of calmness (*P. upasama*), and the development of inner peace (*P. nibbana*).

This transformative practice ultimately culminates in liberation (*P. vimutti*). Enlightenment dawns with the clear perception of the impermanence of all things (*P. anicca*). When coupled with equanimous acceptance of this insight (*P. upekkha*), the path to liberation is paved.



Be Your Own Protector

While many practitioners follow well-trodden paths in this lifetime, a courageous few venture into uncharted territories, becoming their own guardians. They 'leave the house,' embracing a state of homelessness (*P. anoka*). This path is the most audacious, captivating, and challenging. The choice lies within each of us, and we only get one chance.

Metaphorically termed 'stream-entry' (*P. sotapatti*) by the Buddha, those who traverse this path are known as 'stream enterers' (*P. sotapanna*) or *ariya-puggala*—Noble individuals. This path leads to 'becoming cool' (*P. sitibhuto*)—to liberation (*P. vimutti*), inner peace (*P. santi*), and self-realization (*P. nibbana*).

'Becoming cool' signifies 'coming to rest,' liberated from desires or expectations. It entails detachment and insight into the transience of all things, accepting the process of *anicca*, calming passions, and finding contentment in a simple life with no further demands.

The *ariya-puggala*, the Noble person, is their own master, 'a god in the depths of their thoughts' (inspired by Willem Kloos).³¹⁰ Independent of every opinion, they serve as their own protector—a resilient island where the tsunamis of ignorance, desire, and aversion lack any effect.

As described by Eknath Easwaran, *“Lacking nothing, craving nothing, they stay in the world solely to help and serve.”*



One-pointedness (*P. ekagatta*)

The term '*ekagatta*'—often translated as 'one-pointedness' or 'concentration'—is considered crucial in the context of Buddhist meditation and the development of insight (*vipassana*).

Ekagatta is associated with the fourth *jhana* in the traditional description of meditative absorption states in Buddhism. The *ghanas* form an integral part of many meditation practices in the Buddhist tradition, providing a framework for understanding the stages of mental absorption and mastery of the mind, leading towards profound insights and, ultimately, liberation.

The four *ghanas* represent progressively deepening stages of concentration achieved through meditation:

First *jhana* (*P. pathama jhana*): Characterized by applied and sustained attention, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.

Second *jhana* (*P. dutiya jhana*): Involves the deepening of concentration, with the fading away of applied attention and the arising of inner tranquility, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness.

Third *jhana* (*P. tatiya jhana*): Marked by equanimity, mindfulness, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness. It is a state of even greater mental stillness and detachment.

Fourth *jhana* (*P. catuttha jhana*): In this stage, joy and happiness subside, leaving a state of pure equanimity and mindfulness, along with one-pointedness. The mind is highly concentrated and tranquil.

Ekagatta is particularly emphasized in the fourth *jhana*. In this state, the mind is so concentrated and unified that it remains undistracted and focused on a single point. The meditator experiences a deep sense of inner peace, mental stability, and profound mindfulness. In the practice of meditation, particularly *vipassana* meditation, cultivating *ekagatta* involves training the mind to remain consistently and single-pointedly focused on a chosen object or meditation subject. This could be everything: the breath, a visual object, a mantra, or another point of focus.

Understanding why *ekagatta* is considered key to opening the door of insight is crucial:

- Reducing Distractions: The ordinary, untrained mind is often scattered and distracted, jumping from one thought to another. *Ekagatta* helps reduce these mental distractions, allowing the mind to settle and become still.

- Deepening Concentration: As concentration deepens through *ekagatta*, the mind becomes more stable and less prone to wandering. This heightened concentration is a necessary foundation for developing insight.
- Observing Phenomena Clearly: With a concentrated and focused mind, practitioners can observe the arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena with greater clarity. This observation is a key aspect of insight meditation.
- Seeing Impermanence (*P. anicca*): *Ekagatta* enables sustained attention, allowing practitioners to observe the constant flux and impermanence of experiences. This insight into impermanence is one of the three characteristics of existence in Buddhism (*P. tilakkhana*).
- Overcoming the Illusion of Self (*P. anatta*): Through sustained concentration, practitioners may also observe the nature of the self more clearly. They may recognize that what they once considered a permanent and unchanging self is, in fact, a collection of impermanent and interdependent phenomena.
- Experiencing the Present Moment: *Ekagatta* helps bring the mind into the present moment, reducing preoccupation with the past or future. This focused attention on the present is essential for understanding the nature of experience.

In summary, *ekagatta* plays a crucial role in creating the mental conditions conducive to insight. By calming distractions and focusing the mind, practitioners can directly experience the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self nature of phenomena, leading to profound insights into the nature of reality. The unity between subject and object in a concentrated mind supports the direct experiential understanding of these fundamental aspects of Buddhist teachings.



The Process

A noble disciple (*P. ariya-puggala*) perceives existence as a continuous cyclical process, characterized by constant change—a constant transformation. They witness existence as an eternal flow, an unceasing flux.

This insight sharply contrasts with the illusion of a stable, separate, and eternal 'self'—a conditioned delusion that the worldling (*P. putthujana*) dogmatically adheres to, but which can never lead to self-realization.

A noble follower 'sees and knows' (*P. janami passami*) that existence is 'a stream of consciousness'—*vinnanasota*³¹¹—without any solid core or identity. Without identity. It is selfless, akin to space (*P. acala*).³¹² The noble disciple perceives the entirety of interconnected phenomena, where all things undergo permanent change, yet nothing is lost.

The *dhammanuvatti*, realizing this within themselves, 'sees and knows'—experiences (*P. paccakkha-nana*)³¹³—that birth and death are merely rites of passage in the continuous process of creation and passing. They understand and experience that the Unborn (*P. ajata*) and the Deathless (*P. amata*) are descriptions of a noumenal reality that they do not directly know but which undeniably exists. The practitioner experiences 'that there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded.'

They 'see and know' that the inner peace and liberation resulting from this awareness is Self-realization—the Other Shore, the Island, *Nibbana*. In this state, the tsunamis of ignorance, desire, and aversion in the phenomenal world cease to exist.



Self-Realization

One who sees through clear awareness and profound insight understands the nature of existence. Recognizing the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self nature of all phenomena, the practitioner becomes free from the cycle of dependence and bondage.

Understanding that the notion of a 'true self' carrying and illuminating the entire universe is an illusion, the *yogi* comprehends the interconnectedness of all things. Rather than perceiving oneself as boundless, the focus is on realizing the ever-changing and interdependent nature of existence.

In the practice of mindfulness and insight meditation, the practitioner experiences the profound joy of understanding the true nature of reality. This realization is not about adhering to rigid religious rules or structures but about awakening to the inherent truths of impermanence, the unsatisfactory nature of worldly existence, and the absence of a permanent self.

Self-realization, in the context of Theravada Buddhism, is about cultivating awareness, developing insight, and transcending the conditioned attachments that lead to suffering. It is through the understanding of the Three Marks of Existence—impermanence, suffering, and non-self—that one can attain true liberation.



Liberation: Breaking Free from the Cycle of Samsara

In the rich tapestry of Theravada Buddhism, the concept of *dukkha* takes center stage—a pervasive mental and physical discontent that defines the human experience. This exploration delves into the heart of Theravada teachings, navigating the cyclic nature of existence and the transformative journey towards liberation from the perpetual cycle of rebirths.

Dukkha, the encompassing spectrum of pain and sorrow, serves as the crucible of contemplation in Theravada Buddhism. It steers individuals in relentless pursuit of fulfillment within the continuous cycle of 'becoming' (*P. bhavaraga*).³¹⁴ Yet, the essence of Theravada wisdom lies in the profound realization that this incessant 'becoming' leads to no lasting satisfaction.

A crucial juncture in the practitioner's journey unfolds when the realization dawns that cycles of 're'-births never usher in true inner peace. In moments of profound darkness, the practitioner confronts themselves, colliding with their limitations. In this blessed moment, truth becomes apparent, and the light at the end of the tunnel begins to shine. Letting go of conditioned thoughts, insight into the true nature of existence emerges.

True liberation from *dukkha* is not birthed through continuous cycles of birth and rebirth. Birth, identified as the 'root' or 'origin' (*P. mula*) of *dukkha*, is not the path to freedom. The practitioner transcends the perpetual cycle of *samsara* not by viewing rebirth as a goal but by seeking liberation from *dukkha* through self-realization leading to *nibbana* in the present life.

To attain true liberation, the practitioner transcends perceptual conditioning, which perceives the self and the world as permanent, comfortable, and integral to a fixed identity. The Pali concept of '*bhava*,' often translated as 'rebirth,' signifies the perpetual arising and passing away of all phenomena. This insight, gained through experiential understanding or 'seeing,' reveals the Unborn (*P. ajata*) and the Deathless (*P. amata*) as an eternal process of the same energy.

Anicca, the central teaching underscoring the impermanence of all phenomena, denies them stability and a fixed self (*P. anatta*). The worldling (*P. puthujjana*), entangled in transient and selfless phenomena, remains immersed in permanent discontent (*P. dukkha*). In contrast, the noble disciple (*P. ariya-puggala*) 'sees and knows' (*P. janami passami*) that the 'I' is an illusion, a delusion.

Through direct experience (*P. paccakkha-nana*), they comprehend that the aggregates, the components of the self (*the khandhas*) are not truly 'I,' 'me,' or 'mine.'

This profound realization breaks the cycle of *samsara*, liberating the noble disciple from the suffering inherent in clinging to an illusory self.

In the profound teachings of Theravada Buddhism, the journey to liberation is marked by a deep understanding of the nature of *dukkha*, the impermanence of phenomena, and the illusion of a fixed self.

By transcending perceptual conditioning and directly experiencing the truth, the practitioner breaks free from the cycle of *samsara*, attaining true liberation from suffering. Spontaneous inner peace emerges. *Santi*.³¹⁵



Arising and Passing Away

Each moment is a moment of arising, followed by a moment of passing away. Arising and passing away are the fundamental aspects that govern existence.

Everything conditioned undergoes eventual dissolution, only to reappear in a different form when the necessary causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*) manifest. This cyclical process reflects the impermanence inherent in the nature of existence, as emphasized in Theravada Buddhism.

The principle of arising and passing away extends even to the *buddhasasana*—the Teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha himself acknowledged the impermanence and future degeneration of the *Dhamma* in various *suttas* of the *Pali Canon*. This recognition of the changing nature of the teachings aligns with the Theravada perspective on the inevitability of the decline of the *Dhamma* in certain periods. The decline of the teachings is also mirrored in Japanese Buddhism through the concept of '*mappo*,' signifying a period of spiritual and social decline.³¹⁶

Additionally, the Buddha emphasized that his Teachings do not present anything entirely 'new' or original. He asserted that the *Dhamma* has existed before his awakening, and his insights did not arise from personal revelation or divine inspiration. Instead, insight emerges through deep inner observation of phenomena as they are, coupled with equanimity. The qualities of mindfulness (*P. sati*) and equanimity (*P. upekkha*) are essential for the development of insight, attained through experiential 'seeing and knowing' (*P. vipassana*) of reality. The Buddha repeatedly stated in the *suttas* that he has 'only' rediscovered this age-old wisdom and then shared it through his teachings.

Moreover, the text suggests that in the future, after the degeneration of the *Dhamma*, another *bodhisattva* will be born on earth. This *bodhisattva*, known as *Buddha Maitreya*, would rediscover the teachings, attain enlightenment, and share them. The concept of *Buddha Maitreya* symbolizes the cyclical nature of the teachings, ensuring their rejuvenation and guidance, much like a phoenix rising from its ashes.³¹⁷

In summary, the text underscores the universal principle of arising and passing away, applicable to all conditioned phenomena. It discusses the recognition of the decline of the *Dhamma* and the understanding that the Buddha's teachings are a rediscovery rather than a completely new revelation. Deep inner observation, combined with equanimity, is highlighted as the path to insight and wisdom.



Without sankharas

Mindfulness (*P. sati*) entails spontaneous awareness of the process of *anicca*, the impermanent nature of all phenomena. It involves attentiveness to the continuous flow of arising and passing away, observing the world as it truly exists—*Yatha-bhuta*—without additional embellishments or attachments.

This practice requires relinquishing attachment to personal stories, dramas, and the influences of ignorance, desire, and aversion. It necessitates freedom from *sankharas*, the conditioned mental and physical formations that animate our experiences.

This practice underscores the importance of being mindful and present to prevent being consumed by the fires of our senses. When constantly driven by desires and attachments fueled by our senses, our world becomes engulfed in flames, leading to eventual disillusionment. The realization dawns that what was clung to so tightly was merely an illusion.

The reference to leaving behind nothing but burnt illusions and ashes symbolizes the ephemeral nature of our attachments and the imperative to let go in order to find true peace and liberation.

In summary, mindfulness involves spontaneous awareness of the impermanence of all things, recognizing the flow of arising and passing away. It underscores the importance of observing the world as it truly is, free from attachments, ignorance, desire, and aversion. By practicing mindfulness and letting go of conditioned tendencies, one can avoid being consumed by the fires of the senses and attain liberation from the illusions that bind us.



Appamado: The Path of Vigilance in Theravada Buddhism

Vigilance, synonymous with attentiveness and constant attention (*P. sati*), is a critical aspect for adherents of the *Dhamma*, the *dhammanuvatti*. It involves an unwavering commitment to sustained attention from one moment to the next.

Through vigilance, the practitioner gains profound insight into the three characteristics of all phenomena (*P. tilakkhana*): impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (often translated as '*dukkha*'), and selflessness.

The *dhammanuvatti* attains the 'goal' by personally realizing, in every moment, the instability and 'emptiness' of the phenomena within oneself. This necessitates continuous observation and mindfulness of the ever-changing nature of all experiences.

In the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*,³¹⁸ the Buddha states:

• *Appamado amatada — Vigilance is the way to the Deathless.* •

This underscores that vigilance is the direct path to *nibbana*, the state of liberation *beyond*³¹⁹ death and suffering.

In essence, the text underscores that constant attention and vigilance are essential for the *dhammanuvatti* to gain profound insight into the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of all phenomena. Through sustained mindfulness and awareness, one can progress on the path to liberation, ultimately leading to *nibbana*.



Observing with Buddha's Eyes: A Theravada Perspective

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* ³²⁰ the Buddha imparts wisdom to Ananda:

• *Therefore, Ananda, be a lamp unto yourself. Be a refuge to yourself. Take yourself to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp; hold fast to the Truth as a refuge. Look not for a refuge in anyone beside yourself. And those, Ananda, who either now or after I am dead shall be a lamp unto themselves, who take themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the Truth as their lamp, and holding fast to the Truth as their refuge, shall not look for refuge to anyone beside themselves, it is they who shall reach the highest goal.* •

Allow the turbulence of the world to pass you by... Observe all phenomena meticulously as they truly exist. Do not perceive them through the lens of desire, imagination, or expectation. See them with equanimity, as they genuinely are—*Yatha-bhuta*.

Avoid interpreting phenomena in the conditioned way that society seeks to impose upon them. This is not the essence of reality; instead, they are projections influenced by the aspirations of political, economic, financial, social, and religious authorities and their structures. Their objectives may not always be noble, often revolving around maintaining their privileges, utilizing sophisticated and cunning means to shape perceptions.

Therefore, engage in vigilant observation. Be self-reliant. Maintain an open mind. Be a lamp unto yourself. See with the discerning eyes of the Buddha.



Harmony

True peace is not found through the escalation of conflicts with perceived adversaries. Engaging in battles for peace is akin to clamoring for silence—it only brings forth more of what one wishes to evade.

The profound wisdom of the Buddha, as expressed in the *Dhammapada* ³²¹ reflects this insight:

• *Hate is never overcome by hate. Hate is only ever overcome by love. This is an eternal truth.* •

In Theravada Buddhism, the emphasis is often on cultivating loving-kindness (*P. metta*) rather than intensifying struggles or conflicts.



Truth (*P. sacca*)

'Truth' encompasses all that is genuinely true. *The Dhamma* represents this truth, serving as the law of nature, the cosmic order, and the unadulterated reality—the 'process' as it genuinely exists—*Yatha-bhuta*.

According to the *Pali Canon*, any absolute and unchanging reality (or Ultimate Truth) must meet four criteria: universality (non-sectarian), necessity, inevitability, and truth in the past, present, and future. These criteria don't demand blind faith³²² but can be affirmed through personal observation and rational inquiry—a Process of Free Inquiry.

This definition is exhaustive, meaning it is comprehensive and thorough. It applies to very few phenomena. It doesn't extend to gods, religions, ideologies, philosophies, opinions, axioms, or political, financial, economic systems, states, and societies. Despite their roles in organizing our sensory world, none of these phenomena meet the necessary criteria. This perspective aligns with the emphasis in Buddhism on understanding and discerning the nature of reality through direct experience and wisdom rather than relying solely on beliefs or doctrines.

This text delves into the foundations of these cover-ups and untruths, questioning whether they arise from ego-driven eruptions, expressions of belief in a 'personality' (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*), or manifestations of attachment to rites and rituals (*P. silabbata-paramasa*). It also explores the possibility that these untruths act as placebos to dispel doubts (*P. vicikiccha*).

The Buddha termed the destruction of these three chains (*P. samyojanas*) as the conditions for stream-entry (*P. sotapatti*). A stream-enterer 'has to leave the house,' breaking out of conditioned cocoons to liberate themselves.



Structures

Structures are human constructions that veil the impermanence of existence. They act as confining walls, trapping one within the fortress of 'I'—a barrier obstructing the path of the *dharmavutti*. Like clouds obscuring the sun and thick curtains blocking light, structures limit the practitioner's vision.

Reflecting on the fleeting nature of the temples in Bagan, Myanmar, proves more enlightening than being captivated by the grandeur of the Shwedagon Pagoda.

Release the grasp on the 'I.' Refrain from erecting walls around it. Cultivate boundless space—no barriers. Awaken.

Explanation:

This text explores the impact of structures on spiritual growth, portraying them as hindrances to the understanding of impermanence and the liberation from self-imprisonment. The metaphorical language vividly illustrates how structures, akin to walls and curtains, obstruct the practitioner's path toward enlightenment and wisdom.

The text encourages contemplating the transient nature of the temples in Bagan, contrasting it with the allure of prominent monuments like the Shwedagon pagoda. The central message urges individuals to let go of egoic self-attachments and the construction of limiting structures. Instead, it advocates for creating mental and spiritual space by relinquishing fixed identities and beliefs, leading to an awakening to a deeper reality and freedom.

In summary, the text emphasizes the recognition of impermanence, the avoidance of self-centered constructs, and the cultivation of spaciousness as a path to awakening. It encourages individuals to release attachments and to experience reality directly and unobstructedly.



Succinctly

Every practitioner bears the common cost of their continual process of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), and that cost is *dukkha*.

This sentence succinctly affirms that the unceasing cycle of existence, carries a universal toll—*dukkha*. *Dukkha*, often translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness, is an intrinsic aspect of the human condition.

The dynamic nature of existence, involving the pursuit of desires and the inevitable changes of life, leads to suffering. Regardless of individual differences or external circumstances, all beings partake in the fundamental truth of *dukkha* as they navigate life's complexities.

The concept of 'becoming' encompasses the continual cycle of birth, aging, illness, and death, entwined with the pursuit of desires, attachment to outcomes, and the subsequent experience of disappointment and loss.

This observation aligns with a fundamental insight of Buddhism, acknowledging the widespread presence of suffering and offering guidance on understanding its origins in craving and ignorance. The teachings of the Buddha aim to cultivate practices that lead to liberation and the transcendence of suffering.



Becoming a Buddhankura

Embrace the essence of your true self—a Buddha-to-be, an embryonic Buddha, a *Buddhankura*.

This sentence encourages individuals to embody their essential nature, specifically pointing towards the potential for enlightenment and the attainment of Buddhahood. The term 'Buddha-to-be' underscores the ongoing journey toward enlightenment, depicting a state of continual spiritual development. Additionally, the introduction of the term '*Buddhankura*' illustrates this nascent stage of Buddhahood.

In Theravada Buddhism, a 'Buddha' refers to an awakened being who has attained complete enlightenment and liberation from suffering.

The concept of 'becoming' a Buddha implies that enlightenment is not an external achievement to be acquired but an inherent quality waiting to be realized and developed. Everyone possesses the inherent potential to become a Buddha. Each practitioner carries the seeds of enlightenment within themselves, which, through dedicated practice and the cultivation of virtuous qualities, can be nurtured to unfold their Buddha-nature.

The term '*embryonic Buddha*' or '*Buddhankura*' metaphorically represents the early stages of spiritual development, signifying the transformative journey towards the full realization and actualization of one's innate Buddha-nature. It underscores the unfolding process on the path to enlightenment.

This encourages disciples to embrace their spiritual potential and engage in practices that foster growth and development towards becoming a Buddha. It implies that this journey involves self-discovery, self-transformation, and the cultivation of qualities aligned with the awakened state of a Buddha.

Using these terms suggest that one's true nature extends *beyond* the ordinary self, encompassing profound wisdom, compassion, and liberation associated with the enlightened state of a Buddha.

In summary, it inspires practitioners to embark on a path of self-discovery and self-transformation to realize their true nature as Buddhas-to-be.



Live the Dhamma

Dhamma is the truth about how things truly are (*P. yatha-bhuta*). It is the reality of the arising and passing away of all things, viewed as experiential phenomena (*P. paccanubhoti*).

The words and concepts in the *Pali Canon* describe and represent this reality, but they are not the reality itself. They are merely 'signposts.' Fingers pointing to this reality, but not the reality itself. They are tools—*Upayas*.

Dhamma transcends every Buddhist school, every tradition, every lineage. *Dhamma* is not bound by words and concepts. Nor by structures. Nor by opinions, ideas, or viewpoints.

Dhamma spontaneously reveals itself in every moment '*in the ten thousand things presenting themselves to us*' (Ehei Dogen).

Live the *Dhamma*. Do not settle for a surrogate that others have devised for you and molded into strange structures. Make yourself an island. Be your own lamp. Your own beacon. Do not let yourself be enslaved. Never ever.

You are your own Master. Without a head above your head. In essence, you are *Dhamma*. Pure Awareness. The Process.



Experience Impermanence in Every Moment

How?

Observe your breath. Carefully perceive this ongoing process. In. Out. In. Out. Consider the breath as your personal basecamp.

Notice how your breath liberates itself every moment. How it effortlessly breaks free from the grip of its own rhythm. Autonomously. Subconsciously.

Experience the uniqueness of each breath. Notice how it differs from the one before. Immerse yourself in this continuous cycle of creation and decay. Find satisfaction in it. Liberate yourself. Your breath shows the way. As long as you live. If you look carefully. If you look with the eyes of the awakened.

Explanation:

This text provides guidance on engaging in a mindfulness practice centered around observing the breath. It suggests carefully observing the breath, acknowledging the continuous process of inhalation and exhalation. The breath is metaphorically presented as a personal basecamp, offering a point of focus and stability in one's awareness.

The text invites the reader to notice the liberating nature of each breath, emphasizing its autonomous and subconscious release from the constraints of its own rhythm. This highlights the natural and spontaneous aspect of the breath, occurring without deliberate control or effort.

Furthermore, the text encourages the reader to recognize the uniqueness of each breath, observing how it differs from the previous one. This prompts an awareness of the continuous process of creation and decay inherent in the breath. By immersing oneself in this experiential understanding, the text suggests finding a sense of liberation and satisfaction. The breath is presented as a guiding force, offering a path towards liberation and self-realization.

The text encourages the reader to cultivate mindful awareness, referred to as 'awakened eyes,' to fully grasp the transformative potential of observing the breath.

Overall, this text invites the reader to engage in a contemplative practice centered on the breath. By closely observing and experiencing the breath's continuous cycle, the practitioner is encouraged to find liberation, satisfaction, and a deeper understanding of themselves and the present moment. The text highlights the breath as a powerful tool for cultivating mindfulness and awakening.



Samsara

In Buddhism, the concept of rebirth is akin to the mythical Hydra, persistently resurfacing. Just as Heracles dealt with the Hydra by severing its middle head and burying it under a substantial stone, the suggestion here is to address the issue of rebirth decisively.

Let's be unequivocal: debating the existence of rebirth is not a crucial or fundamental question. Emulating the Buddha, envelop yourself in serene silence and concentrate on the essentials of his teachings—the *Dhamma Vinaya*.

The crux of the matter is *dukkha* and its cessation—the extinguishing of suffering. Whether termed birth or rebirth, both paths lead to *dukkha*. There is no salvation in 'becoming' (*P. bhava*) or 'being born again' (*P. bhavaraga*).

Explanation:

The text opens with a metaphor, likening the persistence of the rebirth topic to the mythical Hydra. The decisive action recommended, inspired by Heracles, reflects the need to address the rebirth issue resolutely.

It emphasizes that engaging in debates about the existence or non-existence of rebirth is neither important nor a fundamental question. Following the Buddha's example involves focusing on the essentials of his teachings, encapsulated in the *Dhamma Vinaya*, and adopting a state of serene silence.

The fundamental issue, as per the text, is *dukkha*—signifying suffering, unsatisfactoriness, or discontentment. The focus should be on understanding *dukkha* and seeking its cessation. The text asserts that whether one considers it as birth or rebirth, both ultimately lead to *dukkha*. The key lies in ending the cycle of 'becoming' or 'being born again,' as there is no salvation or liberation from *dukkha* in this perpetual cycle.

Overall, the text encourages a shift away from debates about rebirth, emphasizing the fundamental issue of *dukkha* and its elimination. It underscores the importance of understanding and seeking the cessation of suffering as a central aspect of the Buddha's teachings. Redirecting attention to the core principles of the *Dhamma* foster a deeper understanding and work towards liberation from the cycle of suffering.



Dukkha

Dukkha encompasses the entire spectrum of pain and sorrow, representing the comprehensive mental and physical dissatisfaction inherent in the human experience. This dissatisfaction propels individuals in all directions in a continual pursuit of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), yet this pursuit fails to yield genuine satisfaction—referred to as '*bhavaraga*.'

True understanding of *dukkha* dawns when individuals realize that the perpetual cycle of 'becoming' is a dead end. It is during moments of profound darkness, where individuals confront their limitations, that truth becomes evident, and a glimmer of light appears at the end of the tunnel.

Liberation from *dukkha* is achievable when practitioners free themselves from the conditioned perception that regards themselves and the world as permanent, comfortable, durable, stable, and eternal. Genuine liberation involves perceiving phenomena as they truly are (*P. yatha-bhuta*) and accepting this reality with equanimity (*P. upekkha*).

Embracing this reality and letting go of conditioned thoughts can be challenging for many practitioners due to conflicting teachings. *Worldlings* (*P. puthujjanas*), referring to ordinary individuals, often overlook the reality that a repeated lie can morph into perceived truth.

By releasing conditioned thoughts, gaining insight into the true nature of existence, and embracing the proposed reality, practitioners can experience the emergence of peace, inner tranquility, and blissful spaciousness. The term '*acalam sukham*' encapsulates this state of serene and blissful calm.

In summary, this text emphasizes the multifaceted nature of *dukkha*, underscores the necessity of recognizing the limitations of the perpetual cycle of 'becoming,' and delineates the path to liberation through an understanding of the true nature of existence coupled with an acceptance of equanimity. It underscores the imperative need to relinquish conditioned perceptions and beliefs to attain inner peace and tranquility.



Wisdom is Not a Placebo

The teachings of the Buddha do not advocate blind faith. Concepts such as gods or creators have no place in the lexicon of the Buddha.

Dhamma, the essence of these teachings, is presented as an agnostic, experiential path devoid of divine intervention. Wisdom, a personal accomplishment, is portrayed as an untransferrable quality, uninfluenced by any god or creator. Such concepts are likened to placebos, providing a sense of pleasure but lacking genuine transformative power. They function as mere remedies that seem effective only because users convince themselves of their efficacy.

Wisdom, denoted by the *Pali* term '*panna*,' emerges directly from the *dhammanuvatti*'s personal insight into the true nature of things. It is emphasized that wisdom transcends verbal expression, arising from silence and growing spontaneously. Unlike the noise of dualistic conceptual thinking, wisdom unfolds in the quietude of contemplation. Through silence, one gains a profound understanding of the true nature of all conditioned phenomena, embracing the concept of *yatha-bhuta*.

This text underscores the experiential nature of wisdom and rejects the idea that it can be obtained through external sources or divine intervention. Instead, wisdom is presented as an internal process, cultivated through direct experience and observation of reality. By attaining this wisdom, individuals can deepen their understanding of the conditioned nature of phenomena and the world around them.



Satsang

In silence, observing, connected with others sharing the same experience. Wordless. The collective power of engaging in this silent meditation together is emphasized in *satsang*—a beautiful *Sanskrit* term originating from Indian Hindu concepts, now possessing a universally profound depth.

Satsang literally translates to '*coming together in truth*' or, more succinctly, '*being together in truth*.' Truth, defined as that which is real and truly exists (*P. yatha-bhuta*), encompasses all that is genuine.

Whenever an experience amplifies our understanding of Truth, it has the capacity to open our hearts and bring tranquility to our minds. Conversely, limitations or distortions of Truth, such as thoughts, fears, or judgments, constrict our hearts, leading to restlessness in the mind.

Satsang asserts that each individual possesses the inherent ability to distinguish Truth from illusion and encourages the journey of self-discovery to unearth this truth within oneself. The true teacher, described as the *Satguru*, is recognized as an internal guide residing within each person.

Satsang raises the contemplation of whether it is conceivable to transcend the illusions of delusion consistently and remain in a perpetual state of Truth. It suggests that with the right intention (*P. cetana*), individuals can align themselves with Truth continually. The aspiration is to move beyond the ephemeral forms of delusion and dwell in a blissful space that transcends the cycles of creation and passing. This space is aptly described as '*acalam sukham*,' signifying unwavering happiness or peace.

In summary, this text underscores the transformative influence of participating in *satsang*, where individuals collectively engage in silent meditation to connect with Truth. It prompts practitioners to seek Truth within themselves, highlighting the potential for profound peace and happiness by aligning with Truth and by transcending delusion.



Tanha

The Buddha imparts in the *Tanha Sutta*:³²³

• *Whoever is shackled by lust and indulges in all kinds of 'becoming' is under Mara's yoke and never reaches nibbana. He remains in samsara—the eternal cycle of birth and death.* •

In this *sutta*, the Buddha underscores the profound relationship between desire, suffering, and liberation. He declares that anyone ensnared by lust and entangled in various forms of 'becoming' remains bound by Mara's influence and cannot attain *nibbana*. Such an individual remains entwined in *samsara*, the perpetual cycle of birth and death.

Contrastingly, those who renounce desire, liberate themselves from the ceaseless cycle of 'becoming,' and eradicate mental poisons can achieve liberation in this very life, reaching the Other Shore—a metaphorical representation of transcending suffering and attaining awakening.

Desire, in this context, encompasses a broad spectrum, extending beyond mere sexual craving to include various forms of sensory gratification. This incorporates desires for food, drink, wealth, material possessions, fame, power, desired outcomes in different realms (political, religious, sports, etc.), aspirations for spiritual perfection, and even desires for existence or non-existence. It is these three 'tanhas'—cravings—for existence (*P. bhava tanha*), non-existence (*P. vibhava tanha*), and sensory gratification (*P. kamma tanha*)—that constitute the root cause of suffering or *dukkha*.

The Buddha's teachings underscore the understanding and cessation of desire as crucial for overcoming suffering and achieving liberation. By recognizing the impermanent and insatiable nature of desires and cultivating detachment, practitioners can break free from the cycle of suffering, attaining a state of peace and liberation. This teaching emphasizes the pivotal role of relinquishing desires that foster attachment and discontent, leading to the cessation of suffering.



Desire

Desire, with its seductive promises of pleasure, gratification, happiness, and contentment, is fundamentally deceptive. Despite these enticing pledges, desire ultimately gives rise to suffering and disappointment. The fulfillment of one desire merely begets another, perpetuating an endless cycle of craving and dissatisfaction.

The relentless nature of desire ensures its own perpetuation—increased desire leads to heightened frustration and greater misery. Lasting satisfaction can only be achieved through non-desire, transcending the ceaseless cravings of the mind.

The self-perpetuating quality of desire is emphasized, as each fulfilled desire begets a cascade of new desires, resulting in an unending pursuit of fulfillment. This process inflicts considerable collateral damage on our lives, fostering additional suffering and discontent.

Desire's nature ensures its own perpetuation; the more we desire, the more frustrated we become, and the greater our misery grows. Desire never brings lasting satisfaction; it only fuels the cycle of wanting and seeking more.

Desire is described as the vicious circle of *samsara*. *Samsara* refers to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, driven by attachment, desire, and ignorance. Unless we gain insight into the essential nature of desire and break free from its grip, we will continue to repeat the same patterns and experience the same cycle of suffering, symbolized by the metaphor of 'walking in circles.'

True liberation lies in understanding the illusory nature of desire and cultivating a state of non-desire. Genuine satisfaction can only be found through non-desire, by transcending the incessant cravings of the mind. By breaking free from the endless cycle of craving and finding contentment within ourselves, we can move towards a state of inner peace and liberation.



Loving-kindness (*P. metta*)

Loving-kindness is challenging to describe because the *Pali* word '*metta*' does not even exist in Western languages. Perhaps it can best be described as: universal love—specifically, wishing the best for ourselves and others.

Metta is love radiating in all directions, primarily towards ourselves and extending from there to all living beings.

Taking proper care of ourselves simply means listening to our deepest spiritual needs. Only when we are aware of our own needs can we understand and alleviate the needs of others.

Isolation and seclusion do not allow for *metta*; therefore, *metta* is essentially the identification of ourselves with all beings.

The pervasive, saturating awareness—and the resulting attitude—that everything is One. Extremes are not truly extremes since everything is ultimately one and the same energy. Extremes are two halves of the same organic process. The duality of extremes is solely created by our thinking. By the conceptual glasses we put on. When we realize—experience this, only deep compassion can grow. A profound compassion that leads you to appreciate and love every being.

Metta breaks through our negative thought patterns and strengthens the positive. *Metta* manifests itself through gentleness, warmth, and through your heart. In fact, *metta* is a direct result of the purification of our mind.

Nibbana cannot be realized without *metta*. Never ever. Just as stream-entry (*P. sotapatti*) cannot be faked.



Arising and Passing Away

Wisdom is the profound experience of the incessant unfolding and fading away in each passing moment, moment-to-moment—the very birth and death, the *raison d'être* of all phenomena, all *dhammas*, always and everywhere.

Your liberation resides in comprehending and embracing the eternal process of creation and passing.

True freedom from suffering and dissatisfaction arises through understanding and accepting this perpetual cycle. Recognizing the impermanence and transient nature of all phenomena grants insight into the authentic essence of reality. This understanding empowers practitioners to release attachments and expectations, the root causes of suffering. By wholeheartedly embracing the unending flow of creation and passing, one discovers liberation and inner tranquility.

Genuine wisdom transcends intellectual comprehension; it necessitates a direct experiential realization of the impermanence and flux of existence. It beckons practitioners to observe and contemplate the ever-changing nature of reality, fostering an acceptance of this eternal process. Through such understanding and acceptance, practitioners cultivate wisdom and liberate themselves from the attachments and illusions that give rise to suffering.



You Are the Flow

Awakening involves releasing attachments (*P. upadana*) to enter the flow of life. It entails letting go of identification with our 'story' and personal 'drama'—a 'desouling' of the components (*P. khandhas*) constituting the 'I,' formed by ignorance, desire, and aversion. It peels away the false 'self' feeling.

Enlightenment is described as 'desouling' the components forming the self, including form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Recognizing their impermanence dissolves the layers of false identity and the illusory self. Enlightenment results in confronting our transience and accepting it, transforming from a dogmatic belief in eternal existence to not-knowing.

Moreover, enlightenment signifies a shift from fixed knowing to open-minded not-knowing. True understanding transcends intellectual concepts, arising from openness and receptivity. By embracing not-knowing, one accesses deeper wisdom.

Awakening, or enlightenment, entails releasing attachments, allowing alignment with life's natural flow. Letting go of desires, beliefs, and identifications liberates us from personal stories and dramas, breaking the illusion of a fixed self. Rather than clinging to permanence, embracing impermanence leads to a deeper understanding of reality and freedom from dogmatic beliefs.



The Foundation of Our Practice

The focus of our practice need not be on the cleverest individual thought, the most clinically described doctrine, or the most beautifully decorated temple. Remarkably, the 'goal'—awakening—is not the decisive factor.

For '*the pure and undefiled knowledge of the Dhamma*' befalls the *dhammanuvatti* suddenly, spontaneously, unexpectedly, explicitly, and manifestly.

Sotapatti-magga-citta is termed the moment of consciousness of stream-entry—a singular conscious moment that transforms the practitioner into a stream enterer, a *sotapanna*. This moment marks a complete shift in their life, providing insight into the path (*P. magga nana*).

In the next moment, it offers the fruit, the result, the realization, the 'fulfillment' of this insight (*P. phala nana*). *Sotapatti* is the moment when '*the sword of wisdom flashes, and the light shines unhindered in the darkness*' (Hans van Dam). It's the point of no return, the instant when the *yogi* sheds old layers like a snake.

It's the moment that instantaneously transforms a *kalyana-puthujjana* into an *ariya*, reestablishing their lineage (their 'gotha'). They suddenly, unexpectedly, spontaneously, and manifestly shift from a worldlyling (*P. puthujjana*) to a 'noble person' (*P. ariya-puggala*). Consequently, they rise as a noble scion of the *Ariya*, essentially being born again. Reborn.

The 'awakening' itself is merely the apotheosis of a long spiritual development—the ultimate moment of 'breakthrough' and the culmination of 'waking up.' *Gotrabhu*.

The emphasis of the practice should lie in the journey toward it—the path ensuring that the causes and conditions leading to the 'goal' can be fulfilled: the *hetus* and the *paccayas*.



Rebirth is not a Goal

Rebirth is metaphorically used in the *suttas* to illustrate that all manifestations, phenomena, and things continuously arise and pass away in every moment. They originate and perish as part of an eternal process fueled by the same energy. Nothing remains unchanged even for a moment. Due to this inherent changeability and impermanence (*P. anicca*), manifestations lack stability and a fixed 'self'; they are selfless (*P. anatta*). Selflessness is their essential nature—*Tathata*.³²⁴

Any identification with the world of forms, phenomena, things, *dhammas* causes pain. One who identifies with such changeable, impermanent, and selfless manifestations brings upon themselves discontent (*P. dukkha*).

Upon entering the stream, the *dhammanuvatti*, sees and knows—*janami passami*—that their 'I' is but an illusion, a delusion. They recognize, acknowledge, and become one with it: '*I am not this 'I'*'. They understand that they do not exist as a separate, autonomous, eternal 'self.'

On the contrary, they are merely 'space' in which the manifestation of their 'I' arises and passes away. They know that the true nature of this 'I' is nothing but 'space,' akin to 'air,' or 'energy' where there is no distinction whatsoever between this 'I' and all other living beings.

Rebirth can and should never be a 'goal' for the practitioner. The only 'goal' for the practitioner to set is liberation from suffering in this life—self-realization, i.c. *nibbana*.

Liberation from *dukkha* is only possible when the *dhammanuvatti* destroys the perceptual conditioning (*P. anusaya*)³²⁵ by which they regard themselves and the world around them as permanent, comfortable, durable, and stable.

Realizing this liberation (*P. vimutti*) is a profound experience, a spiritual transformation—an experiential event (*P. paccanubhoti*) that becomes their supreme authority. It is an experience of wholeness, where all facets of existence intertwine, symbolized by Indra's net.

This experience cannot be adequately expressed in words and concepts.

In the *Pathamanibbana Sutta*,³²⁶ the Buddha describes it as follows:

• *There is that sphere, monks, where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air, no sphere of infinite space, no sphere of infinite consciousness, no sphere of nothingness, no sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, no this world, no world beyond, neither Moon nor Sun. There, monks, I say there is surely no coming, no going, no persisting, no passing away, no rebirth. It is quite without support, unmoving, without an object—just this is the end of suffering.* •

In summary, this text underscores the importance of realizing the selflessness of manifestations and the interconnected nature of existence, presenting liberation from suffering and the experience of a transcendent sphere as the ultimate aims of the spiritual journey.



The Nature of Form

Avoid fixating on the permanence of forms, whether material (things, phenomena) or mental (thoughts, ideas, opinions). Such identification fosters delusion, giving rise to ignorance, desire, and aversion—an illusion, in short.

Direct your attention solely to the process of creation and passing, the continuous flow to which all shapes are subject. Impermanence (*P. anicca*) is the primary feature of this process, from which suffering (*P. dukkha*) and non-self (*P. anatta*) emanate.

Wisdom (*P. panna*) is concealed within the ongoing observation of this process—found only in this continuous flow, not in the permanence of forms. The process of creation and passing is the sole constant; forms are ephemeral (*P. ekahika*)³²⁷—they arise and perish.

The Buddha termed this process '*tathata*' in Pali, meaning the suchness or thusness of things. *Anicca* represents the genuine, essential nature of phenomena, the true nature of all shapes. It is the inherent 'nature,' the law of nature, the cosmic law—*Dhammata*. This process serves as the foundation for all Buddhas, the core essence, the heart of the matter.

In summary, meditating on *anicca* underscores the importance of avoiding fixation on the permanence of forms and instead focusing on the continuous process of creation and passing.

It emphasizes impermanence as the essential nature of all phenomena and encourages the cultivation of wisdom through observing this process. The text portrays this process as the foundation of the teachings of all Buddhas, embodying the cosmic law and the true nature of existence.



Dhamma-Vinaya as Your Guideline

The *dhammanuvatti* must wholeheartedly adhere to the truth—the *Dhamma Vinaya*—and refrain from entangling themselves in trivial matters.

They should distance themselves from falsehoods and anything contrary to pure insight (*P. samma ditthi*). Drawing parallels between the *Dhamma* and religions is unnecessary, as *Dhamma* is not a religious doctrine but an agnostic path of insight and wisdom. Practitioners must personally discover and apply it through direct experience (*P. paccanubhoti*). Comparisons between the *Dhamma* and religions are futile, as their principles and foundations fundamentally differ.

Perceived similarities between the *Dhamma* and religions exist only in the imagination of those easily influenced. Such beliefs stem from dogmatic desires for conformity and flexibility of concepts, thriving on naivety and conditioned thinking. *Dhammanuvatti* should avoid such syncretism.

Metaphysical speculations and philosophical assumptions do not lead to liberation. This is why the Buddha remained silent when asked about such matters. The focus should be on maintaining the purity of the *Bhagavat's* principles—pure, unconditioned, and spontaneous. The teachings of the Buddha should not be tarnished, and there is no need to seek inspiration in false thought patterns. Insight cannot be found in Mara's playground; it only leads to distractions and ego-centered pursuits—an extremely favorable substrate for *dukkha*.

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*,³²⁸ the Buddha, on his deathbed, advises the present monks to consider the *Dhamma-Vinaya* as their sole teacher:

• *Let the Doctrine (P. Dhamma) and the Discipline (P. Vinaya) taught and expounded by me after my death be your teacher.* •

This underscores the importance of relying on the teachings and discipline established by the Buddha himself. Buddha's words in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* emphasize the significance of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* as the guiding principle for practitioners, highlighting the distinction between the *Dhamma* and religions while discouraging syncretism. Direct experiential practice is essential.



Awakening in Theravada Buddhism

The practitioner undergoes a profound transformation before and after awakening, with the pivotal difference lying in the realization of insight—the direct perception of the illusion and delusion that pervade existence.

Stream-entry (*P. sotapatti*), the initial stage of enlightenment, signifies the breakthrough on the path to liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*). It's crucial to understand that stream-entry is not an initiation or an esoteric practice. However, it marks a significant milestone, laying the groundwork for further cultivation and deepening of insight, leading to higher stages of enlightenment such as once-returner, non-returner, and arahantship. The ultimate goal of Theravada Buddhism is complete liberation from *samsara*, realized through these stages of enlightenment.

Stream-entry represents a personal breakthrough wherein one gains an experiential understanding of the nature of suffering, its cause, the possibility of cessation, and the path to liberation. This transformative moment propels the practitioner toward further progress on the path to enlightenment.

It is the moment when clarity spontaneously dawns regarding the true nature of things, manifesting if all necessary causes and conditions are fulfilled.

True understanding of the nature of things arises when desire and aversion have subsided. Cultivating equanimity allows one to see things in accordance with the concept of '*yatha-bhuta*'—seeing things as they truly are.

Awakening is depicted as a process of liberation, entailing the relinquishment of the sense of self and conditioned existence. It involves awakening from a state of conditioned ignorance, known as being a 'worldling' (*P. puthujjana*), and transforming into a 'noble person' (*P. ariya-puggala*).

Waking up represents a profoundly different way of experiencing the world. It involves gaining insight into the genuine nature of things and removing the metaphorical veil of ignorance that obscures true understanding.

This text underscores the transformative nature of awakening, emphasizing the shift from ignorance to insight and from a conditioned state to a liberated one. It suggests that through the process of waking up, one can perceive the world with clarity and understanding, transcending the illusions and delusions that hinder true realization.



Je Pense Donc Je Suis: A Buddhist Perspective

The French philosopher René Descartes expressed what could be considered a significant delusion: '*Je pense, donc je suis*' (translated: I think, therefore I am). In this statement, he equates 'fundamental being' with 'thinking,' creating a duality based on thought.

This perspective sharply contrasts with the teachings of the Buddha. While Descartes concludes with thinking, the Buddha emphasized the need to go *beyond* thinking, to the 'space' between two thoughts.

For those seeking to understand their true nature and perceive things as they really are (*P. yatha-bhuta*), the practitioner must transcend duality.

The concept of *anicca*, impermanence, becomes paramount. Everything undergoes change and eventually ceases to exist—body, perceptions, sensations, reactions, and consciousness. The call is to keenly observe this impermanence and draw meaningful conclusions from it.

This text critiques Descartes' famous statement, asserting that equating fundamental existence with thinking is a significant delusion. It contrasts this with the Buddha's teachings, emphasizing the necessity of going *beyond* thinking and duality to comprehend one's true nature. The metaphorical reference to the 'space' between two thoughts symbolizes transcending conceptual thinking.

In Buddhist teachings, especially within the context of mindfulness and meditation practices, the mind is often described as a continuous stream of thoughts. The untrained mind tends to move rapidly from one thought to another, creating a constant flow of mental activity. This flow of thoughts contributes to the illusion of a continuous and fixed self, reinforcing attachments and aversions, which are sources of suffering.

The 'space' between two thoughts represents a moment of stillness, a gap in the continuous stream of mental chatter. In this brief interval, the mind is not actively engaged in generating thoughts. It's a state of non-conceptual awareness, free from the usual proliferation of ideas, judgments, and mental commentary.

Why is this 'space' significant in the context of transcending conceptual thinking?

The constant stream of thoughts often involves dualistic thinking, where the mind categorizes experiences into pairs of opposites—like/dislike, good/bad, self/other. The 'space' between thoughts is a moment free from these dualities, offering a glimpse into a more holistic and interconnected understanding of reality.

In that momentary 'space,' there is a shift from conceptual thinking to direct experience. Instead of engaging with mental constructs, the practitioner beco-

mes attuned to the present moment, to the raw sensations and perceptions without the overlay of interpretation. This aligns with the Buddhist concept of *yathabhuta*, seeing things as they really are.

Since this 'space' is devoid of active thought, it provides an opportunity to break the cycle of attachment to ideas, beliefs, and self-identity. Attachment is a source of suffering in Buddhism, and by momentarily stepping out of the constant flow of thoughts, one can experience a sense of freedom from these attachments.

Mindfulness practices often involve cultivating awareness of the present moment. The 'space' between thoughts is a natural focus for mindfulness, and by paying attention to this space, practitioners develop insight into the impermanent and selfless nature of thoughts and mental phenomena.

In summary, the metaphorical 'space' between two thoughts symbolizes a moment of stillness and non-conceptual awareness. It represents a key aspect of mindfulness and meditation practices, providing a pathway to transcend dualistic thinking, directly experience the present moment, and gain insight into the nature of the mind and reality.

The concept of *anicca*, impermanence, is introduced as a fundamental principle. The text stresses that all aspects of existence, including the body, perceptions, sensations, reactions, and consciousness, are subject to constant change and eventual cessation. It encourages practitioners to observe this impermanence closely and derive insights from it.

This text underscores the disparity between Descartes' focus on thinking and the Buddha's teachings that advocate transcending thinking and duality. It introduces the crucial concept of impermanence and urges practitioners to keenly observe this impermanence for a deeper understanding of reality.



Structures

Avoid dedicating excessive time to constructing rigid frameworks, as they may not lead to authentic insight but rather contribute to wasted effort.

Transform your practice into a catalyst for spontaneous insight—an explosion of clarity. This transformation should unfold independently of financial resources, physical space, organizational structures, or hidden agendas. Discard the reliance on a governing authority or an overhead structure.

Let your practice naturally and spontaneously evolve.

Explanation:

This text advises against investing too much time in creating rigid structures, emphasizing that such frameworks may not foster genuine insight and can result in wasted effort. The metaphor of a 'spontaneous explosion of clarity' underscores the idea of cultivating wisdom in a sharp, penetrating, and natural manner.

It encourages practitioners to shift their focus from external factors such as money, space, and organizational structures, advocating for an unencumbered approach to practice. The text highlights the importance of being free from hidden agendas and hierarchical structures, promoting an open and exploratory journey toward insight. The emphasis is on allowing wisdom to naturally unfold without unnecessary constraints.

In summary, the text encourages a direct, unstructured approach to practice, where insight arises spontaneously. It discourages reliance on external structures and emphasizes the importance of personal wisdom, fostering freedom and exploration in one's spiritual journey.



Our Responsibility

The first two verses (*P. gathas*) of the *Dhammapada* convey a profound message:

- *Mind precedes thoughts, mind is their chief, their quality is made by mind, if with a base mind one speaks or acts, through that suffering follows him like a wheel follows the ox's foot.* ♪ ³²⁹
- *Mind precedes thoughts, mind is their chief, their quality is made by mind, if with pure mind one speaks or acts, through that happiness follows him like a shadow which does not depart.* ♪ ³³⁰

These verses serve as the spiritual testament of the Buddha, emphasizing that through our thoughts, we become the creators of our world.

The Buddha, through these verses, eliminates the need for any higher being or external force in the genesis and regulation of existence.

In the *Rohitassa Sutta*, ³³¹ he expounds that the world and its processes are contained within our own bodies, perceptions, and ideas.

The conclusion is clear: to any inquiry about the existence of a higher power, the Buddha's response is unequivocal—observe and discover for yourself. The answer is concealed deep within oneself, '*in this body, with its perceptions and ideas.*'

Contrary to metaphysical speculations, the Buddha doesn't attribute the origin of everything to a god or a creator. The Buddha rejects the notion of a creative being or an abstract divine concept like Brahman. Holding onto such speculations is considered counterproductive and obstructive to liberation from suffering.

For the Buddha, man is central, responsible for creating their own world through thoughts. Everything that man experiences is a product of their thoughts. By cultivating wholesome thoughts and actions, individuals create the causes and experience the results, shaping their own happiness or suffering. The Buddha dismisses the idea of an external force dispensing rewards or punishments, emphasizing personal agency and accountability.

In summary, the text underscores the Buddha's teachings on the power of thoughts, personal responsibility, and the rejection of external forces in the creation and regulation of existence. It encourages individuals to explore the answers within themselves and take ownership of their experiences in the pursuit of liberation from suffering.



Crossing to the Other Shore

Stream-entry and crossing to the Other Shore represent the pinnacle achievement for a spiritual practitioner in their life.

However, it's crucial to understand that stream-entry is not the terminus; it lacks finality. Instead, it serves as the initiation of something entirely new—a transformative process, a mutation, a birth, or, in Buddhist terms, a 're-birth' known as *Gotrabhu*. It involves 're-creation,' a new 'becoming,' paradoxically realized through the dissolution of the 'I' or ego. It signifies a profound shift in the practitioner's spiritual status and understanding.

Gotrabhu refers to a specific moment or stage of realization that occurs during the attainment of stream-entry (*P. sotapatti*). Stream-entry is considered the first of the four stages of enlightenment in the Theravada tradition, followed by once-returner, non-returner, and arahant. The term *gotrabhu* is derived from *Pali*, where '*gotra*' means lineage or family, and '*bhu*' means becoming. So, '*gotrabhu*' can be translated as '*becoming of the lineage*' or '*change of lineage*.'

During the experience of *gotrabhu*, the practitioner gains a deep and direct realization of the Four Noble Truths, which are central to Buddha's teachings. These truths encompass the nature of suffering (*P. dukkha sacca*), the origin of suffering (*P. samudaya sacca*), the cessation of suffering (*P. nirodha sacca*), and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*P. magga sacca*).

The moment of *gotrabhu* is marked by a significant reduction in defilements (mental impurities) and the breaking of certain mental fetters that bind one to the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*).

For the *dhammanuvatti*, stream-entry is considered a multifaceted marker—an indispensable signpost, a pivotal turning point, and a significant milestone in their journey.

As a signpost, stream-entry guides the *dhammanuvatti* in the direction they should follow, akin to a finger pointing at the moon. It signifies what *Dhamma* fundamentally means—an orientation towards ultimate truth and liberation.³³²

Functioning as a turning point, stream-entry marks the transformative shift from a worldlyling (*P. puthujjana*), driven by ignorance and craving, to a noble person (*P. ariya-puggala*). This profound transformation encompasses a change in perspective, values, and priorities, awakening the practitioner to deeper existential truths.

Crucially, stream-entry stands as a milestone, symbolizing the commencement of self-realization (*P. nibbana*) for every practitioner. Self-realization, considered the paramount goal in this life, involves the extinguishing of ignorance, desire, and hatred, leading to the ultimate liberation from suffering and the attainment of inner peace.

In summary, this text underscores the profound importance of stream-entry in the spiritual journey. It signifies a radical shift in perception, initiation of a transformative process, and a path leading towards self-realization and liberation.

Stream-entry marks the beginning of a profound journey, ultimately extinguishing ignorance and achieving freedom from suffering.



Be Your Own Master

Observe attentively. Look deeply. See phenomena in their complete perspective, considering their deepest essence with a forensic precision. Do not delegate decision-making in your personal name to others. You are your own master. Only you can liberate yourself from *dukkha*. Alone, you have the capacity to break the chains of ignorance, desire, and aversion. This responsibility is yours and yours alone.

Exercise caution.

Perceive the intentions behind all things. Scrutinize the processes governing our existence, recognizing the impermanent nature of phenomena and their ephemeral character. Observe their insubstantial features and the fabrications that surround them.

Identify the misleading influences diverting your thoughts. Recognize the widespread dissemination of misinformation. Observe how persistent falsehoods shamelessly pose as truth. Discern the underlying reasons, motives, drivers, and fallacies behind such occurrences.

Notice the inherent delusion and falsehoods within structures and established institutions that pervade your surroundings. Do not avert your gaze.

Observe, study, and inspect independently. Pursue the facts yourself. See things as they truly are—*yatha-bhuta*. Not as they are 'presented,' but as they are 'packaged,' cunningly dressed to 'trick' you.

Be your own master. Enter the stream. Only masters enter the stream.



Be a Privileged Witness

The Buddha emphasizes in numerous discourses that one must master the senses as an awakened person—a 'noble person' (*P. ariya-puggala*)—not as a worldling (*P. puthujjana*).

Throughout the *Pali Canon*, the Buddha provides clear instructions on this practice, detailed in discourses like the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*.³³³

In essence:

In your 'seeing,' let it be nothing but seeing. In your 'hearing,' nothing but hearing. In your 'smelling,' nothing but smelling. In your 'tasting,' nothing but tasting. In your 'feeling,' nothing but feeling. In your 'thinking,' nothing but thinking. Without stories, dramas, conditioned perception, fantasy, or the veil of automatic prejudices and learned habitual patterns. Without reaction. Spontaneously.

Let your seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking only be concentrated attention and equanimity—*sati* and *upekkha*. *Vipassana*.

Be a silent witness, an alert observer, an objective observer. Then, you will see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and think things as they really are—*yatha-bhuta*.

Stripped of ballast, devoid of concealing decor and decorum.

What will this devoted, alert, objective observer see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and think?

The true nature of all conditioned phenomena—the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*): impermanence (*P. anicca*); dissatisfaction (*P. dukkha*); non-substantiality, 'emptiness' (*P. anatta*).

When the observer realizes the *tilakkhana* within themselves, recognizing, acknowledging, and becoming one with it, they will inhale and exhale the *Dhamma*.

They will perceive in all things the process of arising and passing away—the natural cyclical process driving the universe. The Eternal Law of Nature. *Dhammo sanantano*.

Experiencing *Dhamma*, they will 'understand,' 'realize' (*P. paccanubhoti*) that there is no abrupt division between arising and passing away, life and death. They will directly 'feel' what the Buddha meant by the Unborn (*P. ajata*) and the Deathless (*P. amata*).

Like a Buddha, they will turn away from phenomena because they disappoint (*P. nibbida*). Becoming dispassionate (*P. viraga*), the *dhammanuvatti* will come to rest (*P. upasama*) and extinguish (*P. nibbana*).

Nibbana means the extinction of ideas, opinions, words, concepts—birth and death; existence and non-existence; come and go; good and evil; self and other..., The *Bhagavat* and *Mara*; *samsara* and *nibbana*. It is the congruence of everything with everything.

This is the end of suffering (*P. dukkha*). The end of agony and conditioned desire for 'becoming' (*P. bhava*). The definitive end of desire for 'rebirth.'

What finally remains is the 'source,' the 'blissful space' (*P. acalam sukham*)—'the vastness in which things exist, from which they arise, and in which they disappear.'

In the *Pathamanibbana Sutta*,³³⁴ the Buddha describes and utters this 'blissful space' in these words:

• *There is that sphere, monks, where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no air, no sphere of infinite space, no sphere of infinite consciousness, no sphere of nothingness, no sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, no this world, no world beyond, neither Moon nor Sun. There, monks, I say there is surely no coming, no going, no persisting, no passing away, no rebirth. It is quite without support, unmoving, without an object—just this is the end of suffering.* •



In This Body

In the *Rohitassa Sutta* of the *Pali Canon*, the Buddha clearly indicates where the practitioner—the *dhammanuvatti*—should direct their attention:

• *In this body, one meter and eighty-two centimeters long, with all its sensory impressions, thoughts, and ideas, the world is encapsulated—the origin of the world, the end of the world, and equally the path that leads to the cessation of the world.* •

In this body and in this mind, liberation and inner peace are realized. In the openness of this moment. Of every moment. And not in the conditioned dream world of forms, perceptions, sensations, *sankharas*, and consciousness. Not in our self-created stories and dramas of everyday life.

Inner peace—'*the peace within*'—and liberation—letting go of all that is unnecessary—are not to be found in some god; not in some religion or in some imaginary heavenly place. Let alone in this world. Even seeking is in vain: seeker and sought are one. *Santi* and *vimutti* are here. Nearby. In this body. In this moment.

It is in our meditation practice that we use our non-judgmental awareness to mindfully (*P. sati*) connect with everything that moves in our body (physically); with our sensations (mentally); with what unfolds in our mind and in the content of our mind, without adding our self-created stories and dramas to it.

This is acceptance. Accepting how we are. Not as we think we are, or are not. Or as we would like to be or not be. This is equanimity (*P. upekkha*). The freedom to not interfere, to not react. The freedom to only observe with equanimity, accepting what presents itself to us at every moment. As witnesses. As observers.

So be vigilant. Alert. With *Dhamma*—the natural, cosmic law—as your guide. And your own experience as a touchstone.

Thus, in every moment—with clear insight, with pure mindfulness, equanimous—we realize the *tilakkhana*.

In this body and this mind. In this way, this manifestation, this *nama-rupa*, becomes our direct path to liberation. *Ekayana magga*.



Reflections on the 'Self'

Any notion of a 'self' or 'I' is regarded as an illusion, a deceptive construct similar to the concept of Maya. To investigate this illusion, engage in persistent meditation on the idea of a 'self.' Continue this practice repeatedly and without interruption.

Through meditative practice, one may arrive at the realization that such efforts are futile. Regardless of attempts made, the mind becomes hopelessly entangled, spinning in confusion. This experience serves as evidence that the concept of a 'self' or an 'I' is ultimately fruitless.

Any endeavor to grasp or define the 'self' is in vain because it lacks true existence. The 'self' is characterized as a deceptive fabrication of the mind, akin to 'fake news.' This analogy suggests that the notion of a fixed and independent self is a result of delusion and misinformation.

The transformative insight gained from recognizing the illusory nature of the 'self' has the potential to bring about profound changes in one's life. By acknowledging the absence of a fixed and separate self, practitioners may experience a shift in perspective, reducing attachment to the concept of a personal identity.



Contemplation on Thoughts

Observe your thoughts, but resist the urge to become entangled in them. Merely witness their emergence and dissolution, shaping your world from one moment to the next. Acknowledge their potential to trigger rebirth (*P. bhava*) at any given moment, perpetuating the continuous cycle of *samsara*.

Witness how your thoughts give rise to desires, anger, laziness, restlessness, stress, doubts, and other hindrances—like heavy curtains obstructing the light or clouds veiling the sun in your mind.

Observe the transient and ephemeral nature of thoughts, recognizing their fleeting and illusory qualities. Above all, be mindful of how your thoughts can steer the course of your life if you are not vigilant and attuned to their intrinsic nature.

Realize that you are not defined by your thoughts.



Pali words

Every word in the *Pali Canon* serves as a wellspring for meditation, capable of quenching the thirst for boundless wisdom and compassion in the *dhamma-nuvatti*, piercing the practitioner's heart like a profound arrow.

Consider each word as a step on the Way, a stepping stone toward Awakening, a route to *Buddhankura*. Observe these words meticulously, savoring each one. Allow them to resonate in your being, incorporating and integrating them, penetrating and realizing them—experiencing *pativedha*.³³⁵

In this way, Buddha's thoughts become your thoughts, His words become your words, His deeds become your deeds—a template embossed in your heart.

Calm your mind with these words: • *Deep is the Dhamma, immeasurable, elusive as the sea.* •

Attain liberation and inner peace through this experiential journey.



The Emptiness of Gods

In his profound exploration of human suffering, the Buddha delved into the understanding of *dukkha* (*P. dukkha sacca*), the cause of *dukkha* (*P. samudaya sacca*), its cessation (*P. nirodha sacca*), and the path leading to liberation (*P. magga sacca*), deliberately steering clear of discussions on divine existence or otherworldly intervention. Instead, he maintained a contemplative silence, underscoring the importance of self-reflection.

Essentially, the Buddha regarded gods as products of the human imagination. He observed that, throughout history, no god had transcended time, and, according to their creators, gods lacked a permanent, separate self—fading away and disappearing at their zenith, akin to humans.

Just like humans, no god is destined for eternity. Throughout each kalpa, ³³⁶ gods, like all other phenomena, manifest as extremely ephemeral and transient.

Crucially, the Buddha did not consider gods as entities to identify with, cling to, or rely on for liberation. Gods, in his view, obscured the reality of things and veiled the true nature of existence—*Yatha-bhuta*. They did not serve as a path to liberation; instead, they were viewed as illusions that needed recognition and dismantling.

For the diligent practitioner, the task is to clearly understand and dispel this deceptive foundation, recognizing the illusory nature of gods and focusing on the genuine causes of suffering and the path to its cessation.



Vipassana and the Middle Way

Vipassana does not promote the withdrawal of practitioners, including monks or nuns, from society or 'leaving the house.' Instead, it empowers practitioners to skillfully navigate the challenges of everyday life with calm and balance.

Renouncing the world is deemed unnecessary; the key lies in dispelling ignorance (*P. avijja*) and relinquishing attachment (*P. upadana*)—the constant fueling of desires (*P. upadhi*)³³⁷ for the sensory world and the craving for 'becoming'.

The practice involves being attentively observant at every moment, returning to oneself without renunciation but also without succumbing to desire. It entails transcending the dichotomy between renunciation and lust. This is the Middle Way—*majjhima patipada*³³⁸—that the Buddha advocated.

In essence, *Vipassana* encourages a mental and spiritual shift rather than physical withdrawal from society. The path involves letting go of attachments and desires while fully engaging with the world.

Through cultivating mindfulness and observance, practitioners can navigate life's fluctuations without being driven by cravings and without falling into the extremes of renunciation or indulgence. The Middle Way represents a balanced approach to living, fostering wisdom and liberation.



Mindful Breathing and Impermanence

Experience your breathing as a holistic, whole-body process—not merely the inhalation and exhalation into the lungs. Observe with precision, feeling the constant flow of energy coursing through your body, intricately connected to the circulation of blood and the vibrancy of your nerves. Immerse yourself in the awareness of the entire body with each breath.

Identify your inhalation with the term 'arising' and your exhalation with 'passing away.' Direct your meditation exclusively to these aspects. Delve into the experience of impermanence, observing the transience with both mindfulness and equanimity. In this way, experience *anicca* within yourself.

Extend this awareness to the transience of all forms. Witness impermanence in everything, recognizing the arising and passing away in every form and content. Observe the birth and death process. This is the essence of *Dhamma*—the cosmic law of nature.



Cultivating Awareness

Awareness is synonymous with '*being alert*,' and '*being awake*.' It involves a keen observation of all sensory activities—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking. This awareness extends to ourselves and our surroundings, transcending personal stories and dramas.

Experience everything as an observer, a witness. This mode of awareness allows us to 'be' without succumbing to constant '*becoming*' (*P. bhava*). Often, we find ourselves lost in the conditioned dream world or entangled in habitual patterns—the Buddha termed this as '*turning in circles*' or *samsara*.

True control over the mind, calming its fluctuations, and seeing things as they are (*P. yatha-bhuta*) come only through continuous awareness, attentiveness, and alertness. The ephemeral, unsatisfactory, and empty nature of all phenomena (*P. tilakkhana*) becomes apparent through this practice—both within ourselves and in the external world. Understanding these characteristics forms the foundation of wisdom (*P. panna*).

Referencing the *Maha Satipatthana Sutta*,³³⁹ the Buddha presents a meticulous guide to draw attention through mindfulness. This *sutta* is described as an unparalleled path leading to the purification of beings, the transcendence of sorrow and worry, the cessation of suffering (*P. dukkha*) and fear, and the realization of *nibbana* through the fourfold establishment of mindfulness (*P. satipatthana*).

In essence, this *sutta* aligns seamlessly with the core teachings of the Buddha, emphasizing the purification of beings and liberation from suffering. Consider incorporating this comprehensive guide into your spiritual toolkit for personal growth and realization.



The Gradual Path to Awakening

To awaken is to look *beyond* the walls—starting with the small ones and progressing to the larger ones until there are no more walls, and finally, no more 'I.' The relinquishing of rites and rituals culminates in entering the stream, known as *sotapatti*.

However, sudden awakening is not unprepared or accidental, as highlighted in the *Uposatha Sutta*:³⁴⁰

• *Na ayatakeneva annapativedho—there is no unprepared, sudden penetration of liberating insight.* •

Penetrating insight requires effort, a result of the practitioner's arduous and solitary struggle with themselves.

Cultivating the soil, akin to plowing, sowing, and weeding, is a metaphor for diligent work, as described in the *Pali suttas*' concept of '*kasi*'—ploughing the field.

The Buddha outlines a systematic, seven-step progress in the *Ganaka-moggallana Sutta*:³⁴¹ (1) morality; (2) guarding the senses; (3) moderation in food; (4) vigilance; (5) mindfulness; (6) overcoming the Five Hurdles; (7) realization of the *jhanas*.

While building the 'palace' of awakening takes time, entering the stream is sudden and unexpected. Transformation occurs when conditions are optimal, rather than being a deliberate action.

As Hans van Dam notes:

• *When the sword of wisdom flashes, the way is clear and the light in the darkness can shine unhindered.* •



Duality

Duality is the natural state of the mind, namely perceiving phenomena as opposites, as dichotomies of each other.

This duality allows us to organize 'our' sensory world, to give it 'meaning.' As a result, we consider ourselves as subjects and the world as an object. However, duality is not the true nature of things.

Duality is merely a delusion, an illusion. It represents the mistaken view of seeing duality as 'real and the unity of everything-with-everything as unreal. Duality is a conditioned error in thinking. *Miccha ditthi*.

When you renounce duality, you will attain inner peace. In other words, when you transcend the forms (beyond your body) and become one with everything, you will find tranquility.



Observing Impermanence in All Phenomena

Direct your attention to the profound truth of impermanence (*P. anicca*) that underlies all forms and phenomena. Witness the transient nature of every manifestation, observing their arising and passing away. Contemplate the perpetual process of creation and dissolution, akin to waves rising and returning to the great ocean, clouds emerging and vanishing, and the succession of generations with their origin and passing.

Through careful observation, recognize that everything perceived is impermanent, volatile, and ephemeral. Nothing remains static. Acknowledge your integral part in this perpetual process. Realize that impermanence is the inherent law of nature, challenging any notion of firmness as a grotesque lie. Observe how everything undergoes constant transformation and mutation in each moment, while nothing is truly lost.

Accepting impermanence with equanimity is fundamental to *Dhamma*—the teachings of the Buddha. This perspective becomes the distinguishing factor between one who meditates and one who does not, between a worldling (*P. puthujjana*) and a noble follower (*P. ariya-puggala*).

Embracing the truth of impermanence in this way allows for a deeper understanding of existence. By cultivating this perspective, practitioners can develop a more balanced and insightful outlook on life.



About illusion

A clear distinction exists between the reality of the 'process' involving creation, existence, and passing away, and the illusion of a 'self.'

The process is not a delusion: all phenomena arise, exist momentarily, and perish when the required causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*) manifest. This process is an observable reality.

The illusion emerges when the 'worldling' (*P. puthujjana*) perceives phenomena as stable, as having eternal duration. The *puthujjana* is reluctant, incapable, or unwilling to see that phenomena are 'empty' of stability, 'empty' of essence. They are 'selfless' (*P. anatta*), undergoing continuous change from one moment to the next.

Consider this: you are not the same as when you began reading this sentence. You are a flow of constant transformation, a manifestation of mutating energy. You represent an indefinable space where everything arises, briefly exists, and then passes away—without firmness, without essence.

Within that space, everything moves, transforms, and resonates. This space is an elongated echo extending back to the big bang and beyond.



Without 'Self'

In the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*,³⁴² the Buddha expounds:

• *Monks, the khandhas are without self. Form (P. rupa) is without self. Perceptions (P. sanna) are without self. Sensations and feelings (P. vedana) are without self. Sankharas (P.) are without self. Consciousness (P. vinnana) is without self.* •

In reality, all the components (*P. khandhas*) that compose a person are characterized by mutability, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness—these are their three inherent characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*).

Particularly, the last characteristic demands understanding. They are selfless (*P. anatta*), devoid of 'self' or 'I.' They lack a core of existence, devoid of substance. This is their inherent 'nature' (*P. sabhava*).³⁴³

The emptiness of any essence is not a punitive measure or fate. On the contrary, selflessness presents a significant opportunity. Their instability allows for spontaneous transformation. After all, things can only transform if they lack a core essence. *Anatta*—the insight that nothing exists independently and that nothing endures—is the primary antidote to attachment (*P. upadana*) and the disruptive emotions stemming from it.

Everything that is subject to change, unsatisfactory, and selfless should be contemplated as '*this is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.*'

In the *Dhatuvibhanga Sutta*,³⁴⁴ the Buddha elucidates:

• *Bhikkhu, 'I am' is a conceiving; 'I am this' is a conceiving; 'I shall be' is a conceiving; 'I shall not be' is a conceiving; 'I shall be possessed of form' is a conceiving; 'I shall be formless' is a conceiving; 'I shall be non-percipient' is a conceiving'. Conceiving is a disease. Conceiving is a tumor; conceiving is a barb. By overcoming all conceiving, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace.* •

This arises from right understanding, from *samma ditthi*. The significance of right understanding and the practical implications of selflessness are underscored, encouraging practitioners to perceive phenomena without attachment and to cultivate an existence without pride or assertiveness.

And remember: Everything that is not yours, that is not you, that is not 'self,' cannot be taken from you, must not be protected, justified, or excused. This is how selflessness manifests—an existence without pride, modest, non-assertive, without 'I.'



Right View (*P. samma ditthi*)

'*Samma Ditthi*' is a *Pali* term that translates to 'Right View'. It is the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is a fundamental teaching in Buddhism. The Noble Eightfold Path (*P. ariya atthangika magga*) is considered the path to the cessation of suffering and the achievement of enlightenment (*P. nibbana*).

Right View involves understanding the nature of reality including the Four Noble Truths, which are:

- Suffering (*P. dukkha sacca*): The understanding that life is inherently unsatisfactory and that suffering exists.
- The Cause of Suffering (*P. samudaya sacca*): The recognition that craving and clinging lead to the arising of suffering.
- The Cessation of Suffering (*P. nirodha sacca*): The realization that suffering can be brought to an end by letting go of craving and attachment.
- The Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*P. magga sacca*): The understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path as the way to end suffering.

Right View also encompasses the understanding of kamma: the Law of Cause and Effect (*P. paticca samuppada*), and the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence, suffering, and non-self (*P. tilakkhana*).

Right View provides a foundation for ethical and skillful living, guiding individuals on how to see and interpret the world in a way that leads to liberation from suffering.



The Buddha is a Teacher. Not a Prophet.

The Buddha is not a prophet, god, or divine being; he is a human—an Exceptionally Great Man, a *Mahapurisa*. A Wise One. A *Muni*. A Teacher. A Self-realized Master. A Fully Awakened Noble Man. A *Sammasambuddha*.

The teaching of the Buddha—the *Buddhasasana*—is, therefore, the instruction of a man, intended for all who 'have no sand on their eyelids.' It is guidance for those who seek self-realization through attentive and equanimous observation of phenomena.

The Buddha never claimed that his awakening revealed divine mysteries. Describing his awakening to the Five Ascetics in Sarnath, he spoke of discovering great freedom of heart and mind: complete liberation from the discontent (*P. dukkha*) brought by desire (*P. tanha*).

He achieved self-realization through personal observation, forensic examination of his body and mind, and trial & error. Out of compassion, he directs us to awaken from our ignorance, desire, and aversion.

This teaching is not rooted in hearsay. The Buddha himself experienced and taught what he had realized. His personal human experience forms the foundation of his teachings, emphasizing the experiential and pragmatic nature of Buddhism. The Buddha's insights were not based on abstract philosophy or metaphysics but on his direct experience and understanding of the nature of existence and the path to liberation.

Several aspects contribute to this understanding:

— The Buddha's Enlightenment: Before becoming enlightened, the Buddha engaged in profound contemplation and meditation to understand the nature of existence, suffering, and the path to liberation. His enlightenment, under the Bodhi tree, is described as a direct and transformative experience.

— The Four Noble Truths: The Buddha's teachings are encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths, reflecting his insights gained through personal experience—suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering.

— The Middle Path: The Buddha's emphasis on the Middle Path, avoiding extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, is based on his own experimentation and discovery during his ascetic practices. His realization that a balanced and moderate approach leads to awakening is a result of personal exploration.

— The *Kalama Sutta*: In the *Kalama Sutta*,³⁴⁵ the Buddha encourages discernment through personal experience, direct observation, and understanding, rejecting reliance on hearsay, tradition, or authority. This reinforces the importance of individual investigation and experience.

— *Ehipassiko* (Come and See): The Buddha invites practitioners to 'come and see,' encouraging personal exploration and verification of his teachings through their own experience.

— *Anatta* (No-Self): The teaching of *anatta* (no-self) underscores the impermanent and conditioned nature of phenomena, including the self. The Buddha's realization of the absence of a permanent, unchanging self is foundational to his teachings on the nature of reality.

Avoiding dogmatism, the Buddha teaches only '*Dhamma*,' the law of nature, as things 'as they are,' *Yatha-bhuta*.

To awaken, one must observe this reality personally, with their own senses. The Buddha can only point out the direction. Mere 'belief' in his words cannot lead to awakening.

In practice, the Buddha transparently says to anyone who wants to hear his message: if you seek freedom from suffering (*P. dukkha*), follow my example. Come and see (*P. ehipassiko*) how I did it. Watch yourself. Don't limit yourself to 'hearing' alone (*P. sutamaya panna*). Nor to intellectual understanding (*P. cintamaya panna*). Follow my path and experience for yourself how my teaching leads to liberation and inner peace (*P. bhavanamaya panna*). Waking up is a personal assignment.

The Buddha showed a unique path from ethics (*P. sila*) and meditation (*P. samadhi*) to wisdom (*P. panna*), emphasizing the Middle Path (*P. majjhima patipada*) that avoids all extremes.

His sole purpose was to free us from our suffering (*P. dukkha*)—the permanent dissatisfaction we carry as humans. He defined suffering (*P. dukkha sacca*), its cause (*P. samudaya sacca*), its termination (*P. nirodha sacca*), and the path leading to its termination (*P. magga sacca*). These are the Four Noble Truths (*P. cattari ariya saccani*). This is the Buddha's legacy—nothing more and nothing less. A life mission.



Enlightenment as Liberation through Letting Go

Enlightenment is synonymous with the profound art of letting go. This involves, on one hand, diminishing our attachment to phenomena that bring pleasure and, on the other hand, minimizing aversion to those we find unpleasant. It is a profound realization that neither pleasurable nor displeasurable experiences possess intrinsic qualities capable of truly dictating our happiness or unhappiness.

Letting go signifies transcending duality, relinquishing conceptual frameworks, and dissolving the illusion of a fixed self. It is a gradual process, akin to melting away, dissolving into the continuous flow of energy where phenomena perpetually arise, exist, perish, and re-emerge: *anicca, dukkha, anatta*.

Furthermore, letting go extends beyond releasing the pursuit of perfection and refraining from striving for specific mental states, including the aspiration for inner peace or *nibbana*. Recognizing that these pursuits can also become illusory, it is crucial to go *beyond* any residual differences between the seeker and the sought-after. True letting go involves transcending such distinctions.

In essence, enlightenment is about liberating oneself from attachments, duality, and the illusion of a permanent self. It involves acknowledging the impermanence, dissatisfaction, and selflessness inherent in all phenomena. Letting go encompasses a profound understanding of the nature of reality, fostering a path towards genuine liberation.



Embrace Reflection: Be a mirror

Appearances can be deceiving, and narratives often fall short of revealing the complete truth. Resist the temptation to color reality with assumptions, suspicions, or speculations. Steer clear of biases and refrain from being confined by unwavering convictions.

Instead of passing judgment, embody the essence of a mirror. A mirror reflects pure reality, untainted by the fictitious narratives we weave. Observe reality as it truly is—*yatha-bhuta*.

This mirrors the teaching to directly perceive reality without distorting filters. By cultivating a mirror-like awareness, we can witness and comprehend things as they are, unburdened by personal biases or preconceived ideas.

Such an approach encourages an open-minded and unbiased stance toward reality, aligning with the Buddhist principle of observing things as they truly exist.



Detachment

In the *suttas*, the term '*viveka*' appears in various contexts, presenting challenges in translation. *Viveka*, a *Pali* word, can be interpreted as detachment, loneliness, seclusion, or distinction. However, grasping the full meaning of the term requires additional clarification.

According to the *Niddesa*,³⁴⁶ three dimensions of detachment are associated with '*viveka*': physical detachment (*P. kaya-viveka*), mental detachment (*P. citta-viveka*), and detachment from all substrates of 'becoming' (*P. upadhi-viveka*).

Kaya-viveka involves seeking seclusion and solitude, liberating oneself from the allure of sensory objects by enhancing the protection of the sense gates.

Citta-viveka pertains to the inner detachment of the mental state from sensory experiences, cultivating internal resilience against the impact of external stimuli.

Upadhi-viveka encompasses detachment from the roots of existence, breaking free from the cycle of rebirth (*P. samsara*) and the continuous process of 'becoming' (*P. bhava*). It represents a severance from factors contributing to the perpetuation of rebirth and the emergence of new existences.

These three forms of detachment do not operate in isolation but function cohesively. They are interconnected elements of a unified endeavor, resembling steps on a ladder or ranks of a shared path. Each facet of detachment contributes to the overarching journey toward liberation and the cultivation of insight.

Together, these forms of *viveka* constitute an ascending line or ladder, guiding practitioners towards freedom and liberation. This ladder of insight signifies progressive development and deepening detachment, both externally and internally, leading to a profound understanding of reality and the cessation of suffering.



Dhamma and the Buddhas in Theravada Buddhism

Buddhadhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, was not, as per the Master himself, a 'new' insight. The Buddha acknowledged that his teachings originated from following 'a very ancient path, already trod in the past by those who were perfectly enlightened.'

The Buddha did not claim any originality for the revelation of the *Dhamma*. Instead, he stated that he had not 'invented' this understanding but had only 're-discovered' it through his own experience.

In his unique way, the Buddha explained and clarified this ancient path without altering the fundamental basis of the doctrine and the path. Consequently, the Buddha described his teachings as both '*universal and timeless*' and '*never heard before*.'

As a fully awakened human being, he did not claim exclusivity. His disciples spoke of Buddhas of the past, present, and future teaching the universal *Dhamma*.

In the *Mahapadana Sutta*,³⁴⁷ the Buddha concretely shares the biographies of some Buddhas who preceded him. He concluded this discourse by saying, '*In this fortunate period of time, I have arisen in this world as a fully awakened Buddha*.'

Hence, Buddha Sakyamuni, the Muni, the Enlightened One of the Sakya clan, is referred to as '*the Awakened One of our time*' (*P. kalpa*).

Awakening is not the exclusive trademark of one person. Each of us carries within us this ability to awaken. Our task is to nurture this lotus flower bud, both within ourselves and with others. Everything and everyone are interconnected, like Indra's pearl net.³⁴⁸



Samatha and Vipassana in Theravada Buddhism

Samatha is the cultivation of mental calm and tranquility. It encourages practitioners to enter a state of serene stillness. However, it's essential to recognize that self-realization (*P. nibbana*) is not exclusively attained through indulging in this peaceful tranquility. For true self-realization, the practitioner must observe phenomena, especially the mind/body complex, as they truly are: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. Simultaneously, cultivating equanimity is crucial—accepting these observations with impartiality and steadfastness. This aspect of observation and acceptance is known as *vipassana*.

The practice of *vipassana* involves being fully present and attentively observing everything that arises in one's experience. It requires becoming a witness to one's thoughts, sensations, and feelings without attachment or aversion. Equanimity (*P. upekkha*) is the quality of maintaining calm determination, steadfastness, and imperturbability, regardless of the thoughts and experiences that arise. It is the ability to accept everything that presents itself with equanimity.

In the state of just awareness and observation, one becomes a witness to the unfolding of reality. This witness is characterized by accepting equanimity, allowing everything to be as it is without resistance or judgment. This state of equanimity is described as the real moment of silence, where there is a sense of emptiness that paradoxically feels infinitely full. It is a silence that surrounds and embraces the practitioner, saturating their being.



Buddhadhamma

The teachings of the Buddha (*P. buddhadhamma*) do not advocate blind faith or sectarianism. They are not built on commandments, prohibitions, or rules, nor do they involve a belief in an obscure, menacing, or tyrannical god who punishes. Instead, the teachings are rooted in *Dhamma*—the timeless Truth and the Law of Nature—*Dhammo sanantano*.

According to the *Tathagata*, the only path to Self-realization lies in thorough self-study, a deep understanding of oneself. This process involves delving into the depths of self-awareness and then transcending this concept of 'self.' It requires attentiveness, alertness, and mindfulness, encapsulated by *Satipatthana*—the four foundations of mindfulness. Awakening unfolds through this direct and unadorned exploration of personal experience.

In essence, enlightenment is not achieved through blind adherence to external factors but through direct and genuine self-exploration. The teachings emphasize a path of self-inquiry and personal exploration, promoting an understanding of the law of nature, *Dhamma*.



The Metaphor of the Ocean

• *The river needs to take the risk of entering the ocean because only then will fear disappear, because that's where the river will know it's not about disappearing into the ocean, but of becoming the ocean.* ♣ (Khalil Gibran)

Khalil Gibran's poetic expression resonates with the profound metaphor frequently employed by the Buddha in the *Pali Canon* to illuminate fundamental truths about existence and reality. This metaphor stands as a potent symbol encapsulating the core principles of *Dhamma*.

Understanding this metaphor requires adopting the perspective of a stream-enterer, one who has attained a certain level of spiritual insight. The stream-enterer discerns that concepts such as 'birth' and 'death' are products of an ignorant mind, illusions crafted by consciousness seeking a separate and permanent identity within the whole. This profound realization leads to an understanding that there is no independent, eternal self or soul (*P. atta*).

From the perspective of a stream-enterer, 'birth' and 'death' are not metaphysical or esoteric events but ordinary processes of creation and decay, arising from specific causes and conditions. This cyclical process represents the suchness of things, the law of nature, *Dhamma*. It involves the continual arising and passing away of phenomena, with nothing being destroyed—only transformed. Metaphorically, this transformation is akin to 'rebirth.'

The metaphor extends to the dissolution of the components that constitute the concept of 'self.' These components dissolve into the all-encompassing space where phenomena arise and pass away, undergoing a cycle of recycling and manifestation in various forms. This process aligns with the Buddha's teaching in Sarnath, emphasizing that everything subject to arising is subject to decay.

The metaphor of the ocean underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. It signifies the absence of duality between phenomena, illustrating a holistic understanding where the great exists within the small, and the small exists within the great. This profound realization of impermanence and interconnectedness leads to spiritual awakening and the development of wisdom and compassion.

In essence, the metaphor of the ocean in the Buddha's teachings symbolizes the cyclical nature of arising and passing away, the interconnectedness of all phenomena, and the impermanence that characterizes existence. It serves as a powerful representation of the transformative insights of *Dhamma* and the path to spiritual awakening.



Wisdom Requires Neither Words Nor Concepts

Wisdom (*P. panna*) transcends the confines of words and concepts, arising from the profound stillness within, untouched by the dualistic noise of verbal and conceptual thinking.

In the sanctuary of silence, the miracle of existence unfolds its voice, allowing an intimate encounter with the true nature of things. This direct experience is encapsulated in the Pali term '*Yatha-bhuta*,' inviting us to perceive things exactly as they are.

True wisdom is not an intellectual pursuit or a collection of knowledge; rather, it is the lived realization of the continuous process of arising and passing in every moment. It entails an awareness of the cyclical nature of creation and decay, a dance of impermanence that relinquishes attachment without loss. This intrinsic characteristic defines the true nature of things, omnipresent and unbound.

To grasp wisdom is to recognize this ceaseless process within oneself—to acknowledge, align, and become one with it. It is a deep, intuitive understanding that transcends theoretical knowledge. Wisdom unveils the impermanent, interconnected essence of all phenomena, prompting us to harmonize with the natural flow of existence.

In essence, wisdom emerges from the silence within, beckoning us to directly experience the continuous unfolding of existence and gain profound insight into the impermanent and interconnected nature of all phenomena. True wisdom is not a destination but a journey of aligning with the innate rhythm of life.

In Theravada Buddhism, understanding impermanence is crucial to wisdom. Practitioners are encouraged to go *beyond* recognizing impermanence to understanding the causes and conditions that give rise to it. The concept of conditionality emphasizes the interdependence and interconnectedness of all phenomena, stating that everything arises due to specific conditions and factors.

The path to liberation in Theravada Buddhism involves a deep investigation into the nature of reality and the causes of suffering. Knowing and understanding the causes of impermanence and interpreting phenomena in terms of their causes align with the broader teachings of Theravada Buddhism.



Silence

Silence cultivates attentiveness and even-temperedness in every moment, facilitating a deep experiential immersion in the present, especially when on your *zafu*.³⁴⁹ Through silence, you can perceive reality as it truly is, devoid of personal illusions or misconceptions.

In the realm of silence, the sacred process of impermanence—*anicca*—becomes apparent. This observation leads to a profound realization: '*everything subject to creation is subject to decay*.'³⁵⁰ This understanding aligns with the core Buddhist teaching that all conditioned phenomena are inherently impermanent.

Silence serves as a gateway to the Unborn (*P. ajata*), the Deathless (*P. amata*), the Unconditioned (*P. asankhata*) where an awareness of the interconnected oneness of all things emerges. This interconnectedness resonates with the concept of *paticca samuppada*, emphasizing the dependent origination of existence.

Within the embrace of silence, your original face reflects the essence of your Buddha nature, suggesting that within the quietude of silence, one can authentically connect with their inherent purity and spontaneity. That is our personal responsibility. Therefore: discover this silence.

The Buddha states in the *Dhammapada*:³⁵¹

• *Purity and impurity are personal responsibilities. No one else can make you pure.* •

The final invitation to '*discover this silence*' serves as a call to action, encouraging practitioners to actively seek and embrace moments of stillness and tranquility for a deeper understanding and experience of their true nature.



Desire

Before we embark on our analysis, let's establish the concept of 'desire.' We start with a fundamental truth: life is suffering, the First Noble Truth (*P. dukkha sacca*). The cause of our suffering is ignorance of the true nature of things (*P. avijja*), leading to desire (*P. tanha*) and hatred (*P. vyapada*), encapsulating the Second Noble Truth (*P. samudaya sacca*). Ignorance, desire, and hatred are referred to as 'the three poisons' (*P. kilesas*).

Now, let's initiate our analysis. Desire is the craving for mental or physical objects that promise satisfaction. This desire binds us to the cycle of becoming (*P. samsara*), making it an 'unwholesome root' (*P. akusala mula*) as it harbours future suffering.

In the *Girimananda Sutta*,³⁵² the Buddha leaves no room for ambiguity regarding 'desire.' Concisely, he declares:

• *Tanhaya mulam kanatha—Dig up the root of desire.* •

To attain liberation, the practitioner must strongly and passionately wish for the elimination or eradication of the factors or obstacles preventing liberation. Only through this can one free oneself from *dukkha*, marking the Third Noble Truth (*P. nirodha sacca*).

The Buddha understands the subtle poison that is 'desire'—stealthy, insidious, and sneaky. It's no surprise that Mara, our alter ego, extensively exploits it to mislead us. Any desire, even with the noblest intentions, obstructs our spiritual progress. Hence, the Buddha's succinct command: '*Dig up the root of desire*,' meaning obliterate desire to its core.³⁵³

Desire and liberation are antithetical, signifying their status as opposing or incompatible concepts.

This necessitates clarification on both desire (*P. tanha, lobha*) and liberation (*P. vimutti*).

The *suttas* delineate three types of desire: sense desire (*P. kama-tanha*); desire for 'becoming' or 'eternal existence' (*P. bhava-tanha*); and desire for non-existence.

According to the *Maha Niddesa*, there are two forms of liberation:

→ Liberation from sensual desire (*P. kama-tanha*). Sensory desire encompasses two types: desire for physically pleasurable, material objects (*P. vatthu-kama*), e.g., sexual desire, and desire for mentally pleasant, spiritual objects, i.e., thoughts about desiring spiritual things (cf. *infra*). This could be termed a spiritual defilement (*P. kilesa-kama*), e.g., the desire for power or entry.

→ Liberation from the cycle of creation and decay (*P. samsara*).

Only by liberating oneself from sense desire can one free themselves from *samsara*. This is a sine qua non condition: without liberation from sense desire, liberation from the cycle of *samsara* is impossible.

And now, the most crucial aspect—the Fourth Noble Truth (*P. magga sacca*): which path should the practitioner take to free oneself from *dukkha*?

The practitioner must liberate themselves from the two afore mentioned forms of sense desire: *vatthu-kama* and *kilesa-kama*.

The practice involves attentively observing sense desire (*P. kama vitakka*). The practitioner must see through its impermanence, emptiness, and lack of substance—the three characteristics of all conditioned things (*P. tilakkhana*). Following the proven method of drawing attention (*P. satipatthana*), one must consciously observe what is happening in their mind in the present moment; then 'name'/'notate'/'register' this desire—to name is to tame—and let it go without further reaction of desire (*P. sankhara*).

Registering offers clarity: by 'de-selfing' the phenomenon (→ eliminating an 'I,' its stories, and dramas), one sanitizes this desire. It becomes clear what transient, changeable, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial desire one allows oneself to be deceived by.

The destruction of the root of desire is an imperative task for the practitioner to attain liberation since any desire, even with the highest intention (*P. cetana*), impedes and obstructs spiritual progression.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya* ³⁵⁴ the Buddha stated:

• *Intention I tell you, is Kamma, one does Kamma by way of body, speech, and intellect.* •

Example: The deep desire of an advanced practitioner to enter the flow becomes an obstacle to liberation. It's a formidable but surmountable hurdle.

A *kalyanamitta* termed this her '*Ananda complex*,' a reference to Ananda, the Buddha's nephew, who served as his personal assistant for the last 25 years of the Buddha's life but only attained *nibbana* just before the commencement of the 1st Buddhist Council. Ananda's deep desire to become an arahant was—according to the scriptures—cited as the cause for this.

So, unearth that unwholesome root of desire. Annihilate it with persistence. Then, suddenly, 'see' the spontaneity of *Dhamma*. Witness this 'Process' in its ultimate magnificence.



Earth. Water. Fire. Air.

Impermanence is the key to insight: realizing that our suffering is not caused by impermanence itself but by our desire for permanence. The *dhammanuvatti* must recognize that desire lacks substantiality—it arises and perishes. True insight, true wisdom, lies in realizing within oneself that every form and experience is impermanent (*P. anicca*).

It involves recognizing in every moment that nothing is eternal; all things, all conditioned phenomena, all experiences are composed of and dependent on the interaction of the four elements (*P. dhatus*): Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. The entire universe is a continuous manifestation of energy, characterized by no fixedness, no stability, and no self (*P. anatta*).

The transformative potential of impermanence lies in understanding that clinging to permanence or attaching oneself to fleeting experiences perpetuates suffering. Embracing impermanence and realizing the interconnectedness of all phenomena allows the *dhammanuvatti* to cultivate deeper acceptance and detachment.

By understanding impermanence and the absence of a fixed self, one can cultivate wisdom and insight. This understanding enables practitioners to navigate the ever-changing nature of existence with greater equanimity and freedom from attachment. The *dhammanuvatti* is encouraged to observe and experience the impermanence of all things, gaining a deeper understanding of the transient and interconnected nature of reality.

Overall, the *suttas* of the *Pali Canon* emphasize the importance of recognizing impermanence and letting go of the desire for permanence. This highlights the insight that arises from understanding the impermanent and interconnected nature of all phenomena, leading to wisdom, liberation from attachment, and a deeper appreciation of the present moment.



Sankharas (1)

There is no equivalent word in Western languages for the *Pali* concept of '*sankharas*'. Therefore, once the understanding is clear to the Western practitioner, it seems preferable to leave the term untranslated.

Dutch translations are typically literal renditions of the English equivalents, which are not very apt: conditioned things; fabrications; formations; kammic formations; mental constructions; volitional activities; volitional formations; mental formations.

Literally, the word has two meanings: '*that which is composed*' (passive meaning) and '*that which composes*' (active meaning), encompassing everything that is conditioned, formed, and/or comes into existence under certain causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*).

→ Passive meaning: '*That which is composed*' refers to mental formations, volitional activities, habitual patterns, and reactions—conditioned, composite phenomena. In short, '*everything that animates human experience.*'

All these composite, conditioned phenomena are subject to the three characteristics (*P. tilakkhana*): impermanence (*P. anicca*); dissatisfaction (*P. dukkha*), and selflessness (*P. anatta*). They arise, change at every moment, and decay.

The Buddha termed the understanding of this reality, as it truly is (*P. yatha-bhuta*), 'insight' or 'wisdom' (*P. panna*). Usually, the term '*sankhara*' is employed in this passive sense, referring to psychological conditioning—particularly the habitual patterns of our unconscious, shaping each person's 'unique' character.

→ Active meaning: '*That which composes*' denotes the 'form-creating' quality or power of our consciousness (*P. sankhara-khandha*), which brings together these conditioned phenomena (*cf. supra*).

This analysis explains the term '*sankharas*' in its passive and active meanings, emphasizing the conditioned nature of phenomena and the form-creating quality of consciousness. More importantly, the article invites practitioners to explore their own mental formations and conditioning, aiming for liberation and freedom from attachment.



Sankharas (2)

Sankharas (*P.*) are mental formations, habit patterns, and mentally conditioned phenomena. These impulsive reactions to stimuli from the outside world lead to ignorance (*P. moha*), desire (*P. lobha, tanha*), anger (*P. dosa*), and attachment (*P. upadana*). *Sankharas* contribute to recurring 'becoming' (*P. bhava*) and suffering (*P. dukkha*).

So, the essence of *vipassana* meditation is recognizing that all *sankharas* (like all phenomena) are impermanent. Their nature is to arise and perish. They disappear only to reappear in the next moment. This is how *sankharas* multiply.

The *dhammanuvatti*, who observes mindfully with objective equanimity, develops wisdom: they halt the process of multiplication and initiate the process of elimination. By stopping the permanent 'creation process' (*P. bhava*) and the impact of our perception on the stream of consciousness (*P. vinnanasota*), they consume the fuel for 'being.' This is how the fire is extinguished, liberating them from *dukkha* and attaining inner peace.

In theory, it's as simple as that. The praxis is more challenging.



Observe the Transience of Things

Carefully observe the constant change of things—*Anicca*, the eternal process, spontaneous, without a definitive beginning or end. Not one moment is the same as the previous one—a continuous process where nothing is lost but transforms and mutates, illustrating interbeing in every moment.

Dhamma is at work in this ever-changing reality. Learn to live with the certainty that everything will eventually disappear—the natural law, *Dhamma* as it truly is, *Yatha-bhuta*.

Calm your mind; let go of desires and aversions, illusions and phantoms of the conditioned mind. Free yourself from *dukkha*, from the fear of (death and) change. Live in this moment; the following is uncertain.

By fully embracing the current moment, practitioners can cultivate a deeper understanding of impermanence and navigate life's uncertainties with greater acceptance and equanimity.



Maintain Perpetual Awareness

Extend the practice of drawing attention (*P. satipatthana*) beyond your dedicated meditation sessions. Be constantly observant, integrating formal practice into every moment, moment-to-moment, until your formal practice becomes your standard way of life.

This sentence underscores the significance of not confining the practice of *sati-patthana* solely to designated meditation sessions. It encourages practitioners to infuse every moment of their daily life with mindfulness, integrating the principles and techniques learned during formal practice.

By extending mindfulness beyond formal sessions, practitioners develop heightened awareness and attentiveness in all aspects of life, engaging fully in daily activities, interactions, and experiences. The goal is to make mindfulness an intrinsic and continuous aspect of one's standard way of living, transcending the idea of it being a separate or sporadic practice.

Through consistent and dedicated practice, mindfulness evolves into a natural and effortless state of being. As mindfulness becomes woven into the fabric of everyday life, the need for formal practice diminishes, and the boundaries between formal practice and daily life dissolve. Practice transforms into a seamless way of living, characterized by continuous mindful awareness.

This approach aligns with Buddhist teachings, emphasizing the application of mindfulness and insight in all facets of life. By cultivating mindfulness throughout the day, practitioners develop the ability to be fully present, attentive, and aware of their thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment.

Such way of life encourages practitioners to move *beyond* 'compartmentalizing'³⁵⁵ their practice to specific meditation sessions and embrace mindfulness as an integral part of their being. By doing so, they can experience the transformative power of mindfulness in their daily lives and gradually move *beyond* the need for formal practice, as mindfulness becomes an inherent and inseparable aspect of their existence.



Our Time is Limited

The Buddha urges us to comprehend the brevity of our existence, a realization that can be immediately apparent upon careful reflection.

Yet, how often do we truly acknowledge the transience of life? How frequently does this awareness deeply resonate within us?

Avoid squandering time on trivial matters and refrain from seeking refuge solely in the sensory world, which offers only temporary gratification but no lasting liberation.

Similarly, do not anchor hopes in a hypothetical afterlife, for such notions are mere dreams.

In the *Malunkyaputta Sutta*,³⁵⁶ the Buddha advises:

• *Life is short; refrain from endless metaphysical speculation that does not lead closer to the truth.* •

Self-realization (*P. nibbana*) can only be grasped in this moment—here and now. Direct your attention (*P. sati*) exclusively to the present, and let your meditation (*P. bhavana*) be anchored in the current moment. Perfect insight (*P. samma ditthi*) leads to the abandonment of desire, hatred, and ignorance, setting you free.

Keep it simple. Observe. Be observant. Attend to your body, feelings, sensations, thoughts, and the objects of your thoughts. Approach this with attentiveness and equanimity. Discover what truly matters in the healing silence.

You will experience that *nibbana* is here, within yourself, in the present.



Live in the Present

Release your grip on the past; do not linger on what once was, on shapes that have faded. Such attachments distance you from your true self, from the natural flow, and from the teachings of *Dhamma*.

Dwelling on the past or on the future may unwittingly fuel your ego, fostering self-righteousness and leading to self-deception. In this rigid self-image, cloaked in spiritual solitude, you may find yourself veiled in darkness, harbouring resentment towards the new or illusory dreams towards the present. In this state, the light between thoughts eludes you, and you lose sight of what truly matters.

Devoid of loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity, you risk becoming a mere pawn of your mind. Even adorned in monk's robes, you may be spiritually inert on your *zafu*.

Live in the present—do not reduce meditation to mere form but employ it as a tool for awakening. Welcome the new with spontaneity, flowing like a stream. Embrace the NOW moment; observe how the world is reborn in each passing moment, in all its facets. See, hear, smell, taste, feel, and think like a Buddha—free, untied, untouched by worldly structures, unshackled from the bonds of ignorance, desire, and aversion.



The Eightfold Path: The Middle Way to Liberation

The Eightfold Path, known as the Middle Way, is the noble path (*P. ariya atthangika magga*) leading to liberation and enlightenment.

This path consists of eight interconnected components or factors that guide practitioners in overcoming the mental turmoil, or *dukkha*, within their minds. Through purification and transformation, self-realization becomes attainable.

The Eightfold Path can be categorized into three groups (*P. khandhas*): morality (*P. sila-khandha*), concentration (*P. samadhi-khandha*), and wisdom (*P. panna-khandha*).

By traversing the Middle Way and practicing the Eightfold Path, the noble follower gains the ability to perceive things as they truly are (*P. yatha-bhuta*) and approaches them with equanimity (*P. upekkha*). This involves relinquishing ignorance, desire, and aversion (*P. kilesas*).

As a result, the *dhammanuvatti* achieves harmony within themselves, aligning with the natural process of existence. They transcend extremes, existing beyond birth and death, in the middle. The Middle Way leads to the realization of the Unborn (*P. ajata*) and the Deathless (*P. amata*)—a path to liberation from *dukkha*.



Do Not Identify with Opinions: A Lesson from the Atthakavagga

The *Atthakavagga*, one of the oldest sections of the *Pali Canon*, delivers a resolute message: if practitioners seek to overcome discontent (*P. dukkha*) and attain inner peace (*P. santi*)—the highest goal in life—they must unequivocally let go of all opinions, philosophies, doctrines, metaphysical constructs, and religious views.

Opinions, philosophies, doctrines, and religious views are pinpointed as the root cause of mental turmoil, discord, pride, dejection, emotional disharmony, and a lack of peace within oneself and the world.

The *suttas* of the *Atthakavagga* leave no room for ambiguity: any attachment to opinions and belief systems hampers the attainment of inner peace. Strong identification with opinions inevitably leads to conflicts with others holding different views or even none at all.

This principle extends to opinions about opinions, philosophies about philosophies, doctrines about doctrines, and religious views about religious views.

The Sage of the *Atthakavagga*, representing the Buddha in these *suttas*, categorically rejects any identification with specific opinions or philosophies.

Why?

Because each identification reinforces the illusion of a separate and independent self, perpetuating an individualized world and sustaining the illusion of a fixed personality. This belief in personal identity (*P. sakkaya-ditthi*) stands as the primary and most crucial among the ten mental fetters (*P. samyojanas*) that bind individuals to the cycle of *samsara*, hindering awakening. The text encourages a careful observation of how identification operates, drawing individuals into the whirlpool of life. It warns against falling into the trap of identification and urges practitioners to let go of the notion of a fixed and separate self. By extinguishing the fire of ignorance, desire, and aversion, practitioners take the initial step toward liberating insight.

The teachings of the *Atthakavagga* underscore the importance of recognizing the destructive nature of attachment to opinions and beliefs, as they contribute to suffering and hinder the attainment of inner peace. By letting go of identification and cultivating insight, practitioners can move closer to liberation and transcend the limitations of the self.



Anatta: Perceiving Reality as It Is

Anatta is the profound recognition of reality in its true form, *yatha-bhuta*—seeing beyond the illusions of the uninstructed mind.

Contrary to popular belief, *anatta* doesn't deny the existence of the 'I.' Sensory and mental experiences confirm its existence. However, *anatta* challenges the conventional understanding of the self held by ordinary individuals (*P. puthujjana*). It asserts that the 'I' does not exist in the way people typically conceive it.

Anatta emphasizes the interconnected and non-separate nature of all things. The 'I' is not a 'self' because it lacks autonomous control over itself. It is not a master of its own existence because the components that make up the self, such as the body and mind (*P. namarupa*),³⁵⁷ lack inherent substance or solidity.

The *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*³⁵⁸ clarifies this perspective. It states that the five components or aggregates, including physical form, perceptions, sensations, mental formations (*P. sankharas*), and consciousness, are all without a self. The Buddha explains that if these components were truly a self, one would have absolute control over them. However, since they lack inherent control, suffering arises from identification with them. This realization leads to understanding that the self is not truly mine, not me, and not my self.

The Buddha contrasts this view with the mistaken belief held by ordinary individuals who assume they have complete control over the self, seeing it as separate and distinct from everything else.

The idea that the self and all things exist independently and autonomously is considered a false view, a delusion, or an illusion. The text highlights the interconnectedness of beings and their shared existence. All beings, including humans, are made up of the same fundamental elements: earth, water, fire, and air (*P. dhatus*). Any perceived boundaries or divisions between oneself and the world are artificial and conceptual.

This distorted perception of separateness arises from conditioning, ignorance, and the defilements of desire (*P. tanha, lobha*) and aversion (*P. dosa*). The Buddha aptly referred to ignorance, desire, and aversion as the "Three Poisons" (*P. kilesas*).

By understanding the selflessness of all things, including the self, individuals can free themselves from attachment, suffering, and the delusion of a fixed and separate identity. Recognizing *anatta* is a crucial step towards liberation and the development of wisdom.



Come and See for Yourself

The Buddha held no interest in addressing speculative metaphysical questions that breed imaginary problems without offering real solutions. Intellectual satisfaction was not his aim.

His teachings sought to bring peace and happiness by fostering a clear understanding of the true nature of things—*yatha-bhuta*. This understanding, crucially, liberates individuals from *dukkha*, not in some distant, indeterminate future, but in this present life.

For the Buddha, anything not conducive to liberation from *dukkha* was dismissed outright. When faced with irrelevant questions, he often chose silence, considering them as useless ballast.

Buddha's pragmatic approach to metaphysical inquiries, emphasizes practical understanding over speculative debates. The Buddha prioritizes experiential wisdom (*P. paccanubhoti*)³⁵⁹ to bring about liberation from *dukkha*—suffering, dissatisfaction, and the unsatisfactory nature of existence—in the present life, rather than in a distant and uncertain future.

Buddha's teachings are focused on achieving genuine peace and happiness by understanding the true nature of things. He disregards anything that don't contribute to the alleviation of *dukkha*, demonstrating through his silence that such matters are futile on the spiritual journey.

Buddha's teachings are practical, geared towards personal transformation and realization.



Bhava

In each moment, the practitioner (*P. dhammanuvatti*) makes choices—*sankharas* of desire and aversion—shaping their world and perpetuating the cycle of existence—*bhava*.

Rebirth should not be the practitioner's goal. The ultimate aim is liberation from *dukkha* in this life—a journey towards self-realization and *nibbana*.

Liberation from *dukkha* is only attainable when the practitioner frees themselves from perceptual conditioning (*P. anusaya*).³⁶⁰ This conditioning makes them perceive themselves and the world as permanent and interconnected. The 'becoming' (*P. bhava*) in the *Pali Canon* doesn't signify reincarnation; rather, it represents the continuous arising and passing away of phenomena—an eternal process of the same energy.

Recognizing, knowing, and becoming one with this process—experiencing, seeing, realizing (*P. paccanubhoti*)—is what the Buddha refers to as the Unborn (*P. ajata*), the Deathless (*P. amata*), the Unconditioned (*P. asankhata*).

Phenomena are in constant flux due to their impermanence (*P. anicca*). Therefore, they are unsatisfactory (*P. dukkha*) and lack stability and a fixed self; they are selfless (*P. anatta*).

The worldling (*P. puthujjana*), akin to a servile dog, identifies with these transient, selfless phenomena, shrouding themselves in permanent discontent (*P. dukkha*).

Conversely, a noble person (*P. ariya-puggala*) sees through direct experience that the 'I' or the components (*P. khandhas*) constituting their being are illusory. They understand that this 'I' is not their true self, not 'me,' and not 'mine.'

This understanding brings an end to the cycle of *samsara*.



Birth and Death

According to the Buddha, 'birth' occurs when the five aggregates (*P. khandhas*) come together—these being the components or elements from which our existence arises. Conversely, 'death' is the disintegration of these aggregates. Together, birth and death constitute the perpetual unfolding of causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*) that govern all phenomena, devoid of any reference to an individual 'self' or 'soul.'

These *khandhas* are not substantial entities but rather fleeting processes that arise and pass from moment to moment.

Thus, 'birth' marks the beginning of an ephemeral phenomenon, and 'death' signifies its end, both equally transitory. Birth and death are the 'conscious'-less and 'possession-less' consequences of a multitude of causes and conditions.

It is a process to which only our 'I' assigns significance.

This natural process of creation and decay does not inherently require meaning. The suchness of things does not demand metaphysical consideration or philosophical explanation. It compels the attentive practitioner, seeking tranquility, to turn solely to observation (*P. sati*) and acceptance (*P. upekkha*).

The cause of our dissatisfaction lies in the human desire for the perpetual emergence of new experiences, for 'becoming' (*P. bhava*), for rebirth. *Dukkha* is the result of an illusory interpretation of what birth and death are—an outcome of misinterpretation and ignorance of the true nature of things.



An Assignment and a Wish

Dear *Kalyanamitta*,

For you, I hold a mission and a wish...

Continue to shape your formless *stupa* with unwavering dedication. Embrace the journey marked by trial and error, the continual arising and passing of experiences, each time with diminishing desire and attachment, yet with an ever-increasing perseverance—*Adhitthana*.

This journey is rooted in the unwavering belief in a reality beyond the constraints of your limited sensory experience—a consciousness that extends far beyond the conditioned satisfaction offered by the world's everyday pursuits.

It is a space unexplored by conventional knowledge, a void where *Homo sapiens* does not belong—an organic wisdom free from intellectual burdens.

This space is not external to you, nor is it separate from you; it resides deep within, etched as an invisible *bas-relief* in your mind—an emptiness that can only be experientially realized. Wordless, silent, devoid of concepts, stripped of illusions—on a *zafu*, with only a white wall as a sensory boundary. This is pure wisdom—*Bhavana-maya panna*.

Understand that your journey through *samsara* is a narrative with an ending. Enter the stream—be, as the Master instructed, a light unto yourself. Be an island impervious to the tsunamis of ignorance, desire, and hate.

Realize yourself through attention and equanimity, *Sati* and *Upekkha*. Now, in this very moment. And from moment to moment.

May you find lasting happiness and peace.



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FOOTNOTES

¹ In Buddhism, a 'lineage' refers to a spiritual or monastic lineage, which is a succession of teachers and disciples who carry on a particular tradition, school, or style of practice. A lineage is often characterized by the transmission of teachings, practices, and spiritual authority from one generation to the next.

Different Buddhist schools and traditions have their own lineages, and the concept is particularly significant in monastic settings. In the context of a lineage, there is a recognized and formalized succession of teachers who pass down the teachings and practices to their disciples. This transmission ensures the continuity and preservation of the specific teachings and practices associated with that lineage.

² In the traditional Theravada context, the term 'bhikkhu' is generally associated with formal monastic ordination. Ordination involves a specific ceremony in which an individual formally enters the monastic community and commits to following the Vinaya, the monastic code of conduct. In Western or modern contexts, people may use the term more loosely to refer to Buddhist practitioners, regardless of formal ordination.

³ Dana (P) is a central concept in Buddhism. The term can be translated as 'generosity' or 'giving.' Dana is considered a fundamental practice in Buddhist teachings and is one of the perfections (P. paramis; Skr. paramitas) in Theravada Buddhism. It is the perfection of giving, sharing without attachment, with a selfless and open-hearted attitude. When giving, or generosity, is perfected, it is selfless. There is no measure of gaining or losing. There are no strings attached and no expectations of thanks or reciprocation. The giving is gratifying in and of itself, and there is no hint of reluctance or loss to the act of giving. Giving in such unencumbered way loosens the grip of greed and helps to develop non-attachment.

⁴ Paharada Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 8.19

⁵ Dhammavinaya (P) is a compound term in Buddhism that combines two essential aspects of the teachings: 'Dhamma' and 'Vinaya'.

Dhamma broadly refers to the teachings or the doctrine of the Buddha. It encompasses the principles, truths, and guidelines that form the foundation of Buddhist philosophy and practice. The Dhamma includes the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and other teachings that lead to the understanding of reality and the cessation of suffering, among other things: The concept of not-self (P. anatta); the doctrine of dependent origination (P. paticca samup-pada); the three characteristics of existence (P. tilakkhana)...

Vinaya pertains to the ethical and disciplinary code for monastic communities (P. sangha) in Buddhism. It outlines the rules and regulations that govern the behavior and lifestyle of monks (P. bhikkhus) and nuns (P. bhikkhunis). The Vinaya is designed to create a harmonious and disciplined monastic community, fostering conditions conducive to spiritual practice.

Therefore, 'Dhammavinaya' can be understood as the combination of the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma) and the monastic discipline (Vinaya). It reflects the comprehensive framework that guides both the doctrinal aspects of Buddhism and the ethical conduct of its monastic practitioners. The term underscores the inseparable connection between the philosophical and ethical dimensions of the Buddhist path.

⁶ *vimutti-rasa (P.)* → *vimutti* = liberation, freedom; *rasa* = taste, flavor. *Vimutti-rasa* represents the experiential aspect of freedom and the quality of liberation that is realized through the practice of the Dhamma. The term emphasizes that the experience of liberation is not merely theoretical or intellectual but has a distinct experiential quality.

It is the direct realization of freedom from the inherent suffering and unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha) of conditioned existence. This flavor of liberation pervades the entire path of Dhamma, from its beginning stages to its culmination in the attainment of nibbana.

In Theravada Buddhism, the attainment of liberation or freedom from the cycle of birth and death is considered the ultimate goal. The taste of vimutti-rasa represents the profound sense of peace, liberation, and profound understanding that arises when one transcends the limitations of craving, attachment, and ignorance.

⁷ *Bhagavat (Skr.)* is a Sanskrit term that conveys a sense of reverence and respect, emphasizing the Buddha's supreme qualities and enlightened nature. The title 'Bhagavat' is used to acknowledge the Buddha's mastery over the Dhamma (teachings) and his attainment of Buddhahood.

It highlights his extraordinary qualities, including wisdom, compassion, and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

It is a way of expressing veneration for the Buddha's enlightened state and recognizing him as a Mahapurisa: a Great Being; an Extraordinary Person. In this usage, 'Bhagavat' is not a name but a title, much like an epithet or an honorific, denoting the Buddha's unique and exalted status in the Buddhist tradition. It is commonly found in Buddhist scriptures and discourses when addressing or describing the Buddha.

⁸ *Buddhasasana (P.)* → *buddha* + *sasana*: *buddha* = 'awakened one' or 'enlightened one' and refers specifically to Gautama Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism; *sasana* = 'teaching' or 'doctrine' and encompasses the entire framework of Buddhist teachings, practice, and the community of practitioners.

Buddhasasana represents the teachings, practice, community, and broader influence of Buddhism. It encompasses the wisdom and guidance provided by Gautama Buddha and the ongoing legacy of his teachings as they continue to guide individuals on the path to liberation.

⁹ *Upayas (P.)* can be translated as 'skillful means' or expedient methods employed to teach and guide individuals based on their unique circumstances and capacities, with the ultimate aim of leading them to spiritual realization or enlightenment.

The concept of 'upayas' is associated with the idea that different people have different capacities, dispositions, and levels of understanding.

Therefore, skillful and flexible means are employed by teachers or enlightened beings to guide individuals on the path to enlightenment. The ultimate goal is to help practitioners overcome ignorance and suffering and to lead them to liberation or awakening (P. nibbana).

¹⁰ *nibbanasacchikiriya (P)* → *nibbana + sacchikiriya*: *nibbana* = the ultimate goal of liberation; *sacchikiriya* = realization or attainment. In Theravada Buddhism, *nibbanasacchikiriya* represents the direct, experiential realization of the state of *nibbana*, which is the complete cessation of suffering and the ultimate liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*). It is the highest goal and the culmination of the Buddhist path. The term emphasizes that *nibbana* is not merely a theoretical concept or a belief but an experiential reality that can be directly realized through the practice of the Dhamma.

It signifies the direct insight and realization of the profound truth of the cessation of suffering and the unconditioned state of nibbana. Attaining nibbanasacchikiriya is considered the ultimate goal of the Buddhist practitioner, and it is believed to bring an end to all forms of greed, hatred, and delusion, leading to complete liberation and freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

The realization of nibbanasacchikiriya is described as the extinguishing of the defilements (P. kilesas) and the complete cessation of craving, attachment, and ignorance. It is a state of profound peace, clarity, and freedom from suffering. The practitioner who attains nibbanasacchikiriya is said to have reached the state of an arahant.

¹¹ *dhammanuvatti (P)* → *dhamma + anuvatti*: *Dhamma* = the teachings of the Buddha; *anuvatti* = follower, adherent — 'one who adheres to the teachings'. Being a *dhammanuvatti* involves an active engagement with the teachings, practicing meditation, ethical conduct, and mindfulness to purify the mind, develop wisdom, and progress on the path of liberation. The *dhammanuvatti* is committed to the pursuit of awakening and the realization of the truths taught by the Buddha. It is important to note that the term *dhammanuvatti* is not limited to monastics but include lay practitioners as well. Both monastics and lay followers can be *dhammanuvattis* by sincerely practicing the Dhamma, following the teachings, and striving for liberation.

¹² *silabbata-paramasa (P)* → *sila + bata + paramasa*: *Sila* refers to moral precepts or ethical conduct. It includes guidelines for right speech, right action, and right livelihood; *bata* denotes rites, rituals, or religious observances. It encompasses various religious practices, ceremonies, or rituals performed with the belief that they bring spiritual benefits or merit; *paramasa* implies a wrong understanding or attachment. It signifies an excessive or mistaken attachment to the external forms of religious practice, rituals, or traditions.

Silabbata-paramasa refers to the incorrect belief that one can attain spiritual progress solely through the observance of external rites, rituals, or religious practices, without cultivating inner qualities such as wisdom, compassion, and understanding. It implies a misunderstanding of the true path to enlightenment and places undue importance on external forms rather than internal transformation.

¹³ *From my point of view there is a difference between 'decoration' and 'decorum'. 'Decoration' suggests superficial adornments or embellishments that may not contribute to the deeper essence or significance. On the other hand, 'decorum' implies a sense of proper behavior and conduct, possibly indicating that adhering to certain conventions or external appearances doesn't necessarily lead to a deeper understanding of Dhamma (the Buddhist Teachings).*

¹⁴ *paccanubhoti (P)* → *pacca + anubhoti*: *pacca* = according to; *anubhoti* = experience, undergo, realize. *Paccanubhoti* = to realize through personal experience. In Buddhist teachings, the emphasis is often on personal realization and direct experience of the truths taught by the Buddha.

It is not enough to merely accept teachings intellectually or rely solely on faith. The practitioner is encouraged to explore and investigate the teachings through personal practice and observation to develop a deep and experiential understanding.

Paccanubhoti means realizing direct experience. Wisdom on an experiential level involves immediate observation, emphasizing personal experience without relying on a higher authority, god, master, parachute, or any external support.

Be determined (P. adhitthana) to cultivate and expand personally acquired insight, maintaining a necessary skepticism. Approach the endeavor with the requisite swagger and bravado for the continued development of the spiritual experiment. After all, the path is never smooth or easy. Maintain a firm determination to be unconditionally wise—to see for yourself, to know for yourself. Sapere aude.

If the practitioner views the Buddha's words merely as 'words,' as 'concepts,' or as a metaphysical explanation, they will never truly see Dhamma. It comes down to pure experience. 'Pure experience is realized prior to the distinction between subject and object' (Guitar Nishida, 1990, An Inquiry into the Good).

In other words, it's not just about what the Buddha literally said but about making his deep experience your own, walking next to him rather than behind him.

¹⁵ *adhitthana (P)*: resolution, strong determination. *Adhitthana* signifies a strong resolution or determination to pursue a specific goal or spiritual path in Buddhism. It involves making a firm commitment and applying sustained effort to overcome obstacles and achieve the desired outcome.

¹⁶ *buddhavacana (P)* → *buddha + vacana*: *buddha* = the Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism; *vacana* = the word, the speech. *Buddhavacana* refers to the teachings, discourses, and scriptures attributed to the Buddha.

It represents the authoritative source of guidance and wisdom in Buddhism, providing instructions on ethical conduct, meditation practices, and insights into the nature of reality.

¹⁷ '*Buddhavacana = ekayana*' suggests that the words or teachings of the Buddha are equivalent to or synonymous with the concept of '*ekayana*,' emphasizing the idea that the Buddha's teachings represent a singular, unified path, and, by extension, represent the universal truth or law (*Universal Dhamma*) that transcends particular schools or traditions.

¹⁸ *Paccakkha-nana (P)* refers to direct knowledge or personal realization. It underscores the importance of experiential understanding that arises from direct observation and insight.

¹⁹ *Yatha-bhuta (P)*: 'as it really is'; 'according to reality'; or 'in accordance with the truth'.

²⁰ In Theravada Buddhism, a 'puthujjana' refers to an ordinary, unenlightened person or a common being who has not yet attained any stage of enlightenment. The term is often used to describe individuals who are still bound by ignorance, craving, and the cycle of birth and death (samsara). Puthujjanas are characterized by their lack of insight into the true nature of reality and their continued identification with the self. They are subject to the three root defilements: greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha).

The goal of Buddhist practice is to transcend the state of a puthujjana through the cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline, ultimately leading to liberation (P. nibbana) from the cycle of suffering.

In contrast, an enlightened being, such as an arahant or a Buddha, is someone who has overcome ignorance and attained a state of liberation, free from the fetters that bind ordinary individuals.

²¹ Janami passami (P): Syn.: 'janāmi paśyāmi' (Skr). 'Janāmi' is the first person singular of the verb 'jānāti,' meaning 'to know.' It refers to understanding, comprehending, or realizing something. 'Paśyāmi' is the first person singular of the verb 'paśyati,' meaning 'to see.' It denotes the 'perceiving,' 'witnessing,' or 'experiencing' of something.

The concept of 'janāmi paśyāmi' points to the inner knowing, seeing, or experiencing of truth, higher consciousness, or the essence of existence. It suggests a profound insight, direct perception, or a spiritual realization of reality beyond superficial phenomena.

'Janāmi paśyāmi' is associated with the experiential understanding of the 'true nature' of the Self, the Absolute, or the Ultimate Reality.

²² Vimutti (P) refers to liberation from the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara). It is a state of transcendence, where one is liberated from the inherent unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha) of worldly existence. It is considered the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path.

²³ The Saundarananda is a Sanskrit epic poem, not a canonical Buddhist scripture. It is attributed to the poet Asvaghosa, who lived in the 1st or 2nd century CE and is considered one of the greatest Buddhist poets and philosophers. While Asvaghosa was a Buddhist, and some of his works are related to Buddhist themes, the Saundarananda itself is not a canonical Buddhist scripture. It is a kavya, a type of classical Sanskrit poetry, and it tells the story of the conversion of Nanda, who is the half-brother of the Buddha, to Buddhism.

²⁴ Guru (P; Skr): the term 'guru' originated in Sanskrit and is widely used in various spiritual and religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. 'Guru' can be translated as 'teacher'; 'guide'; or 'spiritual mentor'.

²⁵ A 'zafu' is a traditional round meditation cushion that originated in Japan. It is commonly used in Zen Buddhism but has been adopted by practitioners of various meditation traditions. The zafu is designed to provide a comfortable and stable seat for extended periods of sitting meditation.

²⁶ bhavana (P): 'mental development'; 'cultivation'; 'meditation'. It refers to the systematic and intentional cultivation of the mind to develop positive qualities, deepen understanding, and attain spiritual growth.

²⁷ *Sotapatti (P): 'stream-entry' or 'entering the stream'. 'Sotapatti' refers to the stage of stream-entry in the Buddhist path. It signifies the entry into the stream of the path to liberation and enlightenment, marked by a direct experiential understanding of the Four Noble Truths. It is a transformative stage that brings deep changes and sets the practitioner firmly on the path towards eventual liberation.*

²⁸ *'Our original face' in Buddhist terms points to the profound and unconditioned nature of our being—Buddha-nature (Skr. Tathagatagarbha) (*)—which can be realized through direct experience and transcending conceptual limitations. It is an invitation to discover our authentic self beyond the layers of ego and conceptual thinking.*

() In the Pali Canon, the concept of an intrinsic buddha-nature is not explicitly articulated. Instead, the emphasis is on the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self (anatta).*

²⁹ *Dhamma-cakkhu (P) — Syn.: dhammacakkhu (P). Dhamma = the teaching; cakkhu = the eye. Dhamma-cakkhu = the eye of teaching, the eye of wisdom, the eye of insight. The moment the scales fall from the eyes. Suddenly seeing what reality is like; experiencing the essence. What really matters.*

³⁰ *Dukkha ariya sacca (P): suffering, incapable of satisfying, painful, is an innate characteristic of existence in the realm of samsara. The First Noble Truth, i.c. the truths or realities for the 'spiritually worthy ones' (P. ariya-puggala).*

³¹ *Dukkha samudaya ariya sacca (P): the cause, the origin, the arising of dukkha. The Second Noble Truth, i.c. the truths or realities for the 'spiritually worthy ones' (P. ariya-puggala).*

³² *Dukkha nirodha sacca (P): the ending, the termination of dukkha. The Third Noble Truth, i.c. the truths or realities for the 'spiritually worthy ones' (P. ariya-puggala).*

³³ *Dukkha nirodha gamini patipada sacca (P): the way of practice leading to the cessation of dukkha: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. The Fourth Noble Truth, i.c. the truths or realities for the 'spiritually worthy ones' (P. ariya-puggala).*

³⁴ *In Buddhism, a sotapanna (P) is a 'stream-enterer,' which is the first stage of enlightenment in the Theravada tradition. A sotapanna is an individual who has attained a level of realization characterized by the breaking of the first three fetters (P. samyojanas) that bind a being to the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara).*

These three fetters are:

— *Identity view: the belief in a permanent, unchanging self or identity (P. sakkaya-ditthi)*

— *Skeptical doubt: doubt about the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the path to enlightenment (P. vicikiccha)*

— *Attachment to rites and rituals: attachment to external religious practices as a means to attain liberation (P. silabbata-paramasa)*

A Sotapanna has entered the 'stream' of the Noble Eightfold Path and is guaranteed to attain full enlightenment (arahantship) within a maximum of seven rebirths. This attainment is considered significant because it marks a decisive shift in one's spiritual journey and ensures progress toward complete liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

³⁵ 'Exalted One': this is an honorific title used to refer to the Buddha in Buddhism. It reflects deep respect and reverence for the Buddha's enlightened and exalted status. The title emphasizes the Buddha's supreme wisdom, compassion, and the attainment of nibbana. This epithet is used to highlight the profound spiritual qualities and achievements of Siddhattha Gotama after his enlightenment.

³⁶ Sabbasava Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya, 2

³⁷ sakkaya-ditthi (P) → sakkaya + ditthi: Sakkaya = the belief, the conviction that the five aggregates (P. khandhas) really exist; ditthi = wrong view.

³⁸ vicikicchā (P): doubt; uncertainty.

³⁹ 'silabbata-paramasa' (P): cfr. footnote #12

⁴⁰ Isipatana (P) → isi + patana: isi = holy men; patana = arriving, landing. Isipatana = the place where holy men landed. Isipatana, also known as Deer Park, is a significant historical and religious site located in Sarnath, near Varanasi (Benares), India. Sarnath is an important pilgrimage site for Buddhists as it is here that the Baghavat first taught the Dharma after attaining enlightenment.

The key events associated with Isipatana include:

- First Sermons (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta): After attaining enlightenment in Bodhgaya, the Buddha traveled to Sarnath. It was here, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, that he delivered his first sermon, known as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (the 'Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.' In this sermon, the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to his five former companions. The second sermon, five days later, was the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta (The 'Characteristic of No-Self').

- Formation of the Sangha: After hearing the Buddha's teachings, the five companions—Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama, and Assaji—became the first followers and formed the initial Buddhist monastic community or Sangha. This event marked the beginning of the propagation of the Buddha's teachings.

- Important Teachings: In addition to the First Sermon, the Buddha gave several other important teachings in Sarnath. These teachings laid the foundation for the Buddhist monastic order and included guidance on ethical conduct, mental cultivation, and the path to liberation.

Isipatana, with its association with the Buddha's first sermon and the establishment of the Sangha, is considered one of the four major pilgrimage sites for Buddhists. The other three pilgrimage sites are Lumbini (the birthplace of Buddha), Bodhgaya (where he attained enlightenment), and Kushinagar (where he passed away).

⁴¹ Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11

⁴² Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 22.59

⁴³ While Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the interdependence of phenomena through the law of cause and effect, the specific term 'interconnectedness' is more commonly associated with Mahayana teachings, such as the concept of emptiness (Skr. sunyata).

⁴⁴ *Majjhimadesa (P)* can be translated as 'Middle Country'. It refers to a region of ancient India, as recorded in the Pali Buddhist texts (detailing the geography of ancient India as it was known in to Early Buddhism). *Majjhimadesa* refers to the birthplace of Buddhism and the region of its early activities.

⁴⁵ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11*

⁴⁶ *Panca Vaggiya (P)* refers to the group of five companions who accompanied the Buddha before his enlightenment. 'Panca' means 'five' and 'Vaggiya' can be translated as 'group' or 'company'. These five individuals were: Kondanna; Bhaddiya; Vappa; Mahanama and Assaji. These five companions played significant roles in the early days of the Buddha's teachings and were instrumental in the spread of Buddhism.

⁴⁷ The Deer Park—known as Migadaya in the Pali language—was situated at Isipathana. Now it is known as Sarnath. The Migadaya was so-called because deer were allowed to roam there unmolested and protected.

⁴⁸ *Tathagata (P. & Skr.)* → *tatha* + *agata*: *tatha* = 'thus' or 'in this manner'; *agata* = 'come' or 'gone'. So, 'Tathagata' may be translated as 'Thus-Gone' or 'One who has thus come' or 'One who has thus gone.' The term implies that the Buddha has fully understood and realized the nature of reality and has come to that understanding in a unique and unsurpassable way.

The use of 'Tathagata' suggests the Buddha's awakened or enlightened state, emphasizing the uniqueness and profundity of his realization. It's a reverential term used to describe someone who has attained enlightenment and has come to understand and embody the truth about existence.

In Buddhist scriptures, when the Buddha refers to himself using this term, it is often in the context of explaining his own nature, attainment, and the path to enlightenment.

⁴⁹ *Majjhe Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya*

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of the *Majjhe Sutta*, I refer to the article by Kumara, Sanjeeva, Vijitha, (2016), *Buddhist Teachings About the Middle: A Critical Study of the Majjhe Sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, Prajna Vihara, Vol. 17, #2, July-December 2016 p. 1-19*

⁵¹ Bodian, Stephan, (2008), *Tricycle Magazine, Encountering the Gateless Gate, Summer 2008*

⁵² *Dhatu-Vibhanga Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 140*

⁵³ A 'samana' refers to a monk or ascetic practitioner. The term is often used to describe individuals who have renounced worldly life and are dedicated to pursuing spiritual goals, such as enlightenment or liberation from the cycle of birth and death (P. *samsara*). The word 'samana' is derived from the Pali language; the equivalent term in Sanskrit is 'shramana.' Both terms are used to refer to those who lead a life of asceticism, practicing meditation, ethical conduct, and other spiritual disciplines in their quest for spiritual realization.

⁵⁴ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11* — cfr. *infra*.

⁵⁵ *In the context of Theravada Buddhism, the Early Buddhist Suttas (EBS) primarily refer to the discourses found in the Pali Canon. The Pali Canon is the authoritative scripture for Theravada Buddhists and is divided into several collections or Nikayas, each containing a variety of suttas.*

The main Early Buddhist Suttas collections in the Pali Canon are:

- *Digha Nikaya (The Long Discourses): This collection consists of long discourses attributed to the Buddha, covering a wide range of philosophical and ethical topics.*
- *Majjhima Nikaya (The Middle-Length Discourses): This collection contains medium-length discourses, addressing various aspects of Buddhist doctrine and practice.*
- *Samyutta Nikaya (The Connected Discourses): This collection organizes suttas thematically, grouping together discourses that share common themes or topics*
- *Anguttara Nikaya (The Numerical Discourses): This collection is arranged numerically, with suttas structured around numerical lists addressing different aspects of Buddhist teachings.*
- *Khuddaka Nikaya (The Minor Collection): This collection includes a diverse range of texts, among which are the well-known Dhammapada, Sutta Nipata, and Jataka tales, along with other poetic and didactic works.*

The Pali Canon contains a vast number of suttas that cover a wide range of teachings, from ethical guidelines and meditative practices to discussions on the nature of reality and the path to liberation. These texts are considered foundational in understanding the early teachings of Buddhism ascribed to Gautama Buddha.

⁵⁶ *Analayo, Bhikkhu, (2012), Satipatthana - the direct path to liberation p. 269—'What the first noble truth makes clear is that all these forms of dukkha are traced, upon critical examination, to the basic fivefold adherence to existence through the ranks [khandhas].'*

For a comprehensive discussion of the khandhas, see: Payutto, Phra, Prayudh, (1995), Buddhadhamma. Natural Laws and Values for Life p. 53 ff.

⁵⁷ *Mathieu, Ricard, (2000), The Monk and the Philosopher.*

⁵⁸ *Brahm, Ajahn, (2011), The Art of Disappearing. The Buddha's Path to Lasting Joy p. 1*

⁵⁹ *Vipassana Research Institute, (1990), Anicca, Vol.1 No.2, October 1990*

⁶⁰ *The term 'tilakkhana' refers to the three characteristics of existence in Buddhism. These three characteristics are considered fundamental insights into the nature of reality and are central to the Buddha's teachings. Understanding and realizing these three characteristics is crucial in Buddhist practice, especially in mindfulness and insight meditation (Vipassana). The recognition of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self leads to wisdom and liberation, as it helps individuals break free from attachments and delusions about the nature of reality.*

⁶¹ *Analayo, (2004), The Direct Path to Realization, p. 269*

⁶² Koster, Frits, (2005), *Het Web van Wijsheid. Inleiding tot de Abhidhamma*, p. 115 and also p. 30 e.v.

⁶³ Osho, (2014), *Moving into the Unknown*, p. 85—‘So Buddha says, if you look into your past lives and you see again and again that you are clinging with life, clinging with lust, ambition, ego, greed, jealousy, possessiveness—those are the ways you have been coming in again and again. Those are the ways to go out. If greed is the way to come in, no-greed is the way to go out. If ego is the way to come in, no-ego is the way to go out. If lust, desire, passion is the way to come in, then no-passion, no-desire or desire-lessness is the way to go out.’

⁶⁴ Svabhava (P.) refers to the inherent nature or essential characteristics of a being or phenomenon.

⁶⁵ Libbrecht, Ulrich, (2017), *Stilte*, p. 33

⁶⁶ Brahm, Ajahn, (2011), *The Art of Disappearing. The Buddha's Path to Lasting Joy* p. 52

⁶⁷ Thanissaro, Bhikkhu, (2008), *The Paradox of Becoming*

⁶⁸ Batchelor, Stephen, (2013), *Boeddhisme zonder geloof*, p. 104-105

⁶⁹ Osho, (2012), *The Perfect Way* p. 17

⁷⁰ 'Sankharas' refers to mental formations or fabrications. Sankharas are one of the five aggregates (P. khandhas) that constitute the human being according to Buddhist teachings. The five aggregates are form (P. rupa), feeling (P. vedana), perception (P. sanna), mental formations (P. sankhara), and consciousness (P. vinnana). Sankharas encompass a wide range of mental activities and processes, including thoughts, intentions, volitions, emotions, and habitual tendencies. They are the conditioned and constructed aspects of the mind, arising in dependence on various factors, such as past experiences, conditioning, and the present environment.

There are two main types of sankharas in Buddhism:

- Cetasika Sankharas (Mental Factors): These include the various mental factors or qualities that arise in conjunction with consciousness. Examples of cetasika sankharas include greed, hatred, delusion, loving-kindness, compassion, and various other mental states.

- Kaya Sankharas (Bodily Formations): These refer to the bodily activities or formations, including physical actions, gestures, and expressions that result from mental intentions. Actions performed by the body are considered kaya sankharas.

In the context of the Four Noble Truths and the teaching of Dependent Origination, sankharas play a crucial role. They are seen as contributing to the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death (P. samsara) and are considered one of the links in the chain of causation.

The Buddha taught that understanding and working with sankharas is essential for the cessation of suffering. Mindfulness and insight meditation aim to observe and understand the nature of sankharas, leading to the liberation of the mind from the cycle of craving and ignorance.

The cultivation of wholesome sankharas and the reduction of unwholesome ones are integral aspects of the path to enlightenment in Buddhism.

⁷¹ 'hetu' (P): The term 'hetu' refers to 'cause' or 'factor' in the context of Buddhist philosophy, specifically in the doctrine of dependent origination (P. paticca samuppada). In the Pali language, 'hetu' (singular) or 'hetus' (plural) is used to denote the causes or conditions that contribute to the arising or ceasing of phenomena.

In the framework of dependent origination, the term 'hetus' is associated with the understanding that everything in the phenomenal world arises or falls apart due to specific causes and conditions. The doctrine outlines a chain of twelve interrelated links, each representing a stage in the process of causation. The causes or factors (hetus) in this chain are crucial components in understanding the nature of suffering and the path to liberation in Buddhism.

The interconnectedness of these causes and conditions emphasizes that nothing exists independently, and the arising or falling apart of any phenomenon is contingent upon a combination of factors. Reflecting on the causes and conditions that lead to suffering is a key aspect of Buddhist practice, as it leads to insight and understanding that supports the cessation of suffering.

⁷² *paccayas (P)*: The term 'paccaya' (singular) or 'paccayas' (plural) is used in the context of Buddhist philosophy, particularly in the teachings on dependent origination (*P. paticca samuppada*) and conditional relations. 'Paccaya' is often translated as 'condition' or 'support.' In the Buddhist framework, 'paccayas' refer to the various conditions or factors that support and contribute to the arising, existence and ceasing of phenomena.

These conditions are crucial in understanding the interconnected nature of reality and how one phenomenon is dependent on a network of conditions for its manifestation. The concept of 'paccayas' is closely related to the broader idea of causation in Buddhism. It emphasizes that nothing exists independently or in isolation; rather, everything arises due to specific conditions. Understanding these conditions is vital for comprehending the nature of suffering and the path to liberation.

In the specific context of dependent origination, 'paccayas' are part of the causal chain that explains how suffering (*P. dukkha*) arises and how it can be brought to an end. The twelve links in the dependent origination chain illustrate the intricate web of conditions (*paccayas*) leading from ignorance to suffering and the cessation of suffering.

⁷³ *Adittapariyaya Sutta*, *Samyutta Nikaya* 35.28

⁷⁴ King Bimbisara of Magadha is mentioned in the suttas at various places as one of the Buddha's earliest followers. It is also Bimbisara who offers Veluvana (the Bamboo Grove) in Rajagaha for the use of the Buddha and the Sangha. Veluvana is the first Sangha residence and, after the Jetavana, the location where most of the Buddha's discourses were delivered. The Buddha's favorite meditation spot in Rajagaha was the Vulture's Peak. In the vicinity of Rajagaha, specifically near the Satapanni Cave, the first Buddhist Council took place, during which Sariputta recited the discourses, and Upali recited the Vinaya. The Satapanni Cave was also the place where Sariputta attained enlightenment.

⁷⁵ *Aggihutta (P)* refers to ascetics or practitioners who practiced the worship of fire as a religious or spiritual activity. In the Discourse on Fire (*Adittapariyaya Sutta*), the Buddha used the metaphor of fire to convey profound insights into the nature of desire, aversion, and ignorance, aiming to guide these fire-worshippers towards a deeper understanding of the Dhamma.

⁷⁶ *Atthakatha (P)* refers to commentaries or explanations on the Buddhist scriptures. The word can be translated as 'exegesis' or 'commentary'. These commentaries provide interpretations, explanations, and additional details on the teachings found in the original Buddhist scriptures. The *atthakathas* are considered secondary literature and were written by ancient Buddhist scholars. They aim to clarify the meaning of the discourses (*P. suttas*) and the monastic rules (*P. vinaya*) found in the Pali Canon.

⁷⁷ *Vedana (P)* refers to the aspect of feeling or sensation. *Vedana* encompasses the subjective experience of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings and sensations. These feelings and sensations are considered part of the human experience and play a crucial role in the cycle of craving, attachment, and suffering. In the practice of mindfulness and meditation in Buddhism, individuals are encouraged to observe *vedana* with awareness and without attachment, as a means of understanding and ultimately transcending the cycle of suffering.

⁷⁸ Koster, Frits, (2005), *Het Web van Wijsheid. Inleiding tot de Abhidhamma*

⁷⁹ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, *Samyutta Nikaya* 56.11

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Sammasambuddha (P.)* → *samma + sam + buddha*: *samma* = 'perfect', 'complete'; *sam* = completely; *Buddha* = Awakened One. A *Sammasambuddha* is someone who has attained Buddhahood through their own efforts and insight, without relying on a teacher or any external guidance. They have fully understood the nature of reality, eradicated all defilements and ignorance, and achieved perfect wisdom and compassion.

A *Sammasambuddha* possesses the ability to teach others the path to enlightenment and to guide them to liberation. In contrast, other types of enlightened beings in Buddhism may include *Arhats*, who have also attained liberation but may rely on the teachings of a *Buddha* to reach that state.

The title '*Sammasambuddha*' is reserved for those who achieve enlightenment without relying on external teachings. The *Buddha*, *Siddhattha Gotama*, is considered the most recent *Sammasambuddha* in our historical era, according to Buddhist tradition.

⁸⁴ *Panca nivarana (P.)*: The five hindrances refer to mental states that obstruct the development of concentration (*P. samadhi*) and mindfulness (*P. sati*) in meditation practice. These hindrances are considered obstacles on the path to enlightenment.

The five hindrances are:

- Sensual desire (*P. kamacchanda*): Craving for pleasure through the senses.
- Ill-will (*P. vyapada*): Feelings of aversion, hatred, or hostility.
- Sloth and torpor (*P. thina-middha*): Mental dullness, sluggishness, or drowsiness
- Restlessness and worry (*P. uddhacca-kukkucca*): Agitation, anxiety, or a scattered mind.
- Doubt (*P. vicikiccha*): Skepticism, indecision, or lack of conviction.

Addressing and overcoming these hindrances is an integral part of meditation practice. Meditators are encouraged to recognize when these hindrances arise, investigate their nature, and apply appropriate antidotes. For example, cultivating loving-kindness (*metta*) can counteract ill-will, and mindfulness of the breath can dispel restlessness.

By systematically addressing and transcending these hindrances, practitioners can create the mental conditions necessary for deep concentration and mindfulness, leading to a more profound and transformative meditation experience.

⁸⁵ *Satipatthana (P.)* → *sati* + *upatthana*: *sati* = *mindfulness*; *upatthana* = *establishing, founding*. *Satipatthana* is a Pali term commonly translated as 'the four foundations of mindfulness' or 'the four establishments of mindfulness.' This term refers to a key aspect of Buddhist meditation practice outlined by the Buddha in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, one of the foundational discourses (*suttas*) in the Pali Canon. The practice of *Satipatthana* is central to the development of mindfulness and insight (*vipassana*) meditation. By cultivating awareness of these four foundations, practitioners aim to gain a deep understanding of the nature of existence, leading to insight, wisdom, and liberation from suffering.

The four foundations of mindfulness are:

- *Mindfulness of the Body (P. kaya)*: This involves observing and being aware of the physical aspects of the body, such as breathing, posture, movements, and the anatomical components of the body.
- *Mindfulness of Feelings (P. vedana)*: Here, one observes and understands the nature of feelings or sensations, categorizing them as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- *Mindfulness of Mind (P. citta)*: This foundation involves awareness of the mind itself—its states, moods, and mental activities. Practitioners pay attention to thoughts, emotions, and mental attitudes.
- *Mindfulness of Phenomena (P. dhamma)*: This includes the observation of mental objects, such as the Five Aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness), the Four Noble Truths, and other aspects of the Dhamma.

⁸⁶ *Sambojjhanga (P.)* can be translated as 'factors of awakening' or 'enlightenment factors'. These factors are crucial components in the Buddhist path to awakening and are outlined by the Buddha in various discourses, including the *Satipatthana Sutta* and the *Anapanasati Sutta*. These factors are considered progressive and interrelated, with mindfulness being a foundation that supports the development of the other factors. Cultivating these factors of awakening is believed to lead to the realization of enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*P. samsara*).

The seven factors of awakening are:

- *Mindfulness (P. sati)*: The quality of mind that brings attention to the present moment, fostering awareness and clear comprehension.
- *Investigation of Dhamma (P. dhammavicaya)*: Involves contemplation and inquiry into the nature of phenomena, including the Four Noble Truths and other aspects of the Dhamma.
- *Energy (P. viriya)*: The application of mental effort and diligence in the practice, overcoming laziness and cultivating a sustained commitment.
- *Joy (P. piti)*: A sense of delight, happiness, or joy that arises from the practice, often as a result of mindfulness and concentration.
- *Tranquility (P. passadhi)*: The calming and stilling of the mind, leading to a state of inner peace and tranquility.
- *Concentration (P. samadhi)*: The focused and one-pointed attention of the mind, leading to deep absorption and heightened mental clarity.
- *Equanimity (P. upekkha)*: The quality of maintaining a balanced and even-minded perspective, especially in the face of changing circumstances and experiences.

⁸⁷ *Kondanna is the first disciple of the Buddha who attained insight. He is the first 'stream-enterer' (P. sotapanna). The stream-entry (P. sotapatti) of Kondanna is one of the most poignant passages in the Pali Canon. Why? Because it is the place where every yogi, every dhammanuvatti, attains insight.*

⁸⁸ *In these 10 words the Dhamma is condensed.*

⁸⁹ *But also, observe the illusion, the falsehood that emerges when one rigidly attempts to anchor or lock down this reality.*

⁹⁰ *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 22.59*

⁹¹ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Samyutta Nikaya 56:11) → Dhamma + cakka + pavattana: Dhamma = the Teaching; cakka = the wheel; pavattana = execution, to set in motion; sutta = lecture. Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta = literally: The Lecture on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion.*

⁹² *After the Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths to the Five Companions, the Blessed One uttered these inspired words: 'Do you understand, Kondanna? Verily: Kondanna understands, friends!'*

The meaning of this statement is that Kondanna, after the Buddha's explanation, entered the stream, meaning he became a stream-enterer. After the Buddha gave the second lecture—the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta—Kondanna suddenly comprehended the entire Teaching and became an arahant.

There is another reason why Kondanna is called 'the knower.' After the birth of Siddhattha, he declared that the child would not become a world ruler (P. cakkavatti—a universal monarch, a king of kings) but a Buddha, a spiritual leader. The story goes like this: five days after Siddhattha's birth, King Suddhodana summoned eight prominent Brahmin priests, including Kondanna, to determine what the child would become later. The reason for this gathering was the direct consequence of the prediction of Asita, an old Muni, that the child would either become a world ruler or a Buddha. Of the eight Brahmins, seven predicted that Siddhattha would become a cakkavatti, which pleased Suddhodana greatly. Only the youngest of the eight Brahmins, Kondanna, prophesied that the child would become a Buddha. Hence the name: 'the Knower.'

And to complete the Kondanna story: he became the first abbot of the Veluvana monastery in Rajagaha. To this day, a beautiful place to stay! And to meditate. Especially if you know the whole story. And thus become an integral part of the Whole. Of the Process.

⁹³ *Parinibbana (P.), Parinirvana (Skr.). Parinibbana → pari + nibbana: pari = complete, total; nibbana = extinguishment, liberation. The term refers to the final, complete, and ultimate passing away of an enlightened being, particularly a Buddha. In the context of the life of Gautama Buddha, the historical Buddha, parinibbana refers to his death and passing into final nirvana. According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and spent the remaining years of his life teaching and guiding followers. When the Buddha reached the age of 80, he announced to his disciples that the time of his parinibbana was approaching. The event is said to have taken place in Kushinagar, in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India. The Buddha's parinibbana is considered to be the complete liberation from the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara) and the attainment of final nibbana.*

⁹⁴ In the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta refers 'rupa' to the concept of 'form' or 'physical form.' In the context of this sutta, is rupa one of the five aggregates (P. khandhas) that constitute an individual's experience and existence. In this specific passage from the sutta, the Buddha explains the nature of 'rupa'. The key point is 'rupa' lacks a permanent, unchanging self (P. anatta or anatman). The Buddha asserts that if 'rupa' had a self, the yogi would have control over it, and he would be able to dictate its nature. However, since 'rupa' is without a self, it is subject to change and is not something one can fully control or claim as 'mine' or 'self.'

This teaching is foundational to the Buddhist understanding of anatta, highlighting the impermanence and lack of inherent, unchanging essence in the components that make up human existence. The purpose of the sutta is to guide practitioners toward a deeper understanding of the nature of reality and to cultivate wisdom that leads to liberation from suffering.

⁹⁵ In the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, 'vedana' refers to the aggregate of feelings or sensations. In the context of the sutta, vedana is one of the five aggregates (P. khandhas) that make up the human experience and contribute to the sense of self.

In the specific context of vedana in the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, the Buddha is explaining the nature of feelings in relation to the concept of not-self (P. anatta). The key point emphasized is that feelings are not a permanent, unchanging self. If feelings had a self, one would be able to fully control and dictate the nature of those feelings. However, since feelings are impermanent and subject to change, they do not constitute a permanent, unchanging self.

The Buddha asserts that because vedana is devoid of a self, it is a source of suffering. The inability to fully control and manipulate feelings leads to dissatisfaction and the recognition that feelings are not something one can claim as 'mine' or 'self.' This insight is part of the Buddha's teaching on the Three Characteristics (P. tilakkhana): impermanence (P. anicca), suffering or unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and not-self (P. anatta).

⁹⁶ In the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, 'sanna' refers to the aggregate of perception. In the context of the sutta, sanna is one of the five aggregates (khandhas) that constitute human experience and contribute to the sense of self.

In the Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, the Buddha explains the nature of perception (P. sanna) in relation to the concept of not-self (P. anatta). The key point emphasized is that perception is not a permanent, unchanging self. If perception had a self, one would be able to fully control and dictate the nature of perception. However, since perception is impermanent and subject to change, it does not constitute a permanent, unchanging self.

The Buddha asserts that because sanna is devoid of a self, it is a source of suffering. The inability to fully control and manipulate perception leads to dissatisfaction and the recognition that perception is not something one can claim as 'mine' or 'self.'

⁹⁷ In the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, 'sankharas' refers to the aggregate of mental formations. In the context of the *sutta*, 'sankharas' is one of the five aggregates (P. *khandhas*) that constitute human experience and contribute to the sense of self.

In the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, the Buddha explains the nature of mental formations (P. *sankharas*) in relation to the concept of not-self (P. *anatta*). The key point emphasized is that mental formations are not a permanent, unchanging self. If mental formations had a self, one would be able to fully control and dictate the nature of those mental formations. However, since mental formations are impermanent and subject to change, they do not constitute a permanent, unchanging self. The Buddha asserts that because *sankharas* are devoid of a self, they are a source of suffering. The inability to fully control and manipulate mental formations leads to dissatisfaction and the recognition that mental formations are not something one can claim as 'mine' or 'self.'

⁹⁸ In the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, 'vinnana' refers to the aggregate of consciousness. In the context of the *sutta*, the Buddha explains the nature of consciousness (P. *vinnana*) in relation to the concept of not-self (P. *anatta*). The key point emphasized is that consciousness is not a permanent, unchanging self. If consciousness had a self, one would be able to fully control and dictate the nature of that consciousness. However, since consciousness is impermanent and subject to change, it does not constitute a permanent, unchanging self. The Buddha asserts that because *vinnana* is devoid of a self, it is a source of suffering. The inability to fully control and manipulate consciousness leads to dissatisfaction and the recognition that consciousness is not something one can claim as 'mine' or 'self.'

⁹⁹ 'Dibbacakkhu' is a Pali term that translates to 'divine eye' or 'celestial eye.' It refers to a special form of vision or insight that is not of the ordinary human sense perception. This term is mentioned in Buddhist texts, especially in the context of the higher stages of meditation and spiritual realization. The divine eye is one of the supernormal powers (P. *abhinna* or *iddhi*) that are said to arise through deep concentration and meditative attainments. According to Buddhist tradition, when a practitioner attains a high level of mental purity and concentration, they can develop the divine eye, which allows them to see things beyond the ordinary human range of vision.

The divine eye is described as a form of clairvoyance that enables the practitioner to perceive distant or hidden things, see the workings of karma, and understand the past and future lives of beings. It is important to note that in Buddhism, these supernormal powers are not the ultimate goal of practice; they are considered secondary to the primary goal of attaining enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (P. *samsara*).

The concept of *dibbacakkhu* is found in various Buddhist traditions, including Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, although the terminology may vary across different schools and cultures.

¹⁰⁰ *Karuna* (P.) is a deep and heartfelt compassion for all sentient beings who experience suffering. It goes beyond mere empathy and involves a sincere desire to alleviate the suffering of others, reflecting the understanding of interconnectedness and the shared nature of human experience. *Karuna* is one of the essential virtues or qualities cultivated on the path to enlightenment.

In the Four *Brahmaviharas*, *karuna* is listed along with other qualities like loving-kindness (P. *metta*), empathetic joy (P. *mudita*), and equanimity (P. *upekkha*).

¹⁰¹ *Avalokiteshvara is a bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. The name Avalokiteshvara is derived from Sanskrit and can be translated as 'The One Who Looks Down Upon the World' or 'The Lord Who Gazes Down.' In Chinese Buddhism, Avalokiteshvara is known as Guanyin, in Japanese as Kannon, and in Tibetan Buddhism as Chenrezig.*

Avalokiteshvara is often depicted with multiple arms and heads, symbolizing the ability to reach out to and aid many beings simultaneously. The bodhisattva is considered to have postponed their own enlightenment to help others achieve liberation and awakening. The thousand-armed form of Avalokiteshvara is particularly well-known, each arm bearing an eye in the palm, emphasizing the vigilant compassion extended in all directions.

The figure of Avalokiteshvara plays a significant role in various Buddhist traditions, and devotees often turn to this bodhisattva for assistance and guidance, particularly in times of suffering and distress. The emphasis on compassion and the aspiration to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings are central themes associated with Avalokiteshvara in Buddhist teachings.

¹⁰² *Gandhabbas (P.) refer to celestial beings associated with heavenly realms, often depicted as musicians or attendants in traditional cosmological descriptions.*

¹⁰³ *Nibbida (P.) can be translated as 'disenchantment,' 'disillusionment,' or 'revulsion.' It represents a significant aspect of the spiritual journey and is a crucial concept in the Buddhist path toward liberation. Nibbida refers to a profound sense of dissatisfaction or weariness with the conditioned existence, including the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (P. samsara). It arises as a result of recognizing the impermanence (P. anicca) and unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha) inherent in all conditioned phenomena. Nibbida signifies a turning away from attachment and craving for worldly pursuits and a growing sense of spiritual urgency. This concept is instrumental in the process of letting go of desires and attachments, leading to a deeper understanding of the nature of existence. It is an essential step on the path to liberation (P. vimutti) in Buddhism. The process of nibbida is seen as a necessary precursor to the development of dispassion (P. viraga) and, ultimately, the attainment of inner peace and liberation (P. nibbana). It represents a shift in perspective, encouraging practitioners to seek a higher, more enduring form of happiness beyond the fleeting and unreliable pleasures of the world.*

¹⁰⁴ *Vimutti (P.) refers to liberation from the cycle of birth and death, the extinguishment of craving and clinging, and the attainment of Nibbana. Nibbana is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, representing a state of peace, freedom, and the end of suffering. Vimutti is the realization of this state, where a practitioner is liberated from the fetters of ignorance, craving, and the cycle of rebirth.*

¹⁰⁵ *The Parayanavagga, also known as the 'Way to the Beyond' or 'The Chapter on the Way to the Beyond,' is a section of the Sutta Nipata, which is a collection of early Buddhist discourses in the Pali Canon. The Sutta Nipata is considered one of the oldest parts of the Pali Canon and is highly valued for its poetic and philosophical content.*

The Parayanavagga consists of sixteen suttas, or discourses, that explore various aspects of the spiritual path and the quest for liberation. It covers topics such as mindfulness, wisdom, ethical conduct, and the nature of reality. The verse here mentioned, 'Try to see the Buddha in your mind as if it were with your eye,' encourages practitioners to develop insight and perceive the Buddha's teachings not just intellectually but predominantly through direct contemplation and understanding (P. paccakkha-nana).

¹⁰⁶ *Parayanavagga Sutta, Gatha #167*

¹⁰⁷ *Kalama Sutta, Anguttara-Nikaya, 3.65*

¹⁰⁸ 'Itikira' (P) can be translated as 'hearsay' or 'report'. In the context of the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha advises against relying on 'reports'. He is cautioning against accepting teachings or information solely based on what one hears from others without personal investigation and verification. The emphasis is on direct experience, personal understanding, and experiential wisdom rather than blind faith in second-hand information.

¹⁰⁹ 'Anussava' (P) refers generally to 'tradition' or 'hearing'. In the context of the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha advises against relying on 'legends'. He is cautioning against accepting teachings or information simply based on traditional or hearsay sources. The emphasis is on personal investigation and direct experience rather than relying solely on information passed down through tradition or hearsay.

¹¹⁰ 'Parampara' (P) can be translated as 'tradition' or 'lineage'. The Buddha, in advising against relying on 'tradition' is emphasizing the importance of personal investigation and direct experience (P. paccakkha-nana) rather than accepting teachings based solely on the authority of a lineage or tradition. The idea is to encourage individuals to evaluate the teachings for themselves and not to blindly follow a particular tradition without critical inquiry.

¹¹¹ 'Pitaka-sampadana' (P) refers to 'scriptural texts' or 'collecting (sampadana) the scriptures (piṭaka)'. In the context of the passage in the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha advises not to rely on scriptural texts alone. Instead, individuals are encouraged to investigate and understand the teachings through their own direct experience and discernment. The emphasis is on personal realization and insight—paccakkha-nana (P)—rather than blindly adhering to the words of scriptures.

¹¹² 'Takka-hetu' (P) refers to 'logical conjecture' or 'reasoning.' In the context of the passage in the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha advises against relying solely on logical conjecture or reasoning when determining the validity of teachings. The emphasis is on direct experience, wisdom, and understanding rather than relying solely on intellectual speculation or logical reasoning.

¹¹³ 'Naya-hetu' (P) refers to 'inference' or 'deduction.' In the context of the passage in the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha advises against relying solely on inference or deduction when evaluating teachings. Instead, he encourages individuals to base their understanding on direct experience, wisdom, and the practical consequences of applying the teachings in their lives. The emphasis is on experiential knowledge rather than purely intellectual or deductive reasoning.

¹¹⁴ 'Akara-parivitakka' (P) refers to 'agreement through pondering views' or 'speculation based on reasoning.' In the context of the passage in the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha advises against relying on agreement through pondering views or speculative reasoning when evaluating teachings. Instead, he encourages individuals to base their understanding on direct experience, wisdom, and the practical consequences of applying the teachings in their lives. The emphasis is on experiential knowledge rather than purely intellectual speculation or reasoning.

¹¹⁵ 'Ditthi-nijjhan-akkhantiya' (P) can be translated as 'agreement through pondering views' or 'acceptance based on reflective thinking.' In the context of the passage in the Kalama Sutta, it cautions against relying solely on intellectual speculation or accepting teachings without direct insight and personal understanding. The Buddha encourages individuals to investigate, verify, and experiment for themselves, emphasizing the importance of personal experience and wisdom.

¹¹⁶ 'Bhabba-rupataya' (P) conveys the idea of 'suitability of forms' or 'capability of appearances.' This passage of the Kalama Sutta cautions against relying on probability or appearances alone when seeking the truth. The emphasis lies on investigating and understanding the qualities that lead to welfare and happiness, going beyond mere external appearances.

¹¹⁷ 'Samano no garo' (P): The phrase 'samano no garo' can be translated as 'This ascetic is our teacher' or 'This contemplative is our teacher.' In the context of the passage in the Kalama Sutta, it is mentioned in the list of things the Buddha advises not to rely on when determining what qualities are skillful, blameless, and lead to welfare and happiness. The Buddha encourages a direct and personal investigation rather than relying on external authorities or the perceived status of a particular ascetic or contemplative.

¹¹⁸ 'Dhammavicaya' (P) can be translated as 'investigation of qualities' or 'analysis of pheno-mena.' It refers to the mental factor or faculty of careful investigation, examination, and analysis of the nature of phenomena, particularly within the framework of Buddhist teachings. Dhammavicaya is one of the seven awakening factors (P. satta-bojjhanga) and associated with the Buddha's advice to investigate, verify, and experiment in order to understand the Dhamma. It implies a discerning inquiry into the nature of reality and the teachings, leading to a direct and personal understanding.

¹¹⁹ Dhammapada, Gatha #160

¹²⁰ 'Samma Sankappa' can be translated as 'Right Intention' or 'Right Thought.' It is one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. 'Samma Sankappa' refers to the development of wholesome and skillful intentions or thoughts. In the context of the Noble Eightfold Path, it emphasizes the importance of cultivating intentions that are aligned with the principles of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. This is an integral part of the path leading to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of enlightenment.

¹²¹ Maha Satipatthana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22

¹²² Satipatthana → sati + upatthana: sati = attention; upatthana = establishing, foundation, fundamentals.

¹²³ ekayana magga (P): the only/direct/unrivalled) way.

¹²⁴ vitasoka (P): 'transcending sadness and worry' Vitasoka → vita + soka: vita = being free from; transcending; soka = sadness, worry.

¹²⁵ adhitthana (P): strong determination, unwavering resolve. In the context of Buddhist practice, adhitthana refers to the mental quality of firm determination or unwavering resolve to accomplish a particular goal, especially in the pursuit of spiritual development and awakening. Having adhitthana means being resolute and steadfast in one's commitment to the path of practice, overcoming obstacles, and staying focused on the chosen course of action. It is considered an essential quality in various aspects of Buddhist training, including meditation, ethical conduct, and the development of wholesome qualities.

¹²⁶ 'The Other Shore' is a metaphorical expression used in Buddhism to represent enlightenment, liberation, or nibbana. It refers to a state beyond the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, where suffering and ignorance are transcended. In Buddhism, the journey from one shore to the other is described as a path of spiritual awakening and transformation. It involves understanding the nature of reality, overcoming attachments and desires, and attaining a state of wisdom, compassion, and freedom. The term is commonly found in Buddhist teachings and scriptures as practitioners aspire to reach the 'Other Shore' as a goal of their spiritual journey.

¹²⁷ Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11

¹²⁸ 'Sacca' (P) can be translated as 'truth,' 'reality'. In the context of Buddhist teachings, 'sacca' holds a central and profound significance. The Four Noble Truths, which encapsulate the foundation of the Buddha's teachings, are often referred to as the 'Ariya Sacca'.

In essence, 'sacca' in a Buddhist context goes beyond mere factual accuracy. It delves into the nature of existence, the causes of suffering, and the path to liberation. It emphasizes a deep understanding of reality and the cultivation of wisdom to liberate oneself from the cycle of suffering and rebirth.

¹²⁹ In Buddhism, the term 'fabrication' refers to the mental process of creating, constructing, or fabricating experiences and perceptions. It is associated with the concept of ignorance (P. *avijja*) and is considered a fundamental source of suffering (P. *dukkha*) in the Buddhist understanding of the mind.

Fabrication is seen as a contributory factor to the arising of craving (P. *tanha*) and clinging (P. *upadana*), which, in turn, lead to suffering (P. *dukkha*). Fabrication involves the tendency of the mind to create a sense of self (ego) and to perceive phenomena with a distorted or conditioned view.

This mental activity includes the formation of concepts, ideas, and judgments about oneself and the world. It is a cognitive process driven by ignorance and the illusion of a permanent, unchanging self (P. *atta*).

There are three main types of fabrication in Buddhism:

- **Bodily Fabrication** (P. *kaya sankhara*): This involves the physical aspects of the body and the breath. It includes the involuntary physiological processes and the intentional movements or actions of the body.
- **Verbal Fabrication** (P. *vaci sankhara*): This pertains to the verbal aspects of communication. It involves the formation of speech, including thoughts, words, and expressions.
- **Mental Fabrication** (P. *citta sankhara*): This is related to the mental aspects of thought and perception. It includes the formation of mental constructs, emotions, and attitudes.

The process of overcoming fabrication and dispelling ignorance is an essential aspect of the path to enlightenment in Buddhism. Meditation practices, particularly mindfulness and insight meditation (P. *vipassana*), aim to observe and understand these fabrications, leading to the cessation of suffering and the realization of nibbana.

¹³⁰ *Avijja (P.) is closely linked to the teaching of dependent origination (P. paticca samuppada), one of the central teachings of the Buddha. This doctrine makes it clear how avijja gives rise to continuous rebirth.*

Paticca samuppada refers on the one hand to the basic principle, namely the law of cause and effect; and on the other hand to its explanation through the chain (the 12 links) of mutually dependent origination. The chain is the logical explanation of this basic principle.

¹³¹ *Gilgamesh was a historical king of the Sumerian city-state of Uruk, located in present-day Iraq. He is the central character of the 'Epic of Gilgamesh,' one of the oldest known literary works in human history. The Epic explores themes as friendship, mortality, the fear of death, and the search for the meaning of life.*

¹³² *'Mula' can be translated as 'root' or 'base'. In a Buddhist context, it is often used to refer to the root causes or fundamental aspects of various phenomena, particularly in the context of the Four Noble Truths. For example, in the Four Noble Truths, the 'mula' of suffering (P. dukkha) is often identified as craving (P. tanha) and ignorance (P. avijja). These are considered the underlying roots or causes that lead to the cycle of suffering (P. samsara).*

¹³³ *'Kilesas' (P.) refer to defilements, mental pollutants, or unwholesome states of mind that hinder spiritual progress and contribute to suffering. The kilesas are seen as obstacles to enlightenment and liberation. There are various lists of kilesas in Buddhist teachings, but some common ones include:*

- *Greed (P. lobha): Attachment, craving, or clinging to sensory pleasures and desires.*
- *Hatred or Aversion (P. dosa): Aversion, anger, ill will, or hostility toward oneself or others.*
- *Delusion (P. moha): Ignorance, confusion, or misunderstanding of the nature of reality.*
- *Conceit (P. mana): Excessive pride, arrogance, or the sense of superiority over others.*
- *Wrong Views (P. ditthi): Holding distorted or incorrect views about reality, such as denying the law of karma or the Four Noble Truths.*
- *Restlessness (P. uddhacca): Agitation, mental unrest, or inability to concentrate.*
- *Sloth or Torpor (P. alasya): Laziness, sluggishness, or mental dullness.*
- *Doubt (P. vicikiccha): Skepticism, uncertainty, or wavering in matters of the Dhamma.*

These defilements are considered hindrances to clear seeing, wisdom, and the attainment of enlightenment. The practice of mindfulness, ethical conduct, and the cultivation of wholesome mental states aim to weaken and eventually eradicate these kilesas, leading to liberation (P. nibbana). The process of overcoming the kilesas is central to the path of spiritual development in Buddhism.

¹³⁴ *I refer interested readers to my book: Dubois Guy, (2019), Yatra to Majjhimadesa. A Pilgrimage to the Middle Country p. 105 et seq.*

¹³⁵ *Singh, Rana & Rana Pravin, (2011), The Mythic Landscape of Buddhist Places of Pilgrimages in India, Banaras Hindu University, Shubhi Publications, New Delhi.*

¹³⁶ Vajiragnana, Medagama, (2013), *The Daily News*, Sri Lanka, dd. 15 May 2003—*How the Buddha's Enlightenment changed the world's thinking: • The Buddha discarding theology adopted psychology; instead of being theocentric, he was anthropocentric. Through this non-traditional approach, he understood the problems of man, how they are caused, how they could be solved and the way leading to their solution in a way never heard of before.*

His analysis enlightened him with regard to the truth that dukkha is not something thrust upon us by some external force, but our own creation and therefore lying within ourselves. From this, he concludes that the solution too has to be sought within ourselves. Man was declared to be his own master, responsible both for his purity and impurity. The Buddha's thus enlightened knowledge went against the accepted pattern of thinking in the world about spiritual life. The Buddha himself said that Dhamma is a teaching that is going against the current [P. patisotagamij]. •

¹³⁷ Schumann, Hans, Wolfgang, (1998), *The Historical Buddha* p. 46—*“... these freethinkers, these samanas and paribbajakas, who sought the mystical experience outside of tradition. •*

¹³⁸ Satipatthana (P.) refers to a key meditation practice taught by the Buddha, focusing on the development of mindfulness and awareness. The practice involves paying attention to four primary aspects of experience to gain insight into the nature of reality and achieve liberation. The four foundations of mindfulness are: the body (P. kaya); the sensations or feelings (P. vedana); the mind (P. citta); and the phenomena (P. dhammas).

Practicing satipatthana is considered a powerful method for cultivating mindfulness, concentration, and insight, leading to a deep understanding of the nature of suffering and the path to liberation.

¹³⁹ 'Sammappadhana' (P.) can be translated as 'Right Effort'. It is one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is a central teaching in Buddhism outlining the path to the cessation of suffering (P. nibbana). The Noble Eightfold Path consists of Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Right Effort (Sammappadhana) involves making appropriate and skillful efforts to develop wholesome qualities and eliminate unwholesome ones. Right Effort is a key aspect of the path to liberation, emphasizing the importance of active engagement in mental training and ethical conduct. It encourages practitioners to be mindful of their thoughts, emotions, and actions, making a continuous effort to cultivate positive qualities and abandon harmful tendencies.

Samappadhana consists of four aspects:

- *The Effort to Prevent Unwholesome States: This involves the effort to avoid and prevent the arising of unwholesome mental states such as greed, hatred, and delusion.*
- *The Effort to Overcome Unwholesome States: If unwholesome states have already arisen, this involves the effort to overcome and abandon them.*
- *The Effort to Cultivate Wholesome States: This entails the effort to develop and cultivate wholesome mental states such as loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom.*
- *The Effort to Maintain Wholesome States: Once wholesome states have arisen, this involves the effort to nurture and maintain them, allowing them to deepen and become more established.*

¹⁴⁰ 'Iddhipada' can be translated as 'Bases of Spiritual Power'. It refers to four mental faculties or qualities that, when developed, lead to the attainment of various psychic or super-normal powers. These powers are considered advanced achievements in meditative and contemplative practice. The development of iddhipada is part of the broader path of mental cultivation in Buddhism, particularly in the context of the higher stages of meditative absorption (P. jhana) and the realization of deeper insights into the nature of existence. While the attainment of psychic powers is acknowledged, Buddhism emphasizes that these powers are not the ultimate goal but rather a byproduct of profound spiritual development. The primary aim remains the liberation from suffering and the attainment of enlightenment.

The four iddhipada are:

- *Desire or Will (P. chanda):* The desire or will to attain a particular goal, especially the goal of liberation. In the context of iddhipada, it refers to the focused and determined mental state that drives one toward the development of spiritual powers.
- *Energy (P. viriya):* The persistent and unwavering effort or energy applied to the practice of meditation and the development of wholesome qualities. It involves cultivating a strong determination and dedication to the path.
- *Consciousness (P. citta):* The concentrated and one-pointed state (P. ekaggata) of mind that arises through meditation. It involves the focused and undistracted awareness necessary for the development of psychic powers.
- *Investigation (P. vimamsa):* The analytical and investigative quality of mind that examines and understands the nature of reality (P. yatha-bhuta). It involves a discerning inquiry into the true nature of phenomena, leading to wisdom and insight.

¹⁴¹ 'Indriya' can be translated as 'faculty'. Indriya refers to mental factors or faculties that play a crucial role in the cognitive and experiential aspects of the mind. The Five Spiritual Faculties (P. panca indriya) are considered essential for the progress on the path toward enlightenment. The balance and cultivation of these faculties contribute to the development of mental clarity, ethical conduct, and transformative insights. They are:

- *Faith (P. saddha):* The faculty of faith or confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Faith is considered a positive force that motivates and supports the practice.
- *Energy (P. viriya):* The faculty of energy or effort. It involves the application of sustained effort, diligence, and enthusiasm in the practice of wholesome qualities and the abandonment of unwholesome ones.
- *Mindfulness (P. sati):* The faculty of mindfulness, which is the ability to be fully present and aware in the present moment. Mindfulness is crucial in meditation and the cultivation of clear comprehension.
- *Concentration (P. samadhi):* The faculty of concentration or mental stability. It involves the development of one-pointed focus (P. ekaggata) and concentration, leading to meditative absorption and a settled mind.
- *Wisdom (P. panna):* The faculty of wisdom or discernment. It involves the development of insight into the true nature of reality (P. yatha-bhuta), understanding the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of phenomena.

¹⁴² 'Bala (P) can be translated as 'power' or 'strength'. 'Bala' has the same five qualities as 'Indriya'. While both terms refer to mental qualities that are crucial for spiritual development, 'indriya' emphasizes the inherent capacities or faculties, and 'bala' emphasizes the strength or power aspect of these qualities. The Five Spiritual Faculties and the Five Spiritual Powers are often used interchangeably, highlighting the interconnected nature of these qualities on the Buddhist path.

¹⁴³ 'Satta-bojjhanga' (P) can be translated as 'Seven Factors of Enlightenment' or 'Seven Factors of Awakening'. These factors are crucial elements in the path to enlightenment or awakening, as taught by the Buddha. These factors are considered essential for the development and culmination of insight leading to liberation. They are often presented as a gradual progression, starting with mindfulness and ending with equanimity. The Seven Factors are:

- Mindfulness (P. sati): The ability to maintain awareness and attention in the present moment, cultivating a clear comprehension of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Investigation of Dhamma (P. dhammavicaya): Involves a thorough investigation and contemplation of the nature of reality, the Four Noble Truths, and the interconnectedness of phenomena.
- Energy (P. viriya): The persistent effort and energy exerted in cultivating wholesome qualities, overcoming unwholesome tendencies, and progressing on the path.
- Joy or Rapture (P. piti): A sense of inner joy, happiness, or rapture that arises as a result of the practice, particularly during moments of insight or realization.
- Tranquility (P. passaddhi): A mind state of calmness, serenity, and inner peace that arises through the practice of meditation and the calming of mental activities.
- Concentration (P. samadhi): The focused and unified state of mind achieved through the development of concentration, leading to deep levels of mental absorption and tranquility.
- Equanimity (P. upekkha): A balanced and impartial mental state that arises from the deep understanding of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the nature of reality. It involves maintaining composure in the face of various experiences.

¹⁴⁴ 'Ariyamagga' (P) is the Noble Eightfold Path that consists of eight interconnected factors or principles that guide practitioners toward a life of ethical conduct (P. sila), mental discipline (P. samadhi), and wisdom (P. panna). The Noble Eightfold Path is often depicted as a wheel, symbolizing the dynamic and interconnected nature of its components. Practitioners are encouraged to develop and integrate all eight factors into their lives for the holistic transformation of their understanding, conduct, and mental states.

¹⁴⁵ A Savaka (Syn.: arahant) is a follower who has eradicated all his taints, including the 10 chains (P. samyojanas), by following the Noble Eightfold Path (P. ariya atthagika magga) of the Buddha.

¹⁴⁶ The *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* (Skr.) is a significant Buddhist text, particularly in the Mahayana tradition. The name can be translated as the 'Sutra Unraveling the Thought.' This sutra is highly regarded for its teachings on the nature of reality, emptiness, and the stages of the Bodhisattva path.

¹⁴⁷ *Dhamma-tanha (P.) → Dhamma + tanha: Dhamma = the teachings of the Buddha; tanha = craving, clinging. 'Dhamma-tanha' can be understood as the craving or attachment to views, concepts, or beliefs related to the teachings or phenomena in Buddhism. It signifies the attachment to ideas and theories, hindering one's progress on the path to enlightenment.*

¹⁴⁸ *Dhammapadhana (P.) → Dhamma + padhana: Dhamma = the teachings of the Buddha, the Truth; padhana = 'effort' or 'striving'. 'Dhammapadhana' can be understood as the effort or striving in relation to the Dhamma, which involves practicing, applying, and living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha.*

¹⁴⁹ *'Awakening is sudden, spontaneous, total, manifest':*

- *'sudden': a flash of insight, in which the truth (= what is true: reality as it is) is experienced suddenly, usually after prolonged practice. Any event can lead to self-realization. To self-ignition.*
- *'spontaneous': it is basically accessible to everyone at any time. Life offers an unimaginable range of opportunities to awaken.*
- *'total': the yogi cannot partially awaken. Nor can he be born partially.*
- *'manifest': it is clearly identifiable. This experience is self-realization through attentive observation. Self-realization through self-observation. Bhavana-maya-panna: the wisdom that results from the experiential experience that everything is interconnected.*

See my book: Dubois, Guy, (2020), Sotapattimagga. Het Pad van de Stroombetreder.

¹⁵⁰ *These Three Purifications correspond to the Three Trainings (P. tisikkha): training in morality (P. sila sikkha); training in concentration (P. samadhi sikkha) and training in wisdom (P. panna sikkha).*

¹⁵¹ *'Saddha' (P.) can be translated as 'faith', 'confidence' and 'trust'. The meaning of 'saddha' in the Buddhist context is more nuanced than the English term 'faith' might imply. In Buddhism, saddha represents a positive and wholesome mental state that goes beyond blind belief. It involves confidence and trust based on understanding, wisdom, and personal experience.*

Saddha arises when an individual, through study, reflection, and direct experience, develops a deep conviction in the teachings of the Buddha and the path to enlightenment. It is a dynamic and evolving aspect of the spiritual path, growing as practitioners gain insight and experience the benefits of the practice.

Key aspects of saddha include understanding and wisdom gained through personal exploration of the Dhamma, personal experience, and practice. It involves open-minded investigation and should be in harmony with wisdom, which means that faith should never be divorced from critical thinking and discernment.

¹⁵² *tiratna* (P) → *ti* + *ratna*: *ti* = three; *ratna* = jewels. *Tiratna* = Three Jewels. The Three Jewels are fundamental to Buddhist practice and represent the core aspects of the Buddhist refuge. The Three Jewels are: The historical Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, who attained enlightenment and awakened to the true nature of reality. Taking refuge in the Buddha means looking to him as a guide and example on the path to liberation; the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, which includes the principles and practices leading to liberation from suffering.

Taking refuge in the Dhamma involves studying, understanding, and applying the teachings in one's life; and the Sangha, the spiritual community of monks, nuns, and practitioners who have realized the truths taught by the Buddha. Taking refuge in the Sangha means seeking support and guidance from this community on the path to enlightenment.

¹⁵³ *Kalama Sutta*, *Anguttara Nikaya* 3:65

¹⁵⁴ *Cula Saccaka Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya* 35

¹⁵⁵ *Nana dassana* (P) → *nana* = 'wisdom' refers to a deep understanding and insight into the nature of reality, gained through meditation, study, and direct experience: *dassana* = 'seeing' or 'perception,' that refers to the direct realization or perception of truth, especially the understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the nature of existence.

Nana dassana denotes a profound understanding and direct perception of the fundamental truths taught in Buddhism. The combination of wisdom and insight is crucial on the path to liberation and enlightenment.

¹⁵⁶ *Vimamsaka Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya* 47

¹⁵⁷ *Pubbarama Sutta*, *Samyutta Nikaya* 48:45

¹⁵⁸ *Agganna Sutta*, *Digha Nikaya* #27

¹⁵⁹ *Tathata* (P): Syn.: *dharmata* (Skr.). This term can be translated as 'suchness,' 'thus-ness', or 'so-ness'. *Tathata* points to the ultimate nature of reality as it is: the direct, unmediated experience of reality, beyond conceptualization and dualistic thinking.

Tathata suggests seeing things just as they are, without distortion or interpretation. It emphasizes the idea that reality is neither created nor altered by mental constructs; it simply is in its true nature. '*Tathata*' is closely related to non-duality (P. *advaya*), direct experience (P. *paccakkha-nana*), and emptiness (P. *sunnata*).

¹⁶⁰ *Dhammapada*, *Gatha* #160

¹⁶¹ 'Paccakkha-nana' (P.) can be translated as 'direct insight' or 'personal realization'. It refers to a type of understanding or insight that comes from firsthand, direct, and experiential knowledge rather than indirect or theoretical understanding. This term is often used in the context of Buddhist teachings to emphasize the importance of personal, direct realization of truths rather than relying solely on intellectual understanding or external authorities.

In the practice of mindfulness and meditation, particularly in Vipassana or insight meditation, the goal is to develop paccakkha-nana—deep, personal insight into the nature of reality, including the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (P. *anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*). This direct knowledge arises from the practitioner's own observation and experience, leading to a profound and transformative understanding of the nature of mind and matter.

Important note: 'paccakkha-nana' and 'paccanubhoti' are related concepts but they are not synonymous:

Paccakkha-nana refers to direct knowledge (P. *nana*) or personal realization. It underscores the importance of experiential understanding that arises from direct observation and insight.

Paccanubhoti is a verb and can be translated as 'to experience' or 'to realize'. It is the act of realizing; the process of undergoing or directly encountering an experience.

¹⁶² In Buddhism, a 'lineage' refers to a succession of teachers and disciples who have passed down a particular tradition, teachings, and practices from one generation to the next. Although lineages are a tool for preserving and transmitting the teachings of Buddhism, they are not the sole means.

The Dhamma has been transmitted through a variety of channels, including oral tradition, written texts, cultural adaptation, and individual realization. The concept of lineages can be seen as one of many skillful means (P. *upayas*) used in the diverse landscape of Buddhist traditions. The emphasis on lineages varies across different schools and cultural contexts within Buddhism.

¹⁶³ Dhammapada, Gatha #160

¹⁶⁴ 'Vicikiccha' (P.) can be translated as 'skeptical doubt' or 'uncertainty'. It refers to a state of indecision or hesitation regarding the validity or truth of certain aspects of the teachings or the path. Overcoming vicikiccha is considered an important step on the path to enlightenment, as it involves developing confidence and trust in the teachings through direct experience and insight.

¹⁶⁵ *Idasaccabhinivesa* (P.) → *ida* + *sacca* + *abhinivesa*: *ida* : here, in this moment; *sacca* = truth, reality; *abhinivesa* = clinging, attachment. When combined, '*idasaccabhinivesa*' can be understood as the 'clinging to the truth of the present moment'.

It points to the inclination of the mind to grasp onto or fixate on the present experience, attaching a sense of self-identity or importance to it. In Buddhist teachings, clinging or attachment is considered one of the fundamental causes of suffering (P. *dukkha*).

¹⁶⁶ Sankharas (P.) are the second chain of Dependent Origination (P. *paticca samuppada*). Sankharas refer to mental volitions, formations, or activities. Sankharas include both wholesome and unwholesome mental activities, which are conditioned by one's past actions (P. *kamma*) and contribute to the arising of future experiences and outcomes.

In the context of Dependent Origination, the presence of ignorance (P. *avijja*) in the first chain gives rise to the formation of sankharas in the second link. This means that ignorance leads to the generation of mental volitions, which then influences the entire cycle of suffering and rebirth. The second link sets the stage for subsequent links in the chain, leading ultimately to birth, aging, death, and various forms of suffering.

¹⁶⁷ 'Asavas' (P): the term 'asavas' refers to mental defilements or unwholesome tendencies that hinder spiritual progress and perpetuate suffering. It can be translated as 'influxes,' 'taints,' 'defilements' or 'corruptions' in some contexts. The asavas are considered to be the underlying causes of human suffering and the cycle of rebirth. According to Buddhist doctrine, there are four primary types of asavas:

- *Kama Asava*: The influx of sensual desire or craving for sensual pleasures. This includes attachment to pleasant sensory experiences and the constant seeking of sensory gratification.
- *Bhava Asava*: The influx of desire for existence or becoming. It refers to the craving for continued existence in various realms or states, driven by a sense of identity and attachment to personal existence.
- *Ditthi Asava*: The influx of wrong views or distorted beliefs. It refers to clinging to false perceptions, ideologies, or philosophical views that obstruct the understanding of reality, such as belief in a permanent self or eternalism.
- *Avijja Asava*: The influx of ignorance or delusion. It is the fundamental cause of the other asavas and represents a lack of understanding of the true nature of reality, including the Four Noble Truths and the law of dependent origination.

The asavas bind individuals to the cycle of rebirth and perpetuate suffering. The goal of Buddhist practice is to overcome these defilements through developing insight, wisdom, and the cultivation of moral virtues.

¹⁶⁸ 'Dhammanuvatti' → *Dhamma* + *anuvatti*: *Dhamma* = the Teaching; *anuvatti* = acting behaving accordingly. *Dhammanuvatti* = a person who lives, behaves and acts in accordance with the Dhamma. A follower of the Dhamma. The Buddha used this word to indicate his followers.

¹⁶⁹ *The basic characteristic of all phenomena is that they arise and decay. From moment to moment. However, we often don't see it or don't want to see it.*

That is why anapanasati () is so immensely important as a meditation technique—a technique that we can always fall back on, our base camp. Inhalation, exhalation, arising, decay. No breath is equal to the previous one, or to the next. Breathing serves as a miniature model for the whole of existence. The entire existence is imbued with arising and decay, impermanence, and anicca.*

This principle also applies to every meditation we undertake, to every meditation technique we apply. Therefore, every meditation session must be a discovery, always something new—not a copy of the previous one. It depends on the condition of the practitioner and the circumstances of the moment. All that manifests itself to us is a snapshot of the process, from energy to transformation. Transformation is the natural state, the suchness—of all things. Tathata. The concept of 'suchness' emphasizes the direct, unmediated nature of reality, free from the influence of subjective interpretations or projections.

() anapanasati → anapana+sati: anapana = incoming and outgoing breath; sati = attention, mindfulness, perceptiveness. Anapanasati = attention to the respiratory cycle.*

¹⁷⁰ *Udayabbaya: arising and decay, increase and decrease, up and down, birth and death. Udayabbayanupassana-nana: the 4th phase of the sixteen insights (P. solana-nana) realized by the dhammanuvatti by constantly, intensively drawing attention to the arising and decay. For this purpose, the dhammanuvatti meditates on the three characteristics (P. tilakkhana) of existence in his own mind/body complex.*

For detailed explanations, refer to my book: Dubois, Guy, (2019), Satta-visuddhi – De Zeven Zuiveringen p. 233 et seq.

¹⁷¹ *The 'process': how you call it has no importance whatsoever—whether Absolute Reality. Consciousness. Space. Paramattha. or Dhamma...*

The 'process' is to see and know, to 'experience' that existence is a continuously variable process caused by causal factors. The process of existence is permanently determined by countless cause-and-effect relationships. All of this arises in complete dependence. Everything is connected to everything, like Indra's web or paticca samuppada. As the Buddha said, 'If you see paticca-samuppada, you will see the Dhamma.'

Whoever realizes this within themselves gains insight into their countless past lives, seeing in detail the eternal process of arising and decay, the endless cycle of birth and death. But they also see how everything flows together, recognizing the Middle Way as the right measure between the speculative notions of eternalism (P. sassata-ditthi) and nihilism (P. uccheda-ditthi). They see the 'process' extending across all eras and universes ().*

Anyone who experiences this will see that birth and death are only rites of passage in an everlasting process. Birth is not a starting point, nor is death a terminus. Thus, the dhammanuvatti realizes within themselves the unborn (P. ajata) and the deathless (P. amata), experiencing that they are an integral part of the 'process', that this 'process' is their original nature, and that they are the 'process'.

() See the Maha-Saccaka-Sutta, Majjhima-Nikaya 36, de Breet, Jan & Janssen, Rob, (2004), de verzameling van middellange leerredes, Deel I, Suttas 1-50 p. 388: the first vigil—the first insight of 'triple knowledge'—of Siddhattha Gotama just before his awakening.*

¹⁷² *Dhamma is used here in the sense of the law of nature, the cosmic law, the 'process'. A good description can be found in the Uppada-Sutta, Anguttara-Nikaya 3.136 – 'Monks, whether a Tathagata appears in the world or not, this Dhamma, this natural law persists, this process of natural principles is immutable: all conditioned phenomena are impermanent; all conditioned phenomena are unsatisfactory; all conditioned phenomena are selfless' (free, shortened personal translation of the Uppada-Sutta).*

¹⁷³ *De woorden van de oude Cheng, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, dd. 24 juni 2020. See also: de Groot, Arjen (1988), Meester Tsjeng over het geheim van de oorspronkelijke geest, Uitgeverij Kairos, Soest, Nederland*

¹⁷⁴ *Schrödinger, Erwin, (2008), My View of the World, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK – 'Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the whole; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in one single glance. This, as we know, is what the Brahmins express in that sacred, mystic formula which is yet really so simple and so clear: Tat tvam asi, this is you. Or, again, in such words as 'I am in the East and in the West, I am below and above, I am this whole world'. Thus you can throw yourself flat on the ground, stretched out upon Mother Earth, with the certain conviction that you are one with her and she with you. You are as firmly established, as invulnerable as she, indeed a thousand times firmer and more invulnerable. As surely she will engulf you tomorrow, so surely she will bring you forth anew to new striving and suffering. And not merely 'someday': now, today, every day she is bringing you forth, not once but thousands upon thousands of times, just as every day she engulfs you a thousand times over. For eternally and always there is only now, one and the same now; the present is the only thing that has no end.'*

¹⁷⁵ *'ephemeral' → ekahika (P.) → eka + ahika: eka = one, one single; ahika. Ekahika = literally translated 'for one day,' here in the sense of 'changing from moment to moment'.*

¹⁷⁶ *Dhammuttamo, Achariya, (2020), Concept en werkelijkheid in vipassana, Boeddhistisch Dagblad, dd. 20 August 2020 – 'By shifting the attention from the content to the act of looking, the dhammanuvatti is detached from identification with the seen and is only in the process of following the functioning of his/her own perception. This creates attentiveness on the body, on feeling, on thinking, and on the objects of consciousness without any involvement with the quality or content of the mental objects.'*

¹⁷⁷ *Observing without judgment is synonymous with 'non-thinking,' in the sense of not identifying with the content of the thoughts.*

¹⁷⁸ *The 12 chains of Dependent Origination (P. paticca samuppada): with ignorance (P. avijja) as a condition formations (P. sankharas) arise → with formations as a condition consciousness (P. vinnana) arises → with consciousness as a condition body/mind (P. nama-rupa) arises → with body/mind as a condition the six senses (P. salayatana) arise → with the six senses as a condition contact (P. phassa) arises → with contact as a condition feeling (P. vedana) arises → with feeling as a condition desire (P. tanha) arises → with desire as a condition attachment (P. upadana) arises → with attachment as a condition 'becoming' (P. bhava) arises → with 'becoming' as a condition birth (P. jati) arises → with birth as a condition, aging, death and dukkha (P. jamarana) arises.*

¹⁷⁹ In the first 500 years after the Buddha's death (*P. parinibbana*), there were no Buddha statues. If one wished to depict the Buddha, it was done using symbols such as the bodhi tree, a stupa, a fleeting footprint in the sand, or an empty throne.

The first Buddha statues emerged during the Kushana period (first to the third century AD), particularly during the reign of King Kanishka. King Kanishka, an adept of the Dhamma, presided over the 4th Buddhist Council held in Kashmir. The southern capital of the Kushana Empire was Madhura, where, under Kanishka's rule, many statues were produced, notably the well-known Gandhara statues reflecting unmistakable Greek influence.

Note: Minimalism comes with a sensory price; it diminishes ceremonial traditions, rites, and rituals, extinguishing the immersive music of mantras and scaling down the pleasant smell of incense. However, it opens the door to essence, reinforcing the dhammanuvatti's insight into the Dhamma. Understanding Dhamma is an experiential process that occurs exclusively within the dhammanuvatti, not through the manifestation of external forms.

The dhammanuvatti who realizes the Dhamma within themselves is a far cry from *Buddharupa*. It's essential to remember that the desire for rites, rituals, ceremonies, specific techniques, etc. (*P. silabbata paramasa*) is one of the three chains (*P. samyojanas*) preventing the dhammanuvatti from entering the stream.

See also: Singh, Rana, (2009), *Where The Buddha Walked. A Companion to the Buddhist Places of India*, p. 43-44.

¹⁸⁰ A stupa is a mound-like or hemispherical structure containing relics, typically associated with Buddhist religious practices. Stupas are important elements in Buddhist architecture and are considered sacred. They often house relics of the Buddha or other revered figures and serve as places for meditation, worship, and pilgrimage.

The structure of a stupa usually symbolizes various aspects of Buddhist cosmology and teachings. Stupas can be found in many Buddhist regions and countries, and they come in various designs and sizes.

¹⁸¹ *Paccakkha-nana* (*P.*) refers to direct knowledge or personal realization. It underscores the importance of experiential understanding that arises from direct observation and insight.

¹⁸² 'composed' → refers here to the meaning of 'conditioned,' indicating that it is created by countless causes (*P. hetus*) and conditions (*P. paccayas*).

¹⁸³ 'paccanubhoti' (*P.*): experience, realize. The most important is experiential experience. Direct experience. Knowledge at experience level. Direct seeing.

¹⁸⁴ Hsin Tao, (2018), *Listening to Silence*, *Tricycle Magazine*, Winter 2018 – '[When] you just listen, without attachment, to a sound, to silence or to the contrast between the two, then there is no attachment at all ... Eventually, you will reach a point where listening still takes place, but where the object has disappeared. In other words, there is still consciousness, but what you are aware of is emptiness.'

¹⁸⁵ 'hishiryo' (Jap.) means thinking beyond thinking that involves comparisons, measurements, and calculations. Hishiryo is about seeing without thinking.

If you engage in thinking, you tend to make choices, and through the choices, you identify with them. Making choices perpetuates the 'I' system. By maintaining equanimity and attentiveness, the dhammanuvatti can transcend any specific choice. 'Seeing without thinking' simply means stopping the thought process, the stream of thoughts (P. vinnana-sota), that tsunami of mind-chatter. It's about returning to your original self.

When the dhammanuvatti experiences life in this way, they enter a world without separation, without duality. In everything they do, they are complete, unified, and self-realized. They are fully aware that 'the moon is reflected as much in the ocean as in a dewdrop.'

¹⁸⁶ 'Paramattha' (P.) can be translated to English as 'Ultimate Reality' or 'Absolute reality.' The concept of paramattha is crucial in understanding the nature of existence and the teachings of Buddhism.

In the Buddhist context, paramattha refers to the ultimate constituents or elements that make up all phenomena. These elements are considered to be devoid of inherent or independent existence and are analyzed to understand the true nature of reality. The three fundamental aspects of paramattha are:

- *Citta (Consciousness): The mind or consciousness, which is aware of an object.*
- *Cetasika (Mental Factors): Various mental factors or states that accompany consciousness, such as feeling, perception, volition, etc.*
- *Rupa (Matter): The material or physical aspect of phenomena.*

These components are analyzed to illustrate the impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and non-self (P. anatta) nature of all phenomena. Understanding paramattha is considered essential for gaining insight into the true nature of existence and ultimately achieving liberation from suffering in Buddhism.

¹⁸⁷ 'Pannati' (P.) is a term used in Buddhist philosophy, particularly in the Theravada tradition. It refers to conceptual or nominal reality. It is the level of conventional, conceptual designations and classifications that the mind creates to navigate the world. Pannati includes concepts, names, and labels that are useful for communication and functioning in the everyday world but are considered to be dependent on conditions and lacking inherent reality.

Understanding the distinction between paramattha and pannati is crucial in Buddhist practice. The goal is to see through the illusions created by conceptual reality and gain insight into the Ultimate Reality, which leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of suffering and the path to liberation.

¹⁸⁸ 'Sanna-vipallasa (P) can be translated as 'distorted perception'. A dhammanuvatti can rectify these perceptual distortions by seeing and understanding reality (P. janami passami) as it truly is (P. yatha-bhuta) and by accepting and realizing this reality (recognizing and becoming one with it) within himself. The power of vipassana ('seeing things as they really are') guides the dhammanuvatti to 'see and understand' (P. janami passami) the true nature of things, i.e., the true nature of existence. This involves understanding the impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and selflessness (P. anatta) of all conditioned phenomena (P. tilakkhana).

Perfect insight (P. samma-ditthi) boils down to 'seeing and understanding' the Four Noble Truths in their three rotations (P. tiparivatta) and twelve aspects (P. dvadasakara). This means that each of the Four Noble Truths must be known and understood (P. pariyatti), practiced (P. patipatti), and realized (P. pativedha). Thus, perfect insight involves understanding dukkha (P. dukkha nana), understanding the cause of dukkha (P. dukkha samudaya nana), understanding the end of dukkha (P. dukkha nirodha nana), and understanding the path leading to the end of dukkha (P. dukkha nirodha gamini patipadaya nana). Vipassana is, therefore, nothing more or less than the personal realization of the Four Noble Truths. Vipassana is the embodiment of the essence of the Buddhasasana.

(*) See Vipallasa-sutta, Anguttara-Nikaya 4.49

¹⁸⁹ It is crucial to understand that a dhammanuvatti will never reach the true vipassana phase ('seeing things as they really are') without effectively discerning between the conceptual and the real while engaging in the acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking.

In vipassana meditation, each meditation object should be observed as it truly is (P. yatha-bhuta). Sensory and conceptual reality should never be the objective of vipassana meditation. The vipassana meditator should direct attention to the general characteristics to which all mental and physical phenomena are subject. Focus should be on the three characteristics (P. tilakkhana) of phenomena, namely their impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and selflessness (P. anatta). Recognizing these three characteristics aids the dhammanuvatti in unveiling the illusory nature of his perception of phenomena and in realizing their 'true nature' (Absolute Reality).

Put differently, by objectively observing the tilakkhana in phenomena, the dhammanuvatti describes reality as it is, not as he used to imagine it. In other words, the tilakkhana provides an accurate depiction of samsara and is fundamentally opposed to Nibbana, which lacks these characteristics.

By applying this 'technique' of mindfulness (P. satipatthana) to the mind/body complex (P. nama-rupa), specifically to the five aggregates (P. khandhas = body, sensations, perception, formations, and consciousness) that constitute the 'I,' reality unfolds. Through continuous observation of the four fields of mindfulness (P. gocaras)—body (P. kaya-nupassana); feeling (P. vedana-nupassana); mind (P. citta-nupassana), and mental objects (P. Dhamma-nupassana)—the dhammanuvatti realizes the Four Noble Truths.

¹⁹⁰ *The ego or the 'I' represents the 'self' that directs everything toward the wheel of life. It is the 'self' that demands, attracts, and attempts to grasp or provoke disgust and repulsion. It's this 'me' that believes it has everything under control. This part of ourselves causes dukkha. Although this 'I' lives and influences our lives at various times, it is the ego that clouds reality. Enlightenment (P. sambodhi) is the awakening from the obscuration of the ego. Awakening is not so much a permanent state (cfr. anatta: nothing is permanent; everything is unstable) but rather a continuous, ongoing, dynamic process.*

¹⁹¹ *Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu, (1998), Heartwood of the Bodhitree, Wisdom Publications, USA, p. 101 – 'Birth means the emergence of the feelings of 'I' and 'of me'.*

Samyutta-Nikaya 1.69 – 'The world is chained to desire. Destruction of desire liberates the world. Giving up desire breaks the chains'.

¹⁹² *Dutiyabhaddiya-Sutta, Ud. VII.2*

¹⁹³ *'He has broken the cycle (P. vatta)' is a metaphor for the destruction of the eternal circle of samsara (birth, death and rebirth; but also death and rebirth of the tainted mind—kilesa vatta). Desire (P. tanha), attachment (P. upadana) and 'becoming' (P. bhava) are the current activities that lead to future 'birth'. And as such to the continuation of the cycle of samsara. Etymological the meaning of 'samsara' is: 'aimless and directionless wandering'. Very appropriate.*

¹⁹⁴ *'[He has broken the cycle] and freed himself from his desires' → translation of 'acchecchi vattam byaga nirasam.'*

Desire in the broadest sense of the word: not only the desire for sexual gratification but desire for all possible forms of sensory saturation (P. kama tanha) such as: desire for food; drink; money; material possessions; fame; power; longing for some result (politics; religious; sport...); desire for spiritual perfection; for awakening... But also the desire for existence (P. bhava tanha) and the desire for non-existence (P. vibhava tanha). These three tanhas are the cause of our suffering; of our misery (P. dukkha).

Andrew Olendzki: 'We are used to thinking of freedom as being free to do what we want, but the Buddha sees it as being free from wanting.'

¹⁹⁵ *'This river has dried up: it no longer flows' → translation of 'visukkha sarita na sandati'.*

¹⁹⁶ *'Broken, the cycle has come to a standstill' → translation of 'chinnam vattam na vattati'.*

¹⁹⁷ *'Just this is the end of dukkha' → translation of 'es ev anto dukkhassati'.*

Dukkha stands for the suffering of birth, old age, death, sadness, pain, mourning, despair, the proximity of people and things we don't like, the absence of people and things we do love, not getting what we desire—all this is dukkha.

When we examine the nature of the conditioned phenomena in an ever deeper and subtler way, we see that all phenomena are essentially always unsatisfactory in nature.

¹⁹⁸ 'Sabhava' (P.) can be translated as 'own-nature,' 'inherent nature,' or 'essential nature.' The concept of sabhava is closely related to the understanding of impermanence (P. *anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*). It suggests that all conditioned phenomena lack a permanent, unchanging essence or self-nature. Instead, they are subject to constant change, unsatisfactoriness, and lack a permanent, independent self.

The recognition of sabhava is crucial in developing insight (P. *vipassana*) and understanding the nature of existence according to Buddhist philosophy. It encourages practitioners to see through the illusions of permanence and inherent identity in order to comprehend the true nature of reality (P. *yatha-bhuta*).

¹⁹⁹ 'upadana' (P.): attach, grab, grasp. It is a thorough form of desire (P. *tanha*). The *Visuddhimagga* distinguishes 4 types of attachment: sensory attachment (P. *kama-upadana* → *kamupadana*); attachment to opinions (*ditthi-upadana* → *ditth'upadana*); attachment to rules and rituals (P. *silabbata-upadana* → *silabbatupadana*) and attachment to the 'I' personality view (P. *attavada upadana*).

²⁰⁰ *Anatta-lakkhana-Sutta*, *Samyutta-Nikaya* 10.59 . Schematically, this sutta boils down to this: disenchantment (P. *nibbida*) → becoming dispassionate (P. *viraga*) → unwinding, calming down (P. *upasama*) → internal peace = 'becoming cool' (P. *ajalita* → *a+jalita*: a = not; *jalita* = on fire), freeing oneself from 'becoming' = freeing oneself from the *kilesas* by seeing things 'as they really are' (P. *yatha-bhuta*) and accepting them equally (P. *upekkha*) (*).

Seeing things 'as they really are and accepting equally' leads the *dhammanuvatti* to *nibbana*. 'Awakening ' can be summarized in four Pali words: *nibbida* → *viraga* → *upasama* → *Nibbana*. These four concepts become four shelves for the raft with which the *dhammanuvatti* crosses to the Other Shore: 'Birth is at its end, the holy life is lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no further state of existence.' This text indicates in the *suttas* that a practitioner, a *dhammanuvatti*, has reached *nibbana*.

(*): *upekkha*: equanimity; an equanimous mind that is not disturbed by profit or loss; by honor or dishonor; by praise or disdain; by pleasure or sorrow. These are called the 'Eight Worldly Winds' – See the *Lokavipatti-Sutta*, *Anguttara-Nikaya* 8:6.

²⁰¹ 'sankharas' (P.): mental formations, habit patterns, mentally conditioned phenomena. These impulsive reactions to stimuli from the outside world lead to ignorance (P. *moha*), desire (P. *lobha*, *tanha*), anger (P. *dosa*), and attachment (P. *upadana*). *Sankharas* lead to recurring 'becoming' (P. *bhava*) and suffering (P. *dukkha*).

So, the essence of *vipassana* meditation is recognizing that all *sankharas* (like all phenomena) are impermanent. Their nature is to arise and perish. They disappear only to reappear in the next moment. This is how *sankharas* multiply. The *dhammanuvatti*, who observes mindfully with objective equanimity, develops wisdom: they halt the process of multiplication and initiate the process of elimination.

By stopping the permanent 'creation process' (P. *bhava*) and the impact of our perception on the stream of consciousness (P. *vinnanasota*), they consume the fuel for 'being.' This is how the fire is extinguished, liberating them from *dukkha* and attaining inner peace.

In theory, it's as simple as that. The praxis is more challenging.

²⁰² 'Yatha-bhuta nana dassana' → yatha + bhuta + nana + dassana: yatha = true, what is true; bhuta = the nature of something, the nature; nana = insight, (deep) direct knowledge, knowing (P. paccakkha); dassana = look at, see. Yatha-bhuta nana dassana = freely translated: 'seeing and knowing' reality as it really is. A synonym for this sentence is: yatha-bhuta janami passami: janami = knowing; passami = seeing.

²⁰³ 'mana' (P): the mind. Mana is formed by the combination of the following four mental aggregates (P. khandhas): consciousness (P. vinnana); perception (P. sanna); feelings (P. vedana) and mental formations (P. sankharas).

²⁰⁴ 'magga brahmacariya' (P): this is the 'sacred' life that stems from the development of the Eightfold Path (P. ariya atthangika magga).

²⁰⁵ 'Katam karniyam' (P) refers to the realization by the dhammanuvatti of the Four Noble Truths (P. cattari ariya saccani). The optimum of wisdom is 'seeing & knowing' the Four Noble Truths. Cfr. the Maha-Vedala-Sutta, Majjhima-Nikaya 43—'A person who possesses wisdom understands what dukkha is; understands the cause of dukkha; understands the cessation of dukkha and understands the path leading to the cessation of dukkha. A person who does not possess wisdom does not understand what dukkha is; does not understand the cause of dukkha; does not understand the cessation of dukkha and does not understand the way leading to the cessation of dukkha. The purpose of wisdom is direct [experiential] insight; the goal is penetrating insight. The goal is to prevail.'

Katam karniyam can be translated as 'what had to be done is done'. In concrete terms: understanding suffering (P. dukkha sacca); releasing the cause of suffering (P. samudaya sacca); realizing the end of suffering (P. nirodha sacca), and cultivating the path leading to the end of suffering (P. magga sacca).

²⁰⁶ 'naparam itthattaya' (P): this is the complete extinction of all 'becoming' by the dhammanuvatti. The fire of 'becoming' (P. bhava) no longer receives fuel.

²⁰⁷ 'anicca sammasana nana' (P): anicca = impermanence; the transience; sammasana = understanding; discovering; exploring; determining; nana = insight. Anicca sammasana nana = the insight by which one understands the impermanence of all phenomena.

²⁰⁸ 'dukkha sammasana nana' (P): dukkha = the insight by which one understands the unsatisfaction of all phenomena.

²⁰⁹ 'anatta sammasana nana' (P): anatta = the insight by which one understands the selflessness of all phenomena.

²¹⁰ This corresponds to the first three of the seven purifications (P. satta visuddhi), namely: moral purification—the purification of moral conduct (P. sila visuddhi); purification of the mind—the development of concentration and mental discipline (P. citta visuddhi) and purification of insight—the development of right understanding and the elimination of wrong views (P. ditthi visuddhi). These three purifications correspond to the three trainings (P. tisikkha): training in ethics/morality (P. sila sikkha); training in concentration (P. samadhi sikkha) and training in wisdom (P. panna sikkha). These purifications are foundational steps on the path to enlightenment.

²¹¹ 'Ekaggata' (P.) can be translated as 'one-pointedness' or 'deep concentration'. Ekaggata refers to the mental state of focused attention or concentration, where the mind is unified and directed towards a single point or object. 'Ekaggata' is a term often associated with the development of concentration and is closely related to the states of absorption or concentration known as 'jhana' in Buddhist philosophy. The mental factor (P. jhananga) of one-pointed concentration, or 'ekaggata,' is particularly emphasized in the fourth jhana, where sensory experiences and even the initial factors of joy and happiness found in the earlier jhanas have been transcended.

²¹² 'Realization' is not obtained by borrowed, received wisdom from others (P. suta-maya panna); nor by logical and rational [but conditioned] thinking (P. cinta-maya panna). Only by direct empirical experience; experiential wisdom through self-insight (bhavana-maya panna) the dhammanuvatti can come to self-realization.

²¹³ Dukkha is a pivotal term in the Dhamma, representing the enduring suffering that permeates all beings in every aspect of their existence. The root cause of this suffering is ignorance (P. avijja, moha)—the lack of awareness, the inability, or the reluctance to perceive the true nature of existence (characterized by anicca, dukkha, anatta). This ignorance leads to the arising of desire (P. lobha) and aversion (P. dosa).

²¹⁴ See the excellent article by Peter Harvey, (2009), *The Four Ariya-Saccas as 'True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled'—The Painful, its Origin, its Cessation, and the Way Going to This—Rather than 'Noble Truths' Concerning These*. *Buddhist Studies Review, BSRV* 26.2 (2009) 197-227, Equinox Publishing Ltd, UK.

²¹⁵ This 'proper attention' (P. samma sati) is not 'passive' but 'dynamic'; 'confronting' and 'provocative'—[This means that the mind must] 'cover the object completely; penetrating into it; not missing any part of it.'—Sayadaw U. Pandita, (1992), *In This Very Life. The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* p. 93 e.v.

²¹⁶ Boucher, Sandy, (2017), *We are in Training to Be Nobody Special*, Tricycle, Trike Daily, Personal reflections.

²¹⁷ 'satipatthana' (P.) → sati + upatthana: sati = 'mindfulness' or 'awareness'; patthana = 'foundation' or 'setting up'. In the context of satipatthana, it implies the establishment or development of mindfulness as a foundational practice. The practice of satipatthana is considered a comprehensive method for developing insight (P. vipassana) and cultivating a deep understanding of the nature of reality.

²¹⁸ 'Sattatimsa bodhipakkhiya dhamma' (P.): the seven sets of 37 individual factors/qualities/properties that lead to Enlightenment.

These seven sets are: the Noble Eightfold Path (P. attha magganga); the factors of enlightenment (P. satta sambojjhanga); the five spiritual faculties (P. panca indriya); the five potential forces (P. panca bala); the four fields of mindfulness (P. cattaro satipatthana); the four elements of pure effort (P. cattaro sammappadhana); and the four qualities of spiritual power (P. cattaro iddhipada).

²¹⁹ Dhammapada, Gatha #277

²²⁰ The Mahaparinibbana mantra is an integral part of the Buddhist funeral ritual in Sri Lanka.

²²¹ 'Paccakkha-nana' (P.) can be translated as 'direct insight' or 'personal realization'. It refers to a type of understanding or insight that comes from firsthand, direct, and experiential knowledge rather than indirect or theoretical understanding. This term is often used in the context of Buddhist teachings to emphasize the importance of personal, direct realization of truths rather than relying solely on intellectual understanding or external authorities. In the practice of mindfulness and meditation, particularly in Vipassana or insight meditation, the goal is to develop paccakkha-nana—deep, personal insight into the nature of reality, including the three characteristics of existence: impermanence (P. *anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*). This direct knowledge arises from the practitioner's own observation and experience, leading to a profound and transformative understanding of the nature of mind and matter.

Important note: 'paccakkha-nana' and 'paccanubhoti' are related concepts but they are not synonymous:

Paccakkha-nana refers to direct knowledge or personal realization. It underscores the importance of experiential understanding that arises from direct observation and insight.

Paccanubhoti is a verb and can be translated as 'to experience' or 'to realize'. It is the act of realizing; the process of undergoing or directly encountering an experience.

²²² In the context of Satipatthana, 'gocara' refers to the field or domain of mindfulness. When we talk about mindfulness of different aspects, such as the body, feelings, mind, or phenomena, 'gocara' signifies the specific area, domain or sphere in which mindfulness is directed or applied during the practice of Satipatthana meditation.

²²³ Mahaparinnibbana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 16

²²⁴ Vinaya 3.60

²²⁵ 'Dhammo sanantano' (P.) can be translated as 'The Dhamma is eternal' or 'The Truth is eternal'. This saying conveys the idea that the fundamental truths or principles taught by the Buddha are eternal and persist across time. It reflects the belief in the timeless nature of the Dhamma and its relevance to the human condition.

²²⁶ Visuddhimagga' (P.) → visuddhi + magga: visuddhi = purification; magga = the road, the path. Visuddhimagga = the path of purification.

The Visuddhimagga, authored by Buddhaghosa, a Buddhist monk, serves as the magnum opus that expounds upon the theoretical and practical teachings of the Buddha.

*These teachings, as recorded in the Tipitaka Pali Canon, are presented in the Visuddhimagga as they were understood and practiced by the monks of the Mahavihara monastery in Anuradhapura, located 250 km north of Colombo, the current capital of Sri Lanka, around 430 BC. This book is widely regarded as the most important Theravada text, second only to the Tipitaka Pali Canon. Its structure is derived from the Rathavinita Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 24, which outlines the path of the seven purifications (P. *satta visuddhi*) and the sixteen phases of insight (P. *solana nanas*).*

²²⁷ 'Vimuttimagga' (P) → *vimutti+magga*: *vimutti* = liberation; *magga* = the road, the path. *Vimuttimagga* = the path of freedom.

Upatissa, Thera (1961), *Vimuttimagga - The Path of Freedom*. The original Pali text of this work has been lost but was preserved in a Chinese version (6th century CE). For the most part, the versions of the *Vimuttimagga* and the *Visuddhimagga* are synchronous, although there are still several points of difference. The most significant distinction between the two works lies in the substructure: the *Vimuttimagga* bases the scheme of the insight process on the Four Noble Truths, while the *Visuddhimagga* follows the scheme of the *Rathavinita Sutta*.

The *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa is a Buddhist masterpiece, recommended reading for any advanced yogi. However, this doesn't imply a value judgment about the *Vimuttimagga*. On the contrary, where the *Visuddhimagga* adopts an academic approach, the *Vimuttimagga* is more apologetic in nature. Nonetheless, it is 'liberating' reading.

An excellent English translation of the *Visuddhimagga* is available: Buddhaghosa, Bhadantacariya (2010), *Visuddhimagga, The Path of Purification*, Pariyatti Press, Onalaska, WA, USA.

For a comparative study between the two, I refer to: Bapat P. V. (1937), *Vimuttimagga and Visuddhimagga. A Comparative Study*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

²²⁸ Sayadaw, Mahasi, (1994), *The Progress of Insight (Visuddhinana-katha)*

²²⁹ Sayadaw U. Pandita, (1992), *In This Very Life. The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* p. 192

²³⁰ Sayadaw U. Pandita, (2016), *Freedom Within. Liberation teachings on the Satipatthana meditation practice* p. 14

²³¹ 'anupassana' (P): the continuous intensive establishing of mindfulness on the 4 foundations of mindfulness; on the body (P. *kaya-anupassana*); on the sensations (P. *vedana-anupassana*); on the mind (P. *citta-anupassana*) and on the objects of the mind (P. *dhamma-anupassana*).

Sayadaw U. Pandita, (2016), *Freedom Within. Liberation teachings on the Satipatthana meditation practice* p. 18 — 'Anupassana is ardent effort (P. *atapi viriya*), mindfulness (P. *sati*), concentration (P. *samadhi*) and wisdom (P. *panna*). Its benefit is to know correctly, clearly in order to see the true nature of phenomena.'

²³² 'Panca nivarana' (P) can be translated as 'five hindrances'. These hindrances are mental factors or obstacles that obstruct progress in meditation and the development of insight.

The five hindrances are:

- Sensual Desire (P. *kamacchanda*): The attachment or craving for sensory pleasures.
- Ill-will (P. *vyapada*): Feelings of hostility, anger, or aversion towards oneself or others.
- Sloth and Torpor (P. *thina-middha*): Mental sluggishness, drowsiness, lack of mental energy.
- Restlessness and Worry (P. *uddhacca-kukkucca*): Agitation, anxiety, or a restless mind.
- Doubt (*vicikiccha*): Skepticism, indecision, or uncertainty about the path and one's abilities.

²³³ 'Panca upadana khandha' (P.) can be translated as 'five aggregates of clinging'. These aggregates represent the components that make up the human being and contribute to the sense of self.

The five aggregates are:

- Form (P. rupa): This refers to the physical or material aspects of existence, including the body and the external environment.
- Feeling (P. vedana): The sensory and emotional experiences, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, that arise in response to stimuli.
- Perception (P. sanna): The cognitive process of recognizing and conceptualizing objects or experiences based on sensory input.
- Volitional Formations (P. sankhara): Mental formations, including thoughts, intentions, and mental activities that shape one's experiences.
- Consciousness (P. vinnana): The awareness or cognizance of objects and experiences, including the six sense bases (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mental objects).

These aggregates are considered fundamental to the understanding of the nature of existence and the development of insight in Buddhism. The term 'clinging' (P. upadana) emphasizes the attachment and identification with these aggregates, which leads to suffering (P. dukkha). The goal of Buddhist practice is to gain insight into the nature of these aggregates, leading to liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth (P. samsara).

²³⁴ 'Salayatana' (P.) can be translated as 'six sense bases'. These six sense bases are crucial components in the Buddhist understanding of perception and the nature of experience.

The six sense bases are:

- Eye (P. cakkhu): The physical organ of vision.
- Ear (P. sota): The physical organ of hearing.
- Nose (P. ghana): The physical organ of smelling.
- Tongue (P. jivha): The physical organ of tasting.
- Body (P. kaya): The physical sense of touch and the body as a whole.
- Mind (P. mano): The mental faculty responsible for thinking, cognition, mental processes.

According to Buddhist philosophy, these six sense bases are the avenues through which individuals come into contact with the external world. Sensations arise when there is contact between a sense organ, a sense object, and consciousness. The understanding of the interplay between these sense bases is crucial for comprehending the nature of suffering (P. dukkha) and achieving liberation.

In Buddhism, the concept of 'dependent origination' (P. paticca samuppada) explains the arising of suffering through a chain of causal links. The six sense bases are part of this chain, illustrating the interconnected nature of human experience and the impermanence of phenomena. The practice of mindfulness and insight meditation involves understanding and breaking the cycle of dependent origination to attain liberation (P. nibbana).

²³⁵ 'Satta-bojjhanga' (P.) can be translated as 'Seven Factors of Enlightenment' or 'Seven Factors of Awakening'. These factors are crucial elements in the path to enlightenment or awakening, as taught by the Buddha. These factors are considered essential for the development and culmination of insight leading to liberation. They are often presented as a gradual progression, starting with mindfulness and ending with equanimity. The Seven Factors are:

- *Mindfulness (P. sati)*: The ability to maintain awareness and attention in the present moment, cultivating a clear comprehension of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- *Investigation of Dhamma (P. dhammavicaya)*: Involves a thorough investigation and contemplation of the nature of reality, the Four Noble Truths, and the interconnectedness of phenomena.
- *Energy (P. viriya)*: The persistent effort and energy exerted in cultivating wholesome qualities, overcoming unwholesome tendencies, and progressing on the path.
- *Joy or Rapture (P. piti)*: A sense of inner joy, happiness, or rapture that arises as a result of the practice, particularly during moments of insight or realization.
- *Tranquility (P. passaddhi)*: A mind state of calmness, serenity, and inner peace that arises through the practice of meditation and the calming of mental activities.
- *Concentration (P. samadhi)*: The focused and unified state of mind achieved through the development of concentration, leading to deep levels of mental absorption and tranquility.
- *Equanimity (P. upekkha)*: A balanced and impartial mental state that arises from the deep understanding of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and the nature of reality. It involves maintaining composure in the face of various experiences.

²³⁶ 'Cattari ariya sacca' can be translated as 'Four Noble Truths' or 'The Truths of a Noble Person'. The Four Noble Truths are considered the foundation of Buddhist teachings, providing a framework for understanding the nature of existence and the path to liberation from suffering.

The Four Noble Truths are:

- *Suffering (P. dukkha sacca)*: The acknowledgment that suffering, dissatisfaction, or unsatisfactoriness is inherent in life.
- *Cause of Suffering (P. samudaya sacca)*: The recognition that craving or desire (P. tanha) is the origin of suffering. This includes craving for sensual pleasures, existence, and non-existence.
- *Cessation of Suffering (P. nirodha sacca)*: The understanding that there is a way to end suffering by overcoming and letting go of craving.
- *Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (P. magga sacca)*: The Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This path guides individuals toward the cessation of suffering and the realization of enlightenment.

²³⁷ *Maha-Satipatthana—Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22*

²³⁸ Sometimes this 'experiential knowing' is labeled as 'controlled faith/trust' [verified faith].

Sayadaw U. Pandita, (1992), *In This Very Life. The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* p. 70 — 'Seeing clearly, bright and unconfused, the mind begins to fill with a new kind of faith, known as 'verified faith'. Verified faith is neither blind nor unfounded. It comes directly from personal experience of reality. One might compare it to the faith that raindrops will get us wet. The scriptures formally characterize this kind of faith as 'a decision based on direct personal experience. (...) It is your own direct, personal, intuitive experience that brings you about this firm and durable kind of faith.'

²³⁹ *Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 16*

²⁴⁰ *Nibbana Sutta, Ud. 8.1*

²⁴¹ 'Satta visuddhi' (P.) can be translated as 'Seven Purifications' or 'Seven Purities'. These purifications are part of the path leading to enlightenment and liberation from suffering. The seven purifications are often described in the context of the stages of insight knowledge (P. vipassana) and meditative development. They represent the progressive refinement of the practitioner's mind and understanding. The specifics of these purifications can be found in various Buddhist texts, particularly in the *Visuddhimagga*.

The Seven Purifications typically include:

- Purity of Virtue (P. *silā visuddhi*): Purification of ethical conduct and virtuous living.
- Purity of Mind (P. *citta visuddhi*): Purification of the mind through concentration and meditation.
- Purity of View (P. *ditthi visuddhi*): Purification of one's understanding of reality and the nature of existence.
- Purity of Overcoming Doubt (P. *kankhavitaraṇa Visuddhi*): Purification by overcoming doubt and uncertainty in the path.
- Purity of Knowledge and Vision of What Is Path and Not Path (P. *maggamagganā dasana visuddhi*): Purification of knowledge and insight into what is the path and what is not the path to liberation.
- Purity by Knowledge and Vision of the Course of Practice (P. *patipadānā dassana visuddhi*): Purification by understanding and insight into the correct course of practice.
- Purity by Knowledge and Vision (P. *nāna dassana visuddhi*): Purification by knowledge and insight into the nature of reality, leading to liberation.

For more information, See my book: Dubois, Guy, Eugène, (2019), *Satta-visuddhi. De Zeven Zuiveringen & de Zestien Fasen van Inzicht*, Brave New Books, Rotterdam, Nederland

²⁴² 'Solana nanas' (P.) can be translated as 'Sixteen Insight Knowledges'. These vipassana insights are part of the progress of meditators as they deepen their understanding of the nature of reality. These insights lead practitioners through various stages of understanding, including the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of all phenomena. Each stage represents a deepening level of insight into the true nature of existence. The progression through these insights is considered crucial on the path to enlightenment in Theravada Buddhist practice. The specific details of these insights are expounded in texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*, a classical Theravada Buddhist commentary on meditation.

For more information, See my book: Dubois, Guy, Eugène, (2019), *Satta-visuddhi. De Zeven Zuiveringen & de Zestien Fasen van Inzicht*, Brave New Books, Rotterdam, Nederland

²⁴³ 'rupa dhatus' (P): the four great material elements, which are foundational to the understanding of the material aspect of existence in Buddhist philosophy.

- earth (P. pathavi dhatu): solidity
- water (P. apo dhatu): liquidity
- fire (P. tejo dhatu): heat
- air (P. vayo dhatu): motion

²⁴⁴ Dependent origination (P. paticca samuppada) is a key concept in Buddhist teachings that explains the interconnected nature of all phenomena. It describes the dependent arising and interdependence of all things in the world, illustrating how everything is interconnected and arises due to a complex web of causal relationships.

²⁴⁵ Maha Nidana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 12.20

²⁴⁶ Anguttara Nikaya 3.136

²⁴⁷ Mudita (P) is the practice of finding joy in the happiness and success of others. It involves cultivating an unselfish and empathetic joy when witnessing the well-being, achievements, or good fortune of others. This practice is considered essential in developing a compassionate and open-hearted mind. In contrast to jealousy or envy, which arise from a sense of lacking or competition, mudita promotes a positive and supportive attitude towards others' accomplishments. By appreciating and celebrating the joy of others, practitioners aim to overcome negative mental states and foster a sense of interconnectedness and goodwill.

²⁴⁸ The Brahmaviharas (P), also known as the 'Four Divine Abodes' or 'Four Immeasurables,' are a set of four virtues or meditative practices in Buddhism. These qualities are cultivated to promote the development of a compassionate and loving heart.

The Four Brahmaviharas are:

- Metta (Loving-kindness): Metta is the practice of cultivating boundless, unconditional love and goodwill towards all beings. Practitioners extend thoughts and feelings of kindness, well-wishing, and benevolence to themselves and others. The aspiration is for all beings to experience happiness, safety, and peace.
- Karuna (Compassion): Karuna is the quality of compassion, involving a deep concern for the suffering and difficulties of oneself and others. Practitioners aim to develop an empathetic response to the pain and challenges experienced by all beings and strive to alleviate suffering with a compassionate heart.
- Mudita (Sympathetic Joy): Mudita is the practice of taking joy in the happiness and success of others. It involves rejoicing in the well-being, accomplishments, and good fortune of oneself and others, without any sense of jealousy or competitiveness. Mudita fosters an attitude of selfless joy and celebration.
- Upekkha (Equanimity): Upekkha is the quality of equanimity or balanced mental state. It involves maintaining an even-minded composure and stability of mind, especially in the face of life's ups and downs. Practitioners develop a non-attachment to pleasure and pain, success and failure, recognizing the impermanence and interdependence of all experiences.

²⁴⁹ Upanisa Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 12.23

²⁵⁰ *In the context of Theravada Buddhism, 'suta-maya panna' refers to knowledge or wisdom that is acquired through hearing or learning from others. This type of wisdom is based on information received from external sources, such as teachings, scriptures, or oral traditions. It is knowledge that is obtained through listening to or reading the words of others, rather than through direct personal experience or insight. While such knowledge can be valuable, Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the importance of complementing it with direct experiential wisdom (P. bhavana-maya panna) and insight gained through personal practice and contemplation.*

²⁵¹ *In Theravada Buddhism, 'cinta-maya panna' refers to knowledge or wisdom that is derived from logical and rational thinking. This type of wisdom is based on intellectual reasoning, analysis, and logical deduction. It involves the use of one's cognitive faculties to understand and interpret information. While logical thinking and analysis can contribute to understanding, Theravada Buddhism emphasizes that true wisdom goes beyond mere intellectual understanding. The distinction between 'cinta-maya panna' (wisdom derived from thinking) and 'bhavana-maya panna' (wisdom derived from direct experiential practice and insight) underscores the importance of balancing intellectual understanding with personal, firsthand experience in the pursuit of spiritual realization.*

²⁵² *In Theravada Buddhism, 'bhavana-maya panna' refers to wisdom or knowledge that arises through mental cultivation, meditation, and direct experiential practice. Unlike knowledge gained through learning from others (P. suta-maya panna) or logical and rational thinking (P. cinta-maya panna), bhavana-maya panna is wisdom that emerges from one's own direct experience during contemplative practices, such as meditation. It involves cultivating a deep, experiential understanding of the nature of the mind, emotions, and reality.*

In the context of Theravada Buddhism, the emphasis on bhavana-maya panna underscores the importance of personal practice and direct insight for spiritual development. It suggests that true wisdom arises not only from intellectual understanding or learning but from the direct experience and transformation of one's own mind through meditative and contemplative practices.

²⁵³ *Maha Vedala Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 43*

²⁵⁴ *'Sitibhava' (P.) refers to the state of coolness or tranquility attained through the cessation of defilements and craving. It is associated with nibbana—the ultimate goal in Theravada Buddhism. The term suggests a state of ultimate peace and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara). Achieving sitibhava marks the end of suffering and the attainment of enlightenment.*

²⁵⁵ *'Patisotagami' (P.) → pati + sota + gami: pati = against; sota = stream; gami = going. Together, 'patisotagami' can be translated as 'going against the stream' or 'swimming against the current.' In the context of Buddhism, especially Theravada Buddhism, it refers to the practice of going against the ordinary, conditioned flow of worldly existence. It signifies a practitioner's commitment to the path of enlightenment and liberation, which often involves challenging conventional norms, desires, and attachments.*

In essence, 'patisotagami' embodies the idea of resisting the current of ignorance, craving, and suffering that keeps individuals bound to the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara). The term reflects the rebellious and transformative nature of the spiritual journey, where one actively works against the habitual tendencies and delusions that perpetuate suffering.

²⁵⁶ In the context of Buddhist teachings, 'santi' refers to a mind state of inner calm, peace, and tranquility that arises through mental and spiritual development. The cultivation of 'santi' is an essential aspect of Buddhist practice. It involves calming the mind, overcoming disturbances, and attaining a serene mind state that is conducive to insight and wisdom. Practitioners often seek 'santi' through meditation, mindfulness, and ethical living, aiming to free themselves from the agitation of desires, attachments, and delusions.

Ultimately, the goal of cultivating 'santi' is to move toward the cessation of suffering and attain a mind state of liberation or enlightenment (P. nibbana). The peaceful mind is considered a crucial foundation for deeper understanding and the realization of the Four Noble Truths.

²⁵⁷ 'Cittavimutti' is a Pali term that translates to 'liberation of the mind' or 'mind liberation'. It is a concept associated with mental liberation or freedom from defilements within the framework of Buddhist teachings.

In Theravada Buddhism, there are two main aspects of liberation: 'cittavimutti' (liberation of the mind) and 'pannavimutti' (liberation through wisdom or insight). While both involve liberation, they emphasize different dimensions of the path to enlightenment.

'Cittavimutti' primarily focuses on the mental aspect of liberation. It involves freeing the mind from the defilements, attachments, and disturbances that bind individuals to the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara). This liberation of the mind is achieved through deep concentration, meditation practices, and the cultivation of mental purity.

On the other hand, 'pannavimutti' emphasizes liberation through wisdom or insight. It involves understanding the true nature of reality, seeing through the illusion of a permanent and substantial self, and realizing the Four Noble Truths.

In summary, 'cittavimutti' highlights the importance of attaining mental liberation, while 'pannavimutti' emphasizes the role of wisdom and insight in the overall path to enlightenment in Theravada Buddhism.

²⁵⁸ 'Nibbana' (P.) is, particularly in Theravada Buddhism, the state of ultimate self-realization or liberation. Nibbana signifies the extinguishing or blowing out of the fires of craving, aversion, and delusion. It represents the cessation of suffering and the end of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (P. samsara).

Self-realization in the context of nibbana involves understanding the true nature of the self and transcending the illusion of a permanent and substantial self. It is a state where the practitioner attains freedom from the three fundamental defilements that bind individuals to suffering: craving (P. tanha), aversion (P. dosa), and ignorance (P. moha).

Realizing nibbana involves the complete extinguishment of these defilements, leading to a state of profound peace, contentment, and liberation. It is often described in terms of the removal of mental afflictions, the cessation of desire, and the experience of unconditioned, timeless reality.

²⁵⁹ Kalama Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 3.65

²⁶⁰ Paccakkha-nana (P.) refers to direct knowledge or personal realization. It underscores the importance of experiential understanding that arises from direct observation and insight.

²⁶¹ *Maha Hatthipadopama Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 28*

²⁶² *Difference between 'ignorance' and 'miccha ditthi': Ignorance refers to a fundamental lack of understanding or insight into the true nature of reality. It is considered one of the root causes of suffering and is often identified as the first link in the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. Ignorance involves not seeing things as they truly are, particularly regarding the three marks of existence: impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and non-self (P. anatta).*

'Miccha ditthi' can be translated as 'wrong view' or 'misconception'. It specifically refers to distorted or incorrect views about reality. In the context of the Four Noble Truths, 'miccha ditthi' includes not understanding the true nature of suffering, its cause, the possibility of its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation.

While ignorance is a broader concept encompassing a lack of awareness and understanding, 'miccha ditthi' specifically points to incorrect views and misconceptions. Ignorance can contribute to wrong views, and wrong views can be a manifestation of ignorance, but they are not used interchangeably.

In summary, while both concepts are interconnected within the Buddhist framework, they have distinct meanings. Ignorance represents a broader lack of awareness, while 'miccha ditthi' specifically denotes incorrect or distorted views.

²⁶³ *Craving (P. tanha) is the initial stage of desire in Buddhism. It is the intense and often insatiable desire or thirst for something. Craving can manifest in various forms, but it is generally categorized into three types:*

- *Sensual Craving (P. kama tanha): This is the craving for sensory pleasures, such as the desire for pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile sensations.*
- *Craving for Existence (P. bhava tanha): This type of craving involves the desire for continued existence or being. It is the craving for life, growth, and becoming.*
- *Craving for Non-Existence (P. vibhava tanha): This is the desire to escape or annihilate existence. It is often associated with a wish for non-being or the end of suffering.*

Craving is identified as one of the causes of suffering in Buddhism. It is considered the fuel that propels the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (P. samsara).

²⁶⁴ *Clinging (P. upadana) is the subsequent stage where one mentally or emotionally grasps onto the objects of craving. It involves a sense of ownership, attachment, and identification with these objects. Clinging is categorized into four types:*

- *Sensual Clinging (P. kama upadana): This involves clinging to sensory pleasures and the objects associated with them.*
- *Clinging to Views (P. ditthupadana): This type of clinging occurs when one rigidly holds onto fixed opinions and beliefs.*
- *Clinging to Rituals and Rules (P. silabbatupadana): This involves clinging to rites, rituals, and external observances as a means to achieve salvation or desired outcomes.*
- *Clinging to the Sense of Self (P. atta upadana): This is the clinging to the notion of a permanent and independent self or ego.*

Clinging is seen as a factor that sustains and perpetuates suffering. It keeps individuals bound to the cycle of existence and reinforces the illusion of a separate and enduring self.

²⁶⁵ *In Buddhism, particularly in the context of the Four Noble Truths and the analysis of the nature of suffering, craving (P. tanha) and clinging (P. upadana) are distinct but closely related concepts. Craving is the initial desire or thirst, and clinging is the subsequent attachment or grasping onto the objects of that desire. Craving leads to clinging, and clinging, in turn, sustains the cycle of suffering in the Buddhist understanding of the nature of existence. Both are crucial concepts in understanding the causes of suffering and the path to liberation.*

²⁶⁶ *Mahavedalla Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 43*

²⁶⁷ *'The interconnectedness of all phenomena' is a fundamental concept in Buddhist philosophy, particularly in relation to the teaching of dependent origination (P. paticca samuppada). This principle asserts that all phenomena are interrelated and mutually dependent. Here's a breakdown of what is meant by the interconnectedness of all phenomena:*

- *Dependent Origination (Paticca Samuppada): This teaching describes the causal relationship between various factors or conditions that give rise to the arising of phenomena. It consists of twelve links or stages that illustrate how one condition leads to another, ultimately resulting in birth, aging, and suffering. The cycle continues unless the chain is broken through enlightenment.*

- *Interdependence and Conditionality: The interconnectedness of all phenomena emphasizes the idea that nothing exists independently or in isolation. Everything is contingent upon and influenced by other factors. This interdependence is not limited to the physical realm but extends to mental and experiential aspects as well.*

- *Impermanence (P. anicca): Another aspect of interconnectedness is impermanence. Because all phenomena depend on various conditions, they are in a constant state of flux. Nothing remains static or permanent, and understanding this impermanence is crucial for alleviating suffering.*

- *Non-Self (Anatta): The concept of non-self suggests that there is no permanent, unchanging essence or self within phenomena. Instead, what we perceive as individual entities are dynamic processes interwoven with the larger fabric of existence.*

- *Web of Life: The interconnectedness of all phenomena is often likened to a vast web. Each thread represents an individual phenomenon, and the whole web is a complex network where every thread is connected to and influenced by others. Disturbing one part of the web affects the entire structure.*

- *Karma: The law of karma, which governs the consequences of intentional actions, is also tied to the interconnectedness of all phenomena. Actions have repercussions not only on an individual level but also contribute to the collective fabric of existence.*

Understanding the interconnectedness of all phenomena is essential in Buddhism as it leads to a profound shift in perspective. It encourages practitioners to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom by recognizing the intricate web of relationships and causes that shape our experiences and the world around us. This insight is considered pivotal on the path to liberation from suffering.

²⁶⁸ *Vicaya (P): this term is associated with the concept of examination or investigation. It is one of the factors of the Five Spiritual Faculties (P. indriya) and the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (P. satta-bojjhanga). Vicaya is often translated as 'discrimination,' 'investigation,' or 'analysis.' It refers to the ability to discern, investigate, and critically examine phenomena, particularly in the context of meditation and the development of insight (P. vipassana).*

Vicaya involves a careful and thorough investigation of one's own experiences, thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It includes the process of examining the nature of existence, understanding the impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and non-self (P. anatta) aspects of phenomena.

Through the practice of vicaya, meditators develop a clear and penetrating understanding of the true nature of reality, leading to insight and wisdom. It is considered an important quality to cultivate on the path to liberation and enlightenment in Theravada Buddhism.

²⁶⁹ *Vijati (P) means 'to discriminate' or 'to distinguish'. It is derived from the root verb 'janati,' which means 'to know,' 'to see' or 'to understand'. In Theravada Buddhism, the ability to discriminate or distinguish is considered important in the process of insight meditation (P. vipassana). It involves closely examining and discerning the different aspects and characteristics of phenomena, such as their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self nature. Through the practice of discriminating or unraveling the true nature of phenomena, practitioners develop insight and wisdom, leading to a deeper understanding of the nature of reality and the cessation of suffering.*

²⁷⁰ *Bhavana (P): meditation, mental training. Bhavana involves various meditation techniques, including mindfulness meditation (P. satipatthana), concentration meditation (P. samatha), loving-kindness meditation (P. metta), and contemplation of the three characteristics of existence (P. tilakkhana — impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, non-self).*

²⁷¹ *yoniso manasikara (P): yoniso → yoni = often translated as 'womb,' but more accurately the term 'yoni' is associated with the anatomical structure involved in sexual reproduction and childbirth, i.e. with the vagina; manasikara = to consider, to reflect. Yoniso manasikara = considering the origin of things, i.e., in order to be able to see how things come into being, what leads to their existence, how they 'become' (P. bhava).*

'Yoniso manasikara' implies a form of (perfect) attention or reflection that is unbiased, open, and non-selective, leading to a deep understanding of the nature of phenomena.

It is often associated with the practice of mindfulness and the cultivation of insight (vipassana) in Theravada Buddhism. A practitioner who engages in 'yoniso manasikara' will, therefore, act with wisdom (P. panna).

²⁷² *The Vibhanga is a Buddhist scripture and part of the Pali Canon in the Theravada tradition. It is included in the Abhidhamma Pitaka, which is one of the three 'baskets' (P. pitaka) that make up the Tipitaka, the traditional collection of Buddhist scriptures.*

The Vibhanga, which translates to 'Analysis' or 'Exposition,' consists of various analytical and exegetical teachings that elaborate on the principles found in the Suttas (discourses) and Vinaya (monastic rules). It provides detailed explanations, classifications, and discussions of doctrinal points, making it a crucial text for understanding the nuances of Buddhist philosophy.

²⁷³ 'Ayoniso manasikara' and 'miccha ditthi' are related concepts in Buddhism, but they are not synonyms. 'Ayoniso manasikara' is more focused on unwise or inappropriate attention to phenomena, leading to an incorrect understanding, whereas miccha ditthi specifically refers to holding wrong or distorted views about the nature of reality. However, one can engage in 'yoniso manasikara' to overcome 'miccha ditthi' and develop right understanding (P. samma ditthi) in the Buddhist context.

²⁷⁴ The Jhanas are mind states of deep concentration and mental absorption that are part of the Buddhist meditative tradition. They are cultivated through meditation and are characterized by heightened mindfulness, focus, and profound tranquility. The Jhanas play a significant role in certain Buddhist meditation traditions, particularly within Theravada Buddhism. They are seen as a means of deepening concentration, cultivating mindfulness, and progressing on the path to enlightenment. In Theravada Buddhism, there are generally four Jhanas, each representing a deeper level of meditative absorption.

- *First Jhana (P. piti):* This mind state is characterized by applied and sustained attention, accompanied by joy (piti). It involves a heightened level of concentration and one-pointedness of mind.
- *Second Jhana (P. sukha):* In this mind state, initial joy transforms into a deeper sense of happiness or bliss (sukha). The sense of joy and rapture becomes more refined and less energetic.
- *Third Jhana (P. equanimity):* The meditator reaches a state of equanimity where both joy and bliss fade away, leaving a sense of calm and balanced mindfulness.
- *Fourth Jhana (P. ekaggata):* This mind state is characterized by strong mindfulness, equanimity, and a sense of tranquility. It is a deeper level of absorption, where even the subtlest forms of happiness are abandoned. The Fourth Jhana is considered important for insight in Buddhist meditation because it represents a state of deep concentration and tranquility, providing a stable foundation for the development of insight (P. vipassana). Insight meditation aims to gain direct experiential understanding of the nature of reality, especially the Three Characteristics of Existence: impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (P. dukkha), and non-self (P. anatta). The 4th jhana is seen as crucial for insight because of the stability of the mind (1); the subtle mental mind state (2); the reduced attachment to sensual pleasures (3); the enhanced mindfulness to observe the arising and passing of the phenomena (4) and the equanimity, as it helps practitioners observe experiences without being swayed by personal preferences or aversions (5).

These four Jhanas are commonly associated with the early Buddhist texts. However, some traditions, particularly within the Theravada school, recognize additional four formless (immaterial) Jhanas:

- *Fifth Jhana (P. infinite space):* In this state, the perception of the body disappears, and the meditator experiences infinite space.
- *Sixth Jhana (P. infinite consciousness):* Here, the awareness of space is transcended, and one experiences infinite consciousness.
- *Seventh Jhana (P. nothingness):* The perception of infinite consciousness fades, leaving a state of nothingness.
- *Eighth Jhana (P. neither perception nor non-perception):* The meditator experiences a mind state beyond perception and non-perception, where all mental activity is extremely subtle.

²⁷⁵ 'Sampajanna' (P) → *sampa* + *janna*: *sampa* = well, thoroughly; *janna* = (spiritual) knowing, understanding. Together, 'sampajanna' conveys a deep and comprehensive awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, actions, and the surrounding environment.

Sampajanna is an essential aspect of mindfulness practice. While mindfulness (P. *sati*) involves being aware of the present moment, *sampajanna* goes further by encompassing a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of the actions or experiences occurring in that moment. It involves a profound awareness that includes an understanding of the impermanence (P. *anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*) nature of phenomena.

Practicing *sampajanna* allows a practitioner to engage in activities with a heightened level of consciousness and discernment. It involves being fully present and aware, not only of the immediate sensory experience but also of the deeper implications and context surrounding that experience.

Sampajanna is considered crucial on the path to enlightenment, as it supports a more profound understanding of the nature of reality and facilitates the cultivation of wisdom.

²⁷⁶ 'Hiri' (P) is a term used in Buddhism, particularly in the context of ethics and moral conduct. It is often paired with 'ottappa (P),' and the two terms together are referred to as 'hiri-ottappa.'

The term 'hiri' is commonly translated as 'shame' or 'self-respect.' It represents a sense of inner shame or moral conscience that prevents a person from engaging in actions that are harmful, unethical, or against one's principles.

It is an internal quality that guides an individual to avoid actions that would be considered blameworthy or morally wrong.

In the context of the Buddhist path, the development of 'hiri' is seen as an essential aspect of cultivating ethical conduct. It acts as a safeguard, influencing one's behavior and decisions by promoting a sense of moral integrity and consideration for the well-being of oneself and others.

In the pairing of 'hiri-ottappa,' while 'hiri' is associated with a sense of inner shame or self-respect, 'ottappa' is often translated as 'fear of wrongdoing' or 'dread of the consequences.'

Together, these qualities contribute to the development of a strong ethical foundation in the practitioner's spiritual journey.

²⁷⁷ Dhammapada, Gatha #183

²⁷⁸ Dhammapada, Gatha #160

²⁷⁹ Dhammapada, Gatha #174

²⁸⁰ 'Panca Sila' (P) refers to the Five Precepts in Buddhism. These are ethical guidelines or principles that lay practitioners undertake to follow in order to cultivate moral conduct and live a virtuous life. The Five Precepts are considered the basic foundation of Buddhist ethics, promoting harmony, compassion, and mindfulness in one's actions. Taking the Five Precepts is a voluntary and personal commitment made by individuals to guide their conduct in daily life. Lay Buddhists often recite these precepts during ceremonies or as part of their regular practice, and they serve as a foundation for more advanced ethical guidelines for those who choose to deepen their commitment to the Buddhist path.

The Five Precepts are:

- *Panatipata Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami (P): I undertake the precept to refrain from taking life. This precept encourages the avoidance of causing harm to living beings, emphasizing non-violence and compassion.*
- *Adinnadana Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami (P): I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what is not given. This precept encourages honesty and the avoidance of stealing or taking anything that does not belong to oneself.*
- *Kamesu Micchacara Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami (P): I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. This precept promotes ethical conduct in relationships and encourages individuals to avoid engaging in harmful or inappropriate sexual behavior.*
- *Musavada Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami (P): I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech. This precept emphasizes truthfulness and discourages lying, deceit, or any form of false communication.*
- *Suramerayamajjapamadatthana Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami (P): I undertake the precept to refrain from consuming intoxicants that cause heedlessness. This precept encourages mindfulness and the avoidance of substances that cloud judgment and lead to unwise actions.*

²⁸¹ These training rules are observed by laypeople during periods of intensive meditation practice and during uposatha (lunar observance) days. The Eight Precepts are based on the Five Precepts, with the third precept extended to prohibit all sexual activity (Abrahmacariya veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami) and an additional three precepts that are especially supportive to meditation practice:

- *Vikalabhojana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami (P): I undertake the precept to refrain from eating at the forbidden time (i.e., after noon).*
- *Nacca-gita-vadita-visukkadassana-malagandhavilepana-dharana-mandana-vibhusanathana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami (P). I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics.*
- *Uccasayana mahasayana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami (P). I undertake the precept to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.*

²⁸² *In Theravada Buddhism, the term 'sabhava' (P.) is used to refer to intrinsic nature or inherent characteristics. It is often associated with the idea of the inherent nature or essence of phenomena, which includes both mental and material aspects. The understanding of sabhava is crucial in the context of impermanence (P. anicca), suffering (P. dukkha), and non-self (P. anatta), which are the three characteristics (P. tilakkhana) of all conditioned phenomena according to Buddhist teachings.*

In the Theravada tradition, sabhava is often explained in the context of the arising and passing away of phenomena. Nothing possesses an unchanging, permanent essence or self (P. anatta). Instead, everything is in a state of constant flux and conditioned by various factors. Recognizing the impermanence and non-self nature of phenomena is a key aspect of Buddhist insight and wisdom.

²⁸³ *The phrase 'your original face' is not a specific term found in traditional Theravada Buddhist teachings. However, the idea of an 'original face' or 'true nature' is present in various Buddhist traditions, including Zen Buddhism, where it is often used metaphorically to represent one's fundamental, unconditioned nature or inherent wisdom.*

In Theravada Buddhism, the emphasis is on understanding the nature of reality through the lens of impermanence (P. anicca), suffering (P. dukkha), and non-self (P. anatta). The goal of practice is to cultivate insight and wisdom that leads to liberation from suffering.

²⁸⁴ *The meaning of this phrase suggests that, in its original or fundamental state, the mind is clear, untainted, and free. However, as individuals engage with the world and accumulate experiences, they form opinions, habits, expectations, and conceptual frameworks that obscure this pure awareness.*

Opinions, habits, and expectations are mental constructs that shape one's experience, while perceptions, words, and concepts are tools we use to interpret and make sense of the world.

The path to clarity, according to this perspective, involves recognizing and disentangling oneself from these mental constructs to return to a more fundamental, unconditioned state of mind.

²⁸⁵ *Samma vayama (P.) can be translated as 'Right Effort'. Right Effort involves cultivating wholesome qualities and eliminating unwholesome ones. The practice of samma vayama is essential for the development of a balanced and ethical mind, leading to the purification of the mind and progress on the path toward enlightenment. Samma vayama consists of four components:*

- *Preventing Unwholesome States: This involves making a conscious effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome mental states, such as greed, hatred, and delusion.*
- *Overcoming Unwholesome States: If unwholesome states have already arisen, Right Effort involves making an effort to overcome and abandon them. This may include redirecting one's attention, cultivating positive emotions, or using skillful means to transform unwholesome thoughts and emotions.*
- *Cultivating Wholesome States: Right Effort also includes actively cultivating wholesome mental states, such as loving-kindness, compassion, generosity, and mindfulness. This involves intentionally fostering positive qualities to strengthen them.*
- *Maintaining Wholesome States: Once wholesome states have arisen, the practitioner is encouraged to sustain and develop them further. This involves nurturing positive qualities consistently and integrating them into daily life.*

²⁸⁶ 'Sudantena' (P.) → *sudanta* → *su* + *danta*: *su* = a prefix that conveys a sense of goodness, of excellence; *danta* refers to being tamed, subdued, or controlled. So, 'sudanta' can be translated as 'well-tamed,' 'well-subdued,' or 'well-controlled.' In the context of the Dhammapada Verse #160, it is used in the phrase 'Attana hi sudantena,' which is commonly translated as 'With oneself fully controlled' or 'With oneself well-tamed.'

This phrase emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and mastery over one's own mind and behavior. It suggests that, in the pursuit of spiritual development and liberation, a key factor is the ability to control and train one's own mind, desires, and reactions. This self-discipline is seen as a crucial aspect of the path toward a refuge that is hard to gain.

²⁸⁷ 'Natham' (P.) refers to a refuge or protector. The verse is emphasizing the idea that one is ultimately responsible for their own well-being and spiritual progress. By cultivating self-discipline and wisdom, an individual becomes their own refuge, finding a source of strength and guidance within themselves on the path to liberation.

²⁸⁸ In Buddhism, 'gocara' is a term that can be translated as 'sphere' or 'field of influence.' It refers to the range or domain within which something operates or has an effect.

In the context of Buddhist teachings, particularly in Abhidharma literature, the term is often used to describe the field of experience or the range of objects that can be perceived or encountered by the mind.

In this text 'No field of merit, no gocara,' suggests that dwelling in the past does not offer a beneficial or meritorious field of experience. It implies that the past is not a conducive sphere for positive spiritual development or wholesome actions. Instead, the focus is encouraged to be on the present moment for a clearer and more beneficial understanding of reality.

²⁸⁹ *Sanna* (P.) refers to perception or the cognitive aspect of consciousness. It is one of the five aggregates (P. *khandhas*) that together constitute the human personality. *Sanna* involves the recognition, identification, and interpretation of sensory input. It is the mental function responsible for recognizing and labeling objects or phenomena based on past experiences and conditioning. Note that all the *khandhas* are considered impermanent, subject to change, and without a permanent, unchanging self.

²⁹⁰ The concept of 'gotrabhu' (→ *gotra* + *bhu*: *gotra* = the 'clan,' the 'tribe,' the 'family'; *bhu* = 'to become' or 'to be,' which combined means: 'to belong to the clan') refers to the moment when the *dharmānuvatti* enters the stream (P. *sotapatti*). The *sotapanna* is a practitioner who has achieved the first of the four stages of enlightenment and acquires a direct experience of the Unborn, the Deathless, and the Unconditioned.

*When a practitioner reaches the status of sotapanna, they have gained profound insight into the Dhamma—the teachings of the Buddha—and undergone a fundamental change in understanding reality. This involves understanding the nature of suffering (P. *dukkha*), the concept of non-self (P. *anatta*), and realizing the Four Noble Truths (P. *cattari ariya saccāni*).*

*The term 'gotrabhu' emphasizes the transition from a 'worldly person' (P. *puṭhujjana*) to someone who has entered the stream of Dhamma. It implies a substantial transformation in the understanding and experience of reality.*

²⁹¹ 'Sampajanna' (P.) → *sampa* + *janna*: *sampa* = well, thoroughly; *janna* = (spiritual) knowing, understanding. Together, 'sampajanna' conveys a deep and comprehensive awareness and deep understanding of one's thoughts, feelings, actions, and the surrounding environment.

Sampajanna is an essential aspect of mindfulness practice. While mindfulness (P. *sati*) involves being aware of the present moment, *sampajanna* goes further by encompassing a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of the actions or experiences occurring in that moment. It involves a profound awareness that includes an understanding of the impermanence (P. *anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*) nature of phenomena.

Practicing *sampajanna* allows a practitioner to engage in activities with a heightened level of consciousness and discernment. It involves being fully present and aware, not only of the immediate sensory experience but also of the deeper implications and context surrounding that experience. *Sampajanna* is considered crucial on the path to enlightenment, as it supports a more profound understanding of the nature of reality and facilitates the cultivation of wisdom.

²⁹² Parayanavagga, Gatha 101

²⁹³ Dhammapada, Gatha 221

²⁹⁴ 'Egoic attachment' refers to the tendency or habit of identifying strongly with one's ego or sense of self. In a psychological and spiritual context, the term 'ego' refers to the individual's perception of themselves, including their thoughts, feelings, and identity. Egoic attachment occurs when an individual becomes overly identified with their ego, leading to a rigid and often distorted sense of self.

When someone has egoic attachment, they may strongly identify with their thoughts, beliefs, and personal narratives, considering them integral to their identity. This attachment can lead to behaviors driven by a need to protect and enhance this self-image, often resulting in defensiveness, resistance to change, and a sense of separateness from others.

In most spiritual and philosophical traditions, the concept of egoic attachment is viewed as an obstacle to personal growth and spiritual development.

²⁹⁵ The *yajnopavita* is usually a thin, consecrated, and symbolically significant thread worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm. It is a reminder of one's commitment to leading a righteous and disciplined life and is considered a symbol of spiritual growth and learning. The wearing of the *yajnopavita* is often associated with certain religious ceremonies and rituals, emphasizing the importance of knowledge and wisdom in one's life. The *yajnopavita* is a symbol of a second or spiritual birth and is typically worn by members of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya varnas (castes) during their initiation into formal education or the study of the Vedas.

²⁹⁶ Tatiyananattitthiya Sutta, Udana VI.6

²⁹⁷ The *Brahmaviharas* are considered foundational practices in Buddhism, particularly in the Theravada tradition. They are not only meditation techniques but in the first place qualities of heart and mind that, when cultivated, contribute to the practitioner's spiritual development and the well-being of all beings. These practices are not limited to formal meditation sessions but are encouraged to be integrated into daily life and interactions.

²⁹⁸ 'Buddhanature' (Skr. *Tathāgatagarbha*) is a Mahayana term. It is the inherent potential for enlightenment that is said to exist within all sentient beings. It is the recognition that every being has the capacity to realize Buddhahood, i.e., that every being has the capacity to realize the enlightened state.

²⁹⁹ *Dhammapada*, Gatha #62

³⁰⁰ 'Nullius in verba' is a Latin phrase that can be translated to 'take nobody's word for it'. This expression is used to emphasize the importance of independent verification and critical thinking. It suggests that one should not blindly accept information or claims without questioning or examining them for oneself.

³⁰¹ *Dhammapada*, Gathas #11 & 12

³⁰² Easwaran, Eknath, (2008), *Passage Meditation: Bringing the Deep Wisdom of the Heart Into Daily Life*, Nilgiri Press, Tomales, CA, USA

³⁰³ *Latukikopama Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya* 66

³⁰⁴ 'Paramattha' (P.) can be translated to English as 'Ultimate Reality' or 'Absolute reality.' The concept of paramattha is crucial in understanding the nature of existence and the teachings of Buddhism.

In a Buddhist context, paramattha refers to the ultimate constituents or elements that make up all phenomena. These elements are considered to be devoid of inherent or independent existence and are analyzed to understand the true nature of reality. The three fundamental aspects of paramattha are:

- *Consciousness (P. citta)*: The mind or consciousness, which is aware of an object.
- *Mental Factors (P. cetasika)*: Various mental factors or states that accompany consciousness, such as feeling, perception, volition, etc.
- *Matter (P. rupa)*: The material or physical aspect of phenomena.

These components are analyzed to illustrate the impermanence (P. *anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*) nature of all phenomena. Understanding paramattha is considered essential for gaining insight into the true nature of existence and ultimately achieving liberation from suffering in Buddhism.

³⁰⁵ 'Sammuti' (P.) refers to the conventional or conceptual reality. It represents the world as understood and perceived through conventional concepts, designations, and language. Sammuti reality is the everyday, relative understanding of the world that is shaped by language and conceptualization.

In contrast, 'paramattha' refers to ultimate or absolute reality. It represents the true nature of things as they are, beyond conceptualization. In Theravada Buddhism, there is an emphasis on understanding the difference between sammuti and paramattha to develop insight into the nature of existence and to overcome suffering.

Understanding sammuti and paramattha is related to the teachings on impermanence (P. *anicca*), suffering (P. *dukkha*), and non-self (P. *anatta*). It highlights the distinction between the conventional, conceptually constructed world and the ultimate reality that lies beyond conceptualization.

³⁰⁶ 'Divine eye' refers to a special kind of vision or insight attributed to advanced spiritual practitioners in Buddhism. In Buddhist cosmology and mythology, it is believed that certain beings, especially Buddhas and highly attained individuals, possess a 'divine eye' that allows them to see things beyond the ordinary human perception.

The divine eye is often associated with profound wisdom and the ability to perceive the true nature of reality. It goes beyond ordinary sight and enables the possessor to see the working of kamma, the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara), and the interconnectedness of all phenomena (P. paticca samuppada). This enhanced vision is considered a form of higher knowledge or supernatural ability.

The reference to the 'divine eye' in Buddhist texts is symbolic and should be understood in the context of the spiritual insights and wisdom that come with advanced stages of meditation and realization. It signifies a deep understanding of the nature of existence and the path to liberation.

³⁰⁷ 'Buddharupa' is a term in Buddhism that refers to an image or representation of the Buddha. It is a Pali and Sanskrit term where 'Buddha' refers to the Bhagavat and 'rupa' means 'form' or 'appearance.' Buddharupa is not considered the essence of the Buddha's teachings. The essence of the Buddha's teachings is encapsulated in the Dhamma, which includes the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and various other teachings on wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline.

Buddharupa serves as a visual representation of the Buddha, providing a focal point for reverence, meditation, and inspiration. While it holds a significant place in Buddhist practice and devotion, the teachings of the Buddha are primarily found in the scriptures and oral traditions that have been passed down through generations.

The Dhamma, or the teachings of the Buddha, is considered the true essence of Buddhism. It is through understanding and practicing the Dhamma that individuals seek to attain wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental purification on the path toward enlightenment.

Buddharupa serves as a symbol and reminder of these teachings but is not the teachings themselves.

³⁰⁸ 'Prostrations' refer to a physical gesture of reverence, devotion, and humility. This practice involves bowing down with the body in a position of respect and submission. The exact form of prostration can vary among different Buddhist traditions, but it generally includes bowing, kneeling, and sometimes even lying flat on the ground with the forehead touching the floor.

Prostrations are commonly performed as part of religious rituals, ceremonies, or as a form of personal devotion and mindfulness. Practitioners may engage in prostrations as a way to express gratitude, seek blessings, purify the mind, or as an act of self-surrender in the spiritual path.

³⁰⁹ 'Circumambulating stupas' refers to the practice of walking around a stupa in a clockwise direction, often as a form of religious or devotional activity in Buddhism. A stupa is a dome-shaped structure, typically containing sacred relics or representing important Buddhist symbols, and it serves as an object of veneration and meditation.

Circumambulation, or walking around the stupa in a circular path, is considered a meritorious and devotional act in many Buddhist traditions. The clockwise direction is significant and symbolizes following the path of the sun, the moon, or the course of the Buddhist Dhamma, which is seen as a positive and auspicious direction. Devotees may engage in circumambulation as a way to show respect to the Buddha, express devotion, accumulate merit, or engage in meditative and mindful practices. The act is often accompanied by the chanting of mantras, prayers, or contemplative reflections. The specific rituals and significance associated with circumambulating stupas can vary among different Buddhist cultures and traditions.

³¹⁰ Willem Kloos (1859–1938) was a Dutch poet and one of the leading figures associated with the literary movement known as the 'Tachtigers' (the Eighties). This movement emerged in the late 19th century in the Netherlands and sought to break away from traditional literary norms, embracing individualism, symbolism, and a more subjective approach to art and literature. Willem Kloos, along with other 'Tachtigers,' played a key role in transforming Dutch literature. He was known for his emotional and intense poetry, often exploring themes of love, passion, and the inner workings of the human mind. His work was influential in shaping modern Dutch poetry, and he is considered a significant figure in the history of Dutch literature.

³¹¹ 'Vinnanasota' (P) → vinnana + sota: vinnana = consciousness, awareness. Vinnana refers to the aspect of consciousness that is aware of and experiences sensory impressions and mental objects. It is one of the five aggregates (P. khandhas) that constitute the individual's experience; sota = flow, stream. It denotes a continuous or flowing movement.

Vinnanasota can be translated as 'stream of consciousness' or the 'flow of awareness.' This concept is often used to describe the continuity and interconnectedness of consciousness, suggesting that consciousness is not a static entity but rather a dynamic and continuous process.

In the context of this text, the term 'vinnanasota' is used to convey the idea that existence is akin to a continuous stream or flow of consciousness. It emphasizes the interconnected and ever-changing nature of consciousness and the experiences that arise within it. This concept aligns with the broader Buddhist understanding of impermanence and the interdependence of phenomena.

³¹² 'Acala' (P. & Skr.) can be translated as 'unshakable' or 'immovable'. In Buddhist philosophy and meditation, 'acala' is often used metaphorically to describe a state of mental steadfastness. It signifies a mind that remains unwavering and undisturbed, especially in the face of changing and challenging external circumstances. The term is employed to illustrate a quality of mental stability, resilience, and equanimity that is cultivated through meditation and the development of insight.

In this context, the term 'acala' aligns with the broader Buddhist teachings on impermanence (P. anicca) and the cultivation of a mind that remains steady and composed amidst the fluctuations of experience. The practitioner aspires to develop an unshakable awareness, free from the disturbances caused by desires, aversions, and the ups and downs of life.

³¹³ 'Paccakkha-nana' (P.) signifies direct knowledge or insight gained through personal experience, observation, or realization.

³¹⁴ 'Bhavaraga' (P.) → bhava + raga: bhava refers to the process of becoming or existence. It denotes the dynamic and continuous state of being or becoming that characterizes sentient existence; raga translates to attachment, desire, or lust; it often refers to craving or clinging to things, experiences, or states of being. Bhavaraga can be understood as the attachment or craving associated with the process of becoming or existence. It encapsulates the clinging to the cycle of rebirth and the persistent desire for continued existence, which leads to suffering (P. dukkha).

³¹⁵ 'Shanti' (Skr.); Syn. santi (P.) means peace, tranquility, or serenity. It is commonly used in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions to convey a sense of inner peace, calmness, and the absence of disturbance or conflict. The word is often repeated multiple times as 'Shanti, Shanti, Shanti' in prayers and chants, symbolizing peace in three realms—physical, mental, and spiritual.

³¹⁶ 'Mappo' is a concept in Japanese Buddhism that refers to a period of decline in the Buddhist teachings and the degeneration of society's moral and spiritual values. The term is associated with the idea that as time progresses, the efficacy of Buddha's teachings (P. Dhamma) diminishes, leading to a decline in people's ability to attain enlightenment. The term 'mappo' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'māpyā,' which means 'degenerate' or 'corrupt.' In Japanese Buddhism, 'mappo' is specifically used to describe the last of the three periods in the decline of the Buddha's teachings. The three periods are:

- Shobo: The first period, known as the 'Right Dharma' or 'Correct Dharma,' is characterized by the flourishing and effectiveness of the Buddha's teachings. During this time, people have a relatively easy opportunity to attain enlightenment.
- Zobo: The second period, known as the 'Counterfeit Dharma' or 'Mixture Dharma,' marks a decline in the purity of the teachings. It becomes more challenging for individuals to attain enlightenment, and there is a mix of authentic and distorted teachings.
- Mappo: The third and final period, known as the 'Age of Decline' or 'Latter Day of the Law,' is the most degenerate phase. In this period, it is believed that people face numerous challenges and distractions, making it extremely difficult to follow the Buddhist path and attain enlightenment through traditional practices. During the mappo era, it is thought that people become increasingly attached to worldly desires, and moral and ethical values decline. Consequently, the traditional methods of spiritual practice may be less effective, and individuals may find it harder to achieve enlightenment through their own efforts. In response to the challenges posed by the mappo era, certain Buddhist movements in Japan have emphasized alternative paths to enlightenment, such as reliance on the power of Amitabha Buddha and recitation of specific Buddhist chants (Nembutsu). These practices are believed to offer a more accessible means of spiritual progress during the challenging times of mappo.

³¹⁷ While this concept may align more with Mahayana Buddhism, it's important to note that Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the historical Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, as the final fully enlightened Buddha. Other traditions, such as Mahayana Buddhism, recognize the possibility of future Buddhas or bodhisattvas attaining Buddhahood to guide and instruct sentient beings. The reference to the future Buddha Maitreya symbolizes the cyclic availability of guidance and enlightenment during times of spiritual decline.

³¹⁸ Mahasatipatthana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22

³¹⁹ 'Beyond': In the suttas of the Pali Canon, the term 'beyond' is often used to refer to a state or condition that transcends ordinary worldly experiences. It signifies a realm or dimension that goes beyond the limitations of conventional existence and is often associated with the goal of liberation in Theravada Buddhism.

For example, when the term 'beyond' is used in the context of nibbana, it denotes a state that is beyond the cycle of birth, death, and suffering (P. *samsara*). Nibbana is considered the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, representing a state of complete liberation and freedom from the inherent unsatisfactoriness (P. *dukkha*) of worldly existence.

³²⁰ Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 16

³²¹ Dhammapada, Gatha #5. Translation Bhante Sujato.

³²² Krishnamurti: 'Belief in any form is a 'hindrance': A man who 'believes' in God, can never find God.'

³²³ Tanha Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 4.199

³²⁴ 'Tathata' (P) is often translated as 'suchness' or 'thusness'. Tathata represents the ultimate nature of all things as they are, without distortion or conceptualization. The concept of Tathata is closely tied to the understanding of reality. It suggests seeing things as they truly are, beyond the influence of subjective interpretation or mental constructs.

Tathata embodies the idea that reality is not obscured by our perceptions, judgments, or conceptualization; instead, it is an unfiltered, direct experience of the present moment.

In essence, Tathata encourages practitioners to perceive and engage with the world in a way that transcends dualistic thinking and conceptual frameworks, allowing for a direct, unmediated experience of the suchness or thusness of reality.

³²⁵ 'Anusaya' (P) is a Pali term used in Buddhist teachings, particularly in the context of the mind and mental states. The term is often translated as 'latent tendency,' 'underlying tendency,' or 'latent disposition.' Anusaya refers to deep-seated inclinations or tendencies in the mind that can lead to unwholesome thoughts, emotions, and actions.

These latent tendencies are considered to be residues or habits from past experiences, actions, or mental states. Anusayas operate beneath the surface of conscious awareness and can influence one's thoughts and behaviors, often leading to the perpetuation of unwholesome patterns. They are seen as obstacles to spiritual development and enlightenment.

In Buddhist practice, the goal is to recognize and overcome these latent tendencies through mindfulness and insight. By bringing awareness to these underlying inclinations, practitioners can gradually weaken their influence and eventually eradicate them.

The process of overcoming anusayas is essential for breaking the cycle of suffering and achieving liberation (P. *nibbana*).

³²⁶ Pathamanibbana Sutta, Udana, VIII.2

³²⁷ 'Ekahika' (P.) can be translated as 'ephemeral' or 'lasting only for a day.' In the context of this text, it is used to describe the impermanence of forms, emphasizing their transient and fleeting nature. The idea is that forms, whether material or mental, arise and pass away in a short duration, highlighting the impermanent and changing nature of all phenomena.

³²⁸ Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 16

³²⁹ Dhammapada, Gatha #1, Translation Bhikkhu Anandajoti, SuttaCentral

³³⁰ Dhammapada, Gatha #2, Translation Bhikkhu Anandajoti, SuttaCentral

³³¹ Rohitassa Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 4.45

³³² The doctrine underscores that a person who has experienced gotrabhu is guaranteed to attain full enlightenment (arahantship) within a maximum of seven more lifetimes. The term emphasizes the transformative nature of the initial breakthrough into the stream of the Dhamma (Noble Eightfold Path), signifying a change from being a 'worldling' (P. puthujjana) to becoming a 'noble one' (P. ariya-puggala).

³³³ Mahasatipatthana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22

³³⁴ Pathamanibbana Sutta, Udana 8.1

³³⁵ 'Pativedha' (P.) refers to realization, penetration, or direct understanding. It is a word that is often used to describe a deep, experiential comprehension of the nature of reality, particularly in the context of the Buddhist teachings.

When practitioners engage in meditation, study, and contemplation, the goal is not just intellectual understanding but a profound realization of the truths taught by the Buddha. Pativedha involves a direct and personal insight into the nature of impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (P. dukkha), and the absence of a permanent, independent self (P. anatta).

This realization goes beyond conceptual understanding and involves a direct experience or 'seeing' of the nature of existence. It is a pivotal aspect of the Buddhist path, as it is through such direct insight that one can attain liberation from the cycle of suffering (P. samsara). Pativedha is often associated with the development of wisdom (P. panna) and is considered a crucial element in the process of enlightenment or awakening (P. nibbana).

³³⁶ Kalpa (P. & Skr.) is a term used in various Indian religious traditions, including Buddhism, to denote a vast period of time or an aeon. In Theravada Buddhism, a kalpa can refer to an immensely long period, often described in cosmological terms. There are different interpretations and measurements of kalpas, but generally, they represent vast cycles of cosmic time. The concept is used to illustrate the impermanent and cyclical nature of the universe, emphasizing the transient and changing nature of all phenomena.

³³⁷ 'Upadhi' (P.): the substrate, the fuel prevents the extinguishing of the fire— i.e. ignorance, desire and aversion.

³³⁸ 'Majjhima Patipada' (P.) can be translated as 'Middle Way'. It is a central concept in Buddhism, particularly associated with the teachings of the Buddha. The Middle Way refers to the path of moderation and balance, avoiding extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification.

The Buddha discovered this middle path during his own spiritual journey. Initially, he had practiced extreme asceticism, denying himself almost all physical comforts in the pursuit of enlightenment. However, he realized that such extreme practices did not lead to liberation. Upon this realization, the Buddha adopted a more balanced approach. He began to follow a path of moderate asceticism, emphasizing mindfulness and mental cultivation. Eventually, under the Bodhi tree, he attained enlightenment by meditating on the Middle Way, finding a balance between extreme austerity and indulgence.

The Middle Way is considered a fundamental principle in Buddhist philosophy and practice. It encourages practitioners to navigate between the extremes of sensual pleasure and severe self-mortification, aiming for a balanced and mindful approach to life and spiritual practice.

³³⁹ Maha Satipatthana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22

³⁴⁰ Uposatha Sutta, Udana 5.5

³⁴¹ Ganaka-moggallana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 107

³⁴² Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 22:59

³⁴³ *sabhava* → *sa* + *bhava*: *sa* = so, this way; *bhava* = to be born, to arise, nature. It can be translated as 'own-being,' 'inherent nature,' or 'essential nature.' The concept of *sabhava* is closely related to the understanding of phenomena in terms of their own inherent characteristics.

In the context of Buddhist philosophy, *sabhava* is used to emphasize the nature of things as they truly are, independent of human perceptions or conceptualizations. It suggests that each phenomenon possesses its own intrinsic qualities or characteristics, which are not subject to arbitrary human impositions.

The recognition of *sabhava* is tied to the Buddhist teaching of *anatta* (non-self or selflessness), which asserts that phenomena lack a permanent, unchanging self. Instead, they are impermanent, conditioned, and devoid of a lasting essence.

Understanding *sabhava* is an integral part of gaining insight into the nature of reality and the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism. It encourages practitioners to observe and comprehend phenomena as they exist in their own right, without superimposing personal biases or misconceptions onto them.

³⁴⁴ Dhatuvibhanga Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 140

³⁴⁵ Kalama Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 3:65

³⁴⁶ *The Pali Canon is a collection of early Buddhist scriptures written in the Pali language, and it is divided into three main sections: The Sutta Pitaka: The Basket of Discourses attributed to Gautama Buddha; the Vinaya Pitaka: The Basket of Monastic Discipline; and the Abhidhamma Pitaka: The Basket of Higher Teachings, i.e. systematic philosophical and psychological analysis.*

The Niddesa is a part of the first section, the Sutta Pitaka. It is a commentary or exposition on various discourses (P. suttas) found in the main body of the Sutta Pitaka. The Niddesa provides explanations, interpretations, and clarifications of the teachings found in the suttas, offering a deeper understanding of the Buddha's words. The Niddesa is considered part of the broader Buddhist commentarial literature, and it serves to elucidate the meaning of the suttas, especially for those seeking a more profound comprehension of the Buddhist teachings.

³⁴⁷ *Mahapadana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 14*

³⁴⁸ *Indra's Pearl Net is a metaphorical concept used in some Buddhist traditions, particularly in the Avatamsaka Sutra (Flower Garland Sutra) of Mahayana Buddhism. This metaphor illustrates the interconnectedness and interdependence (Skr. pratityasamutpada; P. paticca samuppada) of all phenomena in the universe. The metaphor conveys the idea that every individual phenomenon, or 'jewel,' is not only connected to every other individual phenomenon but also reflects the entire universe. It emphasizes the intricate web of cause-and-effect relationships and the shared nature of reality.*

The imagery involves a vast, cosmic net that is said to be owned by the Hindu god Indra, who is also incorporated into certain Buddhist cosmologies. In this net, at each intersection of the threads, there is a radiant, multifaceted jewel. Each jewel reflects all the other jewels in the net, creating an infinite and intricate web of reflections.

³⁴⁹ *A zafu is a traditional round meditation cushion used primarily in Zen or mindfulness meditation practices. It typically has a circular or crescent shape and is filled with kapok, buckwheat hulls, or other materials to provide a comfortable and supportive seat for practitioners during meditation. The zafu is designed to help maintain an upright and stable posture during meditation sessions, allowing the meditator to sit comfortably for extended periods. Zafus are often paired with a zabuton, a larger square or rectangular cushion, which provides additional cushioning for the knees and ankles when sitting on the floor.*

³⁵⁰ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 56.11*

³⁵¹ *Dhammapada, Gatha #165*

³⁵² *Girimananda Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, 10.60*

³⁵³ *'obliterate' in its most literal sense: destroy, eliminate, or erase something, often to the point of complete extinction or annihilation. It implies a thorough and total removal, leaving no trace or recognizable remnants behind.*

³⁵⁴ *Anguttara Nikaya, 6.62*

³⁵⁵ *The term 'compartmentalizing' refers to the act of separating or dividing something into distinct and isolated compartments or categories. In a psychological or personal context, it often refers to the practice of mentally separating different aspects of one's life or emotions to prevent them from overlapping or influencing each other.*

³⁵⁶ *Malunkyaputta Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 35.95*

³⁵⁷ *Namarupa (P.) refers to the composite nature of an individual, particularly the psycho-physical components that constitute a person. The term is a compound of two words: 'nama' + 'rupa.' Nama includes mental factors, perception (P. sanna), sensations, (P. vedana), sankharas and consciousness (P. vinnana). Rupa encompasses the physical elements of the individual, such as the body and its material components. Together, 'namarupa' represents the intricate combination of mental and physical elements that give rise to the existence of an individual being. In the context of dependent origination (P. paticca samuppada), namarupa is a pivotal link, as it signifies the coming together of mind and matter, leading to the subsequent stages of consciousness, name-and-form, and ultimately birth.*

Understanding namarupa is crucial in Buddhist philosophy, especially in the context of the doctrine of not-self (anatta). The Buddha taught that these components are impermanent, subject to change, and devoid of a permanent, unchanging self. By recognizing the nature of namarupa and its impermanence, practitioners can cultivate insight into the true nature of existence and work towards liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

³⁵⁸ *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 22.59*

³⁵⁹ *paccanubhoti (P.) → pacca + anubhoti: pacca = according to; anubhoti = experience, undergo, realize. Paccanubhoti = to realize through personal experience. In Buddhist teachings, the emphasis is often on personal realization and direct experience of the truths taught by the Buddha.*

It is not enough to merely accept teachings intellectually or rely solely on faith. The practitioner is encouraged to explore and investigate the teachings through personal practice and observation to develop a deep and experiential understanding.

Paccanubhoti means realizing direct experience. Wisdom on an experiential level involves immediate observation, emphasizing personal experience without relying on a higher authority, god, master, parachute, or any external support.

Be determined (P. adhitthana) to cultivate and expand personally acquired insight, maintaining a necessary skepticism. Approach the endeavor with the requisite swagger and bravado for the continued development of the spiritual experiment. After all, the path is never smooth or easy. Maintain a firm determination to be unconditionally wise—to see for yourself, to know for yourself.

*If the practitioner views the Buddha's words merely as 'words,' as 'concepts,' or as a metaphysical explanation, they will never truly see Dhamma. It comes down to pure experience. 'Pure experience is realized prior to the distinction between subject and object' (Guitar Nishida, 1990, *An Inquiry into the Good*).*

In other words, it's not just about what the Buddha literally said but about making his deep experience your own, walking next to him rather than behind him.

³⁶⁰ *Anusaya (P.) refers to latent tendencies, inclinations, or underlying tendencies that lie dormant in the mind. These are deep-rooted predispositions or tendencies that can influence thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Anusayas are considered latent defilements or impurities that have the potential to arise under suitable conditions, affecting an individual's mental state.*

There are different types of anusayas, and they are often associated with the three main defilements or 'kilesas' in Buddhism. These three defilements are interrelated and reinforce each other in a cyclical manner. Ignorance gives rise to greed and aversion, while the presence of greed and aversion perpetuates ignorance. The process of overcoming these defilements is central to the Buddhist path, which involves developing ethical conduct (P. sila), mental discipline or concentration (P. samadhi) and wisdom (P. panna) through practices such as mindfulness and meditation. The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to eradicate these defilements and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

The three main defilements, 'kilesas' or 'poisons' in Buddhism are:

- *Lobha anusaya—the latent tendency of greed or attachment. It involves craving for sensory pleasures, material possessions, or any form of gratification. Attachment arises when one develops an unhealthy and clinging relationship with things, people, or experiences. This clinging leads to suffering, as it creates a cycle of desire, pursuit, and dissatisfaction. Overcoming raga involves cultivating contentment, reducing desires, and recognizing the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness inherent in all conditioned phenomena. The practice of non-attachment is central to alleviating this defilement.*
- *Dosa anusaya—the latent tendency of aversion or hatred. It arises when one reacts negatively to unpleasant experiences, situations, or individuals. Hatred can manifest as anger, resentment, or ill will. This defilement leads to harmful actions, both physical and mental, which contribute to the cycle of suffering. Overcoming dosa involves cultivating loving-kindness (P. metta) and compassion. Practitioners are encouraged to develop understanding and patience, recognizing that aversion only perpetuates suffering.*
- *Moha anusaya—the latent tendency of delusion or ignorance. It is the fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of reality, the inability to see things as they truly are. Moha involves being unaware of the impermanence (P. anicca), unsatisfactoriness (P. dukkha), and non-self nature (P. anatta) of existence. Overcoming moha is the primary aim of Buddhist practice. It involves developing wisdom (P. panna) through insight meditation (P. vipassana) and understanding the Four Noble Truths. Wisdom helps dispel the illusions of the mind and leads to liberation from the cycle of birth and death (P. samsara).*

EHIPASSIKO — COME & SEE

Practice. Cultivate. Through trial and error, verify whether something
contributes to your liberation, be it a skillful tool
or useless baggage.

You decide. You alone.
No one else can do this for you.

Develop insight. Trust yourself. Be a Master. A Jñānī.
You are the stream. A stream, worthy of its name, cannot be channeled.
It flows autonomously in its own course. Beyond the banks is space.
Boundless space.
Dhamma.

There lies your liberation.