AWAKENING

THE END OF DUKKHA

What the Buddha discovered
and why liberation is possible

Guy Eugène DUBOIS

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THE END OF DUKKHA

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Dhamma
books

‘ Spiritual wisdom is a gift to be shared with insight and compassion, never exploited for personal gain. The moment wisdom is commercialized—marketed—it ceases to be a gift and becomes a commodity.
Once profound insight is assigned a price,
its transformative power is inevitably diminished. ’

(Guy E. Dubois)

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‘ *Vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetha —*
All conditioned things are subject to dissolution.
Strive on with heedfulness. ’

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16

FOREWORD

This book has been written from a perspective grounded in freedom of inquiry: the freedom to return, again and again, without being bound by doctrines, schools, structures, or institutional forms, to what can be directly investigated and seen.

This does not imply a rejection of the richness of the various Buddhist traditions. Each of these approaches has, in its own way, sought to express insights that arose from the Buddha's awakening. Provided that we remember that no formulation, no organization, and no interpretation can ultimately do more than point to what must be investigated and seen for oneself.

Here, freedom of inquiry refers to the willingness not to accept anything solely on the basis of authority, tradition, social or institutional recognition, or conviction, but to approach human experience again and again with openness, attentiveness, and a spirit of investigation. In this sense, it accords closely with the spirit of the Dhamma itself: not to believe, but to investigate; not to accept, but to look; not to speculate, but to see.

Ultimately, my concern is not to defend Buddhism as a religious identity or to uphold a particular interpretation of the teaching, but to explore the simple yet radical question that Siddhattha Gotama himself investigated: How does dukkha arise, and how can it come to an end?

This book is an invitation to inquiry. To looking. To direct seeing. To exploring, again and again, human

experience and the possibility that liberation from dukkha may still unfold today.

Guy Eugène Dubois
Beerzel, July 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, I have written many texts on the Dhamma. On meditation. On the *jhānas*. On insight. On the various Buddhist traditions and their approaches. All of these subjects have their value. They can inspire, clarify, and offer direction.

Yet, over time, a question kept returning: What is the true heart of the Dhamma?

Not its interpretations. Not its commentaries. Not its traditions. Not the various schools that have emerged over the centuries. Not the doctrines that have sometimes become so elaborate that they risk obscuring the simplicity of the original message.

But its essence. For this reason, awakening cannot be reduced to a particular experience. Experiences arise and pass away. They belong to the domain of the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).*

What the Buddha understood was not an extraordinary experience that had to be preserved or held onto, but the conditioned nature of all experience and the way identification with it arises and falls away.

What did the Buddha truly discover beneath the Bodhi tree?

What did he see that was so profound that it brought his search to an end?

And what did he consider so important that he devoted the rest of his life to speaking about it?

These questions formed the basis of a series of three Dhamma talks that I gave in the spring of 2026: one for the teachers and facilitators of *Sangha Metta* in the Netherlands, and another for a group of experienced practitioners and facilitators of *Boeddha in de Stad*, the independent Buddhist saṅgha in Antwerp.

These talks did not arise in isolation. They grew out of many years of dialogue, investigation, and friendship with people who take the Dhamma deeply to heart. I am especially grateful for the friendship of Paul Van Hooydonck, at whose invitation this series was shared within *Boeddha in de Stad*, and for the many conversations and exchanges with Jotika Hermsen, whose trust and encouragement helped give rise to this cycle of talks.

They were not intended to establish a new system, nor to defend a particular tradition or interpretation.

Quite the opposite.

The intention was to set aside, as far as possible, everything that is secondary and to return to what, in my view, constitutes the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

When one reads the early Buddhist texts attentively, something remarkable becomes apparent. The Buddha spoke about many subjects, yet again and again he returns to one and the same reality: the ending of dukkha.

The Dhamma may also be understood in another way. Not as a collection of beliefs, doctrines, or theories, but as an invitation to inquiry.

Ultimately, the Buddha's teaching is not primarily about believing, but about investigating; not about accepting, but about looking; not about thinking, but about seeing; not about speculating, but about seeing through and understanding.

The Dhamma is not something to believe, but something to investigate until dukkha comes to an end.

What follows is not a canonical framework drawn from the early Buddhist texts, but a personal and contemplative summary of what, for me, characterizes the spirit of the Dhamma. [1]

Four simple movements that, in their dynamic interplay, resonate with the Four Noble Truths:

Investigating.
Looking.
Seeing.
Seeing through.

Investigating, in the spirit of *dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya)* and *yoniso manasikāra (yoniśo manaskāra),* means bringing careful, discerning attention to experience. Such inquiry opens the possibility of understanding.

Looking, in the spirit of *anupassanā (anupaśyanā):* attentively observing body, feelings, mind, and phenomena as they present themselves. Looking reveals what nourishes *dukkha (duḥkha)*.

Seeing things as they truly are—*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana (yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).* Seeing opens the possibility of cessation.

Seeing through, in the spirit of *pariññā (parijñā):* [2] fully comprehending the nature of experience, whereby identification and attachment gradually fall away. Seeing through unfolds when reality reveals itself as it actually presents itself, moment after moment.

These four movements do not describe successive stages, but a living dynamic.

For me, no formulation captures the spirit of the early Dhamma more fully than these four simple movements.

Just as all rivers eventually flow into the ocean, so the Buddha's teaching continually flows toward a single reality: the ending of *dukkha*.

The Dhamma has many entrances, but only one taste: the taste of liberation.

This is also why this book does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of Buddhism.

It is not an encyclopedia.
It is not a historical study.
It is not a systematic or analytical exposition of Buddhist doctrines.

Many subjects that are explored in depth in my other books are mentioned here only in passing, or are not discussed at all.

Not because they are unimportant, but because this book serves a different purpose.

Its aim is to return to the essence.

When one carefully examines the earliest teachings, it becomes apparent that the Buddha was not primarily concerned with describing a metaphysical reality, but with uncovering a process. He investigated how *dukkha* arises, what sustains it, and how it comes to an end. Understanding that process forms the central thread running throughout the Buddha's teaching.

The concern with the arising of *dukkha* is already evident in the earliest texts. In the opening verses of the *Dhammapada,* [3] the decisive role of the mind in the arising of suffering and well-being is clearly emphasized. The focus is not primarily on circumstances themselves, but on the way the mind relates to them.

The three talks from which this book emerged follow a simple movement.

First, we turn to the awakening of the Buddha himself. Not as a historical narrative, but as an affirmation that liberation is possible.

Next, we examine what he taught in his first discourse: the Four Noble Truths, in which the structure of *dukkha* and its cessation are laid bare.

Finally, we explore the teaching of not-self, which exposes the root of identification and appropriation, thereby opening the door to liberation.

This explains why the different parts of this book each have their own distinctive character.

The first part is narrative in nature. It follows the life of Siddhattha Gotama, not in order to reconstruct the

past, but to make visible that liberation from *dukkha* is possible.

The second part is analytical and investigative. It examines the structure of *dukkha,* its arising, and its cessation as set forth by the Buddha in the Four Noble Truths.

The third part deepens this investigation further. It focuses on the assumption of a lasting self and unfolds as an inquiry into identification, appropriation, and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

The fourth and final part is quite different. It no longer attempts to explain or analyze. Instead, it follows the gradual unfolding that takes place when searching grows quiet, illusions lose their enchantment, the fire of desire begins to fade, and the mind comes to rest.

As a result, the language itself gradually becomes simpler and quieter, as though the words are slowly giving way to that toward which they have always pointed: liberation and direct seeing.

Awakening, dukkha, and not-self are not, in reality, separate subjects. They are different perspectives on the same reality.

This becomes especially clear when we investigate what *dukkha* actually entails.

Dukkha arises through grasping and identification. *Anattā (anātman)* reveals the assumption of an owner or an independent entity to be unfounded. *Awakening* is the ending of that grasping and therefore the ending of *dukkha*.

Ordinarily, it is assumed that there is someone who suffers, someone who wishes to be liberated, and ultimately someone who awakens. The teaching of not-self *(anattā; anātman)* is directed precisely at that assumption.

The inquiry concerns not only how *dukkha* arises and comes to an end, but also whether any enduring entity can truly be found that owns or governs that process.

Perhaps the purpose of this book can be expressed even more simply.

This is not a book about Buddhist philosophy. It is not an attempt to defend a doctrine, nor to expound a particular system of thought.

At its heart, it is an investigation into how *dukkha* arises and how liberation becomes possible.

The purpose of this book may be summarized even more simply: to re-examine what an extraordinary human being *(mahāpurisa; mahāpuruṣa)* [4] investigated down to the very roots of *dukkha*. [5]

How does *dukkha* arise?
How does *dukkha* sustain itself?

And what happens when the mechanisms that nourish *dukkha* are directly seen and fully understood?

The chapters that follow approach these questions from different angles, yet continually return to the same reality: the ending of *dukkha*.

Where ignorance is seen through, *awakening* unfolds. Where grasping falls away, *dukkha* comes to an end and liberation appears.

This is the central thread running through this book.

Readers will notice that certain viewpoints that have arisen around Buddhism throughout history receive little attention here.

This is a deliberate choice.

My primary interest lies not in what people have said about the Dhamma, but in that to which the Dhamma itself points.

The Buddha did not invite his listeners to believe him. He invited them to look carefully. To look for themselves.

Not to collect doctrines.
Not to defend convictions.
Not to cling to systems.
But to see directly.

This book seeks to extend that same invitation once again.
Not to learn something new.
Not to construct a new identity.
Not to become a Buddhist.

This calls for one final clarification.

Although this book is fully rooted in the early Buddhist Dhamma, it is not concerned with adopting a religious identity.

The Pāli Canon presents the Dhamma not as the possession of a religious community, but as something that can be seen, investigated, and verified.

Precisely for that reason, it cannot be appropriated and transcends every form of exclusivity. Any attempt to claim it exclusively for a particular tradition fails to do justice to its universal character.

The question that the Buddha investigated—the possibility of awakening and the ending of *dukkha*—does not belong to any particular tradition, religion, or culture. It is a human, existential, and universal question.

It arises wherever desire, aversion, grasping, identification, and becoming *(bhava; id.)* give rise to *dukkha,* and wherever the question emerges whether liberation is possible.

Over the years, the religious, institutional, and identity-based forms that have historically developed around the Dhamma have gradually receded into the background for me. Increasingly, what came to the foreground was Siddhattha Gotama's human quest: his original investigation into dukkha, its arising, and its cessation.

The more everything secondary fades into the background, the more clearly the figure of the Buddha himself appears before me: an extraordinary human being *(mahāpurisa; mahāpuruṣa)* who investigated the roots of *dukkha* and devoted his life to sharing what he discovered.

The fact that the insights the Buddha articulated with such exceptional clarity continue to inspire people,

more than two millennia later, to look and investigate for themselves reveals the depth of his inquiry into *dukkha,* its arising, and its cessation.

In these pages, the terms “Buddha,” “Dhamma,” and “Path” do not refer to a system of beliefs, structures, organizations, or a religion, but to an investigation of human experience itself and to the possibility that *dukkha* can be seen through and brought to an end.

In this sense, this book is not about Buddhism as an identity, but about the universal possibility of *awakening* and the ending of *dukkha*. That is the reality to which the Buddha’s teaching continually points.

When a book returns to the heart of the Dhamma, the question naturally arises why it should be written at all. Why add more words to the many words that already exist?

That question accompanied me more than once during the writing of this book. For what is being investigated here ultimately cannot be captured in words. Words can only point. They can never replace what each person must see for themselves.

This book was not written to defend a position, nor to add something new to the many words that have already been spoken about the Dhamma.

It is offered as a form of *dāna (id.):* the free sharing of an inquiry into the nature of *dukkha* and the possibility of liberation. It is the fruit of a long process of *dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya)* [6] that has guided both my practice and the questions explored in these pages.

Not with the intention of convincing others.
Not to be followed.
Not to provide answers.

But in the hope that these pages may encourage some readers to investigate for themselves what becomes visible when they are willing to see things as they truly are, rather than as they think, hope, or wish them to be.

Attentive readers will notice that this book deliberately leaves a great deal of white space. This is not merely to enhance readability, but above all to support attention.

Some insights cannot be deepened by adding ever more words.

At times, a sentence or a single idea asks for space to resonate before the next one appears. White space invites a slowing down, a moment of reflection, and an opportunity to let what has been read settle more deeply. White space often deepens understanding more effectively than further commentary.

Here too, the same invitation that runs throughout the Dhamma can be heard: to look attentively.

The Buddha called this *yathābhūta (id.):* seeing things as they truly are. [7]
Not as we hope they are.
Not as we fear they are.
Not as we have been taught they should be.

But as they actually unfold in each moment and from moment to moment. For ultimately, the Dhamma is not concerned with knowledge.

It is concerned with liberation.
And liberation means nothing other than the ending of *dukkha*. [8]

That was the Buddha's discovery.
That is the heart of his teaching.
And that is the subject of this book:
Awakening — The End of Dukkha.

CHAPTER I — AWAKENING OF THE BUDDHA

There are events that change the course of history. And there are events that transform forever the way we see ourselves and the nature of existence.

The awakening of the Buddha belongs to the latter.

The life of Siddhattha Gotama is not presented here merely as a sequence of historical events. The events themselves matter only insofar as they reveal the gradual unfolding of insight into the nature of *dukkha* and its ending.

They are not the heart of this part of the book, but the transparent medium through which the Dhamma gradually reveals itself. The life of the Buddha is therefore not offered as a biography to be admired, but as an invitation to see how the ending of *dukkha* gradually became visible through direct investigation.

This part is not primarily the story of a prince who left his palace, studied under teachers, practised asceticism, and eventually attained insight beneath a tree.

Rather, it explores what these events reveal. The value of the Buddha's life story lies not in the historical facts themselves, but in what they point to.

What was truly seen on the night of awakening?
What came to an end?
What fell away?
What began?

And why did this discovery become the starting point of a teaching that, for forty-five years, returned tire-

lessly to one and the same reality: the possibility of liberation from *dukkha*?

The pages that follow invite the reader to approach these questions not merely as the history of a distant past, but as an inquiry that remains relevant today. For as long as there is *dukkha,* the question of awakening remains alive.

I. TOWARD THE HEART OF THE DHAMMA

In conversations with yogis, both in the East and the West, and through various international forums, the same theme keeps returning.

What continually strikes me—and at times surprises me—are the questions and reflections that arise.

They reveal not only a sincere search, but also the extent to which the original teaching often appears filtered, interpreted, or even distorted through dogmatic views, systems, and beliefs. Yet the Buddha's message points again and again to liberation, not to clinging to viewpoints or defending what is regarded as “correct."

The Buddha was not a dreamer. He was someone who looked and saw.

He grounded himself in reality as it truly is. In the law of nature. In Dhamma. [9]

Not in:
traditions;
rumours;
assumptions;
speculations;
axioms;
views accepted after reflection;
probabilities;
or what others had said. [10]

What the Buddha taught arose from direct experience—something to be known individually by the wise *(paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi).* [11]

What he later summarized for his followers in the Four Noble Truths was not a doctrine to be believed, but a description of reality that can be investigated and seen through.

In the *Uposatha Sutta* of the *Udāna*, [12] the Buddha says:

‘ *Just as the great ocean has but one taste—the taste of salt—so this Dhamma and Discipline has but one taste: the taste of liberation.* ’

The Dhamma may be expressed in many ways, yet its direction remains the same. It may appear in many forms, yet its taste remains one.

What the Buddha points to always refers to the same reality: Dhamma.

The words may differ.
The approaches may differ.
The formulations may vary.

Different concepts may be used.
Different emphases may be given.
Different images may be employed.

Yet wherever the end of *dukkha* is truly being pointed to, the direction remains the same.

Just as all rivers ultimately flow into the ocean, every authentic practice flows toward liberation *(vimutti; vimukti).*

This suggests that the various Buddhist schools are, in the end, different approaches to the same search

for liberation. They may be regarded as skillful means *(upāya; upāyaḥ),* [13] as different vehicles *(yāna; id.),* [14] each pointing in its own way toward the same goal.

Over the centuries, Buddhism has given rise to a rich diversity of traditions, rituals, philosophical systems, commentaries, and institutional forms. Many of these have supported, inspired, and guided countless practitioners. Yet there is always the possibility that attention gradually shifts from that to which these forms point to the forms themselves.

When this happens, the central question quietly recedes into the background: How does *dukkha* arise, and how does it come to an end? Everything else has value only insofar as it supports that investigation.

When we begin to cling to forms, views, or traditions, however, attention can shift away from what they are meant to reveal. Then differences in interpretation risk becoming more important than insight itself, and identification takes the place of liberation.

Where attachment to views arises, division follows. And where division arises, the simple question of the ending of *dukkha* recedes into the background.

The Dhamma has many gateways, but its direction remains the same. It never points toward division, but toward liberation *(vimutti; vimukti).*

Perhaps this is one of the great challenges for every practitioner: not to remain preoccupied with what distinguishes us, but to investigate carefully what all these approaches are ultimately trying to uncover.

What has become increasingly clear to me is that awakening has nothing to do with debates or metaphysical speculation. Awakening is not found in the accumulation of ideas or in the defence of positions. Neither leads to liberation.

Awakening has only to do with seeing—with directly seeing reality as it is *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).* [15] With looking. With looking for oneself.

When the Buddha was confronted with metaphysical questions, he often remained silent. Not because such questions were central to his teaching, but because, in his view, they do not contribute to the ending of *dukkha*. They occupy the mind with what can be thought about and distract attention from what can be directly investigated and seen through.

The Buddha did not point to interpretations, organizations, rituals, or structures. He pointed to the direct seeing of reality.

Yet it is striking how easily attention shifts toward the forms through which the Dhamma is transmitted, while that to which those forms point—and what truly matters—slips into the background.

Here lies one of the most subtle forms of attachment.

Not attachment to worldly things, but attachment to the Dhamma itself.

What was intended as a raft for crossing the river quietly becomes a possession that must be protected, defended, and held onto.

A belief.
An identity.

Yet as soon as the Dhamma is appropriated as "my insight," "my tradition," "my path," or even "my awakening," precisely that which it seeks to see through reappears: identification and attachment.

Something important becomes visible here, something easily overlooked. The mind that wants to possess the world is the same mind that wants to possess the Dhamma. The mind that wants to become someone in the world is the same mind that wants to become someone on the Path.

What changes are the objects of desire and identification. The underlying movement remains the same.

For this reason, the spiritual search itself requires continuous vigilance. The tendency toward becoming *(bhava; id.)* does not automatically disappear when one turns toward the Dhamma. It can continue in subtler forms: the desire to become an advanced practitioner, to acquire special experiences, to accumulate insight, or to regard oneself as spiritually developed.

What changes is not the tendency toward becoming itself, but only the object toward which it is directed. The form changes, yet the dynamic of becoming remains untouched.

The Dhamma therefore calls for a careful investigation of every form of attachment, even when it appears in what is intended to lead to liberation. For

that which is meant to lead beyond attachment can itself become an object of attachment.

Insight does not arise from building structures, belonging to organizations, or surrounding oneself with impressive places and symbols, however meaningful they may appear.

Even the most magnificent sanctuaries do not, in themselves, lead to liberation from *dukkha*. No place, however sacred or inspiring, can do the seeing for us.

Insight does not grow out of what is anxiously preserved.

Even the Path is not a possession.

For ultimately, the Dhamma belongs to no one. Insight unfolds where grasping and clinging *(upādāna; id.)* diminish, and where the tendency to construct is seen through. Everything that is formed and built belongs to the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).* It bears the marks of intention, repetition, and confirmation. It can guide, support, and protect—but it remains within the domain of the conditioned.

Seeing does not arise from form, but from seeing through form—its arising and passing away.

The Dhamma cannot be confined within forms, words, or institutions. It does not belong to a community, a tradition, or an organization. Even what has been carefully preserved in the Pāli Canon forms part of the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta);* it points

beyond itself to the Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta).*

Direct knowing unfolds naturally, unfiltered and uncontrived, when it is no longer distorted by craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* aversion *(paṭigha; pratigha),* and ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā).*

When the right conditions come together—such as the quieting of the hindrances, mindfulness *(sati; smṛti),* and concentration *(samādhi; id.)*—clear seeing can reveal itself without being constructed by thought.

When mindfulness is present and grasping *(upādāna; id.)* comes to rest, what has long remained concealed becomes visible. In that seeing, *paññā (prajñā)* unfolds: the recognition of *anicca (anitya), dukkha (duḥkha),* and *anattā (anātman)* in all that arises and passes away.

Nothing is added in that seeing. And what falls away is the mistaken assumption that within this ongoing process there exists something permanent that can rightly be called "I," "me," or “mine."

As practitioners, we can continually ask ourselves a simple question: Does our practice contribute to the direct seeing of reality as it is *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana),* or does attention become entangled in concepts, interpretations, and views?

Insight unfolds in simplicity.
In silence.

In a mind purified by *sīla (śīla),* permeated by *mettā (maitrī)* and *karuṇā (id.).*
In a mind that does not grasp.
A mind that does not hold on, but lets go.

Here. [16]
In this moment.
Moment after moment.
Therefore, the Buddha's simple yet penetrating instruction remains as relevant today as ever:

‘ *Attā hi attano nātho* [17] *— Each person is their own protector.* ’ [18]

No one else can see in your place.
No one else can awaken for you.
Not even a Buddha can bestow liberation upon another.

The early Buddhist texts are clear on this point: an experienced teacher ultimately makes himself unnecessary. His role is to guide the student toward becoming an *ariya-puggala (ārya-pudgala),* a noble person who enters the Path for themselves and no longer expects another to walk it in their place.

Rather than creating dependence, the teacher helps the student gradually learn to trust their own insight. Through stream-entry *(sotāpatti; srotāpatti),* a confidence arises that no longer rests upon the authority of others. In the words of the *suttas,* the practitioner becomes *aparapaccaya (apara-pratyaya):* [19] no longer dependent upon another for recognizing the direction of the Path.

The *suttas* do not describe stream-entry as the acquisition of special power or authority over others. Rather, it marks the opening of an irreversible movement toward liberation.

The task of the teacher is not to create dependence, but to point to the Dhamma so that the student ultimately learns to see for themselves.

What is explored here therefore seeks to remain as close as possible to the spirit of the early Dhamma—to that which is consistently pointed to throughout the Pāli Canon—not as a system of beliefs, but as a direct invitation to see. In doing so, it becomes apparent how the Canon, in ever-changing contexts, continually points to the same reality.

By "consistent" I mean that the same indication appears again and again, regardless of context, place, or audience—continually pointing to impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).* Through this insight, the tendency to grasp is seen through and gradually released.

The movement of the mind described here may be summarized simply as: craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā)* → clinging *(upādāna; id.)* → becoming *(bhava; id.)*

Dukkha (duḥkha) is often translated as "suffering," but that translation captures only part of its meaning.

Dukkha is the subtle tension that remains as long as the mind wants something, clings to something, or wishes reality to be other than the way it presents itself in this moment, moment after moment.

As long as there is craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* there is movement toward something not yet present. As long as there is clinging *(upādāna; id.),* there is the tendency to hold on to what is impermanent. And as long as there is becoming *(bhava; id.),* the mind continues to shape itself around ideas of who it is, what it wishes to become, or what it fears losing.

Craving, clinging, and becoming are not separate processes.

They form a single dynamic movement. They continually nourish and reinforce one another. Craving gives rise to clinging, clinging feeds becoming, and becoming in turn fuels further craving. In this way, the mind remains caught in a restless cycle of seeking, acquiring, protecting, and losing. [20]

This process is *saṃsāra (id.).*

It is like a person chasing their own shadow at dusk. The faster they run, the more the shadow seems to elude them. At times they believe they are about to catch it, yet it continually appears just beyond reach. Exhausted, they begin to slow down.

Then suddenly they realize that it was not the shadow driving them forward, but their own running.

When they come to a stop, the chase ends. Not because the world disappears, but because the movement that sustained the pursuit has come to rest.

When this process is carefully observed, it becomes clear that *dukkha* does not arise primarily from what

is experienced, but from the tension inherent in continual wanting, holding on, and becoming.

The price is already contained within every movement of becoming. Whether it takes the form of craving or aversion, seeking or avoidance, becoming someone or trying to escape what is, the same movement of becoming *(bhava; id.)* is present.

And within that movement itself lies stress. Becoming knows no completion. It always contains a next step, a next form, a next attempt, a next ambition. Yet all becoming remains subject to change. What arises passes away. What appears disappears.

And it is precisely here that the cost becomes visible. Not as punishment. Not as the consequence of a mistake. But as the natural shadow cast by everything that comes into being.

Whoever truly sees this, sees not only *dukkha,* but also the quiet ending of *bhava*.

This explains why the Dhamma, despite its many approaches and formulations, possesses a remarkable coherence. Again and again, it points to the same process and to the same possibility of liberation.

By "coherent" I mean that this indication never contradicts itself. It continually returns to the same direct seeing of things as they are—without turning toward metaphysics, without losing itself in speculation, and without becoming dependent upon belief or interpretation.

Whatever does not fit within this framework—or does not contribute directly to seeing the workings of *dukkha* and its cessation—is not taken here as a guiding principle. For the Dhamma is ultimately concerned not with refining thought or elaborating insight as a concept, but with liberation *(vimutti; vimukti):* the ending of *dukkha* and the transcendence of the worldly.

Not everything that appears refined, profound, or impressive is therefore liberating.

What is explored here is that which usually remains unnoticed. That which is obscured by habit, belief, and conditioning. But also that which gradually becomes visible when one looks carefully and without preconception.

What is obscured does not primarily require more explanation, more intellectual accumulation. It simply asks to be seen. And when it is truly seen, the obscuration falls away by itself.

What we are exploring here is therefore not an attempt to offer a new view or construct a new system of thought.

It points only to what is already present, yet usually overlooked. Just as a finger points to the moon, the Dhamma does not point to itself, but to that which can be directly seen.

What is being indicated here cannot be transmitted through words. Words can only point. They can never replace what must be seen for oneself.

This seeing does not take place in thought, but in direct recognition—here and now.

For that reason, there is no need to accumulate or hold on to anything.

It is enough to look carefully and clearly. [21] To look carefully and clearly at what is. Here. In this moment. Moment after moment.

What appears may reveal many things—images, impressions, memories, movements of the mind. But the seeing to which the Buddha points belongs to a different order.

It requires no images.
No metaphysics.
No theories.
No interpretations.

Only attention, clarity, and a mind that is awake, stable, and directly aware.

Not in order to believe something.
Not in order to acquire a new conviction.
Not in order to understand a concept.

But in order to see directly what is.

To see how craving, aversion, clinging, identification, conditioning, and ignorance continually obscure reality as it is.

Through direct seeing, conceptual thought gradually loses its unquestioned authority. What was previously believed, analysed, or defended is simply recognized

as a phenomenon that arises and passes away. And where holding on falls away, grasping loses its foundation as well.

By looking carefully, things are seen as they are—*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana (yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).*

Not in order to understand intellectually what the Buddha taught, but to see through directly what he pointed to: that which cannot be replaced by reasoning or belief, but becomes visible only through direct recognition. This is why the Dhamma speaks of *paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*—that which is to be known individually by the wise.

What stands at the centre of this investigation can be expressed quite simply:

What is awakening?
And how does it unfold?

"Enlightenment" is the conventional translation of the Pāli word *bodhi*. Yet the term can be misleading. *Bodhi* derives from the root *budh*, meaning to awaken, to wake up, to recognize, to notice.

Such explanations can easily acquire a metaphysical flavour, suggesting that something additional must still be acquired—something new. Here lies a subtle trap: the tendency to regard awakening as something that still has to be attained.

Within the context of the early Buddhist teachings, the meaning becomes clearer. It refers to directly seeing through the nature of things—*yathābhūta*.

Not as an idea.
Not as a philosophy.
But as something that can actually be seen and allowed to unfold.

What is being touched here is not new. It is ancient. It can be rediscovered again and again, independently of words, traditions, or beliefs.

Perhaps this is one of the most remarkable aspects of the Buddha's awakening. He did not present himself as someone who had invented a new truth. What he saw was not created by his awakening.

It was already present before his birth and remained present after his passing away. What changed was not reality itself, but the obscuration that concealed it from view.

This may seem a small distinction, yet its implications are profound. For the attentive practitioner, it changes the entire perspective.

It makes clear that awakening does not lie somewhere in a distant future. It is not something fulfilled in eternity, nor something that must be striven for, produced, constructed, or acquired.

It does not appear as an extraordinary state added to life. Rather, it is the falling away of that which obscures the seeing of things as they are.

What becomes clear is not something new.

Awakening is not something produced, acquired, or added. It becomes visible when the obscuration falls away.

Let the echo of that sentence linger for a moment. Perhaps it touches the very heart of what is being explored here.

And yet this direct seeing continually becomes overshadowed. Not because it has disappeared, but because the mind creates images, ideas, and concepts about it.

What is originally simple and direct is quietly transformed into something to think about, something to hold on to, something with which to identify.

A thought.
A form.
A support.

And it is precisely there that the obscuration begins again.

What is explored here is not a separate theme within the Dhamma. It touches the very heart of the teaching itself. For where obscuration is seen through, it also becomes clear how *dukkha* arises, sustains itself, and comes to an end.

In the chapters that follow, we will explore the Dhamma step by step.

Not in order to construct a doctrine.
Not in order to understand a system.

But in order to see clearly what the Buddha himself saw through.

For what he taught cannot easily be placed within the categories through which we today understand religion, philosophy, or spirituality.

Not a system of belief.
Not metaphysical speculation.
Not a theory about reality.

What we now call "religion" is a concept that arose much later. In the time of the Buddha, no separate category existed that corresponded to it.

What he pointed to was not founded upon belief, but upon direct seeing—an invitation to investigate and see through the nature of experience itself.

Ultimately, what he pointed to was something radically simple:

the end of confusion,
the end of obscuration,
the end of ignorance,
and thereby the end of *dukkha*.

Where things are not seen as they are, ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā)* arises. From ignorance come obscuration, confusion, and ultimately *dukkha*. Where ignorance is seen through, *dukkha* loses the ground upon which it depends. [22]

This is why the Dhamma begins not with belief, but with seeing.

The structure of this investigation therefore follows not a theory, but a logic of seeing—a sequence of three movements.

First, we turn to the fact of awakening itself. Not as an article of faith or a historical curiosity, but as an indication that liberation is possible. In doing so, we explore how this awakening unfolded in the life of Siddhattha Gotama.

Next, we direct our attention to the structure of *dukkha* and to the way it sustains itself. This brings us to the Four Noble Truths, in which not only the existence of *dukkha* is revealed, but also the possibility of its cessation.

Finally comes the most radical step. No longer does *dukkha* itself stand at the centre, but that which regards itself as the one who suffers, seeks, desires, and wishes to be liberated. Here the insight into not-self *(anattā; anātman)* opens up, exposing the root of identification and appropriation.

What becomes visible in this progression is not only a logical structure, but also a remarkable simplicity.

Again and again, we return to the same invitation:

to look carefully and clearly.
To look carefully and clearly at what appears.
To look carefully and clearly at what disappears.
To look carefully and clearly at what is taken to be "I."
And to see what becomes visible when nothing more is added to what is already present.

Only seeing. [23]

When we look at the way the Buddha taught, we do not find a complex system or an accumulation of theories, but a clear and direct indication that gradually unfolds what is to be seen.

In his first two discourses at Sarnath, the heart of this indication is already visible.

There the Dhamma is not presented as a doctrinal system, but reduced to its simplest form: an invitation to see what *dukkha* is, how it arises, how it is sustained, and how it comes to an end.

Nothing is added.
Nothing is concealed.

Only that which is necessary for liberation is pointed out. And yet it is precisely this simplicity that is so often lost from view over time.

Not because it disappears, but because it gradually becomes obscured by an ever-growing body of explanations, interpretations, and elaborations. The Pāli Canon itself is vast, and the later commentarial traditions have expanded that body of literature even further.

This is not necessarily a problem in itself. Yet the greater the accumulation of words, the greater the risk of losing sight of what those words originally pointed to.

What the Buddha pointed to remains remarkably simple—directly accessible and immediately verifiable in seeing itself. Yet precisely because the Dhamma is so simple, the mind often overlooks it.

For that reason, we return here to the simplicity of the teaching itself.

Not to what was developed and elaborated over the centuries, but to what formed the heart of the Buddha's teaching from the very beginning.

Let us therefore look carefully and clearly at how this awakening unfolded.

For before there was a Buddha, there was a human being who searched, investigated, doubted, made mistakes, practised, and ultimately saw through what had previously been obscured.

In the earliest discourses, the Buddha is presented neither as the founder of a religion, nor as a divine being, nor as a saviour. He appears first and foremost as a human being who investigated *dukkha* to its very end, realized its complete cessation, and pointed to a path that each person is invited to verify through direct seeing. His authority rests not on revelation, divine status, or institutional power, but on direct knowledge of the way leading to the end of *dukkha*.

When we speak of "the Buddha," it is easy to think of a figure, a history, or an image.

Here, however, he does not appear as a divine incarnation or as the founder of a religion.

He appears as a human being in whom obscuration fell away completely—not through grace or revelation, but through direct seeing.

Every image formed by the mind is a construction—a *saṅkhāra (saṃskāra).* [24]

It is therefore important to understand that "the Buddha" is not identical with the images we create of him.

The name *Buddha* refers to awakening—to seeing through the illusory assumption that there exists a permanent "I," "me," or “mine."

The Buddha did not replace one misconception with another.

Rather, he made clear that within everything that appears, no permanent and independent core can be found that could rightly be regarded as a self.

When this is no longer merely thought about but directly seen, the search gradually loses its foundation. For whoever searches does so from the assumption that there is someone who lacks something, someone who must attain something, someone who still has to become something.

Yet another element is hidden within this movement. Whoever wants to become something always presupposes a future in which what is lacking can eventually be obtained.

In this way, becoming *(bhava; id.)* creates not only the sense of an "I," but also the experience of a "not yet”.

The mind becomes continually oriented toward what is to come, while the direct seeing of what presents itself here and now recedes into the background.

This helps explain why seeking never reaches completion. Not because the sought-after state is impossible. But because the very structure of seeking rests upon a sense of deficiency and projection into the future.

At its essence, it comes down to this: Awakening is not the acquisition of something. Nor is awakening the possession of a special experience.

It is seeing through the movement that continually gives rise to seeking itself: craving, aversion, grasping, identification, and ignorance.

As long as this movement is not recognized, the mind continues to seek fulfilment in what is impermanent. But when it is directly seen, it gradually loses its self-evident character.

Then the search begins to grow quiet—not because something has been suppressed or acquired, but because the illusion of deficiency and becoming has been seen through.

Beneath a tree in Uruvelā, the search of Siddhattha Gotama came to rest. Not because he had found an ultimate answer, but because the grasping after answers—and the attachment to them—lost its foundation.

What became visible was not the insight of a person who had acquired something. What became visible

was the falling away of identification with the impermanent—with all that arises and passes away.

For this reason, awakening cannot be reduced to a special experience. Experiences arise and pass away. They belong to the domain of the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).* What the Buddha saw through was not an extraordinary experience that had to be preserved, but the way identification with all experiences arises and can fall away.

This is what we call awakening.
Not the acquisition of something.
Not the understanding of something.
But seeing through the fact that within what appears as "I," no fixed and enduring ground can be found.

Here we encounter perhaps the most radical dimension of the teaching. For as long as awakening is understood as something that must be attained by someone, the assumption of a separate seeker remains quietly intact.

Yet the Buddha's insight points in a different direction.

Not only does the sought-after lose its solid ground.
The seeker does as well. Not only is desire seen through. So too is the assumption that there exists someone who is the owner or possessor of that desire.

What appears as "I" is itself revealed, upon careful investigation, to be part of that which arises and passes away. No independent and enduring entity is found.

The way the Buddha pointed this out to his listeners is remarkably simple: not by presenting a new doctrine, not by offering a philosophical system, but by inviting each person to investigate for themselves. *Dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya).* [25]

Not believing.
Not interpreting.
Not speculating.

But looking.
Seeing.
Directly seeing.
Seeing this:

The body *(rūpa; id.)* has no owner.
Feeling *(vedanā; id.)* has no owner.
Perception *(saññā; saṃjñā)* has no owner.
Mental formations *(saṅkhāra; saṃskāra)* have no owner.
Consciousness *(viññāṇa; vijñāna)* has no owner.

All conditioned phenomena arise and pass away again and again, dependent upon conditions.

What is being seen here is not that these five *khandhas* are "empty" in the sense of being absent or non-existent. Rather, it is that they possess no fixed core, no stable or enduring substance. They arise and pass away in dependence upon conditions *(paccayā; pratyaya).*

Body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are not entities that exist in and of themselves, but processes—constantly in motion, constantly dependent upon causes and conditions.

Our entire life unfolds as an uninterrupted stream of moments in which seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking arise and pass away.

An image appears.
A sound is heard.
A thought arises.
A feeling is experienced.
Then another moment follows.

When one looks carefully and clearly, it becomes apparent that life takes place nowhere other than within this continual succession of experiences.

In seeing, there is only the seen.
In hearing, only the heard.
In perception, only the perceived.
In knowing, only the known. [26]

What we ordinarily regard as a fixed and continuous life reveals itself, upon closer investigation, as a stream of conditioned phenomena *(saṅkhārā; saṃskārā)* arising and passing away in dependence upon conditions.

It is precisely through the direct seeing of this stream that wisdom *(paññā; prajñā)* unfolds. Not by adding anything to experience, but by seeing through the fact that every moment is impermanent *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactory *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

Consciousness is not separate from what appears.

Consciousness itself arises in dependence upon conditions and cannot be found apart from them.

It always appears as consciousness of something.

Where nothing is known, no consciousness is found. When the necessary conditions come together, consciousness arises; when those conditions cease, it too ceases *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).*

The refinement of thought is not, in itself, liberation. [27] Metaphysical speculation may occupy the mind, but it does not bring about the end of *dukkha*. [28]

The mind can refine itself endlessly. It can speak of consciousness, awareness, the Unconditioned, of what remains and what does not pass away.

Yet however subtle such thought may become, once thinking takes the place of seeing, things are easily replaced by ideas about things. Not because thinking is in itself an obstacle, but because identification with those ideas obscures direct seeing. What appears is no longer seen directly, but through the images and meanings the mind adds to it.

What appears passes away. Even knowing itself is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self—*anicca (anitya), dukkha (duḥkha),* and *anattā (anātman).*

Liberation unfolds through the direct seeing of things as they are.

The Unconditioned does not appear as an object of experience. It cannot be found as a thing, a state, or a possession. It unfolds where grasping and clinging *(upādāna; id.)* come completely to rest.

From this perspective, the continual refinement of ideas loses its central importance. Where thought continues to construct, the mind continues to move. Where seeing becomes simple and direct, that movement gradually loses its nourishment.

For me, therefore, only one question remains important: Does this lead to the ending of *dukkha,* or merely to the further refinement of ideas?

And it is precisely this question that brings us back to immediate experience itself.
When there is seeing, there are eye and form.
When there is hearing, there are ear and sound.
When there is thinking, there are thought and mind.

In this way, consciousness continually appears as a moment of knowing, dependent upon a sense base and an object.

In that sense, consciousness and name-and-form *(nāma-rūpa; id.)* unfold in mutual dependence: what appears is known, and within that knowing the experiential world unfolds. [29]

Consciousness cannot be found apart from what is known, just as what is known cannot be found apart from knowing. What becomes visible is a process of mutual dependent arising—moment after moment.

When this is investigated carefully and clearly, the assumption of a permanent core gradually loses its self-evident character.

What becomes visible here is referred to in the Dhamma as *suññatā (śūnyatā).* Not as a property of

some hidden reality, nor as an abstract principle, but as a way of seeing and seeing through.

Suññatā here means empty of self *(atta; ātman)* and of anything belonging to a self. What appears is seen without finding within it an owner, a core, or an enduring bearer—what would traditionally be called a soul.

Empty—not in the sense of absence, but empty of what is not actually present:

an "I,"
a "me,"
a "mine,"
a “self.” [30]

What falls away is therefore not experience itself, but the projection that attributes a centre to it.

Suññatā does not refer to an underlying unity of all things *(advaita).* What now becomes clear through careful investigation is not a universal One, but the absence of a fixed and independent core in everything that arises and passes away.

What becomes visible is simply this: phenomena arise and cease in dependence upon conditions *(paccayā; pratyaya),* without an owner, without a core.

What we ordinarily regard as "I" or "mine" proves, upon closer investigation, to be nothing other than this dynamic interplay of processes.

Not something that can be possessed, but something that occurs. Not a being that remains, but an event that continually unfolds.

The insight does not lie in denying these phenomena, but in seeing through their nature: that they do not belong to anyone, and that no owner can be found within them.

When this is not merely understood but directly seen, the relationship to the five *khandhas* changes fundamentally. What was previously experienced as fixed and personal now reveals itself as movement, as process—as the arising and passing away of phenomena succeeding one another without an owner.

In direct attention, it becomes visible how the body presents itself as a continually changing field of sensations; how feeling arises and passes away; how perception names and recognizes; how mental formations react; and how consciousness (*viññāṇa; vijñāna)* knows each of these moments—as a moment of knowing that arises and passes away together with its object, without itself constituting a permanent core.

This seeing is not primarily analysis. It is direct recognition: this arises, this passes away.

Everything that appears disappears. This need not be a problem. On the contrary. Liberation is concealed within this very process.

What comes, goes.
What arises, passes away.

Nothing and no one asks to be held on to. Only the mind does.

The difficulty begins when the mind wants things to remain, when it clings *(upādāna; id.)* to what by its very nature is passing away.

Within that wanting, tension is already present. Within that clinging, *dukkha* reveals itself. But when direct seeing is sufficient—without attachment, without grasping—a quiet liberation unfolds in which nothing needs to remain and nothing is lost.

"This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.”

Thus becomes visible what the Dhamma calls *anattā (anātman).*

Not as a doctrinal proposition.
But as an insight that can be directly verified.
Without a permanent centre.
Without a permanent owner.

In this direct seeing, nothing is added and nothing is taken away. Nothing is enlarged and nothing diminished. Everything is left exactly as it is—still, clear, untouched.

What disappears is not the world, nor experience, nor the life that unfolds in its endless variety.

What dissolves is the subtle yet persistent illusion that somewhere at the centre there is an "I" that possesses, controls, and experiences all of this.

What remains is not a liberated person, but the falling away of the assumption that there is someone who must be liberated.

In this clear seeing, what the teaching refers to as *anattā (anātman)* becomes visible: the absence of a permanent and independent core. Or, expressed differently: the direct recognition that arises when grasping *(upādāna; id.)* comes to rest.

Then it becomes apparent:

there is seeing, but no seer;
there is feeling, but no feeler;
there is thinking, but no thinker. [31]

Not because anything is denied, but because careful investigation fails to reveal any enduring owner of these processes.

In this way, insight deepens into *vipassanā (vipaśyanā)*—the clear seeing of impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

Not as concepts, but as the direct experience of how every phenomenon appears and disappears without leaving behind anything that can truly be held on to.

Where this seeing becomes stable, grasping loses its foundation. What was once experienced as "I" is revealed as nothing more than a temporary constellation of processes.

And this is precisely why liberation is not an achievement. Not a striving. Not an acquired object or attainment.

Rather, it is the falling away of the misconception that there is a separate someone who must reach completion. Liberation unfolds where that assumption falls away.

The gnawing unsatisfactoriness of existence—*dukkha (duḥkha)*—rarely manifests loudly. It may reveal itself as *uddhacca (uddhatya):* [32] a subtle restlessness, a barely perceptible movement of the mind that always seems to seek something else, something more, something further—even when nothing appears to be lacking.

This quiet unease is not a mistake within life. It is a gentle indication of the way things are.

Everything that arises within *saṅkhāra (saṃskāra)* carries within itself the seed of its own disappearance—*anicca (anitya).*

What is pleasant changes. What appears to offer security reveals itself to have no lasting ground.

Within this continual movement, no enduring fulfilment can be found. This is the quiet truth of *dukkha*.

When this is seen without craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* without the tendency to cling or reject, another way of looking opens. Not as a solution, but as a shift in seeing itself—a knowing and seeing of things as they are *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).*

The urge to grasp *(upādāna; id.)* gradually loses its self-evident character.

What was previously experienced as a fundamental lack is seen through as a movement without a core—*anattā (anātman).*

In that quiet letting go, the gnawing note softens. Not because existence changes, but because it is no longer regarded as something that must provide fulfilment.

What reveals itself is not an answer, but an openness. Unconditioned—*asaṅkhata (asaṃskṛta).* Not an attainment, but an unfolding beyond seeking.

And it is precisely in this seeing through—not by adding something, but by no longer misunderstanding—that liberation reveals itself as the extinguishing of that misconception.

What is extinguished is not life, but the misunderstanding through which life is held.

This forms the point of departure for this series of talks.

Not a doctrine.
Not a tradition.
But a direct question:
What remains when nothing is held on to?
Liberation appears where the "I" disappears.

Liberation is not an attainment, nor a summit reached by the self, nor the culmination of an effort seeking to complete itself.

It is not the crowning achievement of a path travelled by a separate individual. Rather, it is the quiet ending of that very idea.

And so a question presents itself: What if this subtle desire—to become *(bhava; id.)*, to hold on to something, or to attain something *(upādāna; id.)*—is itself the movement that sustains the obscuration? What if the experience of a seeker and that which is sought are brought forth together within the same movement of craving and becoming?

The mind creates a centre and a periphery, an "I" and a world outside it, something that desires and something that is desired.

Within this seemingly self-evident division, the gnawing unease and unsatisfactoriness of *dukkha* are already present, even before anything can be attained.

When this is seen through—not as something constructed or cultivated, but as a direct seeing *(yathābhūta; id.)* of how things are unfolding right now—nothing remains to be accomplished.

Not because everything has been attained, but because the assumption that someone could attain something falls away.

What remains is not the experience of an "I" that is free, nor a state that must be confirmed or maintained, but a simple openness in which nothing is held as "self" and “other."

Here the search comes to an end. Not in victory, but in seeing through the assumption that there is a separate seeker.

What is explored here asks for nothing except careful and clear seeing. Not in order to become something, but to see what is already the case.

Nothing added.
Nothing improved.
Only seeing.
Careful and clear seeing.

And then something essential becomes visible: awakening is not an extraordinary event. It is the end of confusion, the falling away of obscuration, the seeing through of what was previously misunderstood.

Let us therefore look at how this awakening unfolded in the life of Siddhattha Gotama. Not as a history to be admired. Not as a story with which to identify. But as an invitation to investigate. An invitation to look carefully and clearly.

For ultimately, what matters is not so much what is written here, but whether these words invite genuine investigation. The essential questions remain the same: What is *dukkha*? And how does *dukkha* come to an end?

This is a matter of investigating, of looking, of seeing, of seeing through.

Not ideas.
Not meanings.

But what presents itself, exactly as it presents itself.

What the Buddha saw through does not belong to the past. It is not somewhere else, nor in a distant future. It is not contained within a story, a tradition, or a collection of words.

It becomes visible whenever things are seen as they are. *Yathābhūta (id.).*

When craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā)* falls silent, what emerges is not an emptiness that lacks something, but an openness that no longer needs to hold on to anything.

Grasping *(upādāna; id.)* loses its foundation. What remains is the simple and direct seeing of what is: impermanent *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactory *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

At the same time, it becomes visible how craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā)* continually gives rise to *dukkha.*

In this direct seeing, nothing is rejected and nothing is sought.

There is no movement of craving, but neither is there aversion toward what appears. The field of experience unfolds freely, without a centre that possesses or controls.

What was previously experienced as "I," "me," and "mine" reveals itself as a play of conditions *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda):* a continual arising and passing away in which no enduring owner can be found.

Even the Dhamma itself is no longer held as something to cling to. Not because it loses its value, but because even the most subtle attachment remains a movement of becoming *(bhava; id.).*

And where becoming remains, the seed of *dukkha* remains as well.

The Buddha, too, is seen in the light of this same letting go. Not through a lack of reverence, but through the understanding that every form of clinging—however exalted—remains rooted in craving and thereby places a veil over direct seeing.

What remains is a quiet clarity in which nothing is sought and nothing is rejected. No point of support. No foothold outside this immediate seeing.

Here the Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta)* does not appear as something attained, but as that which becomes visible when craving, aversion, and all that arises from them [33] have completely come to rest.

Nothing is held on to any longer.
Not the world.
Not the path.
Not even that which points to the path.

And it is precisely there—where nothing is held on to—that it becomes clear how confusion falls away.

II. THE BIRTH OF SIDDHATTHA GOTAMA

Siddhattha Gotama was born in Lumbinī, in what is now southern Nepal, as the son of Suddhodana and his wife Māyā. Both belonged to the kṣatriya class, though to different clans: Suddhodana to the Śākyas and Māyā to the Koliyas—two related warrior communities with their own social and political structures.

Historically, there is little more that can be established with certainty.

Within the Dhamma, however, the significance of his birth lies not so much in stories of miracles or symbolism, but in conditions: he came into the world under circumstances that made the ripening of insight possible.

According to the canonical tradition, when the sage Asita saw the child, he did not speak of glory or power, but of awakening.

Not because the child was already awakened, but because he believed he recognized conditions that could mature into complete awakening.

What now becomes evident here is that this potential does not imply some special essence. It simply means that certain conditions came together: physical and mental capacities, upbringing, cultural context, and particular sensitivities capable of supporting the Path.

During his youth, Siddhattha was raised in a protected environment, yet protection does not extinguish the inner search.

The early Buddhist tradition suggests that certain sensitivities were already present from an early age. It does not portray Siddhattha as an extraordinary child, but rather points to a contemplative disposition, a natural receptivity to inner stillness, and a capacity to be deeply touched by whatever presented itself.

The recollection of an experience of profound meditative stillness beneath the shade of a rose-apple tree appears to be an early indication of this. [34]

Later, encounters with sickness, old age, and death would also give rise to a deep existential stirring that further nourished his search for liberation.

Perhaps it is precisely through this sensitivity that an awareness of the fundamental impermanence of existence gradually begins to mature. Not as suffering in a dramatic sense, but as a subtle intuition that no experience is ever truly lasting.

From this sensitivity, *saṃvega (id.)* begins to ripen—the existential shock that breaks through what had seemed self-evident.

In the early Buddhist *suttas*, *saṃvega* refers to the profound disquiet that arises when it is truly seen how fundamentally impermanent *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactory *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman)* existence is.

In that seeing, something opens.

What once seemed familiar loses its solid ground. Existence reveals itself as a continuous stream of

arising and passing away, without anything to hold on to, without a lasting core.

Saṃvega is not fear or despair, but a shock that awakens the heart—a clear sense that there is no time to lose.

Out of this disquiet grows an inner urgency that does not compel, but gives direction. In this way, *saṃvega* becomes the first movement of a heart that is beginning to see.

The birth of Siddhattha is therefore not an isolated miracle, but the starting point of a process that unfolds entirely within cause and effect.

It invites us to see that awakening does not arise through chance or being chosen, but through the ripening of conditions and the willingness to look directly at the nature of experience.

When we remove the mythological veil from Siddhattha's birth, what appears is not a supernatural story, but something far simpler and perhaps therefore far more profound: a human being born under conditions that allowed him not to turn away from the reality of *dukkha*, but to live it fully in all its vulnerability and to see through it.

And if we look carefully, we can see that conditions are present in our own lives as well. Not necessarily in the same form, nor with the same intensity, but sufficient to prevent us from remaining satisfied with the habitual way in which we ordinarily view existence.

The very fact that we are reading these pages is already a quiet indication that within us too there lives a question about what is impermanent, what gives rise to suffering, and what makes liberation possible.

The essential question, then, is not so much whether the conditions are present, but whether they are truly seen.

III. THE FOUR ENCOUNTERS

What led Siddhattha to leave behind his protected life was not a matter of chance. It was the further unfolding of an inner process that had been maturing for a long time.

The Pāli Canon describes four encounters that gave this process a decisive turn: an old man, a sick person, a corpse, and a *samaṇa (śramaṇa).*

In the earliest *suttas,* these encounters are not presented as a dramatic narrative; that literary form emerges only in later biographical traditions.

These "four signs" should not be read as miraculous events or as literally historical occurrences that took place on a single day, but as existential confrontations that every human being sooner or later faces when the apparent self-evidence of existence begins to waver.

The encounter with old age shattered the assumption that youth and vitality provide a reliable foundation. The insight was simple: nothing that arises remains as it is.

The confrontation with sickness undermined the assumption that the body is truly our possession. Health is not something we own, but a temporary harmony dependent upon conditions.

The encounter with death brought the most direct insight: whatever is born comes to an end. This is not a philosophy. It is a fact that undermines every attempt to find lasting security.

And finally, there was the encounter with a *samaṇa*—a renunciant who had left ordinary life behind. Not as a romantic ideal, but as an indication that there may be a path that does not seek to deny old age, sickness, and death, but investigates whether there is a reality that is not born and therefore does not perish.

These four encounters did not constitute a story, but an unmasking.

Without romanticism.
Without religious colouring.
Without mythological mystification.
Only the clarity of what reveals itself—the seeing of things as they are *(yathā-bhūta; id.).*

The four encounters pierce the veil that obscures ordinary life: the tendency to treat the impermanent as lasting, the uncontrollable as controllable, and that which is not-self as "I," "me," and “mine."

In these four encounters, the apparent self-evidence of existence breaks open for Siddhattha. Impermanence *(anicca; anitya)* no longer appears as an idea, but as an inescapable reality.

What becomes visible here is not only the vulnerability of human existence, but also the first clear confrontation with *dukkha*. Not as a pessimistic view of life, but as seeing through the fact that nothing which arises, changes, and passes away can ultimately provide lasting ground.

What awakened within Siddhattha is what the Buddha would later call *saṃvega (id.):* a profound inner shock, born not of despair but of clarity. A deep

existential stirring that arises when the impermanence, vulnerability, and uncontrollability of existence are no longer understood merely in theory, but seen directly. A realization that life, as long as it is driven by craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* aversion *(paṭigha; pratigha),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.),* does not lead to liberation.

It was precisely this clarity that became the condition for his departure from the household life—not an escape, not a rejection, but a radical turning toward the Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta),* which is not subject to arising and passing away.

IV. THE GREAT DEPARTURE

What later came to be known as the Great Departure *(pabbajjā; pravrajyā)* was not a dramatic escape from a palace.

In the early Buddhist suttas, it is described quite simply: a human being who realizes that he himself is subject to birth, ageing, sickness, and death—and that it is not fitting to continue seeking that which is likewise subject to those very conditions.

In the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, [35] the Buddha describes it in these words:

‘ *Being subject to birth, seeking what is subject to birth...*
Being subject to ageing, seeking what is subject to ageing...
Being subject to sickness, seeking what is subject to sickness...
Being subject to death, seeking what is subject to death… ’

And then comes the insight:

‘ *This cannot be the right way.* ’

That clarity marks the turning point.
Not confusion, but insight.
Not despair, but sober consistency.

What follows is not so much a choice as a consequence of insight: when something is truly seen, it cannot be otherwise.

Pabbajjā literally means "going forth" or "going out.”

What is important is to see what is actually being left behind.

Not merely house and family.
Not merely possessions or status.

What is left behind is the search for security within the impermanent. More radically still, it is the movement of the mind that seeks security where no lasting security can ever be found.

One of the deepest human drives is concealed here. Most religious, philosophical, and spiritual systems arise from the same fundamental question: how can we find security amidst change, impermanence, and death?

The turn Siddhattha makes is therefore remarkable.

While most religious, philosophical, and spiritual systems attempt to answer the human search for security, he begins to investigate the very nature of the seeker.

That may seem a small difference, yet its implications are far-reaching.

Ordinarily, our attention is directed toward what is being sought: happiness, truth, salvation, security, meaning, or eternity. Siddhattha shifts the focus to a different question: what is the nature of that which seeks security?

With that, the direction of the investigation changes completely.

The question is no longer, "Where can lasting security be found?" Rather, it becomes: "What is the nature of the drive that seeks security?”

When this tendency is carefully investigated, it is seen to be closely bound up with craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.).*

The search for security then no longer appears as the solution to *dukkha*, but as one of the ways in which *dukkha* continually sustains itself.

What is initially experienced as a search for liberation reveals itself, upon closer investigation, to be an attempt to find permanence within what is constantly changing.

Here, the radical dimension of the Dhamma opens up. Not only is what is sought investigated, but also the one who seeks. Not only does desire become visible, but also the assumption that there exists someone who could find lasting security through the fulfilment of that desire.

Through this insight, the striving for security within worldly existence is fundamentally undermined. It becomes clear that no lasting security can be found within the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).*

For this reason, the Great Departure is not an escape from existence, but a radical honesty toward existence itself. It is the moment when one no longer

seeks refuge in that which is itself subject to arising and passing away.

Later biographical traditions would surround this event with symbolic stories of a nocturnal departure from the palace and other images intended to express the break with his former life. [36]

The oldest early Buddhist texts remain simple: the Great Departure is not a heroic act, but the inevitable consequence of a clear insight—not seeking a lasting ground within the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta),* but turning towards the Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta)*—not as something to be acquired, but as the extinguishing of the conditions that sustain *dukkha*.

What now becomes evident is simple: liberation begins not with mysticism, but with fully acknowledging what is seen. With no longer turning away from our own impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman),* even when that insight removes the ground beneath our certainties.

V. THE TWO TEACHERS: KĀLĀMA AND RĀMAPUTTA

After his Great Departure, Siddhattha sought out teachers who were renowned in his time as masters of deep meditative absorption—particularly the *jhānas*. [37]

Both teachers represented what appeared to be the most refined contemplative attainments available within the brahmanical and śramaṇa traditions of the time.

Āḷāra Kālāma was a respected contemplative teacher who taught the refined *arūpa* meditations, while Uddaka Rāmaputta preserved the tradition of Rāma, a master who had realized even subtler states of concentration.

Under Āḷāra Kālāma, Siddhattha attained the sphere of nothingness *(ākiñcaññāyatana; ākiṃcanyāyatana),* the third of the four *arūpa* spheres as they were later systematically described within the tradition.

According to the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, [38] Āḷāra recognized that Siddhattha had attained the same contemplative realization as himself. He even invited him to lead the community alongside him, as an equal in insight and authority.

Yet Siddhattha saw clearly: this refined state of consciousness is conditioned; it too arises, endures for a time, and passes away. There was peace and great subtlety, but no ending of *dukkha*.

Siddhattha therefore left Āḷāra Kālāma.

Not out of rejection, but through the insight that this could not be the Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta).*

His second teacher, Uddaka Rāmaputta, taught the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception *(nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana; naivasaṃjñā-nāsaṃjñāyatana),* the fourth and most subtle of the *arūpa* spheres.

Siddhattha attained this state with ease. Uddaka Rāmaputta likewise recognized him as one who had fully realized this exceedingly subtle state of consciousness and was therefore worthy of leading the community.

But once again he saw: however refined a state of consciousness may be, as long as it arises through conditions, it belongs to the conditioned and cannot bring liberation from *dukkha*.

Even the most subtle experience appears, remains for a time, and disappears again. For that very reason, it cannot be identical with the Unconditioned.

What becomes visible here is this: *samādhi (id.)* is a powerful means of quieting, refining, and stabilizing the mind, but in itself it does not lead to the definitive ending of *dukkha*.

Peace is not the same as liberation. Concentration is not the same as insight. No matter how deep a meditative absorption may be, as long as it is not seen through how *dukkha* arises and how it comes to an end, one remains within the domain of the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).*

Precisely because he had personally experienced the furthest reaches of *samādhi*, he could see that what is initially experienced as a search for liberation reveals itself, upon closer investigation, to be an attempt to find permanence within what is constantly changing. He also saw that even the most refined state of consciousness does not liberate.

No conditioned mode of experience, not even the most subtle, can be identical with the Unborn, the Deathless, the Unconditioned.

Nibbāna (nirvāṇa) belongs to the Unconditioned and is therefore categorically different from every conditioned experience.

What now becomes evident here is a subtle tendency that can permeate the entire spiritual search: the tendency to seek liberation within experience itself—even within the most refined states of consciousness.

In clarity.
In unity.
In stillness.

What Siddhattha saw here was irrefutable: every state of consciousness that arises and passes away belongs to the conditioned. And what arises and passes away cannot be the Unborn.

This insight was not a disappointment, but a turning point—a threshold leading to awakening.

It makes clear that the path extends beyond *samādhi (id.)*—towards seeing through *anicca (anitya), dukkha*

(duḥkha), and *anattā (anātman):* seeing through the nature of conditioned existence itself.

Expressed in a single sentence: *jhāna* in itself is not liberation, but an excellent supporting condition for the arising of insight.

Here emerges what would later be called *vipassanā (vipaśyanā):* not primarily a separate technique, but the spontaneous illumination of insight when the mind has become sufficiently quiet, clear, and balanced through *samatha (śamatha).*

In this way, *satipaṭṭhāna (smṛtyupasthāna)* becomes not merely a method of cultivating attention, but a foundation for the arising of insight into the nature of experience itself.

When the mind has become sufficiently still—clear, stable, and balanced—it begins spontaneously to see the characteristics of existence.

This is no longer conceptual thinking, but the unfolding of insight—where meditation shifts from seeking a state of consciousness to seeing through every state of consciousness.

This is why Siddhattha continued on—not because his teachers had failed him, but because what he was seeking could not be found in anything that arises and passes away; not in the impermanent, not in the conditioned.

When this is fully seen through, a fundamental misconception falls away. Not gradually in time, and not

as the result of further effort, but through directly seeing the nature of the conditioned itself.

What is seen is that everything that appears disappears—without exception. And that nowhere within what appears can a lasting and stable ground be found.

Where nothing is held onto any longer, where no owner is assumed, nothing falls away from the world—except the misunderstanding about the world itself.

What does not arise—the Unborn *(ajāta; id.)*—is no longer sought as an object of experience.

What does not pass away—the Deathless *(amata; amṛta)*—is no longer missed as something that still needs to be attained.

This is what the Dhamma refers to as *bodhi*: awakening, waking up from the fundamental misunderstanding of what is.

VI. THE YEARS OF EXTREME ASCETICISM

What followed was a period of radical asceticism *(dukkara-kārikā; duṣkara-kārikā).* Not out of blind faith, but as an ultimate attempt to investigate whether the complete mastery of the body and the senses could lead to liberation from craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā)* and clinging *(upādāna; id.).*

Having now experienced both the furthest refinement of concentration and the most extreme form of self-mortification, Siddhattha came to see that liberation could be found in neither of these extremes.

In the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, [39] this period of extreme asceticism is described in considerable detail, including the physical exhaustion to which it led.

According to the *sutta,* Siddhattha subjected himself for a long time to severe deprivation. He restricted his breathing, almost entirely abstained from food, and brought his body to the brink of death. His limbs became thin like bamboo reeds, his ribs stood out like the rafters of a dilapidated building, and his skin lost its radiance. Yet he saw that none of these ordeals led to liberation.

Precisely because he had followed this path to its utmost conclusion, Siddhattha could see unmistakably that liberation does not arise through destroying the body or by waging war against experience. The problem did not lie in the existence of sensations themselves, but in the tendency of the mind to identify with them, reject them, or cling to them.

What becomes visible here is this: suffering is not transcended by adding more suffering. Self-mortification suppresses the body, but it does not lead to liberating insight.

Rather than bringing liberation closer, this extreme asceticism weakened the mind and obscured the clarity of seeing.

An exhausted body proved to be an unsuitable vehicle for clear seeing. When vital energy was nearly depleted, the mind could no longer unfold in its natural clarity and stability.

It was precisely this extreme experience that made the Middle Way visible—not as a compromise between two extremes, but as seeing through the misconception that gives rise to both.

For both sensual indulgence and self-mortification remain rooted in the same movement: the attempt to become something, attain something, or reject something.

What is seen through here is not effort itself, but the craving that underlies that striving.

VII. THE DISCOVERY OF THE MIDDLE WAY

The moment Siddhattha abandoned asceticism marked a turning point. Not because he was seeking comfort, but because he saw that an exhausted mind cannot sustain clarity.

Extreme asceticism obscures the seeing of impermanence and weakens the conditions for insight.

In the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, it is recounted how he remembered that, as a child sitting beneath the shade of a rose-apple tree, he had naturally entered a state of calm concentration *(jhāna; dhyāna)*—free from self-mortification and free from sensual indulgence.

The memory of the rose-apple tree did not merely bring back a childhood recollection. It revealed something that had long been overshadowed. As a child, Siddhattha had experienced a quiet and natural stillness that did not arise from craving, achievement, or self-mortification. The mind was simply present, collected, and clear. It was precisely for this reason that the question arose: might this form of stillness be closer to liberation than any of the extremes he had explored up to that point?

Without force, without striving, a natural stillness appeared—a clarity that would later be referred to in his teaching as right concentration *(sammā samādhi; samyak samādhi).* [40]

What became clearly visible here for the first time was the possibility of a happiness that does not depend on sensual pleasure and does not arise from

self-mortification. It was a quiet and natural joy that appeared when the mind was no longer divided, no longer exhausted, and no longer entangled in craving.

This insight proved decisive: self-mortification does not lead to liberation. Insight does not arise from violence against the body, but from a mind that is balanced, clear, and stable.

Here a distinction became visible that would prove crucial. Not every form of happiness is rooted in craving. There is a joy that arises when the mind is no longer driven by sensual pleasure, no longer exhausted by resistance, and no longer divided by inner conflict. Such joy does not bind; it supports clarity, attention, and insight.

The meal offered by Sujātā, simple and freely given, was not a miraculous act of salvation, but a concrete expression of this restored balance: a body that is sufficiently nourished supports a mind capable of seeing clearly. Here it became fully evident for the first time that liberation cannot be forced. It does not appear where the mind wages war against itself, but where body and mind exist in a natural harmony that makes clear seeing possible.

With this, something heavy fell away: the assumption that liberation must be fought for, forced, or earned through the subjugation of the body. The Middle Way did not appear as a new theory that had to be formulated but as something that naturally revealed itself once both extremes had been fully seen through.

It became visible because both extremes had been fully lived through and fully understood. Where the pursuit of pleasure scatters the mind and self-mortification exhausts it, a path of inner balance opens: a mind that is clearly present, without grasping and without forcing.

Siddhattha recognized that the path lies neither in self-exaltation nor in self-destruction, but in a subtle openness that forces nothing.

In the same *sutta,* the term "Middle Way" *(majjhimā paṭipadā; madhyamā pratipad)* is not yet used, yet the foundation is laid here for what would later be called by that name.

The five ascetics left him because they believed he had abandoned the search.

In reality, the opposite was true: Siddhattha had not abandoned the search for truth, but the path that did not lead to it.

Something else also became visible here: both the pursuit of pleasure and the practice of self-mortification can be sustained by the same underlying movement—the tendency to want to become someone, attain something, or force a particular state into being. Where this movement is seen through, the mind begins to open to a different way of being: attentive, clear, and free from forcing.

What fell away was not the seriousness of his search, but the conviction that truth can be found in the extreme. Where one extreme leads to distraction and

the other to exhaustion, a path of clarity, balance, and attentiveness now opens.

The path that now became visible was simple, direct, and free from the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification. It would lead him to the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgayā, where the question that had sustained his entire search would finally reach its resolution.

VIII. THE NIGHT OF AWAKENING

When Siddhattha seated himself beneath the Bodhi Tree at Uruvelā, his path had already been profoundly purified of the Five Hindrances. His mind was clear, stable, and concentrated, yet the root of ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā)* had not yet been completely destroyed.

What took place during that night is not described in the Canon primarily as a sequence of hours, but as the arising of three liberating knowledges—the *tisso vijjā*. [41] In the early Buddhist tradition, these three insights describe the gradual unfolding of awakening.

The reference to the three "watches of the night" serves merely as a division of time: the first watch *(pubba-ratti),* the middle watch *(majjhima-ratti),* and the final watch *(pacchimā-ratti).*

In the early Buddhist texts, this division is presented simply as a chronological indication, without any explicit symbolic meaning.

What is truly being pointed to here is neither a story unfolding in time nor a series of extraordinary experiences that should be understood as ends in themselves.

The three watches of the night refer to a progressive deepening of insight in which the mind gradually sees through what had previously been taken for granted.

The passing of the night is not what matters here. What is essential is the successive arising of insight.

The descriptions are merely the form; what becomes visible through them is the heart of the matter.

In the first watch, insight arose into former modes of existence.

In the second watch, insight arose into the passing away and reappearance of beings.

In the final watch, insight arose into the destruction of the *āsavas (id.)*—the liberating insight itself.

Insight unfolded from the individual process of existence to the universal lawfulness underlying all existence, and ultimately to the destruction of the *āsavas* —the complete ending of ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā).*

Together, these three knowledges *(vijjās; jñānas)* form the foundation of his awakening.

1. The First Watch *(pubba-ratti):* insight arose into former existences. *(pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa; pūrvanivāsānusmṛti-jñāna).*

During the first part of the night, Siddhattha saw an immeasurable series of his own former existences. He recognized within them the continuity of the process of existence across many lives, each conditioned and sustained by *saṅkhārā (saṃskārā).*

Not as stories or chronicles of a personal history, but as a direct seeing of continuity within conditionality.

What is overcome here is not merely ignorance concerning "past lives," but the deeply rooted assumption that this present existence stands alone.

He saw how birth, ageing, and death repeated themselves, sustained by intentional formations *(saṅkhārā; saṃskārā)* that continually gave rise to renewed existence.

For the early Buddhist tradition, however, the significance of this insight does not lie in the number of lives remembered, but in seeing through the lawfulness that makes their continuation possible.

What matters is not the memories themselves, but the insight into what drives this continuity—how intention, craving, and ignorance repeatedly make renewed becoming *(bhava; id.)* possible.

What was seen through was not a personal history, but the ceaseless dynamic of arising, conditioned existence, and passing away.

What became visible was that existence has no fixed point, but unfolds as an ongoing process of causes and conditions.

Just as one flame lights another without transmitting itself, so too does this process of existence continue without a fixed core or soul.

What appears as continuity is not identity. Neither the same, nor entirely different.

This insight does not confirm the notion of a self that endures, but rather sees through its absence *(anattā; anātman).*

It reveals how existence unfolds as a stream of causes and conditions, without any permanent bearer or essence behind the process.

2. The Middle Watch *(majjhima-ratti):* Knowledge of the Passing Away and Reappearance of Beings *(cutūpapāta-ñāṇa; cyutyupapāda-jñāna).*

In the middle watch of the night, the perspective widened. Not only his own stream of existence, but also the arising and passing away of other beings became visible. Siddhattha saw how processes of existence take shape through causes and conditions. Beings appear in accordance with their *kamma (karma),* remain for a time, and pass away once more.

What now becomes evident is not a cosmological description, but a direct recognition of lawfulness: nothing arises without causes, nothing endures without supporting conditions.

No worldview is discovered here. No beginning is found, no first cause, no governing entity. Only arising and passing away, dependent upon causes and conditions. What appears does not appear independently; what disappears does not disappear independently. Nowhere is a fixed ground found, only conditionality.

In the Canon, this is described as a direct seeing of causality—not as a speculative metaphysical theory, but as insight into conditionality and the lawfulness of cause and effect.

Here it became clear: nothing arises without causes, nothing endures without support, and nothing escapes change.

The notion of a permanent essence travelling through these processes finds no confirmation in this insight.

3. The Final Watch *(pacchimā-ratti):* Knowledge of the Destruction of the Āsavas and the Breakthrough of Liberation (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*; *āsravakṣaya-jñāna*).

Siddhattha saw directly:

‘ *When this is, that comes to be. When this is not, that ceases.* ’

This was the immediate seeing through of dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).*

Here insight reaches its fulfilment: no longer merely seeing processes, but seeing through their arising—and their cessation.

He saw how ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā)* gives rise to conditionings; how from these arise consciousness, name-and-form, contact, feeling, craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.);* and how, in this way, birth, ageing, and death continually unfold.

And he saw with equal clarity that when ignorance ceases, this entire chain of dependent arising also comes to rest.

What became visible here was not a new reality that had to be attained, but the extinguishing of the conditions that had continually given rise to suffering.

Nothing was added.
Something simply ceased.

In this insight, the decisive liberation took place: the *āsavas*—the deeply rooted currents of sensual desire *(kāmāsava),* becoming *(bhavāsava),* and ignorance *(avijjāsava),* which continually sustain existence—were destroyed.

What disappears here is not an experience, but the very ground that nourishes all experience leading to suffering.

What is meant by extinguishing is therefore not the destruction of life, but the extinguishing of that which repeatedly keeps existence bound within the cycle of *dukkha*.

Where there is no more craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* no clinging *(upādāna; id.)* can arise. Where there is no clinging, there is no becoming *(bhava; id.).* Where there is no becoming, no new birth takes place.

As we have already seen: craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā)* → clinging *(upādāna; id.)* → becoming *(bhava; id.).*

This is the actual breakthrough: not the seeing of something new, but the complete falling away of what had obscured seeing.

In this final watch of the night, what the Dhamma calls *bodhi* takes place: the awakening in which nibbāna (nirvāṇa), the Unconditioned, fully unfolds.

Awakening—waking up—is therefore not a mystical event.
Not a metaphysical leap.
Not a belief.
Not a conditioned experience.

Awakening is the complete seeing through of phenomena exactly as they actually occur—*yathābhūta*.

When these three watches of the night are understood together as a single whole, their significance becomes clear.

First, it is seen that existence is not an isolated fact, but a stream of conditions.

Then it is seen that this stream is universal—that everything arises and passes away according to the same lawfulness.

And finally, it is seen through how this entire process arises—and how it comes to rest when ignorance falls away.

In these watches of the night, the images are not what is essential. Nor are the experiences.

What matters is the insight that nothing exists independently—and that liberation lies in completely seeing through the conditionality of the entire process of existence.

This is the lawfulness of dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).* This is also why the Buddha repeatedly states in various suttas:

‘ *Whoever sees dependent arising sees the Dhamma. Whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent arising.* ’

In the Pāli Canon, this decisive breakthrough is presented through a traditionally transmitted metaphor: the encounter with Māra.

The texts speak of Māra's assault. In the earliest tradition, Māra appears both as a mythical figure and within the experiential world of the practitioner—as a symbol of inner temptation and resistance.

In psychological terms, this imagery points to the final movements of the mind: the subtle tendency to continue seeking some form of foothold—in craving, doubt, or self-reference.

Māra represents the force that repeatedly draws the mind back into craving, identification, and becoming *(bhava; id.).*

For this reason, Māra is not presented in the Dhamma merely as a figure encountered by the Buddha, but equally as a designation for the forces that keep the mind bound within *saṃsāra*.

The defeat of Māra signifies that no residual point of identification remains.

The touching of the earth—*bhūmi-phassa* (*bhūmi-sparśa*)—is therefore understood not merely as a ritual gesture, but as an indication of the indisputable

nature of reality itself: the direct recognition of lawfulness—cause and effect, dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).*

When dawn came, the cycle of *saṃsāra* had been broken for Siddhattha.

He had gained nothing, acquired nothing, added nothing. What had disappeared was the illusion that nourishes suffering. What had opened was the Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta):* nibbāna (nirvāṇa), the end of *dukkha*.

According to the tradition, it was at this moment that the Buddha uttered words later preserved in the *Dhammapada*: [42]

❛ *Through many births in saṃsāra have I wandered,*
Seeking the builder of this house.
In vain have I searched.
Painful it is to be born again and again.
But now I have seen you, house-builder!
You shall build this house no more.
All your rafters are broken,
Your ridgepole is shattered.
My mind rests in the Unconditioned;
Craving has come to an end. ❜

The "house" spoken of here refers to conditioned existence itself: the repeatedly constructed process of body and mind.

The "house-builder" is *taṇhā (tṛṣṇā):* the craving that repeatedly gives rise to clinging *(upādāna; id.),* becoming *(bhava; id.),* and birth *(jāti; id.).* When that

craving is fully seen through, the house of *saṃsāra* can no longer be rebuilt.

Within this metaphor, the entire insight of awakening is brought together: how processes of existence continually unfold according to dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda);* why no enduring essence can be found within them *(anattā; anātman);* and how liberation becomes possible when the craving that drives this process is completely extinguished *(taṇhā-nirodha; tṛṣṇā-nirodha).*

In this imagery, we see what the Buddha summarized in a simple formula:

‘ *When this is, that comes to be; when this ceases, that ceases.* ’

Although this insight was complete, another question would arise shortly thereafter: Would anyone understand this Dhamma?

That question forms the bridge to the next phase of the story: the seven weeks following awakening.

IX. THE SEVEN WEEKS FOLLOWING AWAKENING

Before speaking of the seven weeks following Siddhattha's awakening, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider something simple.

When awakening takes place, nothing new appears. No new state, no new identity, no special quality that someone comes to possess.

What disappears is seeking and holding on—the confusion that continually drives the mind to grasp at something else.

What remains is simplicity. Clear presence. A mind that no longer needs to become something or go anywhere.

The seven weeks following awakening are described in the Pāli Canon through a series of episodes that can be read both literally and contemplatively.

What becomes visible is how liberation unfolds—not as a sequence of extraordinary or mythical events, but as qualities of a liberated mind.

If we were to summarize these seven weeks in their essence, they could be expressed in seven simple sentences:

The first week — abiding unmoved in liberation. A mind that no longer seeks anything.

The second week — the silent acknowledgement of the place where ignorance disappeared. Gratitude without words.

The third week — contemplation of dependent arising. The direct seeing that nothing exists independently, but only arises and passes away in dependence upon causes and conditions.

The fourth week — the refinement of insight. The Dhamma is fully seen through in its interconnectedness.

The fifth week — peace amidst circumstances. The world changes, yet clarity remains undisturbed.

The sixth week — where there is no longer any identification, nothing remains that must be defended.

The seventh week — the first contact with the world.
This summary is not intended as a replacement for the canonical account, but as a contemplative summary of what becomes visible within it.

If we now look somewhat more closely at what the Pāli Canon relates, the following unfolds.

The First Week — Abiding Unmoved in Liberation. For seven days, the Buddha remained beneath the Bodhi Tree, immersed in the happiness of liberation *(vimutti-sukha; vimukti-sukha).*

Traditionally, this is described as an uninterrupted abiding and may be understood as indicating a mind completely free from seeking and resistance. There is nothing left to strive for, nothing to avoid, nothing to perfect. The path has been fully seen through; nothing remains to be attained or completed.

The Second Week — The Unblinking Gaze *(animīṣa-locana; id.).* According to the tradition, the Buddha spent seven days facing the Bodhi Tree without blinking.

This description need not necessarily be read literally. It may also be understood as an expression of uninterrupted attention and silent acknowledgement of the place where ignorance fell away.

The emphasis here is not upon a ritual act, but upon unobstructed clarity free from distraction.

The Third Week — The Jewel Chamber *(ratanaghara; id.).* Tradition relates that during this week the Buddha deeply contemplated the Dhamma, particularly the principle of dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).*

This does not refer to discursive thinking, but to a complete and direct seeing through of the interconnectedness of conditionality. What becomes visible here is that no phenomenon exists independently, but only appears and disappears in dependence upon causes and conditions.

The Fourth Week — Contemplation of the Abhidhamma Elements. In later traditions, this week is described as a period during which the Buddha contemplated the Dhamma in its most refined distinctions.

This presentation, however, belongs to later traditions and is not found in the oldest strata of the Pāli Canon. It should therefore be approached with appropriate caution.

What remains essential here is not the systematization of the Dhamma, but the further deepening of insight.

The Fifth Week — Mucalinda. During this period, the Buddha stayed near the pond of Mucalinda. A sudden storm is traditionally mentioned.

Whether understood literally or symbolically, the meaning is clear: a liberated mind remains undisturbed under all circumstances. Calm amidst movement. Clear amidst change.

The Sixth Week — The Encounter with a Brahmin. During this week, the Buddha met a brahmin who asked him who he was. According to the tradition, the Buddha did not answer in terms of lineage, status, or social role. Instead, he pointed to the extinguishing of the cravings, tendencies, and identifications through which a person regards himself as this or that. What becomes visible here is that awakening does not create a new identity, but marks the ending of all identification.

The Seventh Week — The Two Merchants (Tapussa and Bhallika). Two merchants offered food to the Buddha. He accepted their offering and, according to later tradition, gave them two strands of hair, an event subsequently associated with the origins of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. They became the first lay followers to take refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma. This episode is often told quite simply, yet it points to something essential: the Dhamma begins to become visible in the world—not as a doctrine, but as a living recognition.

What until then had been the silent reality of an inner awakening begins here, for the first time, to open into encounter and shared human contact. It was not persuasion through words, but a quiet recognition of the presence of liberation.

Throughout these seven weeks, the Buddha remained in the peace of his awakening: there was nothing more to attain, nothing more to become, nothing more to defend.

There was nothing left to seek and nothing left to complete. Yet this did not mean that the world had disappeared. Life continued, but was now met without grasping, without resistance, and without the need to become someone.

Gradually, however, another question began to arise —one that would prove of immense importance for the world: Can this Dhamma, so profound, truly be understood?

The peace of awakening was not a withdrawal from the world, nor a state that had to be protected.

Where nothing is held onto, life can freely appear exactly as it is. And it was precisely within that openness that a new question gradually began to take shape.

That question marks the beginning of a new chapter: no longer the story of his own awakening, but the question of whether what had been seen could also be shared with others.

X. THE HESITATION TO TEACH THE DHAMMA

According to the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, [43] the Buddha reflected as follows:

‘*Ayaṃ kho me dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo — This Dhamma of mine is profound, difficult to see and difficult to understand; peaceful and sublime, beyond the reach of mere reasoning, subtle, and to be known personally only by the wise.*’ [44]

The Buddha Dhamma runs counter to the ordinary human way of seeing and is therefore not easily understood.

In the texts, this reflection is not presented as doubt in the ordinary sense, but as a clear recognition of how difficult it would be to communicate this insight.

What becomes visible here is that the Dhamma is not difficult because it is intellectually complex, but because it runs counter to the deeply rooted tendency of the mind to grasp, to identify, and to become someone.

According to the Canon, Brahmā Sahampati then appears—not as a creator god, but as a *brahmā* being who, within Buddhist cosmology, belongs to a subtle *brahmā* realm and represents beings who, through refined meditation *(jhāna; dhyāna),* have attained a high degree of concentration and moral purity, yet are not thereby necessarily liberated.

Brahmā Sahampati should not be understood here as a supernatural miracle, but as an element within the

traditional narrative that points to a possibility: that there are beings capable of understanding the Dhamma.

He asks the Buddha to teach—not as a divine command, but by pointing out that there are beings "with little dust in their eyes.”

This episode reveals that, despite the profundity of the Dhamma, there are indeed beings capable of understanding it.

It also makes clear why the Dhamma cannot easily be communicated. It does not call for new beliefs, but for a radically different way of seeing. What matters is not the addition of something new, but seeing through what the mind itself continually produces from moment to moment.

Here the Canon remains faithful to its own perspective: Brahmā Sahampati gives no command. He merely points to a possibility.

The decision to teach rests entirely with the Buddha himself.

Seen in this light, Brahmā Sahampati need not be understood as a divine messenger, but may be read as an acknowledgement—within the traditional narrative—of a simple reality: that some beings are sufficiently mature, clear, and open to receive this insight.

That recognition was enough.

Nothing needed to be added to what had already been seen through. Only the possibility became vis-

ible that what liberates might also be seen through by others.

The Buddha never taught on the basis of authority, revelation, or divine command. Nor does he do so here.

He chose to teach—not out of duty, nor because of an imposed mission, but out of compassion and from the understanding that some beings are capable of seeing.

This moment marks the beginning of what we now call the Dhamma.

Not as revelation.
Not as doctrine.
But as a pointing towards what can be seen..

The truth the Buddha had seen through cannot be transmitted as a possession, a belief, or an experience. It can only be pointed to.

From this follows something essential: what is pointed to must be seen, investigated, and seen through by each practitioner for themselves.

The teaching therefore did not begin from the wish to gather followers or establish a religious system. It began simply from the recognition that there are beings who, despite the power of craving and ignorance, are capable of seeing.

From this moment onward, the Buddha appears not only as one who is awakened, but also as a teacher.

What begins here is not the transmission of a truth, but the pointing out of a path that each person must walk and see through for themselves.

The task of the teacher is therefore not to provide answers, but to point to the possibility of seeing.

Not because anything needed to be added to the truth, but because what had been seen through could also be pointed out. Where insight arises, ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā)* comes to an end.

XI. THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE FIVE ASCETICS

Now that clarity had become fully established, the Dhamma now began to unfold in the world. The Buddha set out for Sarnath, to the five ascetics, who would become the first recipients of the insight that had fully unfolded.

On the journey from Bodhgayā to Sarnath, nothing occurred that the Canon presents as doctrinally essential. The journey is mentioned quite simply: the Buddha walked from one place to another—a practical journey without symbolic significance. The journey itself contains no new teaching and brings no further deepening of awakening.

The only encounter recorded in the Canon is that with the ascetic Upaka. Yet this meeting does not alter the course of the path or add anything to the insight that had already reached completion.

It is precisely this simplicity that gives the episode its strength: the insight was complete, the path fully clear, and nothing remained to be added.

Yet something fundamental had changed. Until then, awakening had unfolded as an inner seeing through. By setting out for Sarnath, the possibility arose for the first time that what had been seen through could also be expressed in words and shared with others.

According to the Canon, the Buddha first considered to whom he should teach this insight. His thoughts turned to Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, the two teachers under whom he had studied before his awakening. He regarded them as accomplished

practitioners who would likely understand the Dhamma quickly.

That the Buddha first thought of these two teachers is deeply significant. Although their meditative attainments had not led to liberation, he acknowledged their sincerity, their concentration, and their contemplative maturity. Refined concentration is not liberation, yet it can provide fertile ground for insight.

According to the tradition, however, he learned that Āḷāra Kālāma had recently passed away. He then turned his thoughts to Uddaka Rāmaputta, only to discover that he too had died.

His thoughts then turned to the five ascetics *(pañca vaggiyā; pañca vargīya)* who had accompanied him during the years of ascetic practice. Although they had abandoned him when he renounced extreme asceticism, the Buddha saw that they were capable of receiving the insight that had unfolded within him. He therefore decided to travel to Isipatana, near Sarnath, to meet them first.

The Canon records only one event during this journey. On the road to Sarnath, the Buddha encountered the ascetic Upaka. When asked under which teacher he had found liberation, the Buddha replied simply that he no longer had a teacher and had become fully awakened.

This reply is not a claim, but a statement of fact: the ending of dependence upon a teacher as the source of liberation.

Upaka could not understand these words and continued on his way.

What becomes visible here is that awakening is not always recognized.

Insight bears no outward mark. Awakening does not necessarily manifest itself in a way that others can recognize, nor is it something with which one identifies. Even the first person the Buddha met after his awakening did not see that all seeking had come to an end and that there was nothing further to become.

When the Buddha finally arrived at the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Sarnath, he found the five ascetics with whom he had practised for many years.

They were the very companions who had shared his years of severe asceticism, yet had abandoned him when he realized that self-mortification does not lead to liberation.

From their perspective, Siddhattha Gotama had given up the effort and abandoned the path of purification. They had therefore agreed among themselves not to receive him with any special respect.

According to the tradition, they said to one another:

“ There comes the ascetic Gotama. He has abandoned asceticism and now lives in abundance. We shall not rise to greet him, nor welcome him, nor receive his alms bowl. “

But when the Buddha drew near, their resolve could not be maintained.

The Canon does not describe precisely what they saw, but it makes clear that they recognized something fundamentally different.

The man they had once known was no longer marked by seeking, striving, or inner struggle. There was a peace and clarity they had never seen before. What they noticed was not so much the presence of something new, but rather the absence of something old: the seeking, the striving, the inner conflict they had known so well had disappeared.

Their resistance fell away. They rose, greeted him, and offered him a seat. When they addressed him as Gotama, calling him *āvuso* ("friend"), the Buddha gently corrected them:

❛ *Do not address the Tathāgata as 'friend.' The Tathāgata is an arahant, a Fully Awakened One (sammāsambuddha).* ❜

These words express no personal superiority and make no claim to status. The Buddha did not distinguish himself from the five ascetics on the basis of birth, power, or possessions. He pointed only to a difference in seeing.

What had to be seen through had been seen through. What had disappeared was ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā).*

Awakening is not an identity that someone possesses. It is the falling away of the misunderstanding through which things are seen differently from how they truly are.

For this reason, the Buddha's words should be read with care. He was not declaring that he had become someone extraordinary, but that the ignorance which had driven all seeking had completely fallen away.

At first, the ascetics hesitated.

They still remembered the man they had left behind. But the Buddha remained firm in his words. He simply stated that the Deathless *(amata; amṛta)* had unfolded and that he could show them a path leading to liberation.

Gradually, receptivity arose.
There was confidence.
There was attentive presence.
There was a willingness to listen.

Not because an authority was speaking, but because they recognized that the peace radiating from him did not arise from belief, theory, or asceticism, but from a profound seeing through into the nature of existence.

The conditions were now present for something that would become decisive in the unfolding of the Dhamma.

For the first time since his awakening, the Buddha would put into words what he had seen through.

What was then spoken at Isipatana is known as the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*—the discourse in which the Wheel of the Dhamma is set in motion.

What was set in motion, however, was not a system of doctrine.

Not a doctrine.
Not a philosophical system.
Not a metaphysical interpretation.
But an invitation to look—to see.

An invitation to investigate *dukkha*, to understand its arising, and to see through its ending. What was set in motion was not a system of belief, but an inquiry that every human being can investigate and see through within the immediacy of their own experience.

With this first discourse, the Dhamma begins to unfold visibly in the world.

CHAPTER II - THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

There are truths that can be accepted, rejected, or debated. And there are truths that reveal themselves only through direct investigation in one's own life.

The Four Noble Truths belong to the latter.

The Buddha did not teach them as a doctrine requiring belief, nor as a philosophical system to be understood merely through intellectual reflection.

Rather, they are an invitation to look carefully into the nature of human experience itself: into that which every one of us knows—the longing for what is pleasant, the resistance to what is unpleasant, and the subtle restlessness that arises whenever the mind clings to what is changing and impermanent.

The Four Noble Truths do more than reveal the existence of *dukkha*. They also point to the conditions through which *dukkha* arises, to the possibility of its cessation, and to the Path leading to liberation.

This part invites the reader to approach these truths not as abstract concepts, but as a mirror in which one's own experience gradually becomes visible.

For ultimately, the Dhamma does not direct our attention toward a theoretical reality, but toward that which unfolds, moment after moment, within life itself.

Gradually, it becomes clear that the Four Noble Truths are not four separate doctrines, but different

perspectives on one and the same process: the arising and the ending of *dukkha*.

I. THE INVESTIGATION OF DUKKHA

The Buddha did not begin his first discourse with metaphysics. He did not speak about the origin of the universe. Not about a creator god. Not about a soul. Nor did he set out to found a religion.

He began where human existence actually unfolds: with *dukkha*.

Not because *dukkha* is all that exists, but because it is the point of departure for every sincere investigation into liberation.

The Buddha saw that human existence is continually shaped by craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.).* From these arises a subtle yet persistent tension: the desire for things to be different from the way they are, or for them to remain exactly as they are.

What became visible was simple: everything that arises passes away. Whatever appears disappears. Whatever is held onto changes. And it is precisely here that *dukkha* becomes visible.

Such seeing does not leave us untouched.

There is an urgency to it—something that can no longer be avoided. Something that allows no postponement. It is as though life loses its apparent self-evidence. As though it becomes clear that no form of possession, security, or becoming can ever provide lasting fulfilment.

In the early Buddhist texts, this existential shock is referred to as *saṃvega (id.):* the awakening of a heart that no longer turns away from impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

What the Buddha then taught was not a theory about reality, but the possibility of liberation.

Not by turning away from what is seen, but by looking more deeply into it.

Not by denying *dukkha,* but by fully understanding it. Not by adding something to existence, but by seeing through what gives rise to *dukkha* and sustains it.

For this reason, the Buddha began his teaching with what would later become known as the Four Noble Truths *(cattāri ariya saccāni; catvāri ārya satyāni).*

But let us be careful: these are not truths to be believed, nor a doctrine to be defended.

They are truths to be seen through. Not by accepting them, but by directly knowing and seeing them as they are. It is this seeing that makes one a noble person—an *ariya-puggala (ārya-pudgala).*

They are indications—pointers toward what becomes visible when things are seen as they truly are *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).*

These four truths are not successive articles of faith, but descriptions of a process that can be investigated in direct experience. They begin not with specu-

lation, but with something every human being knows: dukkha.

For this reason, the Buddha opens his first discourse not with a metaphysical explanation, but with a simple observation: there is *dukkha*.

This first truth is often understood only superficially.

It refers not merely to pain, sorrow, or loss, but to a far more fundamental characteristic of conditioned existence.

To understand what the Buddha meant, we must first investigate carefully what *dukkha* truly is.

Before we explore this *sutta,* it is important to understand something essential.

Whoever approaches this teaching through thinking alone touches only its surface.

The Buddha's words are not merely concepts. They point to something that must be directly investigated, seen, and seen through.

For this reason, they invite us not only to understanding *(pariyatti; paryāpti),* but also to practice *(paṭipatti; pratipatti),* and ultimately to direct penetration *(paṭivedha; prativedha).*

The words need not be believed.
Nor do they need to be rejected.

Simply allow them to appear as they are and investigate what they point to.

Sometimes a word touches us immediately.
Sometimes it leaves us in silence.
Both are entirely appropriate.
What is not yet seen through today may become clear at another time.

What matters is seeing—the direct seeing in which phenomena reveal themselves as they are *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).*

The five ascetics did not receive the Buddha's words as a philosophical system that had to be accepted. What they heard was tested against direct experience.

Here, knowing and seeing become one.

This is *jānāti passati (jānāti paśyati):* one knows through truly seeing, and sees through truly knowing.

With this open and investigative attitude, we can now turn to the Buddha's first words.

Not to collect a teaching.
Not to construct convictions.
But to investigate what becomes visible when *dukkha* is truly understood.

II. THE DHAMMACAKKAPPAVATTANA SUTTA

The *sutta* begins as follows:

‘ *Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Vārāṇasī. There he addressed the Group of Five Ascetics as follows.* ’

I would like to take this opportunity to show how a *sutta* may be approached as a meditation—one that invites careful investigation *(yoniso manasikāra; yoniśo manaskāra).* [45]

I shall do so by first approaching the place itself, not merely as a historical location, but as an open space that gradually reveals itself.

The **Deer Park** *(Migadāya; Mṛgadāva)* was originally a natural sanctuary where deer roamed freely. According to the tradition, it was a protected area in which hunting was forbidden. Its very name evokes a place of quiet openness: neither a place of severe asceticism nor one of worldly distraction.

Isipatana literally means "the place where seers descended," or "the place where sages dwelt," and is traditionally presented as a place of spiritual practice.

Read contemplatively, the name carries a subtle symbolism: as though it were a place where insight begins to unfold and direct seeing gradually dawns.

The reference to **Vārāṇasī** is not incidental. By naming this city, the Pāli Canon makes something essential clear: these events took place in a real place, in a

real city, under real circumstances. I do not regard this as a mere historical detail. Rather, it situates the Dhamma firmly within the concrete reality of human existence, rather than within the realm of legend or myth.

For those listening in ancient India, this was significant, for Vārāṇasī was an important intellectual and religious centre—a place where different spiritual and philosophical traditions met.

It was a crossroads of seekers, ascetics, brahmins, and philosophical schools, a cultural centre where ideas encountered, challenged, and influenced one another. In that sense, it forms a fitting setting in which to set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion.

The setting therefore deepens the significance of this moment. The first discourse does not arise outside the world, but in the midst of human existence. Not apart from life, but in the midst of seeking, questioning, doubt, and contemplation.

What the Buddha had seen through did not belong to a particular place or a particular time. It was not a new truth waiting to be revealed, but a natural principle that becomes visible when things are seen as they truly are *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana).*

For this reason, the Dhamma is not a decree, but a discovery. Not a command, but a recognition. Not an article of faith, but an invitation to see.

A decree rests upon the authority of someone who determines what is true or what ought to be followed.

The Dhamma functions differently.

In the Canon, the Buddha is not presented as someone who received a truth, but as someone who saw how reality functions.

Insight unfolds through direct seeing, through experience, through meditative investigation, and through recognising what reveals itself within one's own experience.

The Buddha does not ask us to accept something because he says it. He points to something that can be investigated, seen, and seen through in direct experience.

What he taught was not a truth to be imposed, but a reality that becomes visible when things are seen as they truly are.

In the Buddhadhamma, awakening refers to discovery, not to reception.

It does not appear as something imposed from outside, but as an insight that unfolds when the mind becomes clear.

Truth is not given. It is seen.

The Five Ascetics: it is no coincidence that the Buddha addresses the five ascetics. The Dhamma is taught where the conditions for insight are present.

The five ascetics were morally disciplined, deeply committed to their practice, and sincerely devoted to the search for truth. Yet they remained bound by the

conviction that liberation could be attained through extreme asceticism.

Precisely for that reason, they formed fertile ground for the first discourse. They embody a condition that remains recognisable even today: great dedication, great discipline, and sincere commitment, yet still without liberating insight.

According to the tradition, it was in them that the Dhamma-eye *(dhammacakkhu; dharma-cakṣus)* first arose.

Before we continue, it is important to pause for a moment and consider the designation the Buddha himself uses: the Four Noble Truths *(cattāri ariya saccāni; catvāri ārya satyāni).*

The word *ariya (ārya)* does not refer to birth, race, social status, or position. Here it refers to someone who has begun to see reality directly.

An *ariya-puggala (ārya-pudgala)* is one in whom insight has begun to awaken, and who therefore no longer lives solely from habit, craving, and confusion.

These truths are called "noble" not only because they become visible to those who truly look, but also because seeing them through makes one a noble person.

What distinguishes this nobility is therefore not privilege, achievement, or status, but a transformation in the way reality is perceived. It begins when direct seeing gradually replaces assumption, and when wisdom starts to take the place of ignorance.

They do not ask for belief, but for investigation, contemplation, and direct insight. What the Buddha teaches thus proves to be not a theory, but a reality that can be directly seen.

We now come to the heart of the Buddha's first discourse at Sarnath.

What follows is one of the most influential texts in the entire Buddhist tradition: the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,* [46] the discourse in which the Wheel of Dhamma is set in motion.

According to the traditional account, after awakening at Bodhgayā, the Buddha had fully seen through the Dhamma. In this first discourse, he withheld nothing that leads to liberation, insofar as it could be expressed in words.

Yet words have their limits.

Awakening *(bodhi; id.)* can never be fully contained within concepts, reasoning, or descriptions. Words can point, clarify, and offer direction, but they can never replace what each person must know and see through for themselves (*paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi*).

When the Buddha speaks, he therefore seeks to express something that reaches beyond what words can ordinarily convey.

This first discourse unfolds not as a theory, but as a movement: from ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā)* to insight, and from insight to liberation *(vimutti; vimukti).*

What follows unmistakably touches the very heart of the Dhamma.

Here, for the first time, the fundamental structure of *dukkha,* its arising, its cessation, and the Path leading to its cessation are systematically unfolded.

At the same time, we should remain realistic.

Everything presented here belongs to the heart of the teaching, yet this single discourse does not contain the whole of the Buddha's teaching.

What this *sutta* does provide, however, is sufficient to see what reveals itself through right seeing. As so often in the Dhamma, simplicity sometimes carries more than elaborate explanation.

For the sake of clarity, this first discourse may conveniently be divided into five sections.

This division is not part of the original *sutta,* but is intended solely to facilitate reading and understanding.

For that reason, I have added the section headings in square brackets to make it clear that they do not form part of the original Pāli text.

For each of these five sections, I first present my translation of the Pāli text, followed by an analytical commentary.

The complete text of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* is included as an appendix at the end of this book.

I. [—THE TWO EXTREMES AND THE MIDDLE WAY—]

❛ *Monks, a samaṇa should not cultivate these two extremes.*

Which two?

The pursuit of happiness through sensual pleasure, which is low, vulgar, ordinary, ignoble, and does not lead to well-being.

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

By avoiding both of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the Middle Way, which gives rise to seeing and knowing, and leads to inner peace, direct understanding, awakening, and Nibbāna.

And what is that Middle Way, which gives rise to seeing and knowing, and leads to inner peace, direct understanding, awakening, and Nibbāna?

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

This, monks, is the Middle Way, which gives rise to seeing and knowing, and leads to inner peace, direct understanding, awakening, and Nibbāna. ❜

The Buddha does not begin his first discourse with metaphysics, nor by defining himself—by declaring who he is—nor even with the Four Noble Truths.

He begins not with a doctrine, but with something immediately recognisable within human experience.

By presenting the two extremes, he sketches the field in which all human beings—ascetics, monks, lay followers, and ordinary people alike—generally live. This is a crucial point: he begins not with dogma, but with recognition.

The first extreme is the pursuit of happiness through sensual pleasure. This refers not only to coarse forms of pleasure, but to every form of attachment to pleasant sensory experience in which the longing for gratification occupies a central place.

Not because such pleasure is "wrong," but because it depends upon what arises and inevitably passes away. Whatever arises and ceases cannot provide lasting fulfilment and therefore cannot lead to liberation.

For this reason, the Buddha calls it *ignoble*—not as a moral judgement, but as a quiet indication that it does not lead to liberation.

For the experienced yogi, this becomes increasingly clear: sensual pleasure does not produce freedom, but dependency. It perpetuates a cycle of craving, fulfilment, and renewed craving.

Because all of this is subject to impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), it cannot bring dukkha to an end.

The second extreme is severe asceticism and self-mortification. The Buddha describes it as painful, ignoble, and not conducive to well-being because a

mind that becomes rigid and suppresses itself cannot arrive at clear seeing.

Where there is contraction, insight cannot unfold.

Something equally important becomes visible here: self-indulgence and self-mortification appear to be opposites, yet both are driven by the same underlying movement—craving and clinging.

In both cases, there is grasping *(upādāna; id.).*
In both cases, there is becoming *(bhava; id.).*

For this reason, neither approach leads to liberation. The mind remains trapped within the same dynamic of craving and attachment. It is precisely for this reason that the Buddha begins his first discourse by seeing through these two extremes.

Here, one of the fundamental characteristics of the Dhamma already becomes apparent. Attention is directed not toward speculation or theory, but toward immediate experience itself—not toward what can be thought about, but toward what can be directly investigated.

This does not mean that there is no place for a teacher, for confidence, or for spiritual guidance—quite the contrary.

Without the Buddha's guidance, without the confidence that gradually opens the heart, and without the support of spiritual friends along the Path, this insight would rarely unfold.

Ultimately, however, what liberates does not lie in what is offered, but in what is recognised.

Insight does not descend as something bestowed. It dawns when the mind becomes clear and sees reality as it is: conditioned, impermanent, and not fully subject to our control.

In this way, the Dhamma is not a teaching that one simply receives, but a reality that one sees through.

Liberation does not arise through grace, through belief, or through some cosmic plan. It arises through the ending of ignorance and clinging.

For this reason, the Dhamma is fundamentally different: it places the responsibility for insight within direct experience—precisely where *dukkha* arises, and precisely where it comes to an end.

Ultimately, both extremes are expressions of craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā)* and clinging *(upādāna; id.).* In the first case, one clings to pleasure. In the second, one clings to a perception *(saññā; saṃjñā)* of purity or spiritual attainment. In both cases, one remains bound to the "self" that wants to become something *(bhava; id.).*

The question that naturally arises is this: why does the Buddha begin his first discourse in precisely this way?

Because he begins not with doctrine, but with human existence as it is. He knows that a person caught

between sensual indulgence and severe asceticism is not yet capable of clearly seeing through dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).*

A mind *(citta; id.)* that continually swings between these two extremes lacks the stability required for insight to unfold.

For this reason, the Buddha begins not with metaphysical propositions, but with seeing through and letting go of the two forces that continually throw the mind off balance.

It is important to understand that the alternative he presents—the Middle Way—is not a compromise between two extremes. It is not a little of one and a little of the other.

The Middle Way is not a position midway between two extremes, but an altogether different way of seeing and experiencing.

It gives rise to seeing and knowing *(jānāti passati; jānāti paśyati):* the direct seeing of phenomena as impermanent *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactory *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

It leads to inner peace *(upasama; upaśama),* to a profound stillness because the mind is no longer carried away by craving and aversion.

It makes possible direct understanding *(abhiññā; abhijñā),* an insight that reaches beyond intellectual comprehension.

And ultimately, it leads to awakening *(bodhi; id.)* and to Nibbāna *(nirvāṇa),* the ending of *avijjā*, *taṇhā*, and *saṃsāra*—the unconditioned liberation.

What stands at the centre here is this: the Middle Way provides the indispensable ground in which insight can unfold.

This is not a moral doctrine, but an existential indication. The Middle Way describes the condition of mind in which seeing—clear seeing without distortion or defilement—becomes possible.

For the attentive reader, it gradually becomes clear—*Ayaṃ eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo* [47]—that the Middle Way is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path.

Not as a system, but as an interdependent set of conditions that mutually support one another.

Not in order to attain something, but to allow confusion to fall away.

Not because the Buddha wished to construct a system, but because these eight factors create precisely the conditions in which the mind becomes so clear that seeing through *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* can unfold without obstruction.

The Noble Eightfold Path may therefore be understood as a path of purification.

For this reason, throughout this translation I consistently use the word "right": right view, right intention, right speech, and so forth.

The Pāli word *sammā* [48] does not refer merely to what is "correct" in a rational or doctrinal sense. It also conveys what is in harmony with liberation and free from distortion.

Thus, *sammā-diṭṭhi* is not simply a correct view, but a way of seeing that is no longer obscured by ignorance.

Sammā-vāyāma refers to an effort directed towards cultivating wholesome qualities and abandoning unwholesome ones.

Sammā-samādhi refers to a concentration that is no longer carried away by craving, aversion, or distraction.

It is important to understand this clearly: this purity, this clarity, does not arise independently of practice. It unfolds within conditions that are gradually cultivated—through ethical conduct *(sīla; śīla),* mindfulness *(sati; smṛti),* and concentration *(samādhi; id.).* What may appear to arise suddenly does so within a field that has slowly matured.

The Middle Way points to the condition in which seeing becomes possible: a mind that neither pursues nor suppresses, but is quiet, clear, and fully present.

In this way, the Noble Eightfold Path constitutes the complete set of conditions through which the mind may attain complete clarity and purity. It leads to seeing and knowing not through concepts or theories, but through direct experience. Within that clarity, the workings of dependent arising *(paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda)* gradually become visible.

To summarise, what becomes evident here is this: not every effort leads to insight.

Sensual indulgence scatters the mind.
Self-mortification hardens the mind.

Neither allows clear seeing to arise. What the Buddha is doing here is therefore not offering a moral lesson, but diagnosing the workings of the mind. He points to the mental condition that makes liberating wisdom *(paññā; prajñā)* possible—and to the mental conditions that prevent it.

For this reason, the opening section of the *sutta* is far more than a mere introduction. It is a precise indication of the mental space in which insight can arise: a mind that neither pursues nor suppresses, that is neither strained nor forced, but stable, simple, and quietly present.

When this passage is read with careful attention, something else gradually becomes apparent. The structure of the Four Noble Truths is already present here, even before the Buddha formulates them explicitly later in the *sutta:*

There is *dukkha*—visible in the tension between the two extremes.

There is a cause—visible in craving, aversion, and clinging.

There is cessation—when those extremes are no longer followed.

And there is a path—the Middle Way that makes this clarity possible.

II. [—THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS—]

‘ *This, monks, is the Noble Truth of dukkha (dukkha-sacca). Birth is dukkha. Ageing is dukkha. Illness is dukkha. Death is dukkha. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are dukkha. Association with what is unpleasant is dukkha. Separation from what is loved is dukkha. Not getting what one desires is dukkha. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha.*

And this, monks, is the Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha (samudaya-sacca). It is craving, which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. In brief, there are three forms of craving: craving for sensual pleasure (kāma-taṇhā), craving for existence (bhava-taṇhā), and craving for non-existence (vibhava-taṇhā).

And this, monks, is the Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha (nirodha-sacca). It is the complete fading away and relinquishment of craving, its abandonment and release.

And this, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of dukkha (magga-sacca). It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. ’

When these words are heard, it is important to understand how they are to be approached. What matters here is not only what is said, but how it is understood.

Dukkha is not defined here so much as indicated. Not as an idea, but as something immediately recognisable. Tension, restlessness, craving, and aversion all belong to the same underlying structure.

What is asked of us here is not merely analysis, but recognition.

And it is precisely here that the shift begins: from thinking to direct seeing; from conceptual understanding to *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana (yathābhūta-jñānadarśana)*—the direct seeing and knowing of things as they truly are.

Put differently: something is seen, and in that very moment it becomes clear, without the intervention of discursive thought.

In ordinary thinking, the mind reacts almost immediately from conditioning. Stories, dramas, interpretations, and identification rapidly accumulate.

With direct seeing, the movement is different. The yogi sees that irritation is present, and at the same time it becomes clear that irritation arises, unfolds, and passes away.

Seeing and knowing become one in a single, direct experience.

Yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana refers to a direct mode of seeing in which knowing *(ñāṇa; jñāna)* and seeing *(dassana; darśana)* become inseparable. It is not conceptual thought or reasoning, but an immediate clarity in which reality reveals itself.

When the Buddha speaks of this direct seeing, he points to another dimension of knowing: not the intellect that analyses and draws conclusions, but a clear seeing through to which nothing is added.

It is the awakening of insight that does not come from outside, but can quietly dawn when the mind has become clear through mindfulness *(sati; smṛti),* concentration *(samādhi; id.),* and thorough investigation that does not remain caught in stories or projections, but penetrates to the very nature of experience itself *(yoniso manasikāra; yoniśo manaskāra).*

Nothing is added here.
Only what concealed reality falls away.

Yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana is the moment when the habitual search for security in stories, dramas, and conditioning comes to an end, and experience reveals itself exactly as it is, free from distortion.

A simple way to approach this is as follows: do not look only at what appears, but above all at how it appears and functions.

Let us take a concrete example. You are sitting in meditation, and irritation or anger arises.

Ordinarily, the moment the thought "*I am angry*" appears, the mind almost immediately goes into overdrive, and stories and dramas begin to accumulate:

"Why am I feeling this?"
"This should not be happening."
"How can I get rid of this?"
"Why now?"

The stream of thought gathers momentum, and the experience becomes personal.

The moment the thought "I am angry" arises, identification begins.

It is precisely at that point that anger is appropriated and turned into a personal experience.

With direct seeing, however, one does not become absorbed in the content of the anger. Instead, it becomes clear how anger arises, unfolds, and passes away.

Not:
"I am angry,”

but simply:
"There is anger.”

When anger is no longer immediately experienced as "I" or "mine," the story surrounding it gradually loses its force.

The experience becomes transparent as nothing more than a process of arising and passing away.

To summarise, what disturbs the mind in its ordinary mode of functioning?

Always the same movement:

grasping — "I want this."
resisting — "I don't want this.”

This happens continuously, usually without our noticing it, as a deeply conditioned habit.

What happens when phenomena are truly seen as they are—that is, through direct seeing *(yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana; yathābhūta-jñānadarśana)?*

Then it becomes evident:

that everything changes,
that nothing can be held onto,
and that whatever appears depends upon conditions and cannot be controlled according to the wishes of the self—according to what the "I" wants or does not want.

And as this becomes clear, something fundamental takes place.

The grasping after what is pleasant gradually diminishes, while aversion towards what is unpleasant begins to soften.

For us as human beings, this is profoundly confronting, because the mind is deeply conditioned to seek security—in certainty, continuity, identity, and becoming.

From this longing arises the tendency to cling to beliefs, images, and stories, even when they no longer correspond to reality.

What at first seemed personal—"I am experiencing this," "This is happening to me," "Why me?"—is gradually seen as a process that arises and passes away.

Through direct seeing, experience shifts from something subjective to something processual; from identification to direct knowing.

From becoming *(bhava; id.)* to wisdom *(paññā; prajñā).* From "I" to a process of arising and passing away.

What becomes visible here is the very movement that the Buddha completely saw through at the moment of his awakening: the deeply conditioned tendency of the mind to seek security in what can never provide lasting security.

The urge to continue, not to disappear, to hold on to what is loved, to perpetuate oneself through time, meaning, or identity—all of this belongs to the same dynamic of craving, clinging, and becoming *(bhava; id.).*

As long as this movement is not directly seen, the mind remains trapped in stories of I, me, and mine; in hope and loss; in craving and aversion; in grasping and resisting.

It is precisely for this reason that the Buddha now shifts from the human experience of restlessness and impermanence to a direct investigation of the structure of experience itself.

In this passage, the Buddha shifts from his diagnosis of the human mind, as presented through the two extremes and the Middle Way, to the structure of reality as it was seen through at the moment of awakening.

He presents no metaphysical system, but a direct description of how *dukkha* arises and how it comes to an end within immediate experience.

For the attentive reader, it gradually becomes clear that the Four Noble Truths are not merely ideas to be understood intellectually, but insights that unfold when experience is observed with clarity and directness.

They do not describe a theory about life, but a way of seeing through which every experience becomes transparent as a process of arising and passing away.

This transformation does not occur by changing one's thinking, but by changing the way one sees.

How does this happen?

The Four Noble Truths open up experience in a particular way.

They make it possible to understand experience, to see its conditionality, to recognise *dukkha* as a process, and to discern the Path that leads to liberation.

In the early Buddhist tradition, the Four Noble Truths are described not only as truths to be understood, but above all as living tasks to be directly investigated, seen through, and fulfilled within one's own experience.

In the commentarial tradition, these four tasks are systematically referred to as the four kicca *(kṛtya),*

although the tasks themselves are already stated explicitly in the early Buddhist texts. [49]

Dukkha is to be fully understood *(dukkha pariññeyya; duḥkha parijñeya).* [50]

The origin of *dukkha* is to be abandoned *(samudaya pahātabba; samudayaḥ prahātavyaḥ).* [51]

The cessation of *dukkha* is to be directly known *(nirodha sacchikātabba; nirodhaḥ sākṣātkartavyaḥ).* [52]

And the Path is to be cultivated *(magga bhāvetabba; mārgaḥ bhāvayitavyaḥ)*. [53]

The Four Noble Truths do not describe four separate realities, but four perspectives on one and the same process: the arising of *dukkha,* the causes that sustain it, the possibility of its cessation, and the Path through which this insight deepens. [54]

These four tasks may be summarised in four simple movements: understanding — letting go — directly knowing — cultivating.

They do not describe successive stages, but a living dynamic. Understanding deepens letting go. Letting go opens the possibility of cessation. And cultivating the Path allows the conditions to mature in which this insight can continue to unfold.

In this way, the Four Noble Truths become not an abstract doctrine, but a direct practice of insight. Wherever grasping is seen through and released, an openness naturally appears that has not been constructed.

Just as a lens does not change what is seen but brings it into focus, so the Four Noble Truths do not alter experience, but render it transparent. What appears is recognised. Its cause is seen through. Its cessation is known. And the conditions for clear seeing are cultivated.

Within that clarity, it becomes evident that *dukkha* is not a personal problem, but a conditioned process—and that liberation is not attained, but becomes visible when that process is completely seen through.

The early Buddhist tradition, however, takes this one step further. It not only describes what the Four Noble Truths are and what task each requires, but also how insight into them gradually unfolded in the Buddha's own awakening. This is traditionally summarised as the Three Rotations and the Twelve Aspects.

III. [—THREE ROTATIONS AND TWELVE ASPECTS—]

‘ With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This is the Noble Truth of dukkha.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of dukkha is to be fully understood.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of dukkha has been fully understood.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This is the Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha is to be abandoned.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understand-

ing, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha has been abandoned.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This is the Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha is to be directly known.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha has been directly known.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of dukkha.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of dukkha is to be cultivated.'

With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understand-

ing, there arose light: 'This Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of dukkha has been fully cultivated.' ❜

The Buddha never made his teaching complicated. Whenever he spoke about the Path, he spoke above all about clarity. Nowhere does that clarity become more evident than in his exposition of the Four Noble Truths.

When the Buddha presents these Truths, he reveals not only what was seen, but also how that seeing unfolded.

Here, the inner structure of awakening becomes visible.

What is described here is both simple and profound. Within each Noble Truth, three aspects of insight appear: seeing *(sacca-ñāṇa; satya-jñāna),* recognising the task *(kicca-ñāṇa; kṛtya-jñāna),* and knowing that the task has been fulfilled *(kata-ñāṇa; kṛta-jñāna).* These are not rigidly separated stages, but an ever-deepening clarity in which distinction and continuity come together.

1. Seeing: *Sacca-ñāṇa* [55] refers to clearly seeing the truth as it is. The truth becomes visible without being distorted by expectation, opinion, or projection.

2. Recognising the task: *Kicca-ñāṇa* [56] refers to understanding what is to be done with each Noble Truth. *Dukkha* is to be fully understood; the origin of *dukkha* is to be abandoned; the cessation of *dukkha* is to be directly known; and the Path is to be developed.

3. Knowing that the task has been fulfilled: *Kata-ñāṇa* [57] refers to the knowledge that the task has been completely accomplished. Nothing remains unfinished: *dukkha* has been fully understood, its origin abandoned, its cessation directly known, and the Path fully cultivated.

These three rotations appear within each of the Four Noble Truths. Together they give rise to the Twelve Aspects of liberating insight—twelve ways in which the mind comes to see completely.

Although this section of the sutta belongs to the most fundamental descriptions of awakening, it receives surprisingly little attention in many discussions of the Four Noble Truths. Yet it is precisely here that the Buddha shows not only what is to be seen, but how liberating insight gradually unfolds.

Only when these twelve aspects have been completely fulfilled does the Buddha speak of complete and unshakable awakening.

Awakening means that the tasks associated with the Four Noble Truths have been brought to completion.

The Path thus becomes remarkably simple: seeing, recognising what is to be done, and knowing that the task has been fulfilled. Again and again, until everything has become completely clear.

Within this simplicity, the stillness of awakening becomes almost tangible. The deeper the insight, the more completely it can sustain simplicity.

For this reason, the Buddha describes this process with such precision and repeats the same pattern throughout. Not in order to persuade, but to show that insight unfolds according to a recognisable structure.

First, the truth is seen.

Then it becomes clear what is to be done.

Finally, it is known that the task has been completely fulfilled.

The Four Noble Truths are therefore not abstract doctrines, but living realities that can be investigated within direct experience.

Here, the Buddha explains not only the content of the Four Noble Truths, but also the way in which liberating insight actually unfolds.

In effect, he is saying something remarkably simple: he does not claim awakening because he believes something, but because these twelve aspects have been completely fulfilled. It is for this reason that his liberation is unshakable.

For experienced yogis, this is especially illuminating. What is described here concerns both the continuity of practice and the moment of direct recognition.

Insight does not appear suddenly as an isolated event. It matures gradually, until it suddenly becomes clear.

What is first dimly recognised becomes clearer.

What becomes clear is fully lived.
What is fully lived becomes irreversible.

This is the turning point of liberation: a moment that appears suddenly after a long period of maturation.

Only then can the Buddha say: ‘ *My liberation is unshakable.* ’

These words are not a triumphal proclamation, but a sober statement of fact.

One sentence still remains to be understood—a sentence that the Buddha repeats with each of the Four Noble Truths:

‘ *With regard to what had never before been heard by me, monks, there arose vision, there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose understanding, there arose light.* ’

Why does he say that he had never heard this before?

Not because the truth itself was new, but because this direct seeing had not been received through tradition, nor had it previously arisen in its full clarity.

What appears here is not a revelation, but a recognition of a principle that has always been present.

For this reason, the Buddha does not present himself as a prophet or the messenger of a divine truth.

Rather, he describes how, through direct observation, he saw through the mechanism of *dukkha* and its cessation.

The words he chooses are both deliberate and deeply significant:

Vision arose.
Knowledge arose.
Wisdom arose.
Understanding arose.
Light arose.
Nothing is added.
Nothing is created.
Nothing is revealed.
What had been obscured simply becomes visible.

When the Buddha speaks of "light," he is not referring to something mystical, but to clarity: the absence of confusion.

In other words, the Dhamma does not appear through revelation, but through direct seeing—not through belief, but through careful investigation, through looking directly and clearly.

Then it becomes evident that what is seen was never absent. It had simply not been seen.

IV. [—THE BUDDHA'S PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE—]

‘ *Monks, as long as my seeing and knowing of these Four Noble Truths, as they truly are, with their three rotations and twelve aspects, had not yet become completely clear, I did not declare that I had attained the Highest Awakening: the unsurpassed Perfect Complete Awakening in this world with its gods, its Māras and Brahmās, with its generations of monks and brahmins, with its kings and their subjects.*

But when my seeing and knowing of these Four Noble Truths, as they truly are, with their three rotations and twelve aspects, had become completely clear, then I declared that I had attained the Highest Awakening: the unsurpassed Perfect Complete Awakening in this world with its gods, its Māras and Brahmās, with its generations of monks and brahmins, with its kings and their subjects.

There arose in me the knowledge and vision: 'My liberation of mind is unshakable. This is my last birth. There is now no further becoming.' ’

In this fourth theme of the *sutta,* the Buddha speaks in an exceptionally personal and direct way about his own process of awakening. He does so not to affirm himself, but to make clear what awakening truly rests upon.

He does not refer to an extraordinary experience, but to complete seeing through.

Here, the Buddha states unambiguously what full awakening is founded upon: not ecstasy, charisma, or an exceptional state of consciousness, but the

complete and irreversible seeing through of *dukkha,* its origin, its cessation, and the Path.

What is remarkable is the radical clarity of his words.

Not because he harboured any doubt, but because, within the Dhamma, complete awakening is never a matter of belief, recognition, or confirmation by others. It becomes evident only when nothing remains that still needs to be understood, abandoned, directly known, or cultivated.

Only when the Four Noble Truths have been completely seen through in their three rotations and twelve aspects can one speak of complete awakening.

For the experienced yogi, this is of profound significance.

In many spiritual traditions, depth is often measured by the intensity of one's experiences: expanded states of consciousness, profound tranquillity, visionary experiences, subtle forms of happiness, or feelings of inner exaltation.

Here, the Buddha implicitly rejects these as the ultimate measure.

Awakening is not founded upon an intense experience, however sublime it may be. Experiences are conditioned, impermanent, and subject to change. For that reason, they can never in themselves constitute the decisive criterion for liberation.

Nor do the *jhānas,* by themselves, constitute proof of liberation. They can stabilise the mind, refine it, and prepare it for insight, yet they remain conditioned phenomena *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta).* For this reason, the early Buddhist texts never equate them with the cessation of *dukkha*.

Whatever arises in dependence upon conditions disappears when those conditions cease.

The experience of *jhāna* can therefore never demonstrate that ignorance has been completely brought to an end. The *jhānas* provide a powerful foundation for insight, but liberation lies in completely seeing through how *dukkha* arises and how it ceases.

Here an essential distinction becomes apparent: an experience may be profound, yet it remains conditioned. Only liberating insight breaks through that conditioned dependence.

Nor do spiritual presence, powers of persuasion, or personal charisma play a decisive role. The Buddha does not establish his authority through status, followers, miracles, or personal magnetism. His presence may well have been extraordinary, but even that is not the criterion for awakening.

The only criterion lies in what has truly been seen through.

The sole measure of complete awakening is the complete seeing and knowing of the Four Noble Truths as they truly are.

The Buddha states explicitly that he declared himself fully awakened only after he had seen through these Truths in their three rotations and twelve aspects.

In essence, what the Buddha is saying is this: awakening is complete when *dukkha* has been fully understood, its origin has been completely abandoned, its cessation has been directly known, and the Path has been fully cultivated.

The Buddha therefore declares himself awakened not on the basis of an extraordinary experience, but because he has completely and irreversibly seen through the Four Noble Truths.

It thus becomes clear that awakening is not founded upon a special experience, but upon completely seeing through the structure of experience itself.

When this insight fully matures, the way reality is experienced also changes. *Dukkha* is no longer perceived as something personal, but as a conditioned process that arises in dependence upon causes and conditions.

Its origin is no longer sought in people or external events, but recognised in craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* aversion *(paṭigha; pratigha),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā).*

The cessation of *dukkha* no longer appears as a matter of hope or expectation, but as something that can become directly visible within experience itself.

And the Path is no longer understood as a theory, but as a fully developed way in which ethical conduct

(sīla; śīla), mindfulness *(sati; smṛti),* concentration *(samādhi; id.),* and wisdom *(paññā; prajñā)* come together.

One further passage deserves particular attention, for it is often overlooked. The Buddha declares that the Perfect Complete Awakening is unsurpassed in this world with its gods, its Māras and Brahmās, with its monks and brahmins, with its kings and their subjects.

In doing so, he expresses the universal scope of awakening. Within the language and worldview of the sutta, this means that no realm of existence, no power, and no authority surpasses the insight described here.

When the Buddha says: ❛ *Akuppā me cetovimutti — My liberation of mind is unshakable* ❜*,* he uses an expression of very precise significance.

It refers to a liberation that can never again be shaken or lost. It is the designation of a liberation in which ignorance, craving, and rebirth have come to a definitive end.

For this reason, the Buddha can immediately add:

❛ *This is my last birth. There is now no further becoming.* ❜

These words are neither a triumphant proclamation nor a speculative statement about an afterlife. They are the sober recognition that the process of becoming *(bhava; id.)* has come to a complete end.

Where craving and ignorance have been fully extinguished, the conditions for further becoming are no longer present.

Thus, this passage concludes with an exceptionally clear statement of what awakening means within the Dhamma: the complete and irreversible seeing through of the Four Noble Truths, through which the entire dynamic of ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā),* craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* becoming *(bhava; id.),* and rebirth *(jāti; id.)* finally comes to rest.

V. [—SETTING THE WHEEL OF DHAMMA IN MOTION—]

‘ *Thus the Blessed One spoke. The Group of Five rejoiced and delighted in the Blessed One's words.*

And while the Blessed One was expounding the Four Noble Truths, there arose in the Venerable Koṇḍañña the spotless, stainless Dhamma-eye: 'Whatever is subject to arising is subject to ceasing.'

When the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the earth deities proclaimed: 'At the Deer Park in Isipatana, near Vārāṇasī, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Wheel of Dhamma, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic, brahmin, deity, Māra, Brahmā, or anyone else.'

The deities of the Four Great Kings heard this proclamation and repeated it. Then the deities of the Tāvatiṃsa heaven, the Yāma heaven, the Tusita heaven, the Nimmānarati heaven, and the Paranimmitavasavatti heaven likewise heard it and echoed it further. The Brahmā deities also heard this proclamation and repeated it. Thus the message spread upward as far as the Brahmā worlds.

At that very moment, the ten-thousandfold world system shook, trembled, and quaked, and a great light appeared in the world, surpassing even the radiance of the gods.

Then the Blessed One uttered these inspired words: 'Koṇḍañña has truly understood! Koṇḍañña has truly understood!'

From that day onward, the Venerable Koṇḍañña became known as Aññā Koṇḍañña—Koṇḍañña, the One Who Has Understood.

After Koṇḍañña became the first to realise the Dhamma, the other four companions soon followed. Seeing and knowing arose in them, and they declared:

'*Unshakable is our liberation. This is our last birth. There is now no further becoming.*' ’

The fifth and final theme of this sutta shows how what the Buddha had seen through now becomes recognisable in others. Once the Wheel of Dhamma has been set in motion, the movement of insight continues to unfold.

Not through dogmatic belief, but through the direct seeing of impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

As the Buddha expounds the Four Noble Truths, the sutta describes a decisive moment: the first arising of insight in Koṇḍañña.

The Canon expresses this as the arising of the Dhamma-eye *(dhammacakkhu; dharma-cakṣus),* summarised in a single sentence: ‘ *Whatever is subject to arising is subject to ceasing.* ’

This concise statement contains the very heart of the Buddha's teaching. Everything that arises through causes and conditions also passes away when those causes and conditions cease.

The Dhamma-eye is therefore not a mystical vision, but the direct seeing of conditionality. It is the unmistakable recognition that whatever arises is impermanent, and that whatever is impermanent cannot provide lasting security.

This first breakthrough of insight marks the beginning of irreversible transformation.

From this moment onward, Koṇḍañña no longer sees reality as before. His understanding is no longer founded upon belief, reasoning, or inherited tradition, but upon direct seeing.

For this reason, the Buddha joyfully declares:

‘ *Koṇḍañña has truly understood.* ’

The word "aññā " literally means "understanding," "direct knowing," or "penetrative insight." It refers not to conceptual knowledge, but to the first irreversible breakthrough into the Dhamma.

What Koṇḍañña understood was not a new doctrine. He saw directly what the Buddha himself had seen through beneath the Bodhi tree: whatever arises also ceases.

From this point onward, the Dhamma no longer belongs to the Buddha alone. It has become a living reality in another human being.

From this point onward, the symbolism of the Wheel of Dhamma also becomes clearer. A wheel begins to turn when one point is set in motion. Once it turns,

however, the movement is carried by the whole wheel.

So it is with the Dhamma.

What was first discovered within the experience of one human being now becomes directly visible to others whenever they begin to see the same reality for themselves.

For this reason, the setting in motion of the Wheel of Dhamma does not signify the founding of a religion, but the beginning of a living tradition of direct insight.

The proclamation of the earth deities and the successive echoes through the various heavenly realms should therefore not be understood merely as cosmological description.

Within the literary language of the sutta, they express the immeasurable significance of this event.

The message resounds throughout the entire cosmos because what has been discovered is not a local or historical truth, but a universal principle.

Wherever beings exist, whatever arises through conditions is subject to cessation.

The great light that surpasses the radiance of the gods likewise points beyond the literal image.

Throughout the early Buddhist texts, light repeatedly symbolises the dispelling of ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā)* through wisdom *(paññā; prajñā).* Darkness does not disappear because it is driven away, but because

light appears. In the same way, ignorance comes to an end not through struggle, but through direct seeing.

The final scene of the *sutta* therefore forms a beautiful conclusion to everything that has preceded it.

The discourse begins with one person who has awakened. It ends with awakening becoming visible in another.

The movement continues.

When the structure of this *sutta* is carefully contemplated, a subtle circle gradually reveals itself.

At the beginning, only the Buddha speaks. He points out the Middle Way and expounds the Four Noble Truths as he himself has seen them through.

At the end, that very same insight appears in another. What began as the awakening of one human being now becomes recognisable in anyone who directly sees the same reality.

Herein lies the deeper meaning of the image of the Wheel of Dhamma.

The Dhamma is not transmitted through authority, but through direct seeing. Not through tradition alone, but through the repeated arising of liberating insight.

For this reason, the *sutta* concludes not with a doctrine, but with the first breakthrough of insight in another human being.

The Wheel of Dhamma that the Buddha set in motion does not turn in some mythical realm. It turns within human experience whenever someone sees what Koṇḍañña saw: ‘ *Whatever is subject to arising is subject to ceasing.* ’

And it is precisely there—in this simple yet all-pervading insight—that the end of *dukkha* first begins to unfold.

CHAPTER III — THE INSIGHT INTO NOT-SELF

When the arising of dukkha is carefully investigated, sooner or later a question emerges that is as simple as it is profound.

Who is it that suffers?

Who longs, fears, hopes, and clings to the stream of experience? Who is it that seeks liberation? And when one looks carefully, can any enduring and independent entity truly be found that owns this ongoing process of arising and passing away?

The insight into not-self is undoubtedly one of the most radical and, at the same time, one of the most liberating dimensions of the Dhamma. Not because it offers a new philosophical theory, but because it investigates the seemingly self-evident assumption that somewhere there exists a permanent "I" that thinks, feels, acts, and experiences.

This part invites the reader to investigate that assumption with careful attention. Not in order to deny anything, but to see directly what unfolds from moment to moment. What appears? What disappears? What remains when the tendency toward identification and appropriation is gradually seen through?

For as long as someone is presumed to appropriate experience, the movement of craving, clinging, and becoming continues.

Where this appropriation is seen through, an altogether different possibility opens.

Not the destruction of a self, but liberation from the mistaken belief that a permanent self was ever present.

This liberation begins neither with belief nor with denial, but with careful observation. Rather than attempting to define what a self is, the Buddha invites us to look directly at experience itself.

If no enduring owner can be found within what is directly known, the assumption of a permanent self gradually loses its apparent certainty.

What follows is therefore not a philosophical argument, but a careful invitation to investigate what is actually present through direct seeing.

I. THE INVESTIGATION INTO A SELF

With the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,* the Buddha set forth the structure of dukkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

Not as philosophy, but as a direct pointing toward the end of suffering. He showed how *dukkha* arises through craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.),* and how it comes to an end when this entire movement is fully seen through.

Yet even when the Four Noble Truths are fully understood, one subtle assumption may still remain.

The assumption that there is someone who walks this path. Someone who develops insight. Someone who is ultimately liberated.

This is the most persistent of all assumptions: that there is someone who owns this entire process of seeking, understanding, and awakening.

The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* investigates the point at which this assumption loses its final refuge.

This is precisely what the Buddha completely dismantled in his second discourse. Not through argumentation, but through direct pointing.

The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* is the point where everything comes together: the place where the Buddha's earlier teachings are tested in direct experience.

In a sense, this is the moment when the Dhamma ceases to be merely a teaching and becomes a care-

ful investigation of what can be directly seen—of what presents itself in experience.

The Buddha said: ‘ *Look at the body* ’ *(rūpa; id.):* arising and falling apart.

See how it changes.
How it grows old.
How it is beyond our control.
Can it rightly be called self?

Look at feeling *(vedanā; id.):* it arises and passes away.

Look at perception *(saññā; saṃjñā):* it changes.

Look at mental formations *(saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ):* they arise and cease.

Look at consciousness *(viññāṇa; vijñāna):* even this appears and disappears.

Everything appears.
Everything disappears.
Nothing remains.

And yet, again and again, the impression returns that somewhere within this ceaseless stream there must be someone who experiences it all.

When everything is continually changing and escapes control, the question naturally arises whether an enduring owner can be found anywhere within it.

For if everything appears and disappears, where is the one who possesses or controls it?

It is precisely this question that forms the starting point of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta.* The Buddha answers it neither with a theory of the self nor with a metaphysical explanation. Instead, he directs attention to what can be directly investigated: experience itself.

The Buddha does not invite speculation about a hidden reality behind experience. He directs attention to what is already present—to what anyone can directly investigate and see.

What now becomes clear when body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are carefully investigated?

Then the Buddha addressed the five monks:

❛ *Form (rūpa; id.) is not-self. If form were self, it would not lead to suffering, and one could say of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'* ❜

Here the final mask falls. Not the Buddha's mask, but the mask of the presumed "I" that believes itself to be someone.

For advanced practitioners, this is not an intellectual exercise. It is recognition.

A recognition that may already have revealed itself in moments of profound stillness, where experience unfolds without a centre and knowing without a knower.

That is what it comes down to: recognition. Not the acquisition of a new insight as something to possess. Not the adoption of a philosophical position. Not

replacing the thought "*I have a self*" with the thought "*I have no self.*"

The thought "*There is a self*" and the thought "*There is no self*" both belong to the realm of views. The Buddha directs attention not to a view, but to what can be directly seen.

What the Buddha points to, is the recognition of what already reveals itself in experience when one looks carefully. What is directly seen does not have to be constructed, conceived, or believed. It asks only to be carefully seen.

The Buddha does not say, "*Believe that there is no self.*" He does something entirely different. He invites us to look at our own experience.

The Buddha's method is not believing, but looking.

Nowhere does he ask us to accept a metaphysical theory about the self. He asks only that we investigate whether anything can be found within the five *khandhas* that can rightly be regarded as self.

And yet, despite this clear invitation, the conditioned habit continually reasserts itself: the subtle reflex of identification, the thought, "*I am this.*"

The *sutta* investigates the point at which this thought completely loses its foundation. Not in order to acquire a new insight, but to see what is continually taking place: that everything which appears, appears without an owner; that everything which disappears, disappears without an owner.

It is precisely here that the radical nature of this personal investigation unfolds. For when one looks carefully, it becomes evident not only that no phenomenon can be identified as "self," but also that nowhere can a separate observer be found standing apart from those phenomena.

The problem is not merely that we identify with what appears. The problem is also that we identify with the one who believes itself to be seeing what appears.

Sooner or later, many practitioners recognise that the body, feelings, thoughts, and emotions are in constant change. Yet a subtle impression often remains that there is still "someone" observing it all—as though, behind the stream of phenomena, there were a hidden witness, an “I."

But here too the Buddha poses a penetrating question: Who or what appropriates this insight? Who or what claims to see? Who or what calls this insight "my insight”?

The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* leaves even this final refuge standing no longer. For when the investigation is carried through to its end, it becomes evident that not only what is observed is impermanent, but that nowhere can an enduring observer be found.

It is here that both the radical nature and the liberating power of this discourse become fully apparent. It leaves no place where a permanent "I" can still hide. It does not replace the thought "I am" with the thought "I am not." It invites us to investigate directly what is actually present.

To hear this insight from its original source, we now turn to the words of the Buddha himself.

II. THE ANATTALAKKHAṆA SUTTA

The Buddha delivered the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*—the Discourse on the Characteristic of Not-Self—on the fifth day after setting the Wheel of Dhamma in motion with his first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,* and after Koṇḍañña, one of the Five Ascetics, had entered the stream *(sotāpatti; srotāpatti).* For this reason, the discourse is traditionally regarded as the second *sutta* delivered by the Buddha.

What makes this discourse so remarkable is that, step by step and with extraordinary subtlety, the Buddha leads the listener toward the insight into not-self without relying on philosophical debate or metaphysical speculation. Not through theory, but through a touchstone that is always available: direct experience. [58]

In that sense, this *sutta* is undoubtedly one of the most refined discourses preserved within the early Dhamma.

For the present discussion, the *sutta* is followed in its entirety. The repetitions found throughout the text are characteristic of the oral transmission of the earliest Buddhist tradition. They served not only as mnemonic devices but also helped preserve the teaching with the greatest possible accuracy from one generation to the next.

To facilitate both reading and analysis, the *sutta* is presented here in four thematic sections. This division—indicated by Roman numerals and headings in brackets—is not part of the original text but has been added solely for the sake of clarity.

The Buddha does not investigate whether a self exists. Rather, he investigates whether anything can be found within experience that can rightly be regarded as self.

He saw that nowhere could an unchanging essence be identified. Everything that arises is dependent upon causes and conditions and is therefore subject to change. He saw that what is ordinarily regarded as a permanent self cannot, upon careful investigation, be found.

When the three characteristics *(tilakkhaṇa; trilakṣaṇa)* are not recognised, perception becomes distorted.

What is impermanent is perceived as permanent.
What is not-self is regarded as self.

What is unsatisfactory is taken to be satisfying, and what is unattractive is perceived as beautiful.

Thus a world of projections, expectations, and appropriation comes into being, in which the mind continually attributes permanence, meaning, and identity to what is by nature ever-changing.

Following the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,* in which the structure of suffering and its cessation was revealed, this second discourse to the Five Ascetics at Sarnath presents a decisive further refinement: the direct pointing to the five *khandhas (skandhas)* as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

Here the Buddha does not resort to philosophy, but a direct way of looking that reveals why suffering arises: because the impermanent is seen as perman-

ent, the unsatisfactory as satisfying, and the selfless as “I."

The discourse begins not with an abstract argument, but with an extraordinarily simple touchstone: What do we truly have control over?

This is not an abstract analysis but a direct pointing to one's own experience. If something were truly self, it would be under one's complete control. One could simply say, "Let this be so," or, "Let this not be so.”

Yet experience reveals precisely the opposite.

The body functions according to causes and conditions. Feelings arise and pass away without submitting to our will. Perceptions appear and disappear. *Saṅkhārās (saṃskārās)* continue according to their own momentum. And consciousness itself arises dependent upon contact, sense faculty, and object.

Precisely because these phenomena are impermanent, beyond our control, and give rise to unsatisfactoriness, they cannot rightly be regarded as self.

The Buddha therefore employs no metaphysics, but the simple fact of direct experience. In effect, he is saying: Investigate your own experience. Where, within it, is a truly controllable self?

The analysis of the five *khandhas* is directed not only toward the objects of experience but also toward the subtle assumption that behind these experiences there exists a separate owner or observer.

The discourse then proceeds to a second investigation, in which the Buddha sharpens the question even further.

The monks repeatedly replied: "Impermanent, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent," the Buddha then asked, "is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

They replied: "Unsatisfactory, Bhante."

With this, something simple yet inescapable becomes apparent: whatever is impermanent and unsatisfactory cannot rightly be regarded as "This is mine, this I am, this is my self."

Once again, it becomes clear that in this *sutta* the Buddha is not presenting a metaphysical denial of a self. Rather, he is revealing an existential fact: every identification with what is subject to change inevitably gives rise to *dukkha,* because change does not cease simply because we wish it to.

The third investigation of the *sutta* goes still deeper.

Everything—absolutely everything—within these five *khandhas,* whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near, is to be seen as:

"This is not mine. This I am not. This is not my self."

This is not a mantra or a devotional formula. It is an invitation to the radical clarity of direct seeing. As soon as it is seen through that everything is condi-

tioned, the habitual reflex of claiming naturally falls away. The Buddha asks for no belief, only an exceptionally careful and honest investigation of experience.

In this discourse, the Buddha presents for the first time a systematic analysis of the five khandhas as not-self. Herein lies its fundamental significance: he shows that the end of suffering is not reached by changing experience, but by relinquishing identification with everything that appears and disappears.

What the mind ordinarily says is:

"This is mine."
"This I am."
"This is my self.”

The Buddha reveals something altogether different:

"This is not mine."
"This I am not."
"This is not my self.”

What did the Five Ascetics see so clearly at that moment that their minds were liberated?

Here, anattā appears not as a philosophical proposition but unfolds as what becomes visible when experience is carefully investigated.

The Pāli Canon describes the awakening of the Five Ascetics in three stages.

Following the first discourse—the *Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta*—Koṇḍañña attained the first stage of awakening *(sotāpatti; srotāpatti).*

During the days that followed, the other four ascetics likewise deepened their insight through the practice of the Dhamma.

Only with the second discourse—the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*—did all Five Ascetics become fully liberated and attain arahantship.

For the first time, it became evident that the Buddha's insight was not confined to his own experience. What he had seen through beneath the Bodhi tree was now directly recognised by others as well.

The first discourse points the way to liberation; the second reveals why nothing that appears can ever be held as self.

In that sense, the two discourses form one coherent whole. The first reveals the structure of dukkha; the second investigates the identification that continually sustains it.

For this reason, the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* occupies a unique place within the early Dhamma. It explains not only how suffering arises and ceases, but also why nowhere can an enduring owner be found of what arises and passes away.

I. [—NOT-SELF AND CONTROL—]

‘ Monks, form (rūpa; id.) is not-self.

If form were self, it would not lead to suffering, and one could say of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.' But precisely because form is not-self, it gives rise to suffering, and therefore one cannot say of form: 'Let my form be thus; let my form not be thus.'

Monks, feeling (vedanā; id.) is not-self.

If feeling were self, it would not lead to suffering, and one could say of feeling: 'Let my feelings be thus; let my feelings not be thus.' But precisely because feeling is not-self, it gives rise to suffering, and therefore one cannot say of feeling: 'Let my feelings be thus; let my feelings not be thus.'

Monks, perception (saññā; saṃjñā) is not-self.

If perception were self, it would not lead to suffering, and one could say of perception: 'Let my perceptions be thus; let my perceptions not be thus.' But precisely because perception is not-self, it gives rise to suffering, and therefore one cannot say of perception: 'Let my perceptions be thus; let my perceptions not be thus.'

Monks, mental formations (saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ) are not-self.

If mental formations were self, they would not lead to suffering, and one could say of them: 'Let my mental formations be thus; let my mental formations not be

thus.' But precisely because mental formations are not-self, they give rise to suffering, and therefore one cannot say of them: 'Let my mental formations be thus; let my mental formations not be thus.'

Monks, consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna) is not-self.

If consciousness were self, it would not lead to suffering, and one could say of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.' But precisely because consciousness is not-self, it gives rise to suffering, and therefore one cannot say of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.' ❜

In this first section of the discourse, the Buddha investigates the five *khandhas* together with the Five Ascetics: form *(rūpa; id.),* feeling *(vedanā; id.),* perception *(saññā; saṃjñā),* mental formations *(saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ),* and consciousness *(viññāṇa; vijñāna).*

To understand this investigation, it is important to recognise that the order of the five *khandhas* is not accidental. The Buddha proceeds from the most tangible to the most subtle level of identification. He begins with the body, then turns to feeling, followed by perception, mental formations, and finally consciousness itself. Step by step, he investigates whether an enduring essence or owner can be found anywhere within these five *khandhas*.

He does so not by means of abstract reasoning or metaphysical speculation, but by applying an extraordinarily simple criterion.

If something were truly self *(attā; ātman),* it would necessarily be subject to complete control. One would be able to govern it freely and simply say, "Let this be so," or, "Let this not be so."

Yet this proves to be impossible.

Form *(rūpa; id.)* changes: the body becomes ill, grows old, and dies, whether we wish it to or not.

Feelings *(vedanā; id.)* arise and pass away without submitting to our will. Pleasure does not remain, pain cannot be prevented, and neutral feelings come and go according to their own conditions *(paccaya; pratyaya).*

Perceptions *(saññā; saṃjñā),* upon which we so often rely to understand the world, prove to be changing, incomplete, and at times deceptive.

Mental formations *(saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ)*—intentions, impulses, tendencies, and reactions—arise dependent upon causes and conditions that often lie largely beyond our conscious awareness.

And even consciousness *(viññāṇa; vijñāna),* so easily regarded as a permanent core, appears only when the appropriate conditions are present and disappears when those conditions cease.

Here the Buddha points to a simple yet profound observation. The human mind naturally searches for something permanent upon which it can rely. It therefore tends to assume that somewhere within these five *khandhas* there must be a core, an owner, or a controller.

Yet the investigation reveals something altogether different.

What is not permanent, what is not subject to complete control, and what gives rise to *dukkha* cannot rightly be regarded as self.

The five *khandhas* function according to their own dynamic. They arise dependent upon causes and conditions, not because they are governed or possessed by a separate entity.Here the illusion of a permanent "I" begins to lose its apparent self-evidence.

What becomes visible is not a hidden essence behind experience, but rather that nowhere within experience can an unchanging core be found.

Experience unfolds as a continuous stream of conditioned processes in which nothing permanent or independent can be discovered.

Not-self *(anattā; anātman)* is therefore presented here not as a philosophical theory but as a direct description of the way experience actually unfolds.

Whoever truly sees this also sees that the idea of a fixed and controllable identity rests upon a projection of the mind. And once that projection is seen through, it loses its persuasive power. It is precisely here that the possibility of liberation opens—not because a real self is liberated, but because the clinging to the idea of a permanent self gradually falls away.

II. [—ANICCA, DUKKHA, AND ANATTĀ—]

‘ *What do you think, monks? Is form (rūpa; id.) permanent or impermanent?”*

"Impermanent, Bhante.”

"And what is impermanent—is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?”

"Unsatisfactory, Bhante.”

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?”

"No, Bhante.”

"What do you think, monks? Is feeling (vedanā; id.) permanent or impermanent?”

"Impermanent, Bhante.”

"And what is impermanent—is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?”

"Unsatisfactory, Bhante.”

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?”

"No, Bhante.”

"What do you think, monks? Is perception (saññā; saṃjñā) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent—is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?"

"No, Bhante."

"What do you think, monks? Are mental formations (saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent—is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?"

"No, Bhante."

"What do you think, monks? Is consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent—is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Bhante."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?"

"No, Bhante." ❜

In this second section of the *sutta,* the Buddha deepens the investigation. Having demonstrated that the five *khandhas* are not subject to our control and therefore cannot rightly be regarded as self, he now directs attention to their fundamental characteristics: impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman).*

The investigation unfolds in a simple yet profound way.

What is impermanent can offer no lasting security. What offers no lasting security can ultimately provide no lasting satisfaction. And what is impermanent and unsatisfactory cannot rightly be regarded as: "This is mine; this I am; this is my self."

The Buddha therefore asks the same question again and again: Is this permanent or impermanent?

The answer is always the same: Impermanent.

Form *(rūpa; id.)* grows old, becomes ill, and dies.

Feelings *(vedanā; id.)* arise and pass away.

Perceptions *(saññā; saṃjñā)* continually change.

Mental formations *(saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ)* arise and cease dependent upon causes and conditions.

And consciousness *(viññāṇa; vijñāna)* appears only when the appropriate conditions are present and disappears when those conditions cease.

The Buddha is not asking us to adopt a different interpretation of reality. He is inviting us to see reality as it actually is.

What is impermanent cannot provide lasting satisfaction. And what cannot provide lasting satisfaction cannot serve as a stable foundation for a self. For whatever fails to provide lasting satisfaction cannot rightly be regarded as a permanent "I," "me," or “mine."

Here it becomes evident that the three characteristics of existence—*anicca (anitya), dukkha (duḥkha),* and *anattā (anātman)*—are not three separate insights but three aspects of one and the same reality.

Because phenomena are impermanent, they cannot provide lasting satisfaction. Because they cannot provide lasting satisfaction, they cannot rightly be regarded as "I" or “mine."

Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly asks: "Is it fitting to regard this as: 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self'?”

And each time the answer is:

"No, Bhante."

Not as an act of faith, but as the natural consequence of direct investigation.

Whatever continually arises and passes away according to causes and conditions *(paccaya; pratyaya)* possesses no enduring essence.

What we ordinarily regard as "I" proves to be nothing more than an ever-changing constellation of conditioned processes.

In this way, the familiar sense of "I am this" gradually loses its apparent self-evidence.

The five *khandhas* prove to be neither possessions, nor identity, nor a permanent foundation. They arise and pass away like a flowing stream that is never the same from one moment to the next.

When this is seen clearly, the assumption that there is an enduring core naturally loses its persuasive power. Here, insight into impermanence naturally opens the door to insight into not-self. Where no permanence can be found, no permanent self can be established.

Whoever sees this sees things as they truly are.

And where the mind no longer attempts to hold on to what is continually changing, a profound ease naturally unfolds—an ease that does not arise from effort or willpower, but from insight itself.

III. [—COMPLETE SELFLESSNESS—]

❛ *Therefore, monks, whatever form (rūpa; id.) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all form should be seen with right wisdom, in accordance with reality, as follows:*

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever feeling (vedanā; id.) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all feeling should be seen with right wisdom, in accordance with reality, as follows:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever perception (saññā; saṃjñā) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all perception should be seen with right wisdom, in accordance with reality, as follows:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever mental formations (saṅkhārā; saṃskārāḥ) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all mental formations should be seen

with right wisdom, in accordance with reality, as follows:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; coarse or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all consciousness should be seen with right wisdom, in accordance with reality, as follows:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.' ❜

In this third section of the *sutta,* the Buddha leads the Five Ascetics to the full implications of what they have already seen in the first two sections.

Having shown that none of the five *khandhas* is subject to our control and therefore cannot rightly be regarded as self, and having demonstrated that all five *khandhas* are impermanent and unsatisfactory, he now presents the natural consequence of that insight: every phenomenon, in whatever form it appears, is to be seen with right wisdom as "not mine," "not I," and "not my self."

The Buddha now widens the scope of the investigation.

It is no longer concerned with a single moment or a particular state, but with all forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and states of conscious-

ness: past, present, and future; internal and external; coarse and subtle; exalted and ordinary; near and far.

Whatever the circumstance, the structure remains the same: nowhere does anything reveal itself as a fixed, independent essence. Nothing remains. Nothing stands under our control. Nothing can rightly be regarded as our possession.

This comprehensive enumeration is not intended as an exercise in completeness, but as an expression of liberating precision.

For the mind continually searches for somewhere to cling—a subtle experience, an exalted state of consciousness, a refined meditative absorption, a “deeper insight.”

With these words, the Buddha leaves no exception. There is no phenomenon whatsoever, at any level within *saṃsāra,* that can rightly be regarded as self.

The central refrain—"This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self."—is neither a mantra nor a philosophical formula, nor a dogma. It is a description of what the mind sees when it looks without projection.

It is the seeing through of the mechanism of appropriation: the mind's tendency to personalise arising phenomena and transform them into identity.

When this projection falls away, what remains is simply experience as it unfolds from moment to moment—without a centre, without an owner, without any fixed, stable, or enduring essence.

When experience is truly seen in this way—through *yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana (yathābhūta-jñānadarśana)* —a profound disenchantment (*nibbidā; nirvidā*) naturally arises and from this letting go liberation unfolds.

It is precisely here that liberation is found: not because something new appears, but because an illusion falls away.

For the Five Ascetics, this was the moment when nothing remained with which identification was still possible. Not through an act of will, but because they could no longer find anything that could truly function as "I," "me," or “mine."

In this clarity, the conditioned sense of self gradually loses its apparent self-evidence.

This section of the *sutta* reveals how radically simple the Dhamma truly is: nothing that appears endures, nothing that changes can provide lasting security, and nothing that lies beyond our control can rightly be regarded as self.

Whoever sees this—truly sees this—can do nothing other than let go. Not because one ought to let go, but because there is no longer anything to hold on to.

IV. [—THE FRUIT OF LIBERATING INSIGHT—]

❛ *A well-instructed noble disciple who contemplates all this with right wisdom becomes disenchanted with form; becomes disenchanted with feeling; becomes disenchanted with perception; becomes disenchanted with mental formations; becomes disenchanted with consciousness.*

Through disenchantment, passion fades away. With the fading away of passion, the mind is liberated. When the mind is liberated, there arises the knowledge: 'It is liberated.'

He understands:

'Birth has come to an end. The holy life has been lived. What had to be done has been done. There is no further becoming.'

Thus spoke the Blessed One.

Delighted, the Five Ascetics rejoiced in the Blessed One's words. And while this discourse was being delivered, through non-clinging their hearts were liberated from the taints. ❜

This concludes the complete text of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta.*

The final section of the discourse brings the investigation to its fulfilment. Here, the Buddha describes what unfolds when the insight into not-self is no longer a concept but is directly seen within the five khandhas.

When the practitioner truly sees that form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness possess no enduring essence, no owner, and no lasting foundation, a profound inner transformation naturally unfolds: a deep disenchantment, a complete sense of fulfilment, a deeply felt "enough." Not as aversion, but as clarity.

This is *nibbidā (nirvidā):* seeing through the enchantment of conditioned existence.

This disenchantment is not a depressive reaction but the fading of the subtle fascination that has held the mind captive for so long.

What once appeared attractive—the hope for certainty, for control, for a fixed identity—loses its allure. The yogi sees: "There is nothing here to hold on to.” And precisely because this is seen, the tendency to cling naturally comes to rest. Where clinging ceases, passion fades. Where passion fades, the mind settles into a new openness.

The Buddha describes this as *virāga (id.).* It is the moment when the mind is no longer driven by craving, fear, or the subtle search for certainty.

This dispassion is neither cold nor detached in the ordinary sense. It is clear, open, and free: a mind that requires nothing in order to be fully present.

Virāga literally means "fading of colour": the fading away of craving, the disappearance of the emotional colouring with which form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness were once marked as "I," "me," or "mine."

It is not suppression, but the natural fading of craving and aversion.

As craving and aversion fall silent, *upasama (upaśama)* becomes evident: tranquillity, stillness, the calming of mental activity, the complete settling of the mind. The mind comes to rest because nothing remains that grasps or resists. *Upasama* is not a state that is produced. It is the peace that naturally unfolds when the inner struggle comes to an end.

When the mind is utterly still, *vimutti (vimukti)* becomes evident. *Vimutti* means liberation—not as a cosmic event, but as the disappearance of the final structural obstruction.

It is the clear freedom in which nothing remains caught in becoming *(bhava; id.).*

The mind is open, without inside or outside, without an "I" that must be defended.

Vimutti is not the production of something new, but the disappearance of what obscured liberation from dukkha *(duḥkha).*

Liberation is not a supernatural event. It is the natural consequence of the disappearance of the causes of suffering.

The Buddha declares that the noble disciple who fully sees the five khandhas in their not-self nature is liberated from every taint.

This liberation is the quiet recognition that what had to be done has been done. Nothing remains to be

corrected. Nothing remains to be attained. Nothing is lacking.

"Birth has come to an end" refers, within the Canon, to the ending of the conditions for further becoming and rebirth. From a phenomenological perspective, it may also be understood as the cessation of the inner dynamic that continually constructs an “I."

When identification is no longer present, the process of crystallised self-becoming is brought to an end.

The practitioner sees directly: There is no future state of becoming that will again be shaped by craving. In other words, the process of becoming has come to rest.

It is at this point that the Five Ascetics become *arahants.* Koṇḍañña had entered the stream *(sotāpanna; śrotāpanna)* during the first discourse. After several days of intensive practice, the other ascetics likewise deepened their insight.

The Pāli Canon records that only during the second discourse—the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*—did all five attain *arahantship*.

This occurred when insight into the not-self nature of the five *khandhas* fully unfolded and the sequence *nibbidā* → *virāga* → *upasama* → *vimutti* reached its natural completion.

This is a natural unfolding, not something brought about by an act of will.

Not through belief. Not through surrender. But because the illusion of an inner core—the belief in a permanent self—is completely seen through.

What disappears is not a truly existing self, but the conviction that such a self had ever existed.

What remains is simply experience: open, changing, and impossible to grasp as a permanent essence or owner.

In this final section of the *sutta,* the Buddha reveals not only the insight itself but also its fruit: the end of clinging *(upādāna; id.),* the end of becoming *(bhava; id.),* and the end of *dukkha*.

The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* concludes not with a philosophical proposition but with liberation.

What began as an investigation of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness culminates in the complete seeing through of their not-self nature.

When nothing is any longer regarded as "I," "me," or "mine," the conditioned tendency of the mind to cling loses its footing.

For this reason, the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* is regarded within the early Dhamma as one of the Buddha's most radical and liberating discourses—not because it introduces a new theory, but because it points directly to what the Five Ascetics completely saw through at that moment.

Nowhere can a permanent "I" be found.

And in that seeing through, the conditions that sustain clinging fall away, and liberation unfolds.

CHAPTER IV — LIBERATION

There comes a moment when the investigation gradually begins to change in character.

Not because a new truth is discovered.
Not because an extraordinary experience appears.
Not because something is gained that was previously lacking.

But because something that for a long time seemed self-evident gradually loses its self-evidence.

The previous chapters explored how *dukkha* arises, what sustains it, and why the assumption of a permanent self proves to have no enduring foundation. They examined craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* becoming *(bhava; id.),* and identification. They investigated the five *khandhas (skandhas)* and the continuous movement of arising and passing away.

Again and again, the investigation pointed in the same direction.

Nothing that appears endures.
Nothing that appears can provide lasting security.
Nothing that appears can be held as "I," "me," or "mine."

When this is no longer merely understood as an idea, but is directly seen, something begins to change.

The need continually to organise, protect, and control experience gradually loses its apparent self-evidence.

The search begins to grow still.
Not because the world disappears.
Not because phenomena cease to appear.
But because the movement that clings to them gradually fades away.

What follows is neither a new teaching nor another step that still has to be reached.

Rather, it is an unfolding.

A gradual disappearance of the illusion that anything within the conditioned *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta)* can provide lasting fulfilment.
A fading of the fire of craving.
A quieting of the tendency to become someone.
An extinguishing of that which sustains *dukkha*.

The early Dhamma describes this unfolding through several terms: *nibbidā (nirveda), virāga (vairāgya), upasama (upaśama),* and finally *vimutti (vimukti).*

These are not separate attainments, nor are they states that one possesses.

None of them is produced. They become evident as the causes of clinging and identification gradually fade away.

They point to different aspects of one and the same movement: the gradual falling away of everything that binds.

What was investigated throughout the previous chapters now finds its natural fulfilment. Not in acquiring something new.

But in the ending of the need to acquire anything at all.

Not in becoming someone else.
But in the fading away of the movement that continually tries to become someone.

Not in adding yet more knowledge.
But in directly seeing how *dukkha* arises and how it comes to an end.

The pages that follow explore this unfolding not as a theory of liberation, but as a description of what becomes visible when clinging gradually loses its force and the mind no longer needs to add anything to what unfolds from moment to moment.

I. THE END OF SEEKING

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Buddha's awakening is not so much what was discovered, but what came to an end.

A search came to rest.

Not because every question had been answered.
Not because every mystery had been resolved.
Not because an ultimate truth had been acquired as a possession.
But because the movement that had continually been seeking fulfilment lost its power.

When we look back at the life of Siddhattha Gotama, we see a human being who sought.

He sought with teachers.
He sought through meditation.
He sought through asceticism.
He sought through extremes.

Like countless seekers before him and after him, he too was driven by the deep intuition that the ending of dukkha must be possible.

And yet his search did not come to an end because he acquired something.

It came to an end because something was seen through.

He saw how dukkha arises.
He saw how dukkha sustains itself.
He saw how dukkha comes to an end.

And in that seeing, the urge to continue becoming something gradually lost the very ground upon which it had been sustained.

Perhaps this is difficult to understand, because seeking has become so self-evident for most people.

We seek security.
We seek recognition.
We seek love.
We seek knowledge.
We seek experiences.
We seek meaning.

And even when we turn towards the Dhamma, the very same movement quietly continues.

Then we seek spiritual experiences.
We seek insight.
We seek extraordinary states of consciousness.
We seek liberation.

The objects of craving change, but the movement of seeking remains the same.

There is always the subtle assumption that something is still missing.
That something still has to be acquired.
That someone still has to become something.

It is precisely here that the early Dhamma touches something fundamental.

Craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.)* are not separate processes.

They nourish one another and continually sustain the experience of unsatisfactoriness.
Craving seeks.
Clinging tries to hold on.
Becoming tries to become someone who will eventually find fulfilment.

As long as this movement remains active, seeking likewise remains active.

Not because there is anything inherently wrong with seeking itself, but because it continually proceeds from the assumption of lack.

From the feeling that this moment is not enough.
From the thought that liberation lies somewhere else.

But what happens when the mind directly sees that everything it seeks is impermanent *(anicca; anitya)*?

What happens when it becomes evident that no experience can provide lasting fulfilment?

What happens when even the seeker can no longer be found as an enduring entity?

Then seeking gradually loses its self-evidence.

Not through an act of will.
Not through resignation.
Not through indifference.
But because its very foundation is seen through.

Then a remarkably simple insight begins to unfold.
Nothing needs to be added to experience.
Nothing needs to be held on to.

Nothing needs to be defended.
Nothing needs to become.

This does not mean that life comes to a standstill.

The body continues to act.
Thoughts continue to arise.
Feelings continue to come and go.
The world continues to unfold.

But the inner compulsion to find lasting fulfilment within all of this gradually loses its hold.

Experience remains, yet the urge to seek completion within experience itself quietly comes to rest.

This is what is meant by the end of seeking.
Not the end of curiosity.
Not the end of investigation.
Not the end of wholehearted engagement with life.
But the end of the restless movement that continually searches for itself within what is impermanent.

And it is precisely within this quieting that something opens which cannot be found through seeking.

The pages that follow explore how this quieting continues to unfold: first as *nibbidā (nirveda)*, the disappearance of an illusion; then as *virāga (vairāgya),* the fading of the fire; then as *upasama (upaśama),* profound stillness; and finally as *vimutti (vimukti),* liberation.

II. NIBBIDĀ (NIRVIDĀ) — DISAPPEARANCE OF ILLUSION

When seeking loses its self-evidence, a subtle yet profound shift begins to unfold.

The mind still sees.
Experiences continue to arise.
The world continues to unfold.
And yet something is no longer the same.
What once seemed so compelling gradually loses its enchantment.

The early Dhamma calls this *nibbidā (nirvidā)*. The term is sometimes translated as *disenchantment*, *detachment*, or *disillusionment*. Yet each of these translations captures only part of what is meant.

Nibbidā is not a rejection of life.
It is not pessimism.
It is not emotional withdrawal.
Nor is it an aversion to the world.

Rather, it is the quiet disappearance of an illusion.

For a long time, the mind has lived with the assumption that lasting fulfilment could be found in what arises and passes away—in what appears and disappears.

In possessions.
In experiences.
In relationships.
In knowledge.
In identity.
Even in the most refined meditative and spiritual experiences.

But as impermanence *(anicca; anitya),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha; duḥkha),* and not-self *(anattā; anātman)* are seen ever more clearly, this assumption gradually begins to lose its credibility.

Not because someone decides to abandon it.
But because it simply no longer convinces.

What once appeared solid is seen to be in constant movement.
What promised security proves incapable of providing any lasting ground.
What was regarded as "I" or "mine" can no longer be held.

And gradually, a profound disenchantment begins to unfold.

The mind sees.
It sees that no conditioned phenomenon *(saṅkhata; saṃskṛta)* is capable of providing what was expected of it.

It sees that the continual pursuit of experience can never bring lasting fulfilment.

It sees that the movement of craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* clinging *(upādāna; id.),* and becoming *(bhava; id.)* endlessly repeats itself.

What for so long appeared to be a promise is seen through as a self-perpetuating cycle.

Not tragic.
Not cynical.
Simply seen.

For this reason, nibbidā perhaps most closely resembles awakening from a dream. While dreaming, everything appears real.

There is hope.
There is fear.
There is craving.
There is loss.

But upon awakening, it becomes evident that the assumptions sustaining the dream never possessed any real foundation.

In the same way, the assumption that lasting fulfilment can be found within the conditioned gradually loses its power.

The mind does not have to turn away from it.
Nor does it have to struggle against the conditioned.

The conditioned simply loses its enchantment.

What remains is a remarkable clarity.

There is still seeing.
There is still hearing.
There is still thinking.

But the deeply rooted expectation that somewhere within this continuous stream of phenomena something will ultimately be found that can bring complete fulfilment gradually begins to dissolve.

This is the profound meaning of *nibbidā (nirvidā).*
Not an aversion to the world. But the disappearance of the illusion that had been projected onto the world.

And it is precisely because that illusion gradually loses its power that the fire sustaining it slowly begins to die out.

The unfolding of *nibbidā* therefore already contains the seed of what follows.

As enchantment fades away, craving loses the very ground upon which it is sustained.

And where craving loses its hold, *virāga* begins to unfold.

III. VIRĀGA (VAIRĀGYA) — THE FADING OF THE FIRE

When the illusion gradually disappears, something remarkable begins to happen.

What for so long seemed self-evident not only loses its power to convince, but also its power to attract.

The mind no longer feels compelled to reach out with the same intensity towards what arises and passes away. The fire begins to fade.

The early Dhamma calls this *virāga (vairāgya).*

The word refers to the fading of colour, the fading of passion, the gradual dying out of the fire that has sustained craving for so long.

Virāga is not indifference.
It is not emotional numbness.
It is not a withdrawal from life.
Nor is it a rejection of the world.

Quite the contrary.

The world continues to appear exactly as before.
Forms appear.
Sounds appear.
Thoughts appear.
Feelings appear.

Yet something changes in the way they are experienced. The compelling tendency to seek lasting fulfilment in these phenomena gradually loses its power.

This becomes most clearly evident in craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā).*

For a long time, craving seemed to give direction to life.

It promised fulfilment.
It promised security.
It promised completion.

But as the impermanence of all phenomena is seen ever more clearly, this craving gradually loses its self-evidence.

Not because craving is suppressed.
Not because it is fought against.
But because the assumptions that sustained it no longer convince.

Why continue to grasp at what is constantly changing?
Why try to hold on to what by its very nature cannot be held?
Why seek completion in what is itself incomplete, impermanent, and dependently arisen?

The mind does not arrive at these answers through thinking.The mind sees.

And it is precisely in this seeing that the fire of craving begins to fade.

As a result, clinging *(upādāna; id.)* also gradually loses its foundation.

What is no longer regarded as a source of lasting fulfilment no longer needs to be held with the same force.

And where clinging weakens, becoming *(bhava; id.)* likewise loses the very ground upon which it is sustained.

The subtle urge to become someone, to perfect someone, to protect someone, or to complete someone gradually loses its self-evidence.

Here it becomes clear why the Buddha so often describes liberation in terms of extinguishing.

Not because something essential is destroyed. But because something that has been burning continuously is no longer being fed.

Just as a fire dies out when no more fuel is added, so craving loses its power when the illusion of lasting fulfilment disappears.

What remains is not emptiness in the ordinary sense of the word.

Quite the contrary.

A remarkable simplicity begins to unfold.
There is seeing without the need to add anything.
There is experiencing without the need to hold on to anything.
There is action without the continual need to become someone.

The mind becomes lighter.

More spacious.
More still.

Not because phenomena have disappeared. But because the fire that clung to them gradually loses its hold.

This is the deepest meaning of *virāga (vairāgya).*
Not a loss of life.
But the fading of the feverish intensity with which the mind tried to appropriate life.

Not an impoverishment of experience.
But the extinguishing of the thirst that continually sought to transform experience into possession, identity, or fulfilment.

And as this fire continues to fade, something even quieter begins to unfold.

Not the disappearance of the world.
But the quieting of the movement that continually sought to grasp it.

The early Dhamma calls this quieting *upasama (upaśama).*

IV. UPASAMA (UPAŚAMA) — STILLNESS

As the fire of craving gradually fades, it does not leave behind an emptiness that needs to be filled.

It gives rise to stillness.
Not the stillness of absence.
Not the stillness of isolation.
Not the stillness created through effort.
But a stillness that naturally unfolds as the movement of clinging gradually loses its power.

The early Dhamma calls this *upasama (upaśama).*

The word refers to calm, tranquillity, and coming to rest. It points to a profound quieting of what had long been in constant motion.

For a long time, experience was characterised by craving.

By aversion.
By expectations.
By memories.
By hope and fear.
By the subtle tendency continually to add something to whatever presented itself.

Something had to be achieved.
Something had to be acquired.
Something had to be held on to.
Something had to be avoided.

But as the illusion of lasting fulfilment disappears and the fire of craving gradually fades, this continual activity of the mind also begins to grow still.

Not because phenomena cease to appear.
The body continues to breathe.
Sounds remain audible.
Thoughts continue to arise.
The world continues to unfold.

And yet something fundamental has changed.

Nothing needs to be added to what appears.
Nothing needs to be corrected.
Nothing needs to be completed.
Nothing needs to become.

This is the simplicity of *upasama (upaśama).*

It is the stillness that appears when the need continually to shape, manage, and control experience comes to rest.

What for so long was experienced as a fixed "I" is seen to be a stream of continually changing phenomena.

What for so long appeared to be a problem is recognised as a movement of clinging and becoming *(bhava; id.).*

And when this movement is no longer sustained, a remarkable peace naturally unfolds.

Not as an emotion.
Not as an extraordinary state of consciousness.
But as the absence of inner conflict.
There is nothing that must be defended.
Nothing that must be preserved.
Nothing that must be acquired.

Nothing that can be lost.
This is why the early texts so often speak of peace, tranquillity, and calm.

Not as something added to experience. But as what becomes visible when the restlessness of craving, clinging, and becoming gradually grows still.

There is something extraordinarily simple about this stillness.

It draws no attention to itself.
It seeks no confirmation.
It makes no claim to being special.
It is simply still.

Like a lake whose waters have become completely calm.
Like the air after a storm.
Like a fire that is no longer being fed.

Nothing needs to happen for this stillness to be present.

It is not created by the mind but revealed as the mind gradually ceases to disturb itself.

The less the movement of grasping asserts itself, the more naturally this quiet transparency becomes apparent.

And it is precisely within this stillness that what had long been concealed by restlessness becomes visible.
Not a new reality.
Not another world.

But the absence of that which had continually obscured experience.

For this reason, *upasama (upaśama)* is not an end point.

Rather, it is the transparency that appears when the movement of *dukkha* comes to rest. And within that transparency unfolds what the early Dhamma calls *vimutti (vimukti).* Not as an attainment. But as the falling away of that which bound.

V. VIMUTTI (VIMUKTI) — LIBERATION

Few words in the early Dhamma have been as widely misunderstood as liberation.

It is easy to assume that liberation is something to be attained.

An extraordinary state.
A definitive experience.
A new identity.
Something that someone achieves and then possesses.

Yet the early Dhamma points in a different direction. The Buddha does not describe liberation as the acquisition of something new.

Rather, he describes it as the ending of something.
The ending of ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā).*
The ending of craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā).*
The ending of clinging *(upādāna; id.).*
The ending of becoming *(bhava; id.).*
The ending of *dukkha*.

For this reason, liberation possesses a remarkable simplicity.

Nothing is added.
No new reality appears.
No extraordinary identity is constructed.

What falls away is the movement that continually tried to become something, to acquire something, and to hold on to something.

It may best be compared to laying down a burden that has been carried for so long that its weight had almost ceased to be noticed.

Only when it is laid down does it become apparent how heavy it truly was.

In the same way, the restlessness of the mind often becomes fully apparent only when it comes to rest.

For a long time, the movement of craving seemed entirely self-evident.

The desire to become happy.
The desire to find security.
The desire to be someone.
Even the desire to become liberated.

But when the very ground that sustains this movement is seen through, it gradually loses its power.

Not through suppression.
Not through resistance.
Not through an act of will.

But because the misunderstanding that sustained it no longer convinces.

What remains is a remarkable simplicity.
Nothing needs to be added to experience.
Nothing needs to be defended.
Nothing needs to be held on to.
Nothing needs to become.

Here it becomes clear why the Buddha so often describes liberation in negative terms.

Unbound.
Unattached.
The Unconditioned *(asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta).*

Not because liberation is a negation of life. But because words that refer to possession, identity, and acquisition can scarcely approach it.

Liberation belongs to no one.
There is no owner of liberation.
There is no one who can possess it.
Precisely for that reason, it is free.

The early Dhamma uses the word *vimutti (vimukti)* to describe this: literally, released, liberated, unbound.

Like a hand that opens after having held something tightly for a very long time.
Like a bird no longer confined to a cage.
Like a fire that has gone out because all its fuel has been exhausted.

This is why the Buddha again and again summarised his teaching in one simple movement: the ending of *dukkha*.

Not becoming something.
Not acquiring something.
Not constructing a new identity.

But the ending of that which gives rise to bondage.
And it is precisely for this reason that, in the end, little can be said about liberation.

Words can only point towards it.
They cannot contain it.

They cannot transmit it.
They cannot possess it.

Ultimately, only this simple recognition remains:

Where ignorance is seen through, clarity unfolds.
Where clinging falls away, peace appears.
Where the need to become someone comes completely to rest, dukkha has come to an end.

That is *vimutti (vimukti).*
That is liberation.

VI. DIRECT SEEING

Liberation from dukkha unfolds not through becoming *(bhava; id.),* but through letting go *(vossagga; vyutsarga).*

Not through adding.
Not through acquiring.
Not through the refinement of an identity.
But through extinguishing *(sītibhāva; śītibhāva)*—the coolness that appears when the fires of ignorance *(avijjā; avidyā),* craving *(taṇhā; tṛṣṇā),* and aversion *(paṭigha; pratigha)* come to rest.

The Buddha expresses this as follows: [59]

‘ *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, uppāda-vaya-dhammino;*
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho —
Impermanent indeed are all conditioned phenomena;
their nature is to arise and pass away.
Having arisen, they cease again;
their calming is true happiness. ’

How does this stilling unfold?

This question touches the very heart of the Dhamma. Not because it invites new theories. Not because it opens the door to metaphysical speculation. But because it points directly to that towards which the Buddha's teaching has referred from the very beginning: the ending of *dukkha*.

The words have fulfilled their purpose.

They have pointed the way.

The early discourses indicate the direction. They reveal the structure of suffering. They reveal the arising of clinging. They reveal the illusion of a permanent self.

But in the end, one question remains: How is this seen?

For liberation does not unfold because a truth is accepted. It unfolds when things are seen as they truly are.

This is why the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* [60] occupies such a unique place within the Buddha's teaching.

Where the earlier discourses point the way, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* brings the investigation back to the direct experience of this very life.

Not to abstract ideas.
Not to belief.
Not to words.
But to the immediacy of lived experience.

Seeing the body as body.
Seeing feeling as feeling.
Seeing mind as mind.
Seeing phenomena as phenomena.

Seeing as merely seeing.
Hearing as merely hearing.
Smelling as merely smelling.
Tasting as merely tasting.
Feeling as merely feeling.
Thinking as merely thinking. [61]

Here *satipaṭṭhāna* unfolds.

Here words gradually lose their weight.
Here concepts become experience once again.
Here it becomes visible how phenomena arise and pass away.
How they appear and disappear.
How nothing can endure.
Here it becomes visible how craving arises.
How aversion arises.
How identification arises.
And also how they cease.

Not through struggle.
Not through suppression.
But through clear seeing.

In this way, a quiet equanimity unfolds towards everything that arises and passes away.

An openness that needs to hold on to nothing.
A clarity that needs to reject nothing.
A peace that arises not from control, but from the falling away of the need to control.

From there, insight unfolds.
Not as a possession.
Not as an attainment.
But as the gradual extinguishing of that which had long obscured things as they are.

When nothing is any longer held as "I," "me," or "mine," becoming *(bhava; id.)* loses its foundation.

And where the urge to become comes to an end, the possibility of liberation opens.

Not somewhere else.
Not later.
But precisely here.
In this life.
In this moment.
From moment to moment.

The Buddha's final words, spoken at Kusinārā shortly before his *parinibbāna (parinirvāṇa)*, were: [62]

❛ *Vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetha — All conditioned phenomena are subject to decay. Accomplish the practice with diligent heedfulness.* ❜

Once again, these words point to the same simple reality explored throughout this book.

Direct seeing unfolds when seeking, identification, and clinging grow still, allowing reality to reveal itself just as it is.

Nothing more needs to be said.
The rest unfolds in the seeing.
Direct seeing.

AFTERWORD

In its greatest simplicity, the Dhamma points to this:

Awakening is possible.
Dukkha arises, and it can come to an end.

What we ordinarily call "I," "me," and "mine" proves, upon careful investigation, to be a continually changing interplay of processes through which identification takes place.

As craving, appropriation, and identification gradually come to rest, liberation unfolds not as something to be attained, but as the simple absence of that which gives rise to *dukkha*.

The Dhamma does not ask for belief. It asks only for the willingness to look honestly at experience, to investigate *dukkha,* and to verify for oneself the possibility of its ending.

Perhaps the Buddha's invitation can be expressed even more simply:

Awakening is possible.
Dukkha can come to an end.
Look
See for yourself.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - THE DHAMMACAKKAPPAVATTANA SUTTA

When the Buddha arrived at the Deer Park, the five ascetics—whose names have been preserved in the Pāli Canon as Koṇḍañña, Mahānāma, Bhaddiya, Vappa, and Assaji—had agreed not to greet him. They were convinced that their former companion had abandoned the ascetic path. Yet the moment they saw him, they were so deeply impressed by the extraordinary serenity of his presence that they immediately rose and welcomed him with reverence.

Following the customary greeting, the Buddha delivered his first discourse: the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. [63]

Thus have I heard.

On one occasion, the Blessed One was staying in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Vārāṇasī. There he addressed the Group of Five Ascetics:

[I. The Two Extremes and the Middle Way]

"Monks, these two extremes are not to be pursued.

What two?

The pursuit of sensual pleasure, which is low, vulgar, ordinary, ignoble, and without true benefit.

And the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and without true benefit.

Avoiding both of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the Middle Way, which gives rise to

seeing and knowing, [64] and leads to inner peace, direct understanding, awakening, and Nibbāna.

And what is this Middle Way that gives rise to seeing and knowing, and leads to inner peace, direct understanding, awakening, and Nibbāna?

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, monks, is the Middle Way that gives rise to seeing and knowing, and leads to inner peace, direct understanding, awakening, and Nibbāna.

[II. The Noble Truths]

"This, monks, is the Noble Truth of dukkha (dukkha sacca; duḥkha satya): [65]

Birth is dukkha.
Ageing is dukkha.
Illness is dukkha.
Death is dukkha.
Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are dukkha.
Association with what is disliked is dukkha.
Separation from what is loved is dukkha.
Not obtaining what one desires is dukkha.

In brief, the five khandhas (skandhas) subject to clinging are dukkha.

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha (samudaya sacca; samudaya satya):

It is craving that leads to renewed becoming, accompanied by delight and attachment, seeking de-

light here and there. In brief, it is craving for sensual pleasure (kāma-taṇhā; kāma-tṛṣṇā), craving for becoming (bhava-taṇhā; bhava-tṛṣṇā), and craving for non-becoming (vibhava-taṇhā; vibhava-tṛṣṇā).

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha (nirodha sacca; nirodha satya):

It is the complete fading away and cessation of that very craving—its abandoning, letting go, relinquishing, and complete release.

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha (magga sacca; mārga satya):

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

[III. The Three Turnings [66] and the Twelve Aspects [67]]

"Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This is the Noble Truth of dukkha.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of dukkha is to be fully understood.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of dukkha has been fully understood.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This is the Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha is to be abandoned.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of the origin of dukkha has been abandoned.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This is the Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha is to be directly known.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha has been directly known.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha is to be cultivated.

Concerning things never heard before, there arose in me seeing, there arose knowing, there arose wisdom, there arose direct understanding, there arose light:

This Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha has been cultivated."

[IV. The Buddha's Personal Knowledge]

"Monks, as long as my seeing and knowing of these Four Noble Truths—as they truly are, with their three turnings and twelve aspects—had not yet become completely clear, I did not claim to have attained the unsurpassed Perfect Awakening in this world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, [68] with its contemplatives and brahmins, its rulers and its people.

But when my seeing and knowing of these Four Noble Truths—as they truly are, with their three turnings and twelve aspects—became completely clear, then I declared that I had attained the unsurpassed Perfect Awakening in this world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, with its contemplatives and brahmins, its rulers and its people.

Then there arose in me the knowing and the seeing:

"My liberation of mind is unshakable.
This is my last birth.
There is now no further becoming."

[V. The Wheel of Dhamma Set in Motion]

Thus spoke the Blessed One.

The Group of Five Ascetics rejoiced in the Blessed One's words and delighted in his teaching.

And while this discourse on the Four Noble Truths was being given, there arose in the Venerable Koṇḍañña the stainless, dust-free Dhamma-eye:

"Whatever is subject to arising is subject to ceasing."

And when the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the earth deities proclaimed:

"At the Deer Park in Isipatana, near Vārāṇasī, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Wheel of Dhamma, which cannot be stopped by any contemplative or brahmin, by any god, Māra, Brahmā, or anyone else in the world."

Hearing this proclamation, the deities of the Four Great Kings repeated it.

Then the gods of the Tāvatiṃsa Heaven heard it and proclaimed the same words.

In turn, the Yāma gods, the Tusita gods, the Nimmānaratī gods, the Paranimmitavasavattī gods, and finally the Brahmā gods all repeated the same proclamation:

"At the Deer Park in Isipatana, near Vārāṇasī, the Blessed One has set in motion the unsurpassed Wheel of Dhamma, which cannot be stopped by any

contemplative or brahmin, by any god, Māra, Brahmā, or anyone else in the world."

Thus, at that very moment, the proclamation reached as far as the Brahmā worlds.

The ten-thousandfold world-system shook, trembled, and quaked, and an immeasurable radiance appeared in the world, surpassing even the splendour of the gods.

Then the Blessed One uttered these inspired words:

"Koṇḍañña has truly understood!
Koṇḍañña has truly understood!" [69]

From that day onward, the Venerable Koṇḍañña became known as Aññā Koṇḍañña. After Koṇḍañña was the first to penetrate the Dhamma, the other four ascetics soon followed. Seeing and knowing arose in them, and they declared:

"Unshakable is our liberation.
This is our last birth.
There is now no further becoming."

APPENDIX 2 - THE ANATTALAKKHAṆA SUTTA

The Buddha delivered the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta [70] on the fifth day after the Group of Five Ascetics (Pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū; Pañcavargīya bhikṣu) had entered the stream (sotāpatti; srotāpatti). It is traditionally regarded as the second discourse following his awakening.

The Buddha saw that nowhere within experience could a permanent and independent self be found. He saw that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent and empty (suñña; śūnya) of a permanent and independent self. This is their selfless (anattā; anātman) nature.

He saw that failing to see the tilakkhaṇa—the three characteristics of existence—keeps beings trapped in an illusory world: a mirage, a fabrication of the mind.

Thus, what is impermanent is perceived as permanent. What is not-self is taken to be a self. What is merely a delusion is regarded as one's true identity. Suffering is mistaken for happiness, and what is inherently unattractive is perceived as beautiful.

Thus have I heard.

On one occasion, the Blessed One was staying in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Vārāṇasī. There he addressed the Group of Five Ascetics:

"Monks!"

"Venerable Sir," the monks replied.

The Blessed One said:

[I. Not-Self and Control]

"Monks, physical form (rūpa) is not-self.

If physical form were self, it would not lead to affliction, and one could say of physical form: 'Let my physical form be thus; let my physical form not be thus.'

But because physical form is not-self, it does lead to affliction, and one cannot say of physical form: 'Let my physical form be thus; let my physical form not be thus.'

Monks, feeling (vedanā; id.) is not-self.

If feeling were self, it would not lead to affliction, and one could say of feeling: 'Let my feeling be thus; let my feeling not be thus.'

But because feeling is not-self, it does lead to affliction, and one cannot say of feeling: 'Let my feeling be thus; let my feeling not be thus.'

Monks, perception (saññā; saṃjñā) is not-self.

If perception were self, it would not lead to affliction, and one could say of perception: 'Let my perception be thus; let my perception not be thus.'

But because perception is not-self, it does lead to affliction, and one cannot say of perception: 'Let my perception be thus; let my perception not be thus.'

Monks, volitional formations (saṅkhārā; saṃskārā) are not-self.

If volitional formations were self, they would not lead to affliction, and one could say of them: 'Let my volitional formations be thus; let my volitional formations not be thus.'

But because volitional formations are not-self, they do lead to affliction, and one cannot say of them: 'Let my volitional formations be thus; let my volitional formations not be thus.'

Monks, consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna) is not-self.

If consciousness were self, it would not lead to affliction, and one could say of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.'

But because consciousness is not-self, it does lead to affliction, and one cannot say of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus.'"

[II. Impermanence, Dukkha, and Not-Self]

"What do you think, monks? Is physical form (rūpa) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"

"No, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think, monks? Is feeling (vedanā; id.) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"

"No, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think, monks? Is perception (saññā; saṃjñā) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"

"No, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think, monks? Are volitional formations (saṅkhārā; saṃskārā) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"

"No, Venerable Sir."

"What do you think, monks? Is consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna) permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, Venerable Sir."

"And what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, is it fitting to regard it as: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"

"No, Venerable Sir."

[III. Complete Not-Self]

"Therefore, monks, whatever physical form (rūpa) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all physical form should be seen with right understanding, as it truly is:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever feeling (vedanā; id.) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all feeling should be seen with right understanding, as it truly is:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.

This is not my self.'

Whatever perception (saññā; saṃjñā) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all perception should be seen with right understanding, as it truly is:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever volitional formations (saṅkhārā; saṃskārā) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all volitional formations should be seen with right understanding, as they truly are:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'

Whatever consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna) there may be—whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near—all consciousness should be seen with right understanding, as it truly is:

'This is not mine.
This I am not.
This is not my self.'"

[IV. The Fruit of Right Understanding]

"Monks, when a well-instructed noble disciple sees all this with right understanding, he becomes disenchanted with physical form, disenchanted with feel-

ing, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with volitional formations, and disenchanted with consciousness.

Through this disenchantment, passion fades.

With the fading of passion, the mind is liberated.

When it is liberated, there arises the knowledge:

'It is liberated.'

He understands:

'Birth has come to an end.
The holy life has been lived.
What had to be done has been done.
There is now no further becoming.'"

Thus spoke the Blessed One.

The Group of Five Ascetics rejoiced in the Blessed One's words.

And while this discourse was being delivered, the minds of the Five Ascetics were liberated from all defilements through non-clinging.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Guy Eugène Dubois (1947) has devoted many years to the study and clarification of the early Dhamma. As an independent author, translator, and contemplative practitioner, he has written numerous books on early Buddhism, meditation, insight, and the path to liberation.

His work is characterised by a sustained interest in the earliest strata of Buddhist teaching and by a commitment to direct investigation rather than dogmatic interpretation.

Over the years, he has translated and written commentaries on a number of early Buddhist texts from the Pāli Canon, including the *Dhammapada*, *Itivuttaka*, *Udāna*, *Khuddakapāṭha*, *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta*, and *Parāyanavagga*. He is also the author of numerous works on early Buddhist meditation and insight, including studies of the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, the *jhānas*, and the *Sixteen Vipassanā-Ñāṇas*. In addition, he has translated and explored several contemplative works from the Sanskrit tradition.

Although deeply influenced by the Buddha's teaching, Dubois does not identify with any particular school, lineage, or institutional tradition. He approaches the Dhamma in the spirit of a free thinker, placing direct investigation above belief and personal verification above tradition. His approach is experiential, contemplative, and grounded in the spirit of *dhammavicaya*—the careful investigation of reality through direct observation.

In the spirit of the early Dhamma, he regards himself as "homeless," not in an external sense but inwardly: unwilling to take up permanent residence in fixed beliefs, doctrines, or identities. This perspective informs both his practice and his writing.

His writings are made freely available through Yatha-Bhuta—a multilingual website offering English, Spanish, French, and Dutch editions. Through this platform, readers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are invited to explore the Dhamma through direct study and contemplation.

His books are read by practitioners and independent students of the Dhamma around the world who seek a direct, contemplative, and non-sectarian approach to the Buddhist path.

The author's writings have appeared on numerous international Buddhist websites and platforms, including SuttaCentral, *Boeddhistisch Dagblad*, The Universal Sangha, Buddhism Without Borders, Buddhism Stack Exchange, and many others.

Awakening—The End of Dukkha continues this lifelong exploration of attachment, becoming, identity, and liberation. Drawing upon the earliest Buddhist teachings, it invites readers into a direct contemplative inquiry into their own experience.

In accordance with the Buddha's teaching that the Dhamma is the highest gift, the author makes all of his writings freely available and encourages their non-commercial distribution and sharing.

FOOTNOTES

[1] These four verbs do not represent a technical or canonical formula from the Pāli Canon. They are used here as a personal and contemplative summary of the movement of inquiry, mindful attention, and insight that, in the author's view, lies at the heart of the early Dhamma.

[2] Pariññā (parijñā) is a technical term that goes beyond ordinary understanding. It signifies a complete knowing, thorough penetration, and exhaustive comprehension of experience, such that attachment and taking ownership can fall away.

[3] Dhammapada (Dhp. 1–2)

[4] Mahāpurisa (mahāpuruṣa) literally means "great person" or "extraordinary human being." In the Buddhist tradition, the term refers to a human being endowed with exceptional spiritual qualities and a unique destiny. It does not imply a divine or supernatural status, but points to the extraordinary significance of that person's life and insight.

[5] The title of this book intentionally unites the two dimensions of the Buddha's discovery. Awakening (bodhi) refers to what he realized through direct seeing. The End of Dukkha refers to what he investigated throughout his quest, realized beneath the Bodhi tree, and pointed to throughout the remaining forty-five years of his teaching. The two are inseparable.

[6] Dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya) literally means "investigation of the Dhamma." It refers to a spirit of inquiry that encourages the direct examination of experience and the seeing of things as they truly are.

[7] Yathābhūta (id.) literally means "as it truly is." It refers to a direct and unfiltered perception of reality, free from projections, preferences, and beliefs. In the Dhamma, it denotes seeing phenomena as they arise and pass away in dependence upon causes and conditions.

The expression frequently appears in compounds such as yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana (yathābhūta-jñānadarśana): the knowledge and vision of things as they truly are.

[8] Dukkha (duḥkha) is commonly translated as "suffering," but its meaning extends beyond pain or sorrow alone. It refers to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of everything that arises and passes away in dependence upon causes and conditions. Because all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, they cannot provide lasting security, fulfillment, or peace.

In this sense, dukkha encompasses both the more obvious forms of suffering and the subtle tension that underlies every act of craving, clinging, and becoming. Put differently, dukkha is the fundamental tension that persists as long as craving (taṇhā; tṛṣṇā), attachment (upādāna; id.), and becoming (bhava; id.) remain present.

[9] In the early texts, one occasionally encounters the expression esa dhammo sanantano — "this is the timeless Dhamma." It does not refer to a religion or doctrine, but to a timeless principle of reality that is independent of personal beliefs, traditions, or interpretations.

[10] Cf. the Kālāma Sutta (Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.65), in which the Buddha advises against accepting a view solely on the basis of tradition, hearsay, reasoning, or authority, and instead invites careful investigation in the light of direct experience.

[11] Paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhi: literally, "to be known individually by the wise." The Dhamma does not point to something that must be believed or accepted on authority, but to something that can be directly investigated and seen for oneself.

[12] Udāna 5.5 (Uposatha Sutta). In this discourse, the Buddha compares the qualities of the great ocean with those of the Dhamma-Vinaya. Just as the ocean has a single taste—the taste of salt—so the Dhamma has a single taste: the taste of liberation (vimutti; vimukti).

[13] Upāya literally means "skillful means" or "appropriate means." It refers to a method or aid employed to support the development of insight and liberation.

[14] Yāna literally means "vehicle." In Buddhism, it refers to a spiritual path or mode of practice that carries the practitioner toward liberation. Historically, different yānas have been described, including what later became known as Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

[15] Yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana: literally, "knowledge and vision of things as they truly are." In the early Dhamma, this expression refers to the direct seeing of reality as it is, free from distortion by craving (taṇhā; tṛṣṇā), aversion (paṭigha; pratigha), and ignorance (avijjā; avidyā).

[16] In the past, I sometimes used the term "NOW." I have gradually moved away from it. Although the word appears frequently in contemporary spiritual literature, it does not occur as a technical term in the early Buddhist texts. Moreover, it can suggest the existence of a separate, fixed, or self-existing "present moment." The Dhamma, however, does not point to a static present, but to a continuous process of arising and passing away (anicca; anitya) unfolding moment after moment. For this reason, I prefer expressions such as "this moment," "moment by moment," or "reality as it unfolds in this very moment."

[17] Nātho means more than simply "protector." It can also be understood as "refuge," "support," "guide," or "master." The verse points to the fact that the direction of the Path must ultimately be recognized for oneself; liberation cannot be entrusted to another.

[18] Dhammapada 160: Attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā? — "Each person is their own protector; who else could be their protector?"

The Buddha is not pointing here to isolation or self-sufficiency in a worldly sense, but to the recognition that no one else can do the work of seeing, understanding, and letting go for us.

The verse points to the personal responsibility inherent in walking the path to liberation. A teacher may indicate the direction, but the seeing itself can never be delegated. Liberation unfolds only through one's own direct understanding.

[19] Aparapaccaya (aparapratyaya) literally means "not dependent upon another."

In the context of the early Dhamma, the term refers to a confidence that arises from one's own insight and direct experience rather than from reliance on the authority of others. It points to seeing for oneself—to direct seeing.

[20] This mutual reinforcement of craving, clinging, and becoming may be seen as a simplified expression of the dynamic of dependent arising (paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).

The purpose here is not to expound the doctrine in its entirety, but to make visible the recurring cycle through which dukkha (duḥkha) continually sustains itself.

[21] Here, "clear" (zuiver) means free from defilement—free from distortion, free from the stories and dramas that the mind continually projects onto experience.

[22] These four expressions point to the same underlying process, viewed from different perspectives: psychological (confusion), phenomenological (obscuration), doctrinal (avijjā; avidyā), and existential (dukkha; duḥkha).

[23] The sequence looking → looking → looking → seeing → only seeing reflects a gradual simplification of attention. What first appears as multiplicity gradually settles into a quiet clarity. In the early Buddhist tradition, this natural one-pointedness of attention is referred to as ekaggatā (ekāgratā). Such collected clarity is often regarded as a fertile ground from which insight (vipassanā; vipaśyanā) can unfold.

[24] Saṅkhāra (saṃskāra) is a rich and multifaceted term, and for that reason it cannot easily be captured by a single translation. In this context, it refers to everything shaped, assembled, or constructed by the mind: thoughts, images, interpretations, memories, and mental representations. These are not something wrong or problematic in themselves. They arise and pass away in dependence upon conditions (paccayā; pratyaya), and therefore cannot be regarded as a permanent core or as a truly existing self.

[25] Dhammavicaya (dharmavicaya) literally means "investigation of phenomena" or "investigation of the Dhamma." It refers not to mere intellectual analysis, but to a careful and discerning inquiry through which the nature of experience gradually reveals itself.

In the Buddhist tradition, dhammavicaya is regarded as one of the seven factors of awakening (bojjhaṅga; bodhyaṅga).

[26] Cf. the Bāhiya Sutta (Udāna 1.10): "In the seen, only the seen; in the heard, only the heard; in the perceived, only the perceived; in the known, only the known."

The intention of this instruction is not metaphysical but phenomenological. Experience is directly known as it presents itself, without adding an "I," a "mine," or further conceptual proliferation.

[27] The Buddha makes a clear distinction between thinking, reasoning, and speculation (vitakka, cintā) on the one hand, and direct seeing and seeing through (yathābhūta-ñāṇa-dassana) on the other.

However refined thought may become, it does not in itself bring ignorance to an end. Liberation (vimutti; vimukti) unfolds through insight (paññā; prajñā), not through intellectual refinement alone.

[28] The Buddha deliberately refrained from engaging in speculative metaphysical questions because, in his view, they do not contribute to the ending of dukkha.

Such questions may stimulate thought, but they do not in themselves lead to direct seeing or liberation.

[29] By "experiential world" I do not mean that the world exists solely within consciousness or can be reduced to a subjective construction.

The term is used here in a phenomenological sense, referring to the world insofar as it presents itself within experience and becomes known.

Moment by moment, experience unfolds as a mutually dependent process of name-and-form (nāma-rūpa; id.) and consciousness (viññāṇa; vijñāna): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking arise, are known, and pass away.

The Dhamma is not concerned with what the world may be in itself, but with how it reveals itself within direct experience.

[30] A reference to the formula etaṃ mama; eso'ham asmi; eso me attā — literally, "This is mine; this I am; this is my self." Throughout the early Dhamma, this formula is repeatedly applied to the five khandhas.

It points to the three habitual movements of identification through which appropriation, attachment, and the sense of self are continually reinforced.

[31] This formulation does not deny the conventional existence of persons. It simply points to the fact that, upon careful investigation, no permanent and independent seer, feeler, or thinker can be found standing behind these processes as their owner or controller.

[32] Uddhacca (uddhatya) is one of the Five Hindrances (pañca nīvaraṇāni; id.).

In the early Buddhist texts, it refers to a subtle inner restlessness or mental agitation that prevents the mind from coming fully to rest and settling into stillness.

[33] By "all that arises from them," I am referring to the interconnected movement of craving (taṇhā; tṛṣṇā), aversion (paṭigha; pratigha), grasping or clinging (upādāna; id.), becoming (bhava; id.), identification, and the dukkha (duḥkha) that unfolds from them.

In the early Buddhist teachings, these interdependent processes are described as dependent arising (paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).

[34] Cf. Mahāsaccaka Sutta (MN 36), where Siddhattha recalls an experience of profound stillness beneath a rose-apple tree (jambu-rukkha). This recollection leads to the insight that not extreme asceticism, but the path of inner collectedness forms the foundation for awakening.

[35] Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 26

[36] The well-known accounts of the nocturnal departure from the palace, the sleeping court, the farewell to Yasodharā and Rāhula, the horse Kaṇṭhaka, and other symbolic elements derive primarily from later Buddhist biographies, such as the Nidānakathā, Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita, and the Lalitavistara.

In the earliest texts of the Pāli Canon, the Great Departure is described far more soberly. The principal canonical source is the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta (MN 26), in which the Buddha explains his renunciation of the household life in terms of insight into birth, ageing, sickness, and death, and through the search for the Unconditioned (asaṅkhata; asaṃskṛta).

[37] The jhānas (dhyānas) are deep meditative absorptions characterized by an increasing quieting of the mind and a progressive refinement of attention and awareness. Within the early Buddhist tradition, they are regarded as powerful means for concentration (samādhi; id.) and mental purification. Although they provide important support for the development of insight (paññā; prajñā), they are not equated with liberation (vimutti; vimukti) in the earliest suttas.

For a detailed discussion of the jhānas and their relationship to insight, see: Dubois, Guy Eugène (2025), The Stillness of the Jhāna's—The Seeing That Liberates.

[38] Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 26

[39] Mahāsaccaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 36

[40] Sammā samādhi (samyak samādhi) means "right concentration" or "right collectedness of mind" and refers in the early Buddhist texts to a clear, stable, and balanced stilling of the mind. Within the context of the Noble Eightfold Path, it is traditionally associated with the four rūpa-jhānas. It is not an end in itself, but supports the arising of liberating insight (paññā; prajñā).

[41] The three knowledges (tisso vijjā; tisro vidyāḥ) are described in the Canon as: the recollection of former existences (pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa; pūrvanivāsānusmṛti-jñāna); the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings in accordance with their actions (cutūpapāta-ñāṇa; cyutyupapāda-jñāna); and the knowledge of the destruction of the mental defilements (āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa; āsravakṣaya-jñāna). Although the first two insights are important, the emphasis in the early Buddhist tradition ultimately rests upon the third, since it is there that the root of ignorance (avijjā; avidyā) is fully seen through and brought to an end.

[42] Dhammapada (Dhp. 153 - 154)

[43] Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 26

[44] Freely rendered, this means: this Dhamma is profound, difficult to see, and difficult to understand (gambhīro duddaso duranubodho). It is peaceful and sublime (santo paṇīto), beyond the reach of mere logical reasoning (atakkāvacaro), subtle, and to be personally seen through only by the wise (nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo).

[45] Yoniso manasikāra (yoniśo manaskāra) is often translated as wise attention, careful attention, or wise reflection.

It refers to a quality of attention that penetrates to the underlying causes and conditions of experience, rather than remaining on the surface of appearances.

[46] Dhammacakkappavattana literally means "setting the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion." In Indian culture, the wheel symbolizes sovereign authority (as reflected, for example, in the wheel on the Indian national flag) as well as an unstoppable movement.

In the Buddhist context, it refers to the Buddha's first public proclamation of the Dhamma, through which his teaching began to move through the world for the first time.

[47] Ayaṃ eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo literally means "This indeed is the Noble Eightfold Path."

In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Middle Way is not presented as something distinct from the Noble Eightfold Path, but is directly identified with it.

[48] Sammā is traditionally translated as "right," "correct," or "perfect." In this book, I generally follow the conventional English rendering "right" in the translation of the Noble Eightfold Path, since it has become well established in Buddhist literature.

At the same time, the Pāli term conveys more than mere correctness. It also points to a quality of inner purity and alignment with liberation, which is why, throughout the commentary, it should be understood as referring to what is free from distortion and conducive to awakening.

[49] Kicca (kṛtya) means "task," "duty," or "what is to be done." In the early Buddhist tradition, the Four Noble Truths are understood not merely as truths to be intellectually comprehended, but as existential tasks that are to be directly investigated, seen through, and fulfilled within one's own experience.

[50] Pariññeyya (parijñeya) literally means "to be fully known" or "to be completely understood." It refers not merely to intellectual understanding, but to a direct and complete seeing through of the nature of dukkha.

[51] Pahātabba (prahātavya) means "to be abandoned," "to be let go," or "to be relinquished." The origin of dukkha is not brought to an end through analysis alone, but through the gradual relinquishment of craving, clinging, and appropriation.

[52] Sacchikātabba (sākṣātkartavya) literally means "to be directly known," "to be personally experienced," or "to be directly realised."

It does not refer to producing or creating Nibbāna (nirvāṇa), but to directly recognising the cessation of dukkha when its underlying causes have fallen away.

[53] Bhāvetabba (bhāvayitavya) literally means "to be developed," "to be cultivated," or "to be brought to maturity." The Noble Eightfold Path is not presented as a collection of prescriptions, but as the gradual cultivation of the conditions in which clear seeing and liberating insight can unfold.

[54] Although the Four Noble Truths are presented individually, they form a single, coherent dynamic in the early Buddhist texts. Rather than describing four separate realities, they present different perspectives on the same conditioned process: the arising and the cessation of dukkha.

[55] Sacca-ñāṇa (satya-jñāna) is the insight by which a Noble Truth is directly recognised as true. In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, it refers to the direct seeing of dukkha, its origin, its cessation, and the Path leading to its cessation.

[56] Kicca-ñāṇa (kṛtya-jñāna) is the insight into the task associated with each Noble Truth. Dukkha is to be fully understood (pariññeyya), the origin of dukkha is to be abandoned (pahātabba), the cessation of dukkha is to be directly known (sacchikātabba), and the Path is to be cultivated (bhāvetabba).

[57] Kata-ñāṇa (kṛta-jñāna) is the insight that the task has been completely fulfilled. Dukkha has been fully understood, the origin of dukkha has been abandoned, the cessation of dukkha has been directly known, and the Path has been fully cultivated.

[58] The Dhamma is neither hidden nor exclusive. It does not depend on belief but is immediately verifiable in direct experience.

[59] Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16

[60] Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 10

[61] *Bāhiya Sutta, Udāna 1.10*

[62] *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 16*

[63] *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta—literally, "Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion"*

[64] *Seeing and knowing: insight and wisdom. Janāmi passāmi literally means, "I know and I see." It may also be rendered as "I understand and I observe." The expression is frequently used in the context of the arising of insight, indicating both a profound understanding and a direct experiential seeing of reality as it truly is. It thus refers to the inseparable union of knowledge and direct observation—the seeing of the true nature of phenomena.*

[65] *Sacca means truth. It does not refer to an esoteric or dogmatic truth, but to that which is true—that which accords with reality as it is. It denotes a universal principle or natural law that is equally valid in the past, the present, and the future.*

[66] *This threefold structure is often summarised in the later Buddhist tradition as pariyatti (paryāpti), the understanding of the teaching; paṭipatti (pratipatti), its practice; and paṭivedha (prativedha), the direct penetration of truth through insight.*

[67] *In the ancient traditions of Indian philosophy and jurisprudence, a systematic presentation that set out all possible combinations of a number of related elements was sometimes referred to as a "wheel" (cakka). In this sense, Dhammacakka ("Wheel of Dhamma") may also be understood as referring to the twelve aspects arising from the four Noble Truths and their three turnings.*

At the same time, the expression carries its more familiar and powerful symbolic meaning: the Wheel of Dhamma set in motion by the Buddha—a Wheel of Truth that, once set in motion, can never again be stopped.

[68] Although Buddhism places the teachings of anattā (anātman; not-self) and suññatā (śūnyatā; emptiness) at its centre, the Buddhist traditions also contain numerous accounts of gods (devas) and other celestial beings inhabiting various realms within saṃsāra.

These beings are not regarded as eternal, but as conditioned forms of existence subject to the same impermanence (anicca; anitya), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha; duḥkha), and eventual passing away as human beings. In the Pāli Canon, for example, the god Sakka consults the Buddha on questions of conduct and wisdom, illustrating that even the ruler of the gods remains subject to the limitations of saṃsāra.

The Brahmajāla Sutta likewise presents Brahmā, the creator deity of certain Indian traditions, not as an eternal creator but as a being who is himself conditioned by dependent arising (paṭicca-samuppāda; pratītya-samutpāda).

In this respect, Buddhism differs fundamentally from theistic traditions in which a creator god is understood to be eternal and transcendent. Although later Buddhist traditions have at times interpreted devas symbolically or as contemplative archetypes, the early texts primarily present them as impermanent beings within saṃsāra rather than as ultimate realities.

[69] The repetition is intentional and follows the traditional Pāli text. It expresses the Buddha's joyful recognition that Koṇḍañña has become the first disciple to penetrate the Dhamma. From this moment onward, he is known in the Pāli Canon as Aññā Koṇḍañña ("Koṇḍañña Who Has Understood").

[70] Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta—literally, "The Discourse on the Characteristic of Not-Self"

This is not a conventional book about Buddhism. Nor is it an invitation to adopt a philosophy, defend a tradition, or embrace a new set of beliefs. It is a return to a much simpler question: What did the Buddha actually discover beneath the Bodhi tree that brought his search to an end?

Again and again, the early Dhamma points in the same direction—not toward belief, but toward investigation; not toward concepts, but toward direct experience. It invites us to investigate carefully, to look attentively, to see clearly, and finally to see through the movements of craving, clinging, identification, and becoming that give rise to dukkha.

Awakening is presented here not as something mysterious to be attained, but as the gradual falling away of what obscures direct seeing. As confusion gives way to clarity, and grasping comes to rest, the possibility of liberation quietly reveals itself.

Nothing in these pages asks to be accepted on authority or to be taken on faith. They ask only for the willingness to investigate honestly, to look carefully, to see directly, and to discover for yourself what becomes visible when you are willing to look.

Nothing more is asked than the willingness to look honestly at experience as it unfolds, moment after moment.

This book is simply an invitation to look.

Dhamma books