

# **THE MIND WITHOUT FOOTHOLD**

## THE END OF BECOMING



**Guy Eugène DUBOIS**



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Dhamma  
books

• *Spiritual wisdom is a gift to be shared with insight and compassion and not exploited for vulgar personal gain. When wisdom is commercialized—‘marketed’—it loses its purity and degenerates into a commodity, giving profound insights a valuation, which undermines their transformative power.* •

(Guy E. Dubois)

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D/2026/Guy Eugène Dubois, Publisher  
Zomerlaan 8/101 - 2580 Beerzel, Belgium  
gdubois.dhammadbooks@gmail.com  
<https://yatha-bhuta.com>

Lay-out, Prepress, Design & Cover: GD  
Typesetting in Helvetica Neue  
Paper: Wood-free white FSC  
Printing: Brave New Books, Rotterdam, Holland  
ISBN: 9789465467092 | NUR-Code: 718

• *Investigate phenomena so deeply that every need for a permanent essence falls away.* •

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## INTRODUCTION

The human mind is seldom truly still. Even when the body is at rest, the mind continues to move: thinking, desiring, remembering, planning, comparing, hoping, rejecting, fearing, grasping, and clinging.

Upon closer observation, this continuous movement appears almost unbroken, as if the mind were constantly trying to reaffirm, protect, or complete itself from one moment to the next.

Within early Buddhism, this movement is not regarded as a personal failing or a moral deficiency, but as a process of conditioning.

The mind becomes continually entangled in craving, aversion, attachment, identification, and ignorance, giving rise to an unceasing stream of *becoming* (*bhava*; *id.*).

Not only in the sense of rebirth from one life to another, but also psychologically: whenever the mind fixes itself upon experience, a new form of ‘I,’ ‘me,’ or ‘mine’ is born.

From this perspective, the meaning of meditation undergoes a fundamental shift.

Meditation is no longer merely a technique for becoming calmer, nor a method for attaining extraordinary states of consciousness. It becomes a direct investigation into the nature of experience itself.

A quiet and attentive observation of how craving and aversion arise, how attachment takes shape, how identification appears, and how suffering continually conditions itself anew.

For this reason, this book does not proceed from metaphysical speculation, but from direct experience.

The central question is not, “*What is ultimate reality?*” but rather: “*How does inner unrest arise?*” “*How does attachment arise?*” “*How does psychological becoming arise?*” And “*Can this process also come to rest?*”

Within the early Dhamma, liberation does not lie in acquiring a new identity, attaining a higher spiritual status, or gaining a metaphysical insight through which an eternal essence is discovered.

Rather, the emphasis is on the gradual fading away of that which continually fuels suffering: craving (*taṇhā*; *trṣṇā*), aversion (*vyāpāda*; *id.*), attachment (*upādāna*; *id.*), identification (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra*; *id.*), and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

This contemplative path unfolds gradually.

At first, the practitioner learns to recognize the coarse movements of the mind: craving, aversion, sloth, restlessness, and doubt.

Within Buddhism, these movements are known as the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *pañca nivāraṇāḥ*). These obstacles obscure the clarity of the mind and sustain the process of psychological becoming (*bhava*; *id.*).<sup>1</sup>

As these hindrances gradually subside, space emerges for deeper concentration and inner stability.

Within the early Dhamma, the *jhānas* (*dhyānas*) are described as states of stillness, concentration, and refinement of the mind.

Yet even these states of stillness are not an ultimate goal. The *jhānas* are neither metaphysical realities nor spiritual accomplishments that can be possessed.

Rather, they provide a refined and lucid foundation from which insight becomes possible.

From this stillness, *vipassanā* can unfold: direct insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

The practitioner begins not merely to understand, but to see directly that all conditioned phenomena arise dependently through causes and conditions, are in constant flux, and contain no enduring core. Through this insight, the grip of attachment and identification gradually weakens.

What was once experienced as a fixed identity is revealed, upon closer examination, to be a dynamic process of conditioning.

Thoughts arise and pass away. Emotions arise and pass away. Even moments of consciousness arise dependent upon conditions.

Ultimately, no independent and enduring essence is found that possesses or controls the whole.

Within early Buddhism, liberation therefore does not necessarily refer to the discovery of an absolute metaphysical reality behind phenomena, but rather to the extinguishing of the grasping through which the mind continually reconditions itself.

From this perspective, the concept of *the Unborn* (*ajāta*; *id.*) also acquires a special significance.

The Unborn does not refer to a hidden eternal substance or a cosmic Self, but to that which becomes apparent when craving, aversion, attachment, identity, and ignorance come to rest. Nothing new is acquired. Rather, something fades away.

Personally, I do not doubt that there is the Unborn (*ajāta*; *id.*), the Unbecome (*abhūta*; *id.*), the Unmade (*akata*; *id.*), the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*), and *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*). Otherwise, there could be no escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.

At the same time, I feel no need to turn the Unborn into a new metaphysical theory. For the search for an ultimate explanation, an ultimate certainty, or an absolute ground of security is itself still part of the very movement that the Dhamma seeks to investigate.

For me, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned, and *nibbāna* are not "nothingness." Yet neither need they be understood as a metaphysical substance, a cosmic Consciousness, or a hidden essence behind phenomena. It is sufficient for me that they point to the possibility of

escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.

I seek in them no new certainty, no ultimate refuge, and no absolute object upon which thought can once again establish itself. What interests me is not how the Unborn is to be understood precisely, but how dukkha comes into being and how dukkha can come to cessation.

Therefore, I do not regard the Unborn as an object of knowledge that must be comprehended, but as that which becomes apparent when the conditioning through which the mind continually creates, appropriates, and clings to objects comes completely to rest.

For me, the significance of the Dhamma therefore lies not in defining the Unborn, but in bringing dukkha to an end. The Unborn does not need to be defined in order to be liberating.

The contemplative inquiry presented in this book unfolds gradually in two movements.

First, it investigates how the mind continually becomes entangled in craving, aversion, metaphysical grasping, identification, and psychological *becoming*.

Then the focus shifts to the contemplative practice itself: the direct recognition of hindrances, the quieting of the mind, the direct seeing of experience, and the gradual fading away of that which continually seeks to become once again.

This entire contemplative path may be simply summarized as the gradual quieting of everything to which the mind continually tries to cling.

And where that grasping comes completely to an end, becoming itself comes to rest. There, the Unborn unfolds. The Unconditioned. *Nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*): the extinguishing of all that still seeks to be born.

Guy  
Beerzel, July 2026

## PART I — THE CONTEMPLATIVE ANALYSIS

The chapters that follow explore how the mind continually conditions itself through craving, attachment, identification, and psychological *becoming*.

In doing so, the focus shifts away from metaphysical speculation about an ultimate reality and toward the direct contemplative investigation of experience itself.

For only when it becomes clear how bondage arises can the possibility of liberation gradually begin to reveal itself.





## CHAPTER I — THE UNBORN

In my previous book, *The Unborn*,<sup>2</sup> I examined in depth what this term may signify within the context of the early Dhamma.

That investigation returns here, not as a repetition, but as a necessary foundation for what will be further unfolded in this book.

For as long as the Unborn is understood as a metaphysical principle hidden beyond the world, as an enduring essence present within all phenomena, or as an absolute ground of consciousness into which individual existence ultimately dissolves, the meaning of liberation within early Buddhism inevitably remains obscured.

Within the early Dhamma, however, the Unborn is not presented as a first cause, an eternal substance, or a transcendent reality concealed behind impermanent phenomena.

Nor does it refer to a hidden self, a fixed core, or an unchanging identity that must be discovered or realized. It is not described as a universal or absolute consciousness in which all duality ultimately dissolves.

When such notions are projected onto the Unborn, it easily gives rise to the impression that liberation consists in returning to a metaphysical origin or merging with an ultimate reality. Yet it is precisely these speculative views that the Buddha consistently sets aside in the early texts.

The Unborn, within the early Dhamma, does not refer to something that can be possessed through thought, identification, or metaphysical affirmation.

It is indicated only as that which is not subject to arising and passing away, precisely because it is there that the conditioning which gives rise to *dukkha* comes completely to an end.

Only when the Unborn is freed from metaphysical projections does it become possible to see that *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) does not refer to a hidden absolute reality, but to the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identity,<sup>3</sup> and ignorance.

The central issue is not the discovery of an eternal essence, but the falling away of every form of grasping at what is regarded as ‘self’ or ‘reality.’

Within the early Dhamma, the *Unborn* (*ajāta*; *id.*)—together with such terms as the *Unbecome* (*abhūta*; *id.*), the *Unmade* (*akata*; *id.*), and the *Unconditioned* (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*)—does not point to an eternal Self or a transcendent substance behind phenomena, but to the cessation of arising, becoming, and conditioning.

It is precisely because of this that, according to the *Udāna*, liberation from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned becomes possible.

This passage has given rise to diverse interpretations for centuries. That fire has not yet been extinguished.

Some recognize in it a language that seems to resonate with *Advaita Vedānta* or non-dual mysticism.

Words such as *the Unborn* and *the Unconditioned* can easily create the impression of an absolute reality existing behind or beyond the impermanent world.

From an early Buddhist perspective, however, such an interpretation calls for great caution.

Nowhere does the Buddha describe the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*) as an eternal metaphysical essence, a cosmic Consciousness, or an absolute ground in which phenomena find their ultimate foundation.

The emphasis is not on affirming a transcendent reality, but on the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identity, and ignorance, through which liberation from *dukkha* becomes possible.

Within this context, the Unborn therefore does not refer to a hidden reality behind experience, but to the possibility of liberation from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.

In my book *The Unborn*, I examined this text in considerable detail. I quote it here in full because it forms the foundation of my understanding. I present the passage in both Pāli and English in order to limit discussion as much as possible.

This passage from the *Udāna* (8.3) <sup>4</sup> may be read as a forensic dismantling of language: a meticulous freeing of these words from what they are not.

At the same time, it is an approach to silence, in which meaning is not added but carefully stripped away, layer by layer.

The passage reads as follows:

**Pāli**

• *Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam. No ce taṃ, bhikkhave, abhaviṣṣa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, na yidaṃ jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha.*

*Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatas-sa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyatī. •*

**English Translation**

• *There is, monks, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned. If there were not this Unborn, this Unbecome, this Unmade, this Unconditioned, no escape could be discerned here from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned.*

*But because there is the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned, an escape can be discerned from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned. •*

These words belong to the most profound and, at the same time, the most misunderstood passages of the early Dhamma.

This text introduces no metaphysical system. It does not attempt to define an absolute reality. It does not describe a hidden dimension behind the world.

On the contrary, it gradually strips away everything to which thought habitually tries to cling. Here, the terms function less as affirmations than as instruments of dismantling. Step by step, they dissolve whatever the mind seeks to grasp once again.

What then opens is not a doctrine, but an opening. Not an opening into metaphysical certainty and security, but into liberation from bondage. Liberation from *saṃsāra*.

For this reason, the passage seems less concerned with formulating a theory of ultimate reality than with revealing that complete liberation from conditioning is possible.

The text does not speak of an eternal essence that must be discovered, but of *nissaraṇaṃ*—an escape, a liberation from the conditioned domain of craving, attachment, identity, and ignorance.

It is not concerned with abstract metaphysics or union with an ultimate reality, but solely with the structures that sustain suffering.

This is precisely why the language of the *Udāna* remains so careful. The Buddha does not say what the Unborn *is*. He describes it exclusively through negations:

*unborn,  
unbecome,  
unmade,  
unconditioned.*

This negative formulation does not appear accidental. It is deliberate. For the moment the mind attempts to establish something definitively, the tendency toward conceptualization, identification, and metaphysical appropriation inevitably arises.

Through its negative formulation, this passage seems almost to protect itself against that movement.

This is precisely why it remains relevant today, for the human mind continues almost instinctively to search for an enduring core behind impermanence—a final ground upon which it may rest and find certainty.

It is precisely for this reason that there arises a tendency to interpret the Unborn as an absolute reality or a subtle form of eternity.

Yet it is exactly here that the focus of early Buddhism shifts in another direction.

The decisive question is not: *“What is the ultimate reality behind everything?”* but rather: *“What gives rise to dukkha, and how can that bondage be extinguished?”*

Early Buddhism does not begin with a metaphysical affirmation, but with the direct investigation of experience itself: arising and passing away, appearing and disappearing, craving and attachment, identification and letting go.

From this perspective, the Unborn does not refer to a metaphysical possession that must be realized, but to the extinguishing of that very movement of the mind which continually seeks to grasp a self, a core, or an enduring ground.

Therefore, the liberating power of this passage does not lie in speculation about the Absolute, but in revealing the possibility of complete liberation from conditioning.

And therein lies its most radical meaning.

What I personally feel more and more strongly is that the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, and the Unconditioned do not refer to a metaphysical reality that must be discovered, but to what becomes apparent when craving, aversion, attachment, identification, and ignorance have completely faded away.

Not because something suddenly appears that was previously hidden, but because the movement of grasping itself comes to rest.

Perhaps that is precisely where the difficulty of language lies. The moment we give it a name, attribute qualities to it, or attempt to describe it as a kind of “nature,” “ground,” or “dimension,” the tendency easily arises once again to turn it into a subtle object.

And it is precisely in this respect that the early Dhamma remains, in my view, remarkably restrained.

If the Buddha had truly intended to teach that the Unborn is an Absolute Reality, a metaphysical essence, or an ultimate ground of existence, he could have stated so much more explicitly. Here. In this very passage.

Yet what the texts primarily emphasize is not what the Unborn *is*, but that escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned is possible. Escape. Release.

For me, *nissaraṇa* (*niḥsaraṇa*) is the key word in this passage from the *Udāna*. Everything added beyond that is interpretation.

That liberation can only be understood when one carefully investigates how conditioning continually recreates itself within experience. For this reason, the focus of the early Dhamma shifts away from metaphysical speculation and toward the direct investigation of arising and passing away, attachment and letting go, identification and cessation.

What follows, therefore, should not be understood as an abstract philosophical system constructed step by step, but as a contemplative inquiry into the way bondage arises and how it may come to complete cessation.

The only conclusion I myself dare to draw is this: I do not doubt that there is an Unborn. But I leave open how it should be described precisely. For whatever is said about it risks once again becoming an object of thought and identification. For me, the value of the Dhamma lies not in defining the Unborn, but in bringing dukkha to an end.

The various themes that will be explored—the five aggregates or components from which the sense of self is constructed (*khandha*; *skandha*); dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*); identification (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra*; *id.*); craving (*taṇhā*; *trṣṇā*); impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*); letting go (*vossagga*; *vyutsarga*); *nibbāna*(*nirvāṇa*); mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*); equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*); wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*); stillness (*upasama*; *upaśama*); emptiness (*suññatā*; *sūnyatā*); and compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*)—should therefore not be read as separate doctrines that can be placed side by side and examined intellectually.

They are different gateways into the same living Dhamma.

At times they overlap. At times they flow into one another. And at times they reveal the same movement from a different perspective: how conditioning arises, renews itself, and ultimately comes to rest.

For it is precisely through the direct investigation of experience that it becomes clear how the human mind continually recreates itself around craving, attachment, identification, and becoming.

There it becomes apparent that suffering does not arise from a metaphysical deficiency, but from grasping at what is impermanent, changing, and incapable of providing lasting satisfaction.

For this reason, the early Dhamma does not begin with speculation about an ultimate reality behind

phenomena, but with the careful observation of the phenomena themselves.

Not in order to discover a hidden essence, but to see clearly how conditioning arises, continually renews itself, and may ultimately come to a standstill.

The themes that follow should therefore not be read merely as theoretical analyses, but as different gateways into the same living Dhamma.

At times they overlap. At times they flow into one another. And at times they reveal the same truth from a different angle.

Therein lies their coherence. For together they reveal not only how *saṃsāra* perpetuates itself, but also how liberation becomes possible when the grasping after identity, certainty, and becoming fades away.

## The Five Aggregates

The five *khandhas* (*khandha*; *skandha*) do not constitute an abstract philosophical model of the human being within early Buddhism. Rather, they are a direct invitation to carefully investigate what is ordinarily experienced as a “self,” an identity, or an enduring person.

When the Buddha speaks of the five *khandhas*, he is not referring to a hidden essence behind experience, but precisely to the total structure of experience itself as it unfolds from moment to moment.

Everything that is ordinarily regarded as “I,” “me,” or “mine” is revealed, through this investigation, to be

continually constructed out of impermanent processes that arise dependent upon conditions (*paccayā; pratyaya*) and disappear just as quickly.

The five *khandhas* consist of material form (*rūpa; id.*), feeling or sensation (*vedanā; id.*), perception (*saññā; saṃjñā*), mental formations (*saṅkhārā; saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa; vijñāna*).

Yet these should not be understood as separate substances or fixed components from which a person is composed. Rather, they refer to continuously changing processes that together give rise to the illusion of continuity, identity, and an enduring self.

For this reason, the early Dhamma is not concerned with the question of who or what one essentially is—or ought to be—but with the careful observation of how these processes continually arise, change, and pass away.

For it is precisely within this direct seeing that it becomes apparent that no *khandha* is permanent, controllable, or ultimately satisfactory.<sup>5</sup>

This is precisely why the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* occupies such a pivotal place within the early Dhamma. It is the Buddha's second discourse at Sarnath, delivered five days after he set the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion with the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.

In this second discourse, the Buddha examines each of the five *khandhas* individually and demonstrates

that none of them is permanent, fully controllable, or capable of providing lasting satisfaction.

Whatever is impermanent and subject to change cannot reasonably be regarded as a self or an enduring essence.

The insight into *anattā* (*anattā*; *anātman*) therefore appears here not as an abstract philosophical denial of existence, but as the direct penetration of identification itself.

Not because nothing exists, but because everything regarded as “I,” “me,” or “mine” continually arises, persists, and passes away, dependent upon a multitude of conditions.

Material form changes without interruption.  
Feelings arise and disappear without enduring stability.

Perceptions continually change.  
Mental formations are influenced by memory, conditioning, craving, and fear.  
Even consciousness, within the early Dhamma, is not presented as an eternal ground of being, but as a dependent process arising solely in relation to conditions.

For this reason, the five *khandhas* do not describe a hidden essence. Rather, they reveal the unstable structure of everything to which the human mind attempts to cling.

It is precisely because these processes are constantly changing that *dukkha* arises whenever they are regarded as a self—as “I,” “me,” or “mine.”

Within such contemplative investigation, the emphasis gradually shifts from identification to insight.

Not by destroying or denying the *khandhas*, but by seeing clearly that they contain no enduring foundation upon which a self can be established.

And it is precisely there that the first opening toward liberation appears.

## Dependent Origination

Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*) is among the most fundamental and, at the same time, most subtle insights of the Dhamma.

Yet this teaching does not refer to an abstract philosophical system that attempts to explain the origin of the universe. Rather, it points toward direct insight into the way suffering arises, continually renews itself, and may ultimately come to an end.

Within this perspective, nothing appears as wholly independent, permanent, or self-existing. Everything that is experienced arises dependent upon conditions, remains only as long as those conditions are operative, and disappears when they fall apart.

For this reason, the focus of the Dhamma shifts away from the search for a genesis—a first origin or

enduring ground of existence—and toward the careful investigation of conditioning itself.

Within this dynamic, *dukkha* does not arise suddenly or randomly. It unfolds dependent upon conditions. From ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*) arise conditioning formations (*saṅkhārā*; *saṃskāra*). From conditioning formations arises consciousness (*viññāṇa*; *vijñāna*). From consciousness unfolds the entire experience of body, mind, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, and becoming. In this way, *saṃsāra* continually renews itself, moment after moment.

Dependent Origination therefore does not refer merely to a linear mechanism extending across multiple lives. It points equally to an immediately observable process that continually repeats itself within every experience.

Moment by moment, contact (*phassa*; *sparśa*) arises. From contact comes feeling (*vedanā*; *id.*). From feeling arises craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*). From craving comes grasping (*upādāna*; *id.*). And within that grasping, the sense of an “I” that desires, fears, possesses, rejects, or seeks to become is continually recreated.

For this reason, ignorance within the Dhamma is not simply a lack of information or intellectual understanding. It refers much more deeply to the fundamental failure to see the impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and selfless (*anattā*; *anātman*) nature of all conditioned phenomena.

Because this conditional movement is not seen clearly, the mind continues to cling to what is constantly changing and ultimately disintegrates.

Craving therefore does not arise by accident.

It appears wherever feeling is not clearly understood. A pleasant experience gives rise to the desire for continuation. An unpleasant experience gives rise to resistance and aversion. A neutral experience easily leads to latent ignorance and unconscious identification.

Thus the mind continues to move endlessly between grasping and rejecting, hope and fear, becoming and loss.

Within this process, nowhere does there appear an enduring essence directing the movement. What is ordinarily experienced as identity arises within this continuous stream of conditioning.

The experience of a self therefore does not appear as an unchanging core behind phenomena, but as an ongoing process of identification with body, feeling, memory, craving, consciousness, and mental constructions.

Thoughts, emotions, memories, preferences, aversions, cravings, and consciousness do not arise as expressions of an immutable essence, but as dependent processes that mutually influence one another.

For this reason, the liberating power of Dependent Origination does not lie in the intellectual

understanding of a doctrine, but in the direct penetration of this conditional movement as it unfolds within every experience.

For once it becomes clearly visible how craving, grasping, and becoming continually sustain one another, the possibility arises for this chain gradually to come to rest.

Therefore, within the Dhamma, liberation does not mean discovering or recognizing an absolute reality behind *saṃsāra*, but the fading away of the conditioning through which *saṃsāra* continually renews itself from moment to moment.

For precisely this reason, Dependent Origination is not a closed philosophical system, but a living contemplative key to understanding both *saṃsāra* and the possibility of liberation from it.

## Identification

Identification (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra; id.*)<sup>6</sup> does not arise within the Dhamma as the consequence of a truly existing and unchanging self. Rather, it is an ongoing process through which experience is continually appropriated as “I,” “me,” or “mine.”

As the mind becomes attached to what appears, the impression gradually arises of an enduring identity that thinks, feels, desires, acts, and possesses.<sup>7</sup>

This process usually unfolds with great subtlety. A thought arises, and almost immediately the feeling appears: “*I am thinking.*” An emotion arises, and

nearly automatically the conviction follows: *“This is what I feel.”*

Even bodily experience, memory, craving, or consciousness are generally not perceived simply as impermanent processes. They are immediately incorporated into a structure of identification and appropriation. Of holding on. Of possession.

For this reason, the Dhamma investigates not only the content of experience, but above all the movement through which experience is continually turned into a self.

For identification does not arise after experience appears; it unfolds almost simultaneously with the appearing itself.

The moment pleasant experience arises, craving for its continuation appears. The moment unpleasant experience arises, resistance or aversion appears. And precisely within this movement of grasping and rejecting, the sense of a center that experiences, desires, fears, or seeks to become is continually recreated.

Within this process, identity does not arise as a fixed essence, but as a conditioned activity of the mind.

What is ordinarily experienced as personality or self is revealed, through contemplative investigation, to be continually constructed from memory, conditioning, craving, comparison, expectation, and attachment.

Because these processes repeat themselves without interruption, the impression of continuity and an enduring “I” gradually emerges.

For this reason, *anattā* (*anattā*; *anātman*) appears within the Dhamma not as an abstract metaphysical denial of existence, but as the direct insight that no phenomenon can ultimately be regarded as a self.

Not because experience does not exist, but because everything that appears is impermanent, dependently arisen, and constantly changing.

Contemplative investigation therefore does not concern itself with destroying a self, as though some truly existing entity had to be removed.

What gradually becomes apparent is that identification itself arises dependently and can therefore also fade away.

As experience is seen clearly, without immediate appropriation, craving, or resistance, the apparent solidity of the “I” slowly begins to lose its grip.

This does not mean that the conventional functioning of a person comes to an end.

Thinking continues.  
Speaking continues.  
Acting continues.  
Remembering continues.

But the continual psychological movement that instantly converts everything into “I,” “me,” and “mine” gradually loses its unquestioned credibility.

Therein, within the Dhamma, a fundamentally different way of experiencing begins to open.

Not by replacing a metaphysical self with another absolute reality, but because the grasping after identity itself gradually comes to rest.

## Craving

Craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*) does not appear within the Dhamma as a superficial need or a chance emotional impulse. It points much more deeply to the fundamental movement of the mind that continually longs for continuation, satisfaction, security, possession, becoming—or even non-becoming.

For this reason, craving is one of the most powerful forces behind the continual renewal of *saṃsāra*.

Within experience, craving usually appears in extremely subtle ways.

A pleasant feeling arises, and almost immediately there emerges the tendency to hold onto it, prolong it, or recreate it.

An unpleasant feeling arises, and the mind spontaneously moves toward resistance, aversion, rejection, and escape.

A neutral experience rarely remains truly neutral, because the mind is continually seeking stimulation, confirmation, security, or something to hold onto.

For this reason, craving within the Dhamma does not refer exclusively to sensual pleasure or material desire.

The desire to become someone,  
to preserve a particular identity,  
to find certainty,  
to attain spiritual completion,  
or to secure oneself permanently also belongs to this same conditioned movement of grasping and becoming.

Craving is therefore not sustained because objects are inherently desirable, but because the mind seeks lasting satisfaction in impermanent phenomena.

Since everything conditioned is constantly changing, craving endlessly renews itself. What appears satisfying today proves tomorrow once again uncertain, impermanent, or unsatisfactory.

Thus the mind continues to move between hope and disappointment, expectation and loss.

Within this process, craving never appears independently of identification.

The moment experience is regarded as “I,” “me,” or “mine,” the need almost immediately arises to protect, confirm, expand, or secure that construction.

Thus craving and identification continually reinforce one another.

For this reason, contemplative insight is not directed toward the violent suppression of craving, as though

liberation could be achieved through a struggle against experience itself.

Rather, what gradually becomes apparent is the fundamental instability of everything to which craving attempts to cling. Through the direct seeing of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*), craving slowly loses its self-evident credibility.

Within the Dhamma, letting go therefore does not mean that experience is destroyed, but that the continual psychological grasping after experience gradually fades away.

Not because the world is rejected, but because it becomes clearly apparent that no conditioned phenomenon can ultimately provide a lasting ground of security, identity, or completion.

As a result, a fundamental shift occurs within experience itself. The mind no longer needs to move endlessly between craving and resistance, between pursuit and avoidance, between becoming and loss.

And it is precisely within that stilling that the possibility of liberation begins to reveal itself.

## Impermanence

Impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*) is not regarded within the Dhamma merely as a philosophical principle or an abstract characteristic of reality. First and foremost, it refers to something that must be directly investigated, seen, and existentially lived through within immediate experience itself.

As long as impermanence is understood only intellectually (*pariyatti; paryāpti*), identification continues largely undisturbed in renewing itself.

One may theoretically acknowledge that everything changes, while the mind simultaneously continues to cling to the body, feelings, beliefs, relationships, memories, desires, and identities as though they could somehow provide lasting security.

For this reason, contemplative inquiry is not concerned with formulating a doctrine of change, but with the direct practice (*paṭipatti; pratipatti*) of observing arising and passing away as it unfolds from moment to moment. Feelings arise and disappear. Thoughts emerge and dissolve again. Bodily sensations continually change.

Emotions shift. Craving arises, remains briefly, and passes away once more. Even the sense of a lasting “I,” when carefully observed, proves to be not a stable core but a constantly changing stream of mental and physical processes.

Within this direct seeing, there gradually arises a direct penetration (*paṭivedha; prativedha*) that nothing to which the mind attempts to anchor itself possesses genuine permanence.

What is pleasant changes.  
What is unpleasant changes.  
What is cherished changes.

Even what one regards as “my life,” “my history,” or “my identity” is revealed to be subject to becoming, change, and dissolution.

For this reason, impermanence does not appear within the Dhamma as a pessimistic view of existence, but as a liberating insight. For as long as the mind seeks permanence within what is fundamentally impermanent, *dukkha* continues to renew itself.

Not because change is problematic, but because the mind remains attached to what cannot provide a lasting ground.

Within the clear seeing of impermanence, the process of letting go also begins to arise spontaneously. Not as a moral obligation or a forced withdrawal from the world, but because the mind gradually begins to understand that clinging to the impermanent inevitably gives rise to tension, fear, and unsatisfactoriness.

Within this contemplative insight, the experience of possession, control, and absolute certainty slowly loses its self-evident character. The mind no longer needs to struggle constantly against change or cling to becoming.

What appears may appear. What disappears may disappear.

And precisely therein a profound form of inner peace begins to open—not founded upon the discovery of an enduring essence behind the impermanent world, but upon the fading away of the desire to find definitive certainty within the impermanent itself.

## Letting Go

Letting go (*vossagga; vyutsarga*)<sup>8</sup> does not appear within the Dhamma as a forced attempt to withdraw from life, nor as a moral obligation to suppress feelings, relationships, or experiences.

Genuine letting go arises only when it becomes clearly apparent that the continual grasping after everything that is impermanent inevitably gives rise to tension, fear, and *dukkha*.

As long as the mind still believes that lasting security can be found within what is subject to change, grasping will continue to renew itself.

One attempts to hold onto experiences, protect identities, preserve memories—photographs, films, journals—fulfil desires, or secure future forms of completion. As a result, the mind continues to move between hope and disappointment, craving and loss.

Letting go does not occur through willpower alone. It arises gradually through insight.

When impermanence (*anicca; anitya*) is directly seen, attachment slowly loses its self-evident credibility. Not because the world is rejected, but because the mind begins to understand that no conditioned phenomenon can provide a lasting ground of security, identity, or completion.

Within this process, it also becomes clear that grasping continually feeds itself.

The more tightly the mind clings to craving, aversion, or identification, the more tension arises.

What one tries to preserve changes.

What one tries to avoid reappears.

What one attempts to secure as “I” proves to be dependent upon changing conditions.

For this reason, letting go within the Dhamma does not mean that experience comes to an end, but that the psychological appropriation of experience gradually fades away.

Feelings continue to arise.

Thoughts continue to appear.

Bodily processes continue to unfold.

But the mind no longer needs to convert these phenomena into possessions, identity, or self-protection.

As a result, a fundamental inner shift gradually takes place. Experience no longer needs to be continually controlled or fixed in place.

What appears may appear.

What disappears may disappear.

The mind slowly loses its tendency to become entrenched within impermanence and becoming.

Within this stilling, there arises neither passivity nor indifference, but rather a profound openness and clarity.

Because the mind remains less trapped in grasping and resistance, space opens for mindfulness (*sati*;

*smṛti*), equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*), and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).

For this very reason, letting go within the Dhamma is not a withdrawal from life, but the fading away of the conditioned movement through which *dukkha* continually renews itself.

The emphasis is not upon the disappearance of experience, but upon the falling away of the attachment through which experience is continually turned into “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

## Nibbāna

*Nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) does not refer within the Dhamma to a hidden absolute reality, an eternal ground of consciousness, or a metaphysical essence concealed behind the impermanent world.

Nor does it refer to a state in which a presumed self merges with an ultimate reality.

The early Buddhist teaching carefully avoids such projections.

This is why the term *nibbāna* is rarely defined within the Pāli Canon as a “something” that can be thought about, experienced, or appropriated. Instead, it is indicated through terms that point to the cessation of conditioning: the Unborn (*ajāta*; *id.*), the Unbecome (*abhūta*; *id.*), the Unmade (*akata*; *id.*), and the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*).

In this way, the doctrinal language avoids creating a new metaphysical reality to which the mind might once again become attached.

For precisely this reason, *nibbāna* does not appear within the Dhamma as an object of craving or as a spiritual identity to be attained. The moment the mind attempts to turn *nibbāna* into a possession, a destination, or a metaphysical certainty, the movement of grasping, becoming, and identification that gives rise to *dukkha* immediately reappears.

Through contemplative insight, it gradually becomes apparent that liberation does not arise through adding something new to experience, but through the fading away of the conditioning by which craving, identification, and becoming continually reinvent themselves.<sup>9</sup>

What fades away is not reality itself, but the ignorant grasping through which the mind continually attempts to anchor itself in the impermanent—in *samsāra*, the endlessly recurring cycle of bondage and rebirth.

Because it is precisely the movement of identification and becoming that fades away within this process, the impression easily arises that liberation must amount to annihilation or nihilism.

Yet nowhere does the Dhamma present *nibbāna* as a state in which “nothing” remains.

At the same time, the Dhamma refuses to turn liberation into a metaphysical substance. Its language remains deliberately restrained, because

every positive description risks giving rise once again to conceptualization and appropriation.

For this reason, *nibbāna* is approached within the Canon primarily through stillness, emptiness, and cessation: the extinguishing of craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), the ending of grasping (*upādāna*; *id.*), the coming to rest of becoming (*bhava*; *id.*), and the cessation of *dukkha* (*dukkha-nirodha*; *id.*).

In this way, liberation is prevented from becoming yet another hidden essence. What takes place is simply the cessation of the process through which the mind continually turns experience into “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

Within this stilling, a fundamentally different way of experiencing begins to emerge.

The mind no longer needs to seek security within the impermanent. The desire to confirm, protect, or complete itself progressively loses its self-evident compelling force.

It is precisely because of this that a freedom arises which is not dependent upon possession, becoming, or metaphysical certainty.

For this reason, *nibbāna* within the Dhamma does not refer to the discovery of a hidden reality behind *samsāra*, but to the complete fading away of the conditioning through which the entire cycle of becoming and rebirth continually renews itself from moment to moment.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) does not refer within the Dhamma merely to concentration, intellectual reflection, or a technique for temporarily calming the mind.

Rather, it refers to a clear, non-grasping presence in which experience can be seen directly as it appears —without becoming entangled in craving, aversion, or identification.

Ordinarily, the mind moves almost continuously between memory, expectation, desire, fear, judgment, and self-protection. As a result, experience is rarely perceived as it presents itself.

Almost immediately, there arises the tendency to hold on, reject, interpret, compare, or place experience within a structure of “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

This is precisely why mindfulness occupies such a fundamental place within the Dhamma. And why it is the first factor of awakening.

Not because mindfulness is in itself liberating, but because without clear mindfulness (*sati-sampajañña*; *smṛti-samprajanya*) <sup>10</sup> it is hardly possible to see how conditioning continually renews itself from moment to moment.

Only when experience is truly seen as it is (*yathābhūta-nāṇadassana*; *yathābhūta-jñānadarśana*) can craving, grasping, identity, and ignorance progressively begin to reveal themselves.

Within contemplative practice, mindfulness does not mean that experience must be controlled or manipulated.

Quite the contrary.

Within *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*), mindfulness opens a space in which phenomena may arise and pass away without being appropriated.

Feelings are felt.

Thoughts are seen.

Emotions arise and dissolve once again.

Bodily sensations continually change.

But the mind need not automatically identify with these processes.

As a result, a fundamental shift gradually occurs in the way experience itself is lived.

Where the mind was once almost immediately carried away by craving, aversion, or self-protection, a form of clear seeing now begins to emerge in which all phenomena present themselves as impermanent and dependently arisen processes.

For this reason, mindfulness within the Dhamma is never merely passive observation.

Clear mindfulness possesses a quiet clarity that carries stability, openness, and insight. It sees how experience arises, how identification takes shape, how craving appears, and how attachment continually renews itself. And precisely because this process becomes visible, its seemingly unquestionable power gradually begins to diminish.

Within this direct seeing, a profound inner peace (*upasama*; *upaśama*) begins to arise. <sup>11</sup>

The Dhamma is not referring here merely to emotional calm or temporary relaxation, but to the gradual stilling of the continual psychological movement of craving, aversion, identification, and becoming. The mind no longer needs to affirm, protect, or define itself endlessly within every experience.

Clear mindfulness therefore does not create an escape from the world, but a lucid presence in which experience no longer has to lead automatically to *dukkha*.

For this reason, mindfulness is not an auxiliary technique within the Dhamma, but one of the essential conditions through which wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) and liberation can unfold.

## Equanimity

Equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*) does not refer within the Dhamma to emotional indifference, detachment, or a cold withdrawal from life.

Genuine equanimity arises when the mind gradually becomes liberated from the continual movement of craving, aversion, and identification that ordinarily governs every experience.

Ordinarily, experience is almost immediately divided into what one wishes to retain and what one wishes to avoid.

Pleasant experiences are held onto.  
Unpleasant experiences give rise to aversion.  
Neutral experiences are scarcely noticed.

As a result, the mind remains in constant motion between hope and fear, attraction and aversion, expectation and disappointment.

For this reason, equanimity within the Dhamma does not arise through the suppression of feelings, but through the gradual stilling of this reactive movement.

Feelings continue to arise. Joy, sorrow, physical discomfort, memories, and emotions continue to present themselves. But the mind no longer needs to convert these experiences immediately into grasping, aversion, or self-protection.

Contemplative insight reveals that all experiences arise dependent upon conditions and, for the same reason, pass away again.

What is pleasant changes.  
What is painful changes.  
What one attempts to hold onto changes.

It is precisely through this direct insight that the mind gradually loses its compulsive need to control or manipulate the flow of experience.

As a result, a profound form of inner stability emerges. Not because the world becomes predictable or permanent, but because the mind becomes less dependent upon the continual attempt to find security within the impermanent. Equanimity

therefore appears not as passivity, but as an open and lucid presence no longer governed by attraction and aversion.

For this reason, *upekkhā* within the Dhamma is closely connected with mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*).

When mindfulness becomes free from grasping and aversion, a clear equanimity arises in which phenomena can be seen without immediate psychological reaction.

It is precisely through the deepening of *sati* and *upekkhā* together that the still clarity within which *vipassanā* can unfold begins to emerge.

In this sense, within the seven factors of awakening, the first factor—mindfulness—and the last factor—equanimity—meet in a mature form of insightful presence.

The more clearly impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) are seen, the more difficult it becomes to continue regarding experiences as stable and fixed.

As a result, there gradually emerges a mind that is less reactive, less defensive, and less trapped in becoming.

Within this stilling, a profound form of freedom begins to open. The mind no longer needs to move endlessly between pursuit and avoidance.

What appears may appear.

What disappears may disappear.

A space emerges in which experience no longer has to culminate automatically in attachment or aversion.

For this reason, equanimity within the Dhamma is not a form of emotional numbness, but an expression of inner maturity.

Not because one withdraws from life, but because the mind becomes progressively less imprisoned by the desire to draw experience toward itself or push it away.

## Wisdom

Wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*) does not refer within the Dhamma to the accumulation of knowledge, intellectual acuity, or mastery of doctrine.

Genuine wisdom arises only when experience is directly penetrated as it unfolds from moment to moment: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without an enduring core.

As long as insight remains confined to conceptual understanding, the mind continues to behave as though permanence, security, and identity could truly be found within conditioned existence.

One may therefore acquire profound knowledge of the Buddha's teaching while craving, grasping, identification, and ignorance continue inwardly to renew themselves undisturbed.

For this reason, wisdom does not appear within the Dhamma as an abstract philosophical system, but as a transformative insight that gradually weakens the seemingly unquestionable grip of ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*). What was once experienced as absolutely real, enduring, or personal—“I,” “me,” “mine”—gradually begins to become transparent.

Within this process, wisdom does not unfold apart from direct experience itself. It unfolds through the attentive observation of body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, but also through the observation of craving, attachment, and becoming.

Through the clear seeing of arising and passing away, it becomes apparent that everything that appears depends upon conditions and therefore cannot provide a lasting ground of identity or enduring security.

For this reason, wisdom possesses a liberating character within the Dhamma.

It adds nothing to experience. Rather, it penetrates the mechanisms through which *dukkha* continually renews itself.

The mind begins to see how craving arises, how identification takes shape, how aversion gives rise to tension, and how the search for certainty repeatedly leads to unsatisfactoriness.

Wisdom therefore does not appear as a personal attainment through which an “I” perfects itself spiritually. The moment wisdom is turned into an

identity or a possession, the movement of becoming and attachment immediately reappears.

Genuine wisdom works analytically. It gradually undermines the self-evident way in which the mind anchors itself in “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

Within this deepening, a fundamentally different relationship to experience begins to emerge. The mind no longer needs to manipulate reality continually in order to secure itself.

What appears is seen as impermanent.  
What disappears is no longer regarded as lost.  
As a result, an inner liberation begins to unfold that is not dependent upon control, possession, or confirmation.

For this reason, wisdom within the Dhamma is not the end of an intellectual search, but the gradual fading away of the ignorance through which the cycle of *saṃsāra* continually renews itself from moment to moment.

## Stillness

Stillness does not refer within the Dhamma merely to the absence of sound, speech, or outward activity.

True stillness arises only when the mind becomes free from the continual inner movement of craving, aversion, identification, and conceptual proliferation (*papañca*; *id.*).

Ordinarily, the mind remains ceaselessly occupied with thoughts, interpretations, memories, expectations, judgments, and self-constructions.

Nearly every experience is absorbed into a web of meaning-making through which the mind continually confirms what it desires, fears, rejects, or seeks to become. As a result, there is rarely a truly open space in which experience can appear as it is.

For this reason, stillness possesses a far deeper meaning within the Dhamma than mere external silence. One may be outwardly silent while inwardly the mind continues to move between craving, comparison, planning, regret, and self-protection.

True stillness refers to the gradual fading away of this compulsive movement of mental appropriation.

Within every contemplative practice, it gradually becomes apparent how closely thinking remains intertwined with identification. A thought arises, and almost immediately a network of associations, emotions, memories, and self-confirmation follows.

From a single desire, an entire world of expectation and tension emerges. From a single aversion, an ongoing inner struggle against experience takes shape.

For this reason, stillness within the Dhamma does not appear as a state that must be forcibly attained. Rather, it is something that arises naturally when the mind becomes less entangled in grasping and proliferation.

Thoughts may still arise, but they gradually lose their compelling force. Emotions may still appear, but they no longer need to be immediately fed or reinforced. Put differently, a space begins to open between experience and appropriation.

Within this stilling, mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) becomes clearer and equanimity (*upekkhā*; *upekṣā*) deeper. Because the mind refers less continually to itself, an open space emerges in which phenomena are seen as impermanent processes arising and passing away in dependence upon conditions.

For this reason, stillness is not regarded within the Dhamma as an escape from the world, but as the fading away of the inner conditioning through which the mind continually imprisons itself within craving, identification, and becoming. It is not experience itself that must disappear, but the incessant psychological movement that continually turns experience into “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

Within this stillness, a different quality of experiencing gradually begins to unfold—not one founded upon control, confirmation, or metaphysical certainty, but upon a deeper inner freedom in which the mind no longer needs to grasp after becoming and self-confirmation.

## Emptiness

Emptiness (*suññatā*; *śūnyatā*) does not refer within the Dhamma to a metaphysical nothingness, an absolute emptiness beyond the world, or a denial of experience itself.

Rather, emptiness refers to the direct insight that all conditioned phenomena are empty of a permanent essence, an independent self, an unchanging soul, or a fixed core upon which ultimate certainty can be established.

Ordinarily, the mind experiences the world as though phenomena possess a stable identity. One speaks of “my body,” “my thoughts,” “my feelings,” “my life,” and “my history” as though behind them there existed an enduring center that possesses, controls, or experiences everything. As a result, there continually arises the tendency to appropriate experience psychologically and to fix it within a structure of “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

Through contemplative insight, it becomes apparent that everything that appears arises dependently (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*) and therefore possesses no autonomous or enduring essence.

Feelings arise dependent upon contact.  
Thoughts arise dependent upon conditioning.  
Craving arises dependent upon feeling.  
Identity arises dependent upon memory, appropriation, and mental construction.  
Nowhere does there appear an absolute, independent self existing apart from this conditional stream.

For this reason, emptiness within the Dhamma does not refer to the absence of phenomena, but to the absence of stability—and therefore independent existence—within the phenomena themselves.

Experience continues to appear. Body, feeling, perception, consciousness, and thought continue to unfold. But they are no longer seen as fixed substances upon which an enduring identity can be established.

Because of this, the insight into emptiness possesses a liberating power. For as long as the mind continues to believe that lasting security, identity, or completion can be realized within what is fundamentally dependent and impermanent, grasping will continue to renew itself.

Yet once it becomes apparent that no phenomenon can truly be possessed as “self” or “mine,” the seemingly unquestionable grip of identification gradually begins to weaken.

Within the Dhamma, emptiness does not mean that nothing exists. Nor does emptiness refer to a hidden ultimate reality in which all distinctions finally dissolve.

The Dhamma remains extremely cautious in its description of *suññatā*, because every attempt to define emptiness metaphysically may give rise to a new form of conceptualization and appropriation.

What truly matters within the Dhamma is to make the following clearly visible:

What appears need no longer become a possession.  
What disappears need no longer be a loss.  
The mind no longer needs continually to confirm itself within becoming and impermanence.

Then a deeper form of inner freedom begins to open. Not because a new absolute truth appears, but because the grasping after essence, identity, and metaphysical certainty comes to rest.

## Compassion

Compassion (*karuṇā*; *id.*) does not arise within the Dhamma from pity, moral superiority, or the desire to confirm oneself as a good or spiritual person.

Rather, compassion unfolds naturally when the illusion of separateness begins to weaken and the mechanisms that sustain suffering are seen more clearly.

Ordinarily, the mind is preoccupied primarily with its own desires, fears, expectations, disappointments, and forms of self-protection.

As long as experience is continually organized around “I,” “me,” and “mine,” the suffering of others easily remains secondary to one's own concerns.

Yet through contemplative insight, it gradually becomes apparent that the same processes of craving, attachment, identification, and becoming that operate within oneself also operate within others:

The same longing for security.

The same fear of loss.

The same tendency to cling to what is impermanent.

The same search for completion within what can never provide lasting satisfaction.

As this becomes increasingly clear, compassion ceases to be merely an ethical ideal. It becomes a natural response to the shared condition of conditioned existence.

For this reason, compassion within the Dhamma does not arise from sentimentality, but from wisdom.

The clearer the insight into impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*), the more difficult it becomes to maintain rigid boundaries between oneself and others.

Not because individuality disappears, but because the tendency to regard oneself as fundamentally separate gradually loses its foundation.

Compassion therefore does not stand in opposition to wisdom. The two deepen together. Wisdom sees the conditioned nature of existence. Compassion responds to the suffering that arises within it.

Without wisdom, compassion can easily become entangled in attachment, identification, or emotional exhaustion.

Without compassion, wisdom risks becoming detached, abstract, or incomplete.

Within the Dhamma, the two therefore function as complementary expressions of the same liberating insight.

As grasping gradually fades away, the heart becomes less occupied with defending and affirming itself.

A natural openness begins to emerge. Not because one is obliged to care, but because the barriers created by self-centeredness slowly begin to dissolve.

For this reason, compassion within the Dhamma is not a moral commandment, but a natural flowering of insight. It arises when the mind no longer needs continually to place itself at the center of experience.

And where that self-centered movement comes to rest, compassion unfolds naturally—free from possession, free from becoming, and free from the need to turn itself into an identity.

### **A Personal Reflection**

Perhaps it is precisely here that the greatest difficulty contained within this passage resides. Not so much in understanding the words themselves, but in the tendency of the mind to turn these very words into yet another foothold.

For however subtle the formulations of the early Dhamma may be, the human mind continues spontaneously to search for something upon which it can finally rest.

A final certainty.

A hidden ground.

Something that remains enduring in the face of impermanence, loss, and disappearance.

Perhaps this explains why terms such as the Unborn, the Unconditioned, or *nibbāna* are so often—and time and again—interpreted metaphysically.

And yet, the power of this passage from the *Udāna* lies elsewhere. Not in offering a new form of absolute certainty, but in making visible the movement through which the mind continually anchors itself in craving, aversion, identification, and becoming.

As though the Dhamma were not attempting to describe an ultimate reality, but rather to make the continual movement of grasping clearly visible. The more deeply this is investigated, the more difficult it becomes to regard anything as definitively stable and fixed. Not because nothing exists, but because whatever appears can no longer be found to stand on its own.

As a result, a different relationship to experience begins to emerge—less grounded in possession, certainty, and self-confirmation, and more in openness, mindfulness, and letting go.

What the early Dhamma calls “liberation” therefore seems to refer not so much to the acquisition of something new, but to the fading away of the movement of “I,” “me,” and “mine” that continually reasserts itself within becoming, moment after moment.

Perhaps this is why the passage ultimately becomes so quiet. Because the words are not attempting to establish a new metaphysical truth, but are gently pointing toward the possibility that the grasping after “I,” “me,” and “mine” may come to rest. It is precisely therein that its deepest liberating power resides.



## CHAPTER II — FREE FROM CONDITIONING

Following the preceding reflections, a further step presents itself almost naturally: a careful examination of the words themselves.

For however silent the Dhamma ultimately becomes, it initially reaches us through language. Through ancient Pāli terms that have been transmitted across centuries, formulated within a cultural, philosophical, and spiritual context vastly different from our own.

Precisely therein lies a difficulty.

Whoever reads these words superficially risks translating them into modern categories of thought: psychological, philosophical, metaphysical, religious, and so forth.

The language of the early Dhamma cannot simply be reduced to contemporary concepts. Many of its key terms carry a range of meanings that is richer, subtler, and often less sharply defined than modern translations might suggest.

Words such as *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*, *nibbāna*, *saṅkhāra*, *viññāṇa*, and *upādāna* do not refer to abstract theories that can be understood merely on an intellectual level.

Rather, they function as pointers to something that be-comes truly clear only through direct contemplation and insight.

The meaning of such terms therefore lies not so much in their literal translation, but above all in the

context in which they are used, the experience to which they point, and the liberating function they fulfil within the Dhamma.

For this reason, it is of great importance to approach these concepts, as far as possible, from within the Pāli texts themselves, rather than relying exclusively on modern translations or later interpretations.

Many Pāli words possess nuances of meaning that can only be partially conveyed in another language. As soon as a term is too quickly identified with modern philosophical, psychological, or metaphysical categories, its original context is easily lost.

The study and translation of these concepts therefore require particular care. Not every modern interpretation does justice to the original scope of these words.

Some translations have become overly psychological or excessively metaphysical, while others have been influenced by later philosophical systems that were retrospectively projected onto the early texts.

As a result, it can sometimes appear as though the Dhamma seeks to proclaim a dogmatic metaphysical doctrine concerning an ultimate reality or a hidden essence underlying existence, whereas the early texts themselves remain remarkably restrained, employing language primarily in the service of insight and liberation.<sup>12</sup>

The Buddha did not use language to construct a closed philosophical system. The words of the

Dhamma function, rather, as a skillful means (*upāya*; *upāyah*) that points towards insight, letting go, and liberation.

The Buddha's words are not intended to imprison the mind within new beliefs, but to free it from clinging to views, concepts, and positions.

In my view, this is also why so many passages in the early texts retain an open, almost elusive quality. Not because they are unclear, but because they seek to prevent words from once again becoming objects of attachment.

This does not mean, however, that interpretation is arbitrary. On the contrary. Precisely for that reason, an intelligent approach is required—one that takes into account the historical context of the texts, the nuances of the Pāli language, the coherence of the suttas, and, above all, the practical and contemplative orientation of the Dhamma itself.

For a proper understanding of these concepts, it is therefore not sufficient to rely upon a single isolated passage or a single possible translation. The meaning of a term often becomes truly clear only when one examines how that same term is used consistently and coherently throughout the early Pāli Canon—in other words, how it reappears in different suttas within comparable contexts, without fundamentally contradicting other passages.

It is precisely this internal coherence that constitutes an essential criterion and an important aid in critically assessing later interpretations, projections, and doctrinal elaborations.

The question, therefore, is not merely: “*What does this word literally mean?*” Equally important is the question: “*How does this term function within the path to liberation?*”

For this reason, the following chapters will carefully examine the central concepts contained within the passage from *Udāna* 8.3. Not in order to formulate definitive philosophical explanations, but to see more clearly how these words function within the context of the early Dhamma, and how their meaning can easily be lost when they are too quickly placed into fixed conceptual categories.

For sometimes a single Pāli word, when approached with care and without premature conclusions, opens an unexpected space of insight that extends far beyond anything an ordinary translation could convey.

The passage from *Udāna* 8.3 is perhaps one of the most enigmatic and, at the same time, one of the most profound statements found in the early Dhamma.

## Pāli

• *Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ. No ce taṃ, bhikkhave, abhaviṣṣa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ, na yidaṃ jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha.*

*Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkha-tassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyatī. •*

## English Translation

• *There is, monks, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned. Were there not, monks, this Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, and conditioned.*

*But because there is the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned, an escape is discerned from what is born, become, made, and conditioned.* ♫

This brief passage has given rise to widely differing interpretations throughout history.

Some have read it as a reference to an ultimate reality, while others have understood these words in a more functional and liberating sense within the context of the early Dhamma.

For precisely that reason, any analytical approach to this text requires particular care.

Not only because the Pāli terms employed are exceptionally subtle, but also because the human mind is almost naturally inclined to place a metaphysical essence behind expressions such as “the Unborn” or “the Unconditioned.”

Yet the language of the passage itself remains remarkably restrained. The words do not describe what the Unborn *is*; rather, they point primarily to what it is *not*.

In this sense, the text functions largely in an apophatic manner: <sup>13</sup> not by positively defining the

Unborn, but by indicating, step by step, what it is free from—birth, becoming, fabrication, and conditioning.

The analysis that follows therefore does not approach these terms as abstract metaphysical concepts, but as pointing expressions within the context of liberation from *dukkha*.

The central question is not merely: “*What do these words mean?*” More importantly, it is: “*How do they function within the early Dhamma?*”

Step by step, this passage dismantles every form of birth, becoming, construction, and conditioning.

Not in order to describe another reality, but to point towards that which is entirely free from conditioning.

### **Atthi — “There Is”**

The passage begins with a word that appears to say almost nothing: *atthi*—“there is.”

No explanation.

No definition.

No metaphysical system.

No account of origin, substance, or cause.

And yet it is precisely this simplicity that is significant.

The text does not say:

“It arises.”

“It is created.”

“It develops.”

Or: “It manifests itself as an ultimate reality.”

It says only: “There is.”

This simplicity is not accidental. It immediately draws the reader away from the domain of production, becoming, and speculation. Before a concept can even take shape, the text already slows the mind's tendency to grasp and define.

Within the early Dhamma, this is not insignificant. The human mind is constantly attempting to construct certainty. As soon as something is named, there arises an almost automatic tendency to turn it into an object—something that can be understood, possessed, defended, or identified with.

For precisely that reason, the formulation remains exceptionally restrained.

*Atthi* initiates no process and awakens no expectation of a method. It is not an invitation to produce or attain something. It is a simple statement of fact that immediately removes the reader or practitioner from the sphere of doing and becoming. Even before a concept appears, the text seems to bring language itself to a standstill: “There is.”

*Atthi* opens no metaphysical window. It does not affirm the existence of a metaphysical substance. It introduces no hidden reality behind phenomena. It merely states that liberation from the conditioned is possible.

No more.

Yet also no less.

This distinction is essential. For as soon as the Unborn is interpreted as a kind of eternal background of consciousness, or as an absolute ground underlying existence, the meaning of the passage almost imperceptibly shifts in a metaphysical direction.

The Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*) then becomes, once again, a subtle object of thought. It is precisely this movement that the text seems intent on avoiding.

At the same time, *atthi* safeguards a delicate boundary. It does not say that the Unborn is an object, an entity, or a thing.

Nowhere does the Buddha explain *how* the Unborn is. He does not say where it is to be found. He does not describe a transcendent realm inhabited by an eternal essence. Even the word “reality” is carefully avoided.

Instead, the text remains entirely oriented towards liberation from *dukkha*.

This becomes immediately apparent in what follows:

• *Were there not this Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, and conditioned.* •

The significance of *atthi* therefore does not lie in establishing a metaphysical reality, but in revealing the possibility of liberation from the conditioned — from *saṃsāra* (id.).

From an early Buddhist perspective, this means that the conditioned is not a closed system. The process of craving, clinging, identification, and becoming need not continue indefinitely. Bondage is not inevitable. The cycle of rebirth is not our unavoidable destiny. Liberation from the conditioned is genuinely possible.

Within this context, *atthi* acquires a liberating significance. Not because it affirms an eternal substance, but because it makes clear that conditioning is not absolute.

This does not mean, however, that the early Dhamma becomes nihilistic. The Buddha does not say: “Nothing exists.” But neither does he say: “Behind everything there is an eternal essence.”

He carefully avoids both extremes. Extremes hold little interest for him.

The early Dhamma here moves unmistakably within the Middle Way: neither eternalistic nor nihilistic.

This perhaps explains why the language of the *Udāna* remains so cautious. Any positive metaphysical formulation would once again become a source of attachment to ideas, views, and identities.

And it was precisely in such attachment that the Buddha discerned a fundamental source of *dukkha*.

The text does not seek to establish a new philosophical certainty. Rather, it seeks to make visible that complete liberation becomes possible when grasping and identification come to an end.

## Bhikkhave — “Monks”

*Bhikkhave* is the form of address used for monks.

The word places this statement not within an abstract metaphysical space, but within a concrete context of practice, listening, and receptivity.

The Buddha is not speaking here as a deity or prophet proclaiming a cosmic doctrine, nor as someone delivering a message “to the world.” Rather, he speaks as a human guide addressing practitioners who have taken the Dhamma as their way of life.

Yet *bhikkhave* does not refer exclusively to an external religious identity.

The word does not designate an exclusive group possessing something that others lack. Rather, it embodies an existential attitude: simplicity, openness, stillness, and the laying down of unnecessary burdens.

In this sense, it does not point to someone who has attained something, but to someone who is willing to listen, to investigate, and to let go.

For this reason, the entire passage assumes a practical and contemplative orientation from the very beginning. This is not about defending a philosophical system, but about the possibility of liberation from *dukkha*.

Following the simple statement *atthi* and the form of address *bhikkhave*, there appears a series of terms

that belong among the most profound concepts of the early Dhamma:

*ajātaṃ* — unborn,  
*abhūtaṃ* — unbecome,  
*akataṃ* — unmade,  
*asaṅkhaṭaṃ* — unconditioned.

These terms do not function as separate doctrines. Rather, they constitute a gradual dismantling of everything that ordinarily belongs to experience.

The text introduces no new metaphysical reality. Instead, it points towards that which is entirely free from arising, existence, dissolution, and all conditioning.

For this reason, the formulation remains consistently negative.

Not in order to sound mysterious, but because any positive description would once again invite conceptualization and identification.

For as soon as the mind settles upon something and declares, “This is it,” there arises once more the tendency to turn it into a subtle object.

It is precisely this movement that the text appears intent on avoiding.

And for that reason, the passage unfolds through a succession of negative expressions that do not so much attempt to define, as to loosen the grip of everything that arises and passes away.

What follows is therefore not a definition of the Unborn, but a gradual release from every framework through which the conditioned world is ordinarily understood.

### **Ajātaṃ — “Unborn”**

The first key term is *ajātaṃ*—unborn.<sup>14</sup>

Within the early Dhamma, “birth” (*jāti*; id.) does not refer exclusively to biological birth. The term carries a far deeper existential significance.

To be born also means to arise, to appear, to emerge, to enter into time, to become manifest. It points to the continual arising of identification, experience, condition-ing, and becoming (*bhava*; id.).

Everything that appears within the domain of *saṃsāra* (id.) is born:

thoughts,  
emotions,  
desires,  
identities,  
perceptions,  
memories,  
even the sense that “I am.”

Whatever is born appears temporarily in dependence upon conditions and disappears when those conditions change.

*Ajātaṃ*—unborn, not-born—by contrast, refers to that which has no beginning and does not appear as something that comes into existence at a particular

moment. It points to that which is not subject to the movement of arising and passing away.

Thus, *ajātaṃ* does not refer to a hidden object or a reality existing outside the world, but to that which is entirely free from birth, arising, and cessation.

It breaks through the entire pattern by which conditioned phenomena appear and disappear.

For this reason, *ajātaṃ* does not point towards something “elsewhere,” but towards liberation from the entire process of arising and passing away itself. The text does not suggest a transcendent place or a metaphysical realm.

It merely indicates that complete liberation—*nibbāna*—does not belong to the process of arising and passing away.

And therein lies the significance of this word.

For as long as liberation is still understood as something that must be produced, attained, or constructed, it remains implicitly within the domain of becoming (*bhava*; id.).

*Ajātaṃ* cuts directly through that movement.

Not because practice is unimportant, but because the ending of grasping is not the same as the production of a new identity, a new experience, or a new state.

The distinction is subtle, yet essential.

The path unfolds within time. Practice unfolds within time. Understanding deepens within time.

But that towards which the word *ajātaṃ* points is not itself something that comes into being through time.

This is why the early texts remain so careful in their language.

The Unborn is not presented as the final product of a process of spiritual development. It is not described as something newly created at the culmination of practice.

Rather, the term functions as a safeguard against the deeply rooted tendency of the mind to transform liberation into yet another object of becoming.

In this way, *ajātaṃ* already begins to loosen one of the most fundamental assumptions underlying conditioned existence: the assumption that whatever is truly valuable must somehow come into existence, develop, and endure.

The Unborn points beyond that entire movement.

### **Abhūtaṃ — “Unbecome”**

*Ajātaṃ* refers to that which is unborn—to that which has never come into being. It negates arising itself.

With *abhūtaṃ*, the text takes a further step. Not only is there no birth; there is also nothing that has become, taken form, or come into existence.

*Abhūtaṃ* thus stands in contrast to *bhūtaṃ*—that which has become, arisen, or taken shape.

From a contemplative perspective, this touches upon what elsewhere in the Dhamma is described as *bhava* (id.): the ongoing process of psychological and existential becoming through which the mind continually reconstructs itself.

To become something.

To be someone.

To belong somewhere.

To affirm oneself.

To perpetuate oneself.

The human mind lives within this movement of psychological and existential becoming. Even spiritual practice can subtly become part of this dynamic:

“I want to awaken.”

“I want to become purer.”

“I want to be liberated.”

There is nothing inherently wrong in such aspirations. The text does not condemn this movement. Rather, it invites us to discern within it the subtle structure of craving and identification.

With *abhūtaṃ*, therefore, it is not development on the conventional level that is being denied. What is called into question is the notion that liberation is ultimately the result of a process of becoming.

Although the path of practice unfolds gradually, the Unborn does not refer to something that develops in

time, matures, or slowly transforms into something else. It is not subject to gradation, refinement, or psychological perfection.

In this way, *abhūtaṃ* cuts through an exceedingly subtle expectation: the expectation that liberation is the result of a spiritual construction of the self.

*Ajātaṃ* points to non-arising; *abhūtaṃ* points to non-becoming.<sup>15</sup> This gradual dismantling forms the inner logic of the passage from *Udāna* 8.3.

Step by step, the text excludes every subtle form of arising, becoming, construction, and conditioning.

In this way, the early Dhamma succeeds in avoiding two extremes.

On the one hand, nihilism—the view that liberation amounts to total annihilation. On the other, essentialism—the view that there exists a permanent metaphysical essence or absolute Self.

The restrained language of the Dhamma prevents liberation from being reduced to either of these extremes.

The Unborn is not gradually constructed as a refined spiritual identity.

It is not the culmination of the ego in a subtler form. It does not belong to the domain of psychological perfection.

The text does not undermine the necessity of practice. Rather, it shows that what is being pointed to here cannot itself become.

For this reason, the Buddha does not describe liberation—*nibbāna*—as an ultimate form of becoming, but as the extinguishing of precisely that movement which continually seeks to perpetuate itself.

It is here that the early Dhamma differs in an important respect from many metaphysical or essentialist interpretations of spirituality.

For as soon as liberation is understood as the realization of an absolute identity, an eternal essence, or an ultimate Self, a subtle form of “I-becoming” still remains.

The restraint of early Buddhism in this regard therefore seems to arise not from vagueness or uncertainty, but from a profound understanding of the mind’s tendency to turn liberation itself into an object of identification.

### **Akatam — “Unmade”**

*Akatam* stands in direct contrast to everything that is made, fabricated, constructed, or produced.<sup>16</sup>

An identity is built.

A belief is constructed.

A worldview is formed.

Even a spiritual self-image can be manufactured.

Within human existence, the sense of “I” is constantly at work. It fabricates identities, produces viewpoints, constructs security, and weaves experiences into personal narratives and dramas.

Even stillness can subtly become something “made” when the mind attempts to hold onto it, preserve it, or possess it.

Within the early Dhamma, all such processes belong to the domain of conditioning. Whatever is constructed remains dependent upon causes and conditions. And whatever has arisen in dependence upon causes and conditions already carries within itself the seed of change and dissolution.

*Akatam* cuts directly through this continual tendency of the mind to construct, define, and appropriate.

It does not point towards a supernatural substance or a metaphysical essence, but towards that which is not produced through craving, aversion, attachment, identification, or conditioning.

The Unmade is not a product of action. It is not the result of personal achievement. It is not the crown of willpower.

Whatever is made belongs to the compounded and therefore to the conditioned.

And whatever is compounded—dependent upon causes and conditions for its arising, persistence, and cessation—ultimately falls apart. It possesses no enduring stability and no self.

*Akataṃ*, by contrast, points to that which is not produced, assembled, or constructed through causes and conditions.

For precisely that reason, it does not belong to the domain of arising and passing away shared by all conditioned phenomena.

The term *akataṃ* also supports a profound humility. It renders every form of possession or appropriation impossible.

For no one can truly say:

“I have realized the Unborn.”

“I possess insight.”

“I am awakened.”

“I have attained *nibbāna*.”

The moment such appropriation arises, identification has already reappeared. And here we encounter one of the most subtle insights contained within this passage: the mind’s tendency to transform even liberation itself (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*) into a new object of possession.<sup>17</sup>

What is unmade cannot be owned.

What is unmade cannot be accumulated.

What is unmade cannot become part of a personal identity.

The very attempt to claim it already belongs to the movement from which liberation points away.

Seen in this light, *akataṃ* does not merely negate fabrication; it also undermines the deeply rooted

tendency to establish a spiritual self upon the basis of attainment.

The word functions almost as a safeguard against spiritual appropriation. It gently but decisively removes the ground beneath every claim of ownership.

For wherever ownership remains, however refined, identification remains. And wherever identification remains, the movement of becoming has not yet fully come to rest.

### **Asaṅkhataṃ — “Unconditioned”**

This is the word that both gathers everything together and, at the same time, leaves everything open: *asaṅkhataṃ*—the Unconditioned. Here the text reaches its most comprehensive formulation.

The conditioned (*saṅkhata*; *saṃskṛta*) refers to everything that arises in dependence upon causes and conditions.

It encompasses the entire domain of conditioning:

bodily processes,  
emotions,  
thoughts,  
perceptions,  
identities,  
contents of consciousness,  
and even the most refined meditative states.

Whatever arises in dependence upon conditions is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent cannot

provide lasting security. And whatever cannot provide lasting security ultimately becomes a source of *dukkha* when the mind clings to it.

*Asaṅkhatam*, by contrast, points to that which is not sustained by conditions (*paccaya*; *pratyaya*).

Not because it exists “somewhere else,” but because it is not subject to arising and passing away.

It is not a more refined or purified form of the conditioned. The text does not point towards another world or a hidden realm. Rather, it points towards complete liberation from conditioning itself.

For this reason, *asaṅkhatam* does not refer to a subtle substance underlying phenomena, but to the complete cessation of conditioning as a basis for bondage.

This distinction is of utmost importance.

For the passage does not say that behind the conditioned there lies an eternal reality concealed from view.

It merely states that liberation is possible because the chain of conditioning can be understood and brought to an end.

It is precisely here that the early Dhamma differs fundamentally from metaphysical systems that posit a permanent essence, an ultimate reality, or an absolute Self.

Within early Buddhism, the emphasis is not placed upon discovering an eternal reality hidden behind experience, but upon directly seeing Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*).

Whatever appears:

arises dependently,  
changes dependently,  
and passes away dependently.

Here the passage touches the very heart of Dependent Origination without explicitly naming it. Everything that is conditioned exists in relationship and arises only in dependence upon conditions.

*Asaṅkhatam*, therefore, does not point towards a thing outside this web of conditionality. Rather, it points towards the complete ending of bondage to it. Only the extinguishing of grasping opens the gate to liberation.

When this is deeply understood, the longing for an ultimate metaphysical certainty gradually begins to fade.

Not because an absolute reality must be philosophically disproven, but because the need for such certainty loses its self-evident persuasive power.

And herein lies the liberating movement of the early Dhamma. Not in replacing the impermanent with an eternal essence, but in seeing conditioning itself so

completely that the compulsion to cling finally comes to rest.

From this perspective, the Unconditioned is not presented as an object to be discovered, possessed, or defined. It is indicated only through the ending of that which obscures it: craving, grasping, becoming, and identification.

The language remains restrained to the very end. Not because the texts have nothing to say, but because they point beyond what concepts can securely contain.

Thus the passage concludes where it began: not with a metaphysical doctrine, but with the possibility of liberation.

The Unborn.

The Unbecome.

The Unmade.

The Unconditioned.

Not as objects of speculation, but as expressions that indicate freedom from everything that arises, becomes, is constructed, and passes away.





## CHAPTER III — THE WAY OUT

Following the dismantling of birth, becoming, construction, and conditioning, the focus of the passage gradually shifts towards a different question: no longer what the Unborn is, but what it means that liberation becomes possible.

In this way, the text takes on a distinctly existential character. For as long as the conditioned is understood as absolute and closed, bondage itself continues to appear inevitable.

The words of this passage, however, point in the opposite direction: that which arises in dependence upon conditions need not continue indefinitely.

It is precisely here that the possibility of escape (*nissaraṇa*; *niḥsaraṇa*) appears—not as a flight into an “other” world, but as liberation from the movement of grasping, identification, and becoming.

The passage does not explain this liberation in metaphysical terms. It describes no act of creation, no hidden ground of existence, and no eternal substance behind phenomena.

What it reveals is both simpler and more radical: conditioning is not absolute, and therefore liberation is possible.

**No ce taṃ ... abhaviṣṣa — “Were this ... not to be”**

Following the statement *atthi* comes a conditional turn: *No ce taṃ ... abhaviṣṣa* — “Were this ... not to be.”

The text does not open a hypothetical argument in order to prove something. Rather, it makes an existential distinction visible.

The Buddha does not explain how the Unborn is, nor why. He merely states that if this were not so, something essential would be impossible.

In this way, the Unborn is not explained, but rendered indispensable. Not as a cause, but as a condition for liberation.

It is not presented as the origin of the world, but as that by virtue of which escape from bondage becomes possible.

What is important here is what does *not* happen.

No creation story is introduced. Nor is any metaphysical necessity invoked.

The text remains entirely within the framework of liberation: that which makes the difference between being bound and being free.

### **Jātassa Bhūtassa Katassa Saṅkhatassa — “Of the Born, the Become, the Made, the Conditioned”**

This cascade of terms encompasses the entire domain of experience. Everything that appears falls within its scope.

The born, the become, the made, the conditioned are not a list of different things. Rather, they are multiple designations of one and the same reality, viewed from different perspectives:

The born — that which appears.  
The become — that which changes.  
The made — that which is constructed.  
The conditioned — that which depends upon conditions.

Together, these terms describe the field within which life unfolds as we ordinarily know it.

Not as a problem in itself, but as the domain within which wrong view (*micchā diṭṭhi*; *mithyā dṛṣṭi*) becomes possible.

The text does not condemn this. It merely names it, precisely and without pathos. Everything that arises in dependence upon conditions appears and disappears according to those same conditions.

It is as it is.





## CHAPTER IV — COMING INTO VIEW

Following the analysis of the Unborn and the Unconditioned, the focus of the passage gradually shifts towards its existential significance.

The central question is no longer what these words precisely denote, but what they make possible.

In this way, a new key concept emerges: *nissaraṇaṃ* —escape, liberation, release from bondage.

The passage does not point towards a flight from the world or a departure into another reality.

Rather, it points towards the possibility of no longer remaining trapped in craving, attachment, identification, and conditioning.

It is precisely here that the passage acquires its liberating power.

For as long as the conditioned is experienced as absolute, bondage itself appears inevitable.

The words of the *Udāna*, however, open up a different possibility: that the movement of grasping and becoming need not continue indefinitely.

From this possibility there subsequently emerges the direct seeing to which the verb *paññāyetha* refers.

Liberation is not produced or constructed. It comes into view when confusion, appropriation, and attachment fall away.

## Escape from the Conditioned

Following the successive negations—*ajātaṃ*, *abhūtaṃ*, *akataṃ*, *asaṅkhataṃ*—the text suddenly shifts towards its true centre: *nissaraṇaṃ paññāyati* —“an escape becomes visible.”

It is precisely here that it becomes clear that the *Udāna* is not a metaphysical treatise, but a text about liberation.

For the centre of gravity of the passage does not lie in describing an ultimate reality, but in the revealing of a possibility of liberation from bondage.

### Nissaraṇaṃ — “Escape”

This becomes apparent already in the word *nissaraṇaṃ* itself. It is a key term in the *Udāna*.

It is often translated as:

escape,  
a way out,  
liberation,  
release.

Yet the term requires nuance.

Within the early Dhamma, *nissaraṇaṃ* does not mean that one literally “leaves” the world, as though liberation were a flight into another reality. The Buddha does not describe an escape into a transcendent sphere beyond experience.

In this context, *nissaraṇaṃ* does not mean leaving the conditioned behind, but no longer remaining trapped within a misunderstanding. To be freed from captivity is to escape.

From what is one liberated?

Not from arising and passing away as such, but from attachment to them. Not from experience itself, but from identification with experience.

Not from the world as a phenomenon, but from the grasping through which the mind continually attempts to construct certainty within what is impermanent.

This distinction is essential.

For as soon as liberation is presented as a movement towards an absolute reality beyond the world, a subtle duality immediately arises once again:

here, the conditioned;  
there, the Absolute.

The early Dhamma proceeds with far greater caution in this regard.

The Buddha does not say that the conditioned must be destroyed. The text simply states that, without the Unconditioned, no *nissaraṇaṃ* would become visible — that is to say, no possibility of escape from bondage within the conditioned would be discerned.

For bondage arises whenever the mind clings to what is changing as though it could provide lasting security.

*Nissaraṇaṃ* therefore points less to a departure from existence than to the extinguishing of entanglement in a misunderstanding.

What is involved here is insight and clarity. Not a desire to be somewhere else, but the seeing through of confusion.

It is precisely here that the remarkable restraint of the early Dhamma becomes apparent: not in offering a new metaphysical certainty, but in making visible the possibility of becoming completely free from craving, attachment, and the search for lasting ground.

### **Paññāyetha / Paññāyatī — “Becomes Visible”**

The verb *paññāyetha* (respectively *paññāyatī*) is crucial.

It does not mean “arises,” nor “is made” or “produced,” nor “is acquired.” Rather, it means “becomes visible,” “is discerned,” or “reveals itself.”

In other words, it points to insight manifesting as *paṭivedha* (*prativedha*)—not as knowledge that is acquired, but as wisdom that unfolds when certain conditions are fulfilled.

The language of the sutta remains remarkably consistent.

Liberation nowhere appears as an object manufactured by an “I.” It becomes visible when misunderstanding, identification, and grasping begin to fall away.

Liberation is presented here not as something that is produced, but as something that is seen—something that is recognized.

Such “recognition” is not a mental or emotional feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—but a direct seeing, free from entanglement in stories and mental projections.

For this reason, the passage is closely aligned with the central movement of insight (*vipassanā*; *vipaśyanā*).

Within the early Dhamma, insight does not mean adopting a new philosophical conviction.

It refers to directly seeing the nature of experience:

impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*),  
unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*),  
not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

This seeing is not merely intellectual. One does not understand impermanence simply as an idea; one directly sees that everything which appears is continuously changing.

A thought arises and passes away.  
An emotion arises and passes away.  
A mood arises and passes away.  
Even the sense of identity is in constant flux.

When this is deeply seen, it gradually becomes evident that one has continually been seeking stability within what is intrinsically changing.

And it is precisely in this way that *dukkha* arises.

Not because change is in itself problematic, but because the mind becomes fixed in craving, aversion, and identification.

From this perspective, *paññāyatī* also acquires a deeper significance.

Liberation does not appear as a new state added to experience. It becomes visible when the structure of attachment is seen through.

Within the early Dhamma, this process is often described as:

direct seeing,  
clear knowing,  
*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇadassana*—seeing and knowing  
things as they truly are.

Not as we think, wish, or hope them to be.

### Direct Seeing

Direct seeing (*jānāti passati; jānāti paśyati*)<sup>18</sup> is the coincidence of seeing and knowing. What appears is immediately known—without the intervention of conceptualization, interpretation, belief, projection, or speculative thought.

A sensation, thought, or movement appears, and in that very appearing, knowing is already present. Not as meaning or explanation, but as simple clarity.

Within the Dhamma, this is closely related to concepts such as *paccakkha* <sup>19</sup>—directly observable, *sandittika* <sup>20</sup>—visible here and now, *ehipassiko* <sup>21</sup>—“come and see,” and *yathā-bhūta-ñāṇadassana* <sup>22</sup>—seeing and knowing things as they truly are.

Direct seeing is not a subjective experience, an emotional state, or a philosophical standpoint. It refers to what is directly experienced and immediately known before the mind identifies with it or transforms it into concepts, stories, or interpretations.

It is the unfiltered meeting of what appears, before the mind names it, appropriates it, or turns it into an “I” that experiences. What appears is simply known in the very moment of its appearance.

As a result, experience shifts from something personal to something processual. From becoming (*bhava*; id.) to insight (*paññā*; *prajñā*). From “I” to process.

What is seen is not held onto, and what is known is not appropriated. No centre is formed that places itself between experience and knowing.

Impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*) is no longer understood merely as an idea, but directly seen in the continual arising and passing away of feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and moods.

Unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*) is not explained theoretically, but immediately recognized in attachment, resistance, and the longing for permanence.

Not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) is not seen philosophically, but directly known through the inability to find any fixed core anywhere.

In direct seeing, the tendency to add something falls away. Not because adding is wrong, but because it simply becomes unnecessary. Direct seeing takes nothing away from the world. It merely removes the claim that the “I” places upon it.

What remains is a silent openness in which arising and passing away are allowed to be exactly as they are—without craving, aversion, and affirmation.

There is seeing without distance and knowing without an owner—a clarity that does not cling (*upādāna*; id.) and precisely for that reason liberates.

Direct seeing does not arise through grasping or through the desire to attain.

It appears spontaneously when nothing needs to be defended and nothing needs to be sought. Not as a special experience, but as the falling away of not-seeing.

Where the Unborn is directly seen, liberation (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*) becomes evident—not as a conditioned experience, but as the falling away of bondage.

## No Metaphysical Victory

This also explains why the Buddha remains so restrained in relation to metaphysical speculation.

The central question is not: “What ultimate reality lies behind experience?” but rather: “How does bondage arise, and what happens when it is completely seen through?”

This distinction changes everything. As soon as liberation becomes associated with the discovery of an absolute essence, the mind risks turning stillness itself into an object:

a subtle Self,  
a metaphysical ground,  
an untouched nature of consciousness.

It was precisely in this that early Buddhism discerned an exceedingly refined form of attachment.

For this reason, the *Udāna* does not describe liberation as the discovery of a hidden substance, but as the becoming visible of an escape from conditioning.

Not:

a metaphysical victory,  
not a spiritual possession,  
not an eternal identity,  
but the extinguishing of precisely that movement of the mind which continually attempts to find lasting certainty somewhere.

And it is precisely for this reason that the language of this passage remains so restrained.

It does not seek to create a new foothold.  
It seeks to make visible what happens when every  
foothold falls away completely.



## CHAPTER V — BEYOND METAPHYSICS

In the previous chapter, it became apparent how the language of early Buddhism continually balances upon an extraordinarily subtle boundary.

On the one hand, the Buddha speaks of the Unborn (*ajāta*; id.), the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*), and a liberation beyond arising and passing away. On the other hand, he refuses to describe this reality positively as an eternal Self, an absolute substance, or a metaphysical ground behind phenomena.

It is precisely here that confusion often arises.

For as soon as words such as “timeless,” “unborn,” or “free from conditioning” appear, there is an almost spontaneous tendency to read into them a hidden Absolute Reality. The human mind seems almost naturally inclined to search for a lasting core behind change.

Early Buddhism, however, follows a different path.

Its primary concern is not the affirmation of a metaphysical principle, but the direct seeing through of conditioning, attachment, and identification.

As a result, attention gradually shifts away from speculation about what reality “ultimately is” and towards a far more immediate question: How does *dukkha* arise—and how does it cease?

From this shift, the theme of the present chapter unfolds.

For the practitioner, direct seeing brings about a fundamental transformation.

Ordinarily, experience is almost immediately appropriated:

“my thought,”  
“my fear,”  
“my desire,”  
“my experience.”

Yet when experience is carefully examined, nowhere can an independent core be found that possesses or controls these processes.

Form (*rūpa*; id.) appears dependent upon conditions.

Feelings (*vedanā*; id.) arise dependent upon contact.

Perception (*saññā*; *saṃjñā*) and mental formations (*saṅkhārā*; *saṃskāra*) arise dependent upon memory, conditioning, and experience.

Even consciousness (*viññāṇa*; *viññāna*) always appears in relation to what is known.

Nowhere is a fixed essence found.

This insight is not intended as a philosophical denial of existence. Rather, it is a direct seeing through of dependence and conditioning.

It is precisely through this that identification begins to lose its self-evident character. And where identification weakens, grasping likewise diminishes.

Not because the world is destroyed, but because the mind no longer attempts to fix it in place as a source of lasting certainty.

From an early Buddhist perspective, it is precisely here that the possibility of liberation emerges.

**Yasmā ca kho ... tasmā — “Because ... Therefore”**

The final movement of this cryptic text is simple and conclusive. Because the Unborn is, therefore *nissaraṇa* becomes visible. There is no causality in time here, no hierarchy, no ladder. Only an existential relationship: this makes that possible.

In this way, the text returns to where it began. It does not close a circle; it opens one. There is no conclusion, no dogma, no exhortation. Only an indication that confirms itself through its simplicity—without detours, without conceptual exuberance.

Because these words point towards something free from arising and passing away, some practitioners perceive in them a resemblance to the language of Advaita Vedānta.

Yet it is important to distinguish clearly between what the Buddha teaches here and what is later read into these words from other philosophical frameworks.

Within early Buddhism, this passage does not refer to an eternal metaphysical Self, a cosmic Consciousness, or an absolute substance such as Brahman in Advaita.

The “Unconditioned” refers to *nibbāna*: the ending of conditioning, attachment, and suffering. The Buddha does not describe it as a hidden essence behind the world, but rather by indicating what it is not:

free from birth,  
becoming,  
creation,  
and conditioning.

When the Buddha says that there is “an escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned,” he does not mean that one returns to an eternal primordial ground or to an Absolute or Ultimate Reality behind all phenomena. He points out that liberation becomes possible only when craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance come to cessation.

The confusion arises largely because words such as “Unborn,” “timeless,” “Unconditioned” spontaneously evoke a metaphysical impression.

The human mind almost automatically seeks something enduring behind change. As a result, the idea easily arises that behind the impermanent world there must exist an eternal and Ultimate Reality.

It is precisely here that the fundamental difference between Advaita and early Buddhism becomes apparent.

It is in this respect that Advaita and early Buddhism part ways most decisively.

In Advaita, transcending the impermanent world is understood as the recognition of Brahman: the absolute and unchanging Reality with which the Self is identical.

From this perspective, words such as “Unborn” or “Unconditioned” are almost naturally read as references to an eternal, absolute, Ultimate Reality.

The Buddha, however, follows a different approach.

Nowhere does he declare that there exists an eternal essence behind phenomena. He shows that everything which arises is impermanent, that attachment to the impermanent leads to *dukkha*, and that liberation becomes possible when that attachment falls away completely.

Within early Buddhism, therefore, the “Unconditioned” is not intended as an eternal metaphysical substance or cosmic Self. Rather, it refers to the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance.

Perhaps the fundamental difference from Advaita is nowhere more clearly visible than in the original meaning of the word *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) itself.

*Nibbāna* literally means “extinguishing.” The word originally referred to the going out of a flame when its fuel has been exhausted.

Within early Buddhism, this image does not function as the destruction of an existing essence, but as the ending of that which continually fuels the fire of *dukkha*: craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), attachment (*upādāna*;

*id.*), identification and appropriation (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra*; *id.*), <sup>23</sup> and ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

It is precisely here that an important distinction emerges from interpretations that understand the Unborn as a lasting metaphysical Reality or an eternal ground of consciousness.

For early Buddhism does not describe liberation as the discovery of an absolute principle that has always been present. Rather, it describes liberation as the extinguishing of conditioning itself. The central concern is not the realization of an eternal substance, but the ending of grasping, becoming, and clinging.

One could therefore say that, within early Buddhism, *nibbāna* fundamentally points to letting go rather than to preservation.

It does not refer to the construction of a subtle metaphysical identity. Rather, it points to the extinguishing of precisely that tendency of the mind to turn everything once again into a lasting core, an essence, or a “something.”

From this perspective, the notion of the “Unborn” also acquires a different nuance. It no longer refers to an eternally existing substance behind phenomena, but to that which becomes visible when birth is no longer continually conditioned by craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance.

Expressed contemplatively: it is not a permanent essence that reveals itself, but the process of identification and self-construction that gradually comes to an end.

From this perspective, it also becomes clear why insight into *anattā* (*anātman*) occupies such a fundamental place within the early Dhamma.

As long as the mind continues to identify with form, feeling, perception, mental formations, or consciousness, it remains confined within the domain of arising and passing away.

For whatever is born must die; whatever arises passes away once again. For this reason, *anattā* and the “Unborn” (*ajāta*; *id.*) are not identical within Theravāda Buddhism, yet they are intrinsically related.<sup>24</sup>

Not because *anattā* reveals a hidden metaphysical reality, but because the profound seeing through of not-self gradually extinguishes identification with the conditioned.

Through deeply seeing all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhārā*; *saṃskāra*) as impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*), identification gradually loses its foundation.

The Unborn does not refer to a hidden metaphysical Self or an absolute ground of consciousness behind phenomena. Rather, it points to the extinguishing of that which continually conditions birth and suffering:

craving,  
attachment,  
identification,  
and ignorance.

Expressed contemplatively: where no self is any longer found in what arises, birth loses its foundation. And where birth ceases, the Unborn opens itself.

When this is truly seen, the tendency of the mind to search behind experience for a lasting essence or metaphysical ground also gradually loses its force.

Not because a particular philosophical position must be refuted, but because the desire for an ultimate foothold spontaneously begins to fade.

For the ending of *dukkha*, early Buddhism does not need to postulate an eternal metaphysical ground, an already present absolute dimension of consciousness, or a hidden essence behind experience.

According to this approach, the possibility of liberation is already contained within the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance themselves.

The same words can acquire different meanings within different philosophical frameworks. Moreover, the human mind seems almost spontaneously inclined to turn silence into a “something,” emptiness into a hidden essence, and the indescribable into an absolute principle.

From a Buddhist perspective, it is precisely here that a very subtle form of attachment becomes visible: the desire to find a lasting core behind impermanence.

For this reason, early Buddhism remains cautious about placing a subtle enduring principle of knowing either within or beyond experience.

The emphasis falls instead upon directly seeing arising and passing away, without postulating a metaphysical essence behind them.

It is for this reason that early Buddhism remains extremely cautious in its metaphysical statements.

The Buddha consistently refuses to describe *nibbāna* as a Self, an eternal soul, a cosmic Consciousness, or an absolute primordial ground. Not because *nibbāna* is unreal, but because every positive metaphysical description gives rise to identification and attachment.

According to early Buddhism, craving, hatred, confusion, and mental burden are likewise not intrinsic qualities of the mind, but conditionally arisen phenomena.

They arise dependent upon causes and conditions and can therefore also cease. It is precisely here that, according to this approach, the possibility of liberation from *dukkha* is found—without the need to postulate an eternal metaphysical ground or an untouched “nature of mind.”

One might summarize the distinction as follows: Advaita points to an absolute and unchanging Reality upon which phenomena depend, whereas early Buddhism investigates phenomena so deeply that every need for a lasting essence falls away.

This touches the heart of the distinction and calls for careful clarification.

Within early Buddhism, inquiry does not begin with the question: “*What is the ultimate reality behind everything?*” It begins with direct experience itself. Not with metaphysics, but with what presents itself here and now:

body,  
feelings,  
thoughts,  
perceptions,  
consciousness,  
craving,  
fear,  
attachment,  
arising,  
and passing away.

The Buddha therefore does not begin by asking whether an eternal essence exists somewhere. He begins by investigating experience as it actually presents itself.

And it is precisely here that the difference lies.

When one looks very carefully at experience, early Buddhism finds that three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*) continually reveal themselves in everything that appears:

impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*),  
unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*),  
not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Everything that appears changes and passes away.

A thought appears and disappears.

An emotion appears and disappears.

A memory appears and disappears.

Even the feeling “I am” continually changes in content, nuance, and intensity. When this is not merely understood superficially but deeply penetrated (*paṭivedha*; *prativedha*), <sup>25</sup> something fundamental takes place.

The mind begins to see that it has continually been searching for support, for stability, within something that is intrinsically unstable.

Ordinarily, human beings unconsciously attempt to find a core of permanence everywhere:

a lasting identity,  
an unchanging self,  
an ultimate ground,  
an absolute certainty,  
a “something” that does not change.

This search does not necessarily arise from philosophical interest. Rather, it arises from existential unease. The mind longs for security within a reality that is in constant movement.

According to early Buddhism, it is precisely this longing that constitutes a subtle form of attachment.

As long as the mind still seeks refuge in a metaphysical ground, grasping has not yet been fully

extinguished. The mind has merely established itself in another form of becoming.

From this perspective, an essential question also arises: “What, in the end, does a yogi who seeks liberation from *dukkha* gain by continuing to hold to an Ultimate Absolute Reality?”

As long as such a view leads to less attachment, less fear, and greater inner stillness, it may serve a supportive role within practice. Yet within early Buddhism, the question nevertheless remains whether attachment to a metaphysical ground does not itself become an exceedingly subtle form of *upādāna* (id.).

The liberating movement of the early Dhamma therefore does not consist in replacing the impermanent—*samsāra*—with an eternal essence. Rather, it lies in the extinguishing of the illusory necessity to find an ultimate foothold anywhere at all.

Here a fundamental question arises: “When the practitioner has fully seen through the impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) of all conditioned phenomena, is there still any need for a metaphysical ground, an absolute dimension, or a lasting essence behind experience?”

From an early Buddhist perspective, it is precisely here that a decisive shift takes place.

Not because a metaphysical reality must be categorically denied, but because the need for it

gradually dissolves through direct insight into arising and passing away.

What disappears is not necessarily a philosophical position, but rather the existential longing for an ultimate support behind the stream of experience.

Within early Buddhism, the yogi does not need to posit a definitive metaphysical ground in order to arrive at liberating insight.

Liberation from *dukkha* does not depend upon accepting a metaphysical foundation, but upon directly seeing through conditioning, attachment, and identification.

Thus, rather than denying a lasting essence as a philosophical doctrine, early Buddhism investigates experience so deeply that the need for such an essence gradually dissolves and disappears.

This is an important distinction.

Buddhism does not simply say: “There is no essence.”

For that would itself create yet another metaphysical position.

Rather, what takes place is this:

one investigates experience,  
one sees arising and passing away,  
one sees dependence,  
one sees that everything is relational, <sup>26</sup>

one sees that nowhere can a controllable and enduring core be found, and through this, the desire for such a stable support gradually falls away.

In summary, the point is this: not to adopt a dogmatic doctrine first, but to look so deeply that grasping extinguishes itself. What the Buddha is doing here is not opposing thought itself, nor reflection, but the fixation of truth within a conceptual foothold.<sup>27</sup>

For this reason, early Buddhism is fundamentally therapeutic and liberating rather than metaphysically speculative.

The decisive question shifts from: *“What is the absolute reality?”* to: *“How do suffering, attachment, and identification arise—and how can dukkha come to an end?”*

It is precisely here, according to this interpretation, that the fundamental difference lies between early Buddhism and approaches that continue to read the “Unborn” or the Unconditioned as an already existing, untouched nature of mind.

Within early Buddhism, the emphasis does not fall upon recognizing a hidden absolute dimension, but upon directly seeing through and extinguishing that which conditions *dukkha*.

And it is precisely here that it differs from Advaita. Advaita begins with a positive affirmation: Brahman, Pure Consciousness, the Absolute Reality with which the deepest Self is identical.

Early Buddhism is far more reserved.

Not necessarily because such a view must be categorically denied, but because, according to the Buddha, the mind almost automatically turns such notions into a subtle object of identification.

The distinction between the two traditions lies not so much in the depth of their inquiry, but in the direction in which that inquiry unfolds. Early Buddhism remains more consistently restrained with regard to any dogmatic or fixed metaphysical ground.

For this reason, the emphasis of early Buddhism remains upon:

direct seeing,  
letting go,  
the extinguishing of grasping,  
and liberation from *dukkha*.

Consequently, while the language of the *Udāna* may contemplatively resonate with Advaita or non-dual mysticism, the original meaning of this passage within early Buddhism does not point towards an Advaitic metaphysics.

This restraint becomes even more apparent in another well-known passage from the *Udāna* (8.1), in which the Buddha says:

• *There is, monks, a sphere where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air; neither the sphere of infinite space, nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of nothingness, nor the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; neither this world nor another world, nor both; neither sun nor moon.*

*There, monks, I say, there is no coming, no going, no remaining, no passing away, no rebirth. This sphere is not stationary, not moving, without any conditioned foundation. This, indeed, is the end of suffering. १*

Some yogis see in this passage a confirmation of an absolute dimension of consciousness or of an already existing unconditioned dimension.

Yet it remains striking that the text nowhere positively identifies a metaphysical essence. On the contrary, the passage describes it indirectly, by systematically removing what it is not.

Even the highest *arūpa-jhānas* are explicitly excluded. In this way, the text carefully avoids allowing the Unconditioned to be understood as a subtle experiential state, a cosmic Consciousness, or a metaphysical substance.

It is precisely here that the restraint of early Buddhism becomes visible.

The Buddha does indeed affirm the *asaṅkhata*—the Unconditioned—but he does not positively define it as a lasting essence, an absolute Self, or an eternal nature of mind.

The language functions instead as a dismantling of all the categories through which the mind ordinarily attempts to grasp reality.

Expressed contemplatively: it is not a hidden metaphysical ground that is revealed, but the clinging to every ground that gradually comes to an end—

*appatiṭṭhaṃ* (*apraṭiṣṭhitaṃ*), <sup>28</sup> without taking a stand anywhere at all.





## CHAPTER VI — THE FINGERS AND THE MOON

In the previous chapter, we examined how early Buddhism approaches the Unborn not as a metaphysical substance or eternal Self, but as the possibility of liberation through the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance.

Yet this inevitably raises further questions.

For when different contemplative traditions speak of liberation, emptiness, pure Consciousness, non-duality, or the Absolute, the question naturally arises whether such experiences are ultimately entirely different, or whether they share certain phenomenological points of convergence.

Within doctrinal systems, the differences often remain sharply defined. But what becomes of those differences when attachment to views itself begins to fall away?

Perhaps it is precisely here that one of the subtlest forms of spiritual foothold lies hidden: no longer in worldly identification, but in clinging to metaphysical certainty, doctrine, or spiritual identity.

According to early Buddhism, liberation arises precisely when that foothold, too, is gradually seen through and relinquished. Or, expressed differently: perhaps liberation opens itself precisely when such supposed certainties no longer need to be held onto.

Yet a further question arises.

It seems entirely possible that certain profound contemplative insights exhibit phenomenological similarities, even when they are described within different philosophical languages.

One tradition may speak of *anattā* (*anātman*), emptiness (*suññatā*; *śūnyatā*), and the extinguishing of conditioning (*nibbāna*; *nirvāṇa*), while another speaks of Brahman, pure Consciousness, or non-dual unity.

To an outsider, these may appear to be opposing conclusions. Yet the decisive question is whether such a supposed opposition retains any significance at all for an awakened practitioner.

From a doctrinal perspective, the differences remain real. Early Buddhism consistently avoids affirming a lasting essence, whereas Advaita explicitly speaks of an Ultimate Reality with which the deepest Self is identical.

This distinction touches the very heart of both traditions.

Yet this does not necessarily mean that an awakened practitioner remains attached to those differences.

The Buddha compares the Dhamma to a raft: a means of reaching the far shore, not something to be carried on one's back after awakening.

Once the far shore has been reached, the raft has fulfilled its function and may be left behind. <sup>29</sup>

In this sense, it is possible that a liberated practitioner not only lets go of the means that led to awakening, but also of attachment to the distinction itself.

Not because all doctrines suddenly become identical, but because there is no longer anything that needs to be defended.

No identity.

No philosophical correctness.

No spiritual possession.

One might compare this to the well-known metaphor of the fingers pointing to the moon. As long as one looks only at the fingers, the differences appear vitally important. One finger points this way, another that way. But once the moon is truly seen, the fingers lose their central significance.

This does not mean that the fingers were useless. Without them, one might never have looked towards the moon at all.

Spiritual teachings, methods, and doctrines can be immensely valuable means on the path to liberation. Yet once what they point towards has been seen, the finger loses its central importance in relation to that which it indicated.

Nevertheless, caution remains important.

For even the thought that “ultimately everything is the same” can become yet another subtle view to which the mind clings. For this reason, early Buddhism

often deliberately leaves an open space in which no new metaphysical certainty needs to arise.

Here the most important question of all presents itself: Does this entire discussion truly matter for the unfolding of awakening?

To a certain extent, yes—as long as it leads to greater clarity, less attachment, and deeper insight.

But as soon as the discussion degenerates into metaphysical self-preservation, doctrinal conflict, or spiritual identity, it loses its liberating value.

Then the yogi risks becoming entangled in concepts while that to which the spiritual path originally pointed disappears from view.

In this sense, one could say that the opposition becomes meaningless when it is reduced to nothing more than a conflict of viewpoints. At that point, one is looking only at the fingers pointing to the moon while forgetting the moon itself.

Yet this does not mean that such questions should be kept outside the *saṅgha*. On the contrary. A living *saṅgha* must be able to provide space for profound inquiry and contemplative questions. Otherwise, the Dhamma easily hardens into a systematic structure devoid of liv-ing reflection.

For practitioners who have developed sufficient inner maturity, such questions can become a source of deeper contemplation, greater clarity, and a more subtle understanding of attachment to views.

But precisely for that reason, such conversations also require caution and maturity. When they are conducted from identification, intellectual competition, or the desire to be spiritually right, they lose their liberating value. Then they strengthen confusion and division rather than insight and letting go.

For this reason, the essential question remains not: *“Who is metaphysically correct?”* but rather: *“Does this conversation genuinely help to reduce craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance?”*

Perhaps it is precisely here that the most fundamental criterion of early Buddhism is found.

The decisive question is ultimately not which metaphysical view one defends, but whether a particular approach genuinely diminishes craving, fear, confusion, and attachment.

Does it lead to greater clarity, inner peace, compassion, and freedom? Or does it merely create new forms of identification and spiritual foothold?

From this perspective, attention shifts away from metaphysical affirmation and towards the direct investigation of dukkha and its causes.

Liberation does not lie in the destruction of consciousness, but in seeing through attachment and identification.

And with this, an even deeper insight begins to open.

For it seems clear that human beings may arrive at awakening through different spiritual paths—not only through Buddhism, but perhaps also through Advaita Vedānta and other contemplative traditions such as those of Meister Eckhart and Rumi.

In this way, it becomes apparent that awakening is not the exclusive privilege of a single technique, method, or philosophical system.

For the Buddha, the emphasis lies not primarily upon belonging to a spiritual identity or tradition, but upon liberation from *dukkha*. In that sense, the Dhamma is not a system demanding belief, but a means that invites direct insight. Once craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance have been extinguished, every means ultimately loses its importance.

This does not mean that the path is unimportant. Without ethical refinement, practice, mindfulness, and insight, liberation remains little more than a distant wish.

Yet within early Buddhism, the value of the teaching ultimately lies not in defending a doctrine, but in its capacity to make liberation possible.

Methods, doctrines, and spiritual traditions can provide direction, refine the mind, and establish conditions conducive to insight. But they do not “possess” awakening. Their value lies not in exclusive truth claims, but in their intrinsic capacity to genuinely diminish craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance.

Awakening is not a philosophical conclusion, nor an intellectual victory. It is not the result of metaphysical reflection upon an Absolute Reality, a cosmic Consciousness, or unity with Brahman. Awakening takes place here, in this very life, in direct confrontation with the nature of experience itself.

For this reason, the liberating power of early Buddhism does not lie in speculation about the Absolute, but in directly seeing the *tilakkhaṇa*:

*anicca* (*anitya*),  
*dukkha* (*duḥkha*),  
and *anattā* (*anātman*).

Through deeply seeing these, the mind gradually loses its tendency towards craving and aversion, grasping, identification, and ignorance. This letting go constitutes the heart of liberation.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that the ultimate issue does not lie in whether one adopts a particular metaphysical position.

The decisive question is not which doctrine one defends intellectually, but whether attachment genuinely comes to an end.

For this reason, many philosophical oppositions ultimately lose their absolute weight. Not because all traditions necessarily say exactly the same thing, but because awakening does not appear to depend upon clinging to metaphysical formulations. What truly liberates is the direct seeing through which grasping ceases.

From this perspective, the Unborn within early Buddhism does not necessarily refer to an eternal background of consciousness that has always been present. Rather, it points to the possibility of complete liberation when craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance come to an end.

Finally, one important misunderstanding still remains to be clarified: Does all of this mean that early Buddhism ultimately becomes nihilistic?

According to early Buddhism itself: absolutely not. The Buddha rejected both the belief in an eternal and unchanging Self and the nihilistic notion that ultimately nothing has meaning or that everything simply ends in annihilation.

Early Buddhism follows neither eternalism nor nihilism. It walks a Middle Way.

It does not say: “There is nothing.” Rather, it shows that everything which arises is impermanent, dependent, and without a lasting essence.

What disappears is not the conventional functioning of experience, but craving, grasping, identification, ignorance, and the illusion of a fixed Self.

It is precisely here that the possibility of liberation opens itself.

In summary, one might define it quite simply:

the technique is not awakening;  
the doctrine is not awakening;  
the concept is not awakening.

The only thing that liberates is the direct insight through which craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance come to an end.

Yet one final question continues to resonate.

If, within early Buddhism, the Unconditioned does not refer to a lasting metaphysical essence, but to the extinguishing of craving, attachment, identification, and ignorance—what then becomes of that which has not yet been extinguished?

If no enduring Self passes from life to life, how can continuity be understood without once again falling into eternalism or a metaphysical substance?

The following chapter attempts to formulate an answer to this question.





## CHAPTER VII — WITHOUT IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, we explored how early Buddhism invites us to relinquish attachment to spiritual viewpoints, doctrines, and metaphysical certainties.

Yet in doing so, a new and particularly subtle question arises.

When no enduring essence, soul, or metaphysical Self is assumed, how can one speak of continuity, *kamma* (*karma*), and rebirth? What connects experience from moment to moment? And what continues when no unchanging identity can be found?

To the ordinary mind, only two possibilities seem conceivable: either something enduring survives, or everything ends in total annihilation.

Early Buddhism, however, rejects both extremes.

It presents a Middle Way in which continuity remains possible without reverting to an eternal essence.

If the Unconditioned does not refer to a lasting metaphysical essence, but rather to the extinguishing of conditioning, attachment, and suffering, what then becomes of that which has not yet been completely extinguished?

Or, expressed differently: *“if there is no enduring Self (attā; ātman) that passes from life to life, how can one speak of continuity, kamma (karma), and rebirth?”*

This question arises almost spontaneously once one begins to investigate the insight into *anattā* (*anātman*) seriously.

When body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness all prove to be impermanent (*anicca*; *anitya*), dependently arisen, and devoid of any lasting essence, a tension immediately becomes visible.

What then remains? What continues? And who experiences the consequences of karma?

Within early Buddhism, this question is approached with extraordinary caution. The Buddha refuses both to affirm the existence of an eternal and unchanging Self and to fall into the view that nothing whatsoever remains after death.

Both extremes are regarded as forms of wrong view: eternalism (*sassata-diṭṭhi*; *śāśvata-dṛṣṭi*)<sup>30</sup> on the one hand, and annihilationism (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*; *uccheda-dṛṣṭi*)<sup>31</sup> on the other.

Here the early Dhamma follows a Middle Way.

What continues, according to this approach, is not a lasting identity, soul, or metaphysical essence, but the causal dynamics of conditioning.

Within Theravāda Buddhism, rebirth does not mean that an unchanging Self migrates from one life to another. What continues is rather the causal dynamic of Dependent Origination itself.<sup>32</sup>

As long as ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*), craving (*taṇhā*; *tṛṣṇā*), attachment (*upādāna*; id.), and becoming (*bhava*; id.) remain present, the stream of conditioning continues to unfold. It is not a lasting identity that is reborn. Rather, the consequences of conditioning continue to manifest themselves for as long as their causes have not been completely extinguished.

One might therefore say: there is continuity, but there is no unchanging identity that moves through that continuity. There is no independent entity.

This distinction is exceedingly subtle.

Ordinarily, the human mind thinks in terms of fixed entities. When continuity is perceived, one spontaneously assumes that there must also be “something” that remains identical throughout the process. It is precisely this assumption that early Buddhism investigates with great depth.

A frequently used comparison is that of one flame lighting another. The second flame does not arise entirely independent of the first, yet neither is it identical to it. One cannot say that exactly the same flame has passed over. But neither can one say that there is no connection whatsoever.

There is causal continuity without an unchanging essence that migrates.

In a similar way, early Buddhism describes rebirth not as the transmigration of a soul, but as the continuation of conditional processes for as long as their causes and conditions remain present.

Within Dependent Origination, this becomes visible in the chain whereby ignorance conditions formations, formations condition consciousness, consciousness conditions name-and-form, and so forth.

As long as craving, attachment, and becoming (*bhava*; id.) remain present, birth (*jāti*; id.) continues to repeat itself.

What is important, however, is that nowhere in this process is there any assumption of a permanent core hidden behind phenomena.

It is precisely here that early Buddhism differs fundamentally from philosophies and religions that regard an eternal soul, a metaphysical Self, or an unchanging ground of consciousness as ultimately real.

At the same time, early Buddhism does not fall into nihilism.

The Buddha does not teach that “nothing exists” or that death simply signifies total annihilation. *Kamma* (*karma*) remains operative for as long as conditioning remains present. Actions, intentions, and mental patterns continue to bear consequences within the stream of Dependent Origination.

One might therefore say that early Buddhism does not see an identity that survives, but rather a continuity of conditioning.

It is precisely here that one of the most difficult insights arises for the ordinary person (*puthujjana*; *prthagjana*). For the mind spontaneously seeks a

fixed ground: something that remains identical throughout change—a “soul.”

When such a ground cannot be found, there is an almost automatic tendency to swing towards the opposite extreme and conclude that then “nothing” can have any meaning.

The Buddha avoids both extremes.

It is not an eternal Self that is reborn, yet neither does everything end in absolute discontinuity. What continues is the dynamic of causes and conditions themselves.

From a contemplative perspective, attention therefore gradually shifts away from metaphysical speculation and towards direct experience.

The essential question is no longer: *“What am I that truly continues to exist?”* but rather: *“How does attachment arise? How does identification arise? How does suffering arise from moment to moment?”*

Within the early Dhamma, rebirth is understood not only as something that occurs between lives, but also as a continuous psychological process of becoming that unfolds here and now.<sup>33</sup>

Each moment in which the mind once again identifies, grasps, craves, or rejects, a new birth is conditioned in a certain sense.

And it is precisely here that the possibility of liberation also becomes visible.

When craving, attachment, and ignorance are completely extinguished, the process of becoming loses its sustaining ground. Not because a Self is destroyed, but because the conditions for further conditioning have fallen away.

One might therefore summarize it contemplatively in the following way: It is not an identity that continues, but a stream of conditioning that continues to unfold for as long as its causes remain present.

And where those causes are completely extinguished, there becoming itself comes to rest.



## CHAPTER VIII — WITHOUT FOOTHOLD

In the previous chapter, we explored how early Buddhism speaks of continuity without presupposing a lasting identity or metaphysical Self.

But when this insight is investigated more deeply in a contemplative way, an even subtler movement of the mind gradually becomes visible.

For even when coarse forms of identification begin to fall away, the mind continues to search for a place in which it may still establish itself.

No longer in possessions, personality, or worldly certainty, but in an idea of consciousness, emptiness, stillness, presence, or a spiritual ground that appears untouched by change.

It is precisely here that the early Dhamma touches one of its most radical dimensions.

Liberation then appears not as the finding of some ultimate foothold, but as the complete extinguishing of the need to establish oneself psychologically, existentially, or metaphysically anywhere at all.

Within the early Dhamma, the notion of becoming (*bhava*; id.) does not refer exclusively to the arising of a new life within *samsāra* (id.). It also refers to a continuous process of arising and identification that unfolds moment after moment within direct experience.<sup>34</sup>

The mind is continually shaping, confirming, and perpetuating itself. It constructs an identity, seeks a

place of certainty, defends what it regards as “I,” “me,” and “mine,”<sup>35</sup> and longs for something that will endure in the face of impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Sometimes this occurs in coarse and visible ways. Sometimes it is extraordinarily refined and barely noticeable.

Whenever the desire arises to be someone, to preserve something, to become something, or to rest in something, a movement of *bhava* arises once again.

The mind has a tendency continually to give birth to itself anew.

This process is not condemned within the Dhamma. The Buddha simply describes it with precision.

What arises tends towards continuation.  
What appears seeks confirmation.  
What is impermanent longs for permanence.

It is precisely here that the dynamic of *saṃsāra* is contained. Becoming does not manifest itself only in worldly desires such as possessions, recognition, or security. Spiritual practice itself can quietly develop into a refined form of becoming. The mind then identifies with insight, stillness, consciousness, presence, or purity. Even the desire for liberation may give rise to a new identity that seeks to perpetuate itself.

For this reason, the early Dhamma remains so radically restrained with regard to every form of metaphysical foothold.<sup>36</sup>

As soon as the mind seeks rest in a lasting ground, an absolute reality, or a hidden essence, it once again establishes itself in becoming.

As long as the mind seeks refuge in a metaphysical foundation, grasping has not yet been fully extinguished. For the mind has merely established itself in another form of becoming.

This does not mean that there is anything “wrong” with spiritual experiences of openness, stillness, or unity.

Such experiences can be deeply transformative and may bring about a profound shift in the way reality is experienced.

Yet from the perspective of the early Dhamma, one extremely important question remains: Is the mind truly free when it still seeks to establish itself somewhere?

Here the Dhamma touches an especially subtle form of attachment.

No longer attachment to coarse objects, but attachment to security itself. To the longing that there must ultimately be something in which the practitioner can rest completely.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps this touches one of the deepest forms of existential fear: that no lasting ground will be found in

which one may finally disappear, rest, or continue to exist.

For this reason, the mind continually attempts to anchor itself.

In possessions.

In relationships.

In beliefs.

In memories.

In identity.

In spiritual insights.

In consciousness.

Even in emptiness.

Even interpretation itself can quietly become a form of grasping. The moment the mind seeks to fix experience in meaning, a subtle shift easily occurs from direct seeing to mental colouring.

The mind wants to understand, name, classify, and secure. As though experience becomes safe only once the mind finds a psychological foothold within it.

Yet whatever is held onto will sooner or later reveal itself to be impermanent, dependent, and unstable.

Everything that arises changes.

Everything that appears disappears again.

Everything that is conditioned is incapable of bearing lasting certainty.

For this reason, liberation within the early Dhamma does not lie in finding an absolute foundation, but in exposing the very need to search for one.

This does not mean that the world must disappear. Nor does it mean that experience comes to an end. What falls away is the compulsive desire to establish oneself psychologically, existentially, or metaphysically somewhere.

In the language of the Pāli Canon, this touches upon *appatiṭṭhaṃ* (*apraṭiṣṭhitaṃ*): a mind that no longer fixes itself anywhere, no longer seeks rest anywhere, and no longer constructs an identity anywhere.

This “without foothold” does not refer to nihilism, despair, or a denial of existence. It refers to the falling away of the need continually to transform experience into “self,” “mine,” “belonging to me,” or “that which provides me with security.”

For this reason, liberation within the early Dhamma does not appear as a new state that is acquired, but as the extinguishing of grasping.

Not as a new identity, but as the end of the need to be someone at all.

When this is seen clearly, the relationship to experience changes fundamentally.

Phenomena continue to appear.  
Thoughts continue to arise.  
Feelings continue to move.  
The world continues to unfold as before.  
But the mind no longer attempts to establish itself within it.

For this reason, *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) is not described within the Dhamma as a place, a ground of consciousness, or an eternal essence.

*Nibbāna* refers to the extinguishing of that which continually gives rise to identification, attachment, and becoming.

Not because there is “someone” who is liberated or who must become liberated. But because the continual desire to be someone comes to rest.

It is precisely here that the most radical dimension of the Dhamma is found. Not in the discovery of an ultimate reality, but in the complete extinguishing of the need to possess one.

Perhaps it is precisely this that is meant by a mind without foothold.

Most people do not experience this process directly. They feel only its continual movement: a subtle restlessness, a barely perceptible tension that continually drives the mind forward. As though something were still missing somewhere—something that must yet be found, attained, or secured.

Sometimes this manifests as a desire for possessions, recognition, or control. Sometimes as a longing for connection, continuity, or meaning. And sometimes it appears in spiritual form: as a desire for purity, awakening, ultimate truth, or absolute peace.

Though the outward forms differ, the underlying movement remains the same: the mind attempting to

give itself continuity within what is, in reality, impermanent.

It is precisely for this reason that the Dhamma is so exceptionally radical. It questions not only worldly attachment, but ultimately spiritual appropriation as well.

For even the most refined experiences can once again be absorbed into the mechanism of: “I am.”

The mind turns stillness into a possession.  
Insight into an identity.  
Openness into a subtle form of certainty.

The Buddha therefore repeatedly warns against attachment even to the most exalted meditative states.

Not because they are without value, but because they too remain within the domain of the conditioned for as long as identification persists.

The mind continually seeks to find itself somewhere.

When worldly certainties begin to fall away, the mind seeks refuge in metaphysical certainty. One then speaks of an absolute ground of consciousness, an eternal presence, a hidden essence, or an ultimate reality in which everything finally comes to rest.

Yet from the perspective of the early suttas, an extremely important question remains even here: “Who or what is it that longs for this certainty?”

For the moment the mind finds rest in a metaphysical ground, a subtle establishment occurs once again. A centre of identification reappears.

Perhaps no longer in a coarse personal form, but still present as an existential foothold.

For this reason, the Dhamma is not concerned with replacing worldly identification by spiritual identification.

It is concerned with completely exposing identification itself.

This is not an intellectual exercise. Nor is it a philosophical position that must be adopted or defended.

It is a matter of directly seeing how the mind continually constructs itself and attempts to perpetuate itself anew.

Only when this process is seen with genuine clarity does a different relationship to experience slowly begin to unfold.

Not because experience disappears.

Not because the world dissolves.

Not because consciousness ceases.

But because the movement of self-confirmation gradually comes to rest.

For this reason, liberation within the early Dhamma is not presented as the attainment of an ultimate state. It is the extinguishing of the movement that continually attempts to perpetuate itself.

In this sense, “without foothold” does not refer to loss, but to liberation.

Liberation from the need continually to confirm oneself.

Liberation from the longing to rest somewhere once and for all.

Liberation from the compulsion continually to become someone again.

Perhaps this is why complete liberation is so difficult for the human mind to imagine.

Almost everything within our ordinary functioning is built around becoming, holding on, and perpetuating itself.

Even hope can become part of this movement. The hope for awakening. The hope for continued existence. Even the hope for an ultimate spiritual homecoming.

Yet it is precisely here that the radicality of the Dhamma unfolds.

Not by adding something new to experience.  
Not by revealing a hidden reality.  
Not by offering a metaphysical certainty.

But by the complete extinguishing of the need to seek a foothold anywhere at all.





## PART II — THE CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

After this contemplative exploration of identity, attachment, Dependent Origination, and psychological "becoming," the focus now gradually shifts from analysis to direct experience.

For ultimately, the Dhamma is not confined to philosophical reflection or metaphysical inquiry.

At its core, the early Buddhist path is concerned with directly seeing how the mind continually conditions itself through craving, aversion, identification, and the ongoing search for foothold. In this way contemplation gradually acquires a more immediate and existential significance.

The central question is no longer solely how conditioning is to be understood, but above all how it manifests from moment to moment within immediate experience.

For only when this movement becomes directly visible does the possibility arise for it to gradually come to rest.

The chapters that follow therefore examine not only the structure of psychological *becoming*, but also the contemplative practice in which hindrances, stillness, direct insight, and the fading away of grasping gradually reveal themselves.

With this, the focus shifts from the investigation of bondage to the direct possibility of liberation.





## CHAPTER IX —HINDRANCES & BECOMING

Within the early Dhamma, the concept of becoming (*bhava*; *id.*) does not refer solely to the arising of a new life within *samsāra* (*id.*). It also refers to a continuous psychological process unfolding moment after moment within direct experience itself.

The mind continually shapes, confirms, and perpetuates itself. It constructs an identity, defends what it regards as "I," "me," and "mine," seeks certainty in what is uncertain, and attempts to find permanence within a reality that is constantly changing.

Sometimes this occurs in coarse and obvious ways; at other times it is extremely subtle and barely noticeable.

Whenever desire arises to hold on to something, reject something, be someone, rest in something, or protect oneself against impermanence, a movement of "becoming" arises once again.

The mind delights in continually giving birth to itself anew.

Within the early Dhamma, these movements are not condemned as personal faults or moral failings.

Rather, the Buddha describes them as processes of conditioning that obscure the clarity of the mind and cloud the direct seeing of reality.

Whenever the mind is not fully clear and present, it begins to establish itself somewhere once again:

in desire,  
in resistance,  
in dullness,  
in restlessness,  
or in doubt.

Within Buddhism, these movements are known as the Five Hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇāni*; *pañca nivāraṇāḥ*).

Not because they are "sinful," but because they function as veils of the mind. They prevent things from being seen directly as they truly are (*yathā-bhūta*), just as heavy curtains prevent light from entering a room.

Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that these hindrances are not separate from the process of psychological becoming.

On the contrary, they are a direct expression of it.

Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*; id.) seeks to establish itself in pleasant experience.

Ill will (*vyāpāda*; id.) seeks to distance itself from what is unpleasant.

Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*; *styāna-middha*) withdraw from clarity and presence.

Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*; *auddhatya-kaukr̥tya*) continually seek new projections and footholds.

Doubt (*vicikicchā*; *vicikitsā*) seeks certainty within a reality that offers no lasting ground.

The hindrances therefore constitute not merely disturbances of meditation, but ongoing movements of identification. They nourish precisely that through which the mind continues to perpetuate itself.

Some teachers describe the Five Hindrances as one of the direct breeding grounds of ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*).

As long as the mind continues to cling to desire, resistance, restlessness, or certainty, it remains imprisoned within its own conditioning.

It is important to understand that the hindrances do not appear only during formal meditation. They also form the undercurrent of everyday existence. They colour how one sees, thinks, reacts, speaks, and acts.

Desire arises whenever the mind wants something other than what is present here and now.

Aversion arises whenever experience does not conform to the expectations of the “I.”

Dullness arises whenever the clarity of presence gradually becomes obscured.

Restlessness arises whenever the mind is unable to find genuine rest.

Doubt arises whenever the mind continually seeks certainty.

From this perspective, the hindrances are not abstract Buddhist categories but profoundly concrete movements of the human mind.

The Buddha describes this mindfulness in remarkably simple terms:

when desire is present, one knows: "desire is present."

When aversion is present, one knows: "aversion is present."

When dullness is present, one knows: "dullness is present."

When restlessness is present, one knows: "restlessness is present."

When doubt is present, one knows: "doubt is present."

This simplicity is important.

The practitioner need not immediately analyse, resist, or suppress the hindrances. At first, one simply learns to recognize what is manifesting within body and mind.

It is precisely here that a fundamental shift already begins to emerge.

As long as a hindrance remains unconscious, the mind is fused with it. Only when it is clearly seen does space arise between experience and identification.

Within the Satipaṭṭhāna approach that we shall discuss later in this book, this mindfulness does not stop at merely recognizing the hindrance.

The practitioner also investigates: <sup>38</sup>

how it arises,  
how it passes away,  
which conditions sustain it,  
and how it ultimately loses its power.

In this way, meditation shifts from an attempt to attain "special" states of mind to a direct investigation of conditioning itself.

For this lies at the very heart of the early Dhamma: not the construction of a spiritual identity, but seeing through the process by which identity continually arises anew.

When one begins to observe the hindrances carefully, it gradually becomes apparent how deeply intertwined they are with the sense of a separate self.

Virtually every hindrance contains an implicit movement of self-preservation and thereby strengthens the sense of a separate "I."

Desire says: "I need something."

Aversion says: "I do not want this."

Dullness often contains a subtle withdrawal from direct presence.

Restlessness says: "I need to be somewhere else."

Doubt says: "I must first find certainty.

For this reason, the hindrances continually reinforce the sense of a separate identity attempting to maintain itself in relation to reality.

Within the Buddhist tradition, various methods have been developed for working with these hindrances.

Some approaches begin with the Five Spiritual Faculties (*indriyāṇi*; id.): faith (*saddhā*; *śraddhā*), energy (*virīya*; *vīrya*), mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi*; id.), and wisdom (*paññā*; *prajñā*).<sup>39</sup>

These faculties balance one another: faith is corrected by wisdom, energy by calm, while mindfulness oversees the whole.

This approach forms a profound contemplative compass, further elaborated in the Abhidhamma.

Yet for many practitioners, it is not always easy to apply this approach directly within immediate experience.

For that reason, there is also a more direct and practice-oriented approach. One simply investigates which hindrance is present at that moment and consciously allows an appropriate counterbalancing quality to arise, restoring harmony and clarity to the mind.

Desire does not necessarily call for suppression, but rather for simplicity, contentment, letting go, or

clearly seeing the unsatisfactory nature of grasping itself.

Aversion is often softened through *mettā* (*maitrī*), forgiveness, gentleness, or compassion (*karuṇā*; id.).

Dullness may call for energy, movement, lightness, or a more upright posture.

Restlessness often settles through stillness, broader awareness, or deeper breathing.

And doubt is not necessarily resolved through endless analysis, but by simply returning to immediate experience itself.

Whichever approach one follows, ultimately only one thing is truly important: that the mind once again finds sufficient harmony and stability for insight to become possible.

Mindfulness (*sati*; *smṛti*) functions here not as control, but rather as a quiet intelligence that begins to sense what the mind truly needs in that moment.

Sometimes the situation calls for more energy. Sometimes for gentleness. Sometimes for calm. Sometimes for clarity. Sometimes simply for adding nothing at all.

Mindfulness observes not only the hindrance, but also the antidote. For even the antidote can become a subtle form of attachment.

Too much energy becomes restlessness once again. Too much calm becomes dullness once again. Even

silence, concentration, or spiritual clarity can imperceptibly become a new identity to which the mind clings.

This is precisely why the early Dhamma remains so cautious toward every form of foothold.

The mind continually seeks somewhere to establish itself:

in possessions,  
in relationships,  
in beliefs,  
in spiritual experiences,  
in consciousness,  
in silence,  
in insight,  
or even in the desire for liberation.

Yet as long as the mind still seeks to establish itself somewhere definitively, the process of becoming remains active.

Even the wish to be a "good practitioner" can become an extremely subtle form of desire. Even the longing for liberation can give rise to a new spiritual identity seeking to perpetuate itself.

For this reason, the early Dhamma strongly emphasizes that the hindrances do not ultimately lie outside us, but originate in deeper underlying tendencies of the mind itself.

Desire, aversion, restlessness, and doubt do not arise by accident.

They are nourished by old conditioning, habitual patterns, identification, and above all by ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*): not directly seeing reality as it truly is.

The mind continually projects permanence onto what is impermanent. It seeks fulfilment in what ultimately proves unsatisfactory and constructs a fixed identity within a process that contains no enduring core.

According to the early Dhamma, this is precisely the breeding ground of the hindrances.

Desire arises because the mind believes that sensory experience can ultimately provide lasting fulfilment.

Aversion arises because it wants reality to be different from what it is.

Doubt arises because it seeks fixed certainty within a stream of continuous change.

The hindrances are therefore not merely "disturbances" of meditation. They reflect the fundamental way in which the untrained mind relates to experience.

When desire arises, one is drawn away from the present moment into projection, expectation, and gratification.

The mind continually wants something other than what is present. It longs for more, for better, for more pleasant, for safer.

For this reason, the Dhamma ultimately describes desire not merely as desire for objects, but as a movement away from the present moment itself.

The human mind rarely seems satisfied with what is simply present. As soon as a pleasant experience appears, the tendency almost immediately arises to hold on to it, intensify it, or repeat it.

And as soon as an unpleasant experience appears, resistance arises.

In this way, human beings live in continual tension between desire and aversion.

The early Dhamma points out, however, that sensual desires can never provide lasting satisfaction. They function rather as temporary impulses that immediately give rise to further desires.

Just as fire remains dependent upon fuel, desire remains dependent upon continual nourishment. <sup>40</sup>

The stronger the identification with desire, the stronger the sense of a separate "I" that needs something in order to be complete.

For this reason, the hindrances are so closely linked to ego-construction. As soon as the mind desires, there implicitly appears:

"I want,"  
"I need,"  
"I lack something,"  
"I must keep this."

The same movement appears in the opposite direction with aversion. Aversion arises whenever experience does not correspond to what the mind desires. One wants reality to be different from how it is presenting itself.

Inner tension, resistance, and contraction then arise. Aversion may manifest coarsely as anger, irritation, or hatred, but equally in extremely subtle ways:

as impatience,  
disappointment,  
frustration,  
inner resistance,  
or even spiritual discouragement.  
Sometimes aversion is directed toward meditation itself:  
toward restlessness,  
toward pain,  
toward boredom,  
toward lack of concentration,  
or toward the feeling of "not being far enough along."  
This too is yet another subtle form of becoming.

Sloth and torpor represent a different movement of conditioning. The mind gradually withdraws from clarity and presence. Attention loses its sharpness. Consciousness becomes heavy, dull, or hazy.

Sometimes this manifests physically as fatigue or sleepiness. Sometimes psychologically as apathy, lack of energy, or a loss of inner sensitivity.

Within meditation, this is one of the most difficult hindrances because the mind is often no longer sufficiently clear to notice its own obscuration fully.

For this reason, dullness is not countered in the Dhamma through aggressive willpower, but rather through the careful restoration of clarity:

more energy,  
a more upright posture,  
greater embodiment,  
walking,  
breathing,  
light,  
or a renewed interest in direct experience.

Restlessness and remorse represent the opposite movement. Whereas dullness densifies the mind, restlessness continually accelerates it. The mind jumps from thought to thought, from memory to expectation, from planning to analysis. Nowhere does it find genuine rest.

At a subtle level, restlessness often reflects the mind's deep fear of truly becoming still.

As long as the mind continues moving, projecting, analysing, or planning, it need not fully face the fundamental uncertainty and impermanence <sup>41</sup> of experience.

Doubt, finally, is perhaps one of the most subtle hindrances. What is meant here is not healthy reflection or intelligent inquiry, but a paralyzing uncertainty through which the mind can find no genuine rest.

Doubt continually seeks confirmation:

"Am I doing this correctly?"

"Is this really the right path?"

"Am I truly suited for this?"

"Do I really understand this?"

"Does liberation actually exist?"

At a deeper level, doubt ultimately seeks certainty within a reality that offers no fixed ground.

For this reason, doubt is not resolved within the early Dhamma through endless intellectual thinking, but through direct seeing.

Wisdom does not arise through metaphysical certainty, but through directly seeing arising and passing away.

Indeed, the hindrances are often visible within the body before they become fully conscious as thoughts.

Desire may appear as craving, tension, or a subtle hunger.

Aversion as contraction in the chest, throat, or jaw.

Dullness as heaviness around the eyes, head, or body.

Restlessness as hurried breathing or inner acceleration.

Doubt as a hesitant mind continually moving back and forth without finding genuine rest.

For this reason, insight often begins not with thinking, but with direct awareness of what is manifesting here and now within body and mind.

In practice, several hindrances are often present simultaneously. Desire may occur together with restlessness. Doubt with dullness. Aversion with inner tension and mental agitation.

For this reason, practice requires not a rigid but a sensitive approach.

Sometimes it is sufficient for the hindrance simply to be fully seen. Sometimes the situation calls for more energy. Sometimes for gentleness. Sometimes for stillness. Sometimes for compassion. Sometimes simply for no longer feeding it.

Gradually, it becomes apparent that it is not the hindrances themselves that truly create suffering, but the unconscious grasping and identification associated with them.

And precisely here lies the possibility of liberation.

When the mind begins clearly to perceive how each hindrance arises dependent upon causes and conditions, it also becomes apparent that no hindrance possesses a permanent core.

Desire arises and passes away.  
Aversion arises and passes away.  
Sloth and torpor arise and pass away.  
Restlessness arises and passes away.  
Doubt arises and passes away.

Nowhere is a fixed identity ultimately found that owns these movements.

And through this insight, the grip of identification gradually begins to weaken.

The hindrances slowly lose their apparent power. Not because they are forcibly removed, but because their nourishment gradually dries up.<sup>42</sup>

What ultimately dries up is not experience itself, but the grasping through which the mind continually attempts to establish itself within experience.

Ultimately, this even applies to the counterbalancing qualities themselves.

Calm, energy, concentration, *mettā* (*maitrī*), and faith are not ends in themselves. They are provisional supports that restore balance to the mind so that insight becomes possible.

Once that harmony is present, they too need no longer be held onto.

Then, gradually, a mind emerges that no longer needs to rest anywhere, no longer needs to cling anywhere, and no longer needs to construct a new identity around what appears and disappears.

A mind without foothold.





## CHAPTER X — STILLNESS

As long as the mind is continually propelled by desire, resistance, restlessness, and identification, it continues to create new forms of identification. Or, expressed differently, the mind continually reaffirms itself.

It seeks foothold in experiences, thoughts, memories, beliefs, and desires.

It continually attempts to affirm itself in the face of a reality that offers no lasting certainty.

This ongoing psychological movement is what the early Dhamma calls *becoming* (*bhava*; *id.*).

*Becoming* manifests not only as the desire for possessions, pleasure, or identity, but also as the subtle urge to experience oneself continually as "someone" within experience.

Even when the mind appears quiet, an underlying movement often remains present:

the urge to hold on to something,  
to attain something,  
to understand something,  
to establish oneself somewhere.

The human mind seems never entirely satisfied with simple presence.

As soon as an experience appears, the tendency almost immediately arises to name it, evaluate it, hold on to it, or reject it.

The human mind continually moves between attraction and aversion, between hope and fear, between memory and projection.

As a result, human beings rarely live in direct contact with the present moment. They live in relation to their interpretation of the moment.

Within the early Dhamma, liberation therefore begins not with the accumulation of new beliefs, but with the gradual stilling of this ongoing movement of psychological *becoming*.

Not because stillness is itself a goal, but because reality becomes clearly visible only when the distortions of desire, aversion, and identification have (temporarily) come to rest.

Just as muddy water gradually becomes clear when it is no longer constantly stirred, so too does the mind become clear when it no longer reacts incessantly to everything that appears.

For this reason, stillness (*samatha*; *śamatha*) plays an important role within the early Dhamma.

*Samatha* does not mean suppressing thoughts, nor forcing a special state of consciousness.

Rather, it refers to the gradual calming of the reactive movements of the mind.

Through meditation, desire temporarily loses its intensity. Aversion softens. Restlessness settles. The mind becomes quieter, simpler, and less fragmented.

The continual urge to grasp experience begins to soften.

Desire temporarily loses its compelling force.

Aversion diminishes.

Inner restlessness slows.

The mind jumps less restlessly from object to object and becomes less entangled in memories, expectations, and self-constructions.

At first, this occurs only in fragments. Brief moments of stillness appear between the familiar movements of thinking and reacting.

Yet it is precisely here that something essential already becomes visible: inner peace arises not through becoming more, but rather when the ongoing process of becoming (temporarily) slows down and comes to rest.

Within early Buddhism, this stilling forms the basis for *samādhi* (id.): a mind no longer continually torn apart by desire, aversion, and restlessness. A mind that gradually comes to rest in simple clarity.

*Samādhi* does not mean that the mind enters a supernatural state. Rather, it refers to a gradual simplification of experience.

Attention becomes less fragmented and less dependent upon continual stimulation. The mind no longer needs to be somewhere other than here.

Within this stillness, something remarkable begins to reveal itself.

Ordinarily, human beings experience themselves through continual thinking, reacting, desiring, resisting, and interpreting.

But when these movements temporarily become still, it becomes apparent how strongly ordinary consciousness is built upon desire, aversion, identification, and psychological *becoming*.

When these movements temporarily subside, a very different quality of presence emerges.

Perception remains, yet the continual need to judge, control, or identify with everything begins to soften.

Perception remains, yet the mind no longer needs continually to affirm itself in relation to what appears.

There is less grasping at what presents itself.

For this reason, stillness within the early Dhamma is not an end in itself, but an excellent ground in which insight can mature.

As long as the mind remains continually restless, it sees reality primarily through the distortions of its own conditioning.

But when the hindrances temporarily come to rest, a clearer and more direct seeing of experience as it actually appears becomes possible.

This does not mean that all thoughts immediately disappear. Stillness itself develops gradually.

In the beginning, the mind often continues to move back and forth between calm and distraction.

Habitual patterns remain active. Desire for experiences, resistance toward discomfort, and subtle forms of identification continue to arise.

Yet gradually, something fundamental begins to change.

The mind no longer needs immediately to grasp every phenomenon. Space emerges between experience and reaction.

As the mind becomes less carried away by desire, resistance, and identification, stillness can gradually deepen further.

**The first *jhāna*** does not arise because someone forces themselves into concentration, but because the mind begins to withdraw from its habitual tendency to lose itself continually in distraction and desire.

The usual pull of distraction, desire, and mental proliferation temporarily loses its force. As a result, the first meditative absorption emerges.

Yet in the first *jhāna*, the mind is not entirely still. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* are still present: the directing of attention and the subtle sustaining of attention upon the meditation object.

Ordinary mental agitation has been greatly reduced, but a refined form of mental activity remains.

This thinking, however, no longer possesses the restless quality of ordinary mental chatter. It gradually becomes subservient to stillness itself. The mind no longer moves constantly in all directions. It begins to rest within a single field of attention.

From this release from distraction arises *pīti*,<sup>43</sup> a form of inner rapture that may penetrate the practitioner very deeply and intensely.

Alongside it appears *sukha*, a quiet sense of well-being and profound inner peace that is not dependent upon external circumstances. For the first time, it becomes directly apparent that peace is possible without continually having to pursue something.

Yet this state of mind still contains movement. The joy of the first *jhāna* still carries a certain dynamism within it. There remains refined activity, subtle effort, a gentle wave-like motion within the mind.

As this movement begins to fade, **the second jhāna** unfolds. The continual inner dialogue becomes silent.

*Vitakka* and *vicāra* disappear because the mind no longer requires support to remain stable. Attention now gathers naturally into a quiet clarity.

Here a deeper inner unification appears. The mind becomes simple, quiet, and uncomplicated.

Continual inner speech withdraws. What remains is a silent clarity in which commentary no longer continually arises about what appears.

*Pīti* and *sukha* <sup>44</sup> remain present, yet they acquire a different quality. Joy becomes quieter and more peaceful, increasingly infused with tranquility.

The practitioner begins to discover that genuine inner peace does not arise through control, but precisely when the urge to control falls away. The mind no longer needs to become anything. It no longer needs to hold on to anything.

The energy and exhilaration of *pīti* still carry a certain intensity. Yet even the refined peace and happiness of *sukha* contain a subtle vibration, however quiet the mind has become.

In the third *jhāna*, rapture fades away. Not because it is suppressed, but because the mind no longer requires inner excitement or emotional intensity. What remains is a profound serenity.

*Sukha* remains, but now without the wave-like quality of enthusiasm or exhilaration. The mind becomes quiet, balanced, and mindful.

Here *upekkhā* <sup>45</sup> becomes more clearly visible: an equanimity that does not arise from indifference, but from the gradual calming of desire and aversion.

This stillness possesses a remarkable simplicity. The mind no longer demands that experience be different from what it is.

A deep intimacy with impermanence emerges. Things are allowed to appear and disappear without the mind losing itself within them.

For this reason, the third *jhāna* offers a greater openness to insight. Because the mind has become quieter than desire and emotional disturbance, phenomena can be seen more clearly as they truly are: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without an enduring core.

When preference for the pleasant falls away and aversion toward the unpleasant dissolves, the fourth *jhāna* unfolds.

*Sukha* and *dukkha* both come to rest here and lose their hold upon the mind. The mind no longer seeks support in pleasant experience, nor does it resist unpleasant experience.

What remains is profound equanimity, completely purified mindfulness, and deep one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*; *ekāgratā*).<sup>46</sup>

*Upekkhā* and *sati* become extraordinarily clear.

The mind scarcely moves toward the world through desire, aversion, or identification. It rests in an open and quiet presence.

This stillness is neither cold nor detached. It carries great clarity and simplicity within it. The mind no longer needs to add anything to experience. It no longer needs continually to protect, affirm, or perpetuate itself.

Within the fourth *jhāna*, it becomes apparent how deeply the process of becoming ordinarily governs inner life. Now that this mechanism has temporarily become still, an exceptionally clear basis for insight

emerges. Not because *jhāna* itself is liberation, but because the mind has become sufficiently still to see reality without the usual distortions of desire and identification.

The four *rūpa-jhānas* thus reveal a gradual simplification of inner existence.

A movement from the coarse activity of the mind toward silence.

From distraction toward inner unification.

From desire toward equanimity.

From psychological *becoming* toward a temporary stilling of the ongoing process of self-affirmation.

For this reason, the *jhānas* within the early Dhamma are not an escape from life, but a stilling through which the nature of attachment becomes clearly visible. They reveal that peace does not arise through reshaping the world entirely according to our wishes, but through the fading away of the compulsion continually to seek foothold somewhere.

Thoughts arise and pass away.

Feelings arise and pass away.

Perceptions arise and pass away.

Even the sense of "I" arises dependent upon conditions and dissolves once again.

Within this direct seeing, identification gradually begins to weaken. The mind no longer needs continually to become something.

This does not mean that life comes to an end.

Thinking remains possible.

Action remains possible.  
Emotions continue to arise.  
But the continual psychological necessity of affirming  
oneself through experience becomes silent.  
And precisely here lies the profound significance of  
stillness within the early Dhamma:

not the destruction of experience,  
not the disappearance of consciousness,  
not an escape from the world,  
but the gradual extinguishing of the automatic  
grasping through which the mind continually  
attempts to perpetuate itself.

In the beginning, this stillness often appears only in  
brief moments.

A moment of complete simplicity.  
An instant in which the mind has nothing to add to  
experience.  
A brief absence of inner conflict.

But as insight deepens, the mind begins to see ever  
more clearly that it is precisely grasping (*upādāna*;  
id.)<sup>47</sup> that constitutes the source of tension.

The mind gradually discovers that peace does not  
arise through controlling reality, but through softening  
the urge continually to identify with something.

As a result, stillness gradually ceases to be  
something that is "done" and becomes something  
that arises spontaneously as grasping diminishes.  
In this way, the mind learns to rest without  
establishing itself anywhere permanently.

This is an extremely subtle shift.

For even meditative silence can once again become a form of possession.

One may become attached to calm, meditative clarity, equanimity, or deep concentration. The mind then attempts once again to find certainty within a more refined experience.

But as long as there remains something that is being held onto, the process of becoming remains active.

For this reason, the early Dhamma ultimately does not lead toward a new identity as "someone who has become still," but toward the gradual extinguishing of precisely that need to be someone at all.

Within this stillness, it becomes apparent that experience unfolds without any fixed core being found that possesses or controls it.

Then a silence emerges that is not lifeless, but alive.

Not empty in the sense of absence, but empty of grasping, empty of self-construction, empty of the necessity continually to become oneself.





## CHAPTER XI — DIRECT SEEING

Following the stilling of the mind, an even subtler shift begins to unfold upon the contemplative path.

Where the previous chapters were primarily concerned with calming mental agitation, recognizing conditioning, and developing inner stability, the focus now gradually shifts toward something more fundamental: directly seeing experience itself.

Within the early Dhamma, mental stillness and concentration (*samādhī*; id.) never constitute the ultimate goal of practice. <sup>48</sup>

A calm mind may temporarily feel liberating, yet as long as the underlying mechanisms of desire, attachment, identification, and ignorance have not truly been seen through, *dukkha* (*duḥkha*) continues subtly to renew itself.

For this reason, *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*) may gradually arise from *samādhī* within the Buddhist path—not as a separate technique, but as the gradual clarification of insight into the nature of conditioned existence.

When the mind becomes sufficiently still and concentrated, the possibility arises of observing phenomena without immediately being carried away by preference, aversion, or identification.

What previously seemed solid, personal, and self-evident gradually becomes transparent.

Thoughts arise and pass away.  
Emotions continually change in form and intensity.

Even the sense of a lasting "I" proves incapable of maintaining itself anywhere under clear observation.

This direct seeing forms the heart of *vipassanā*.

Not the development of new beliefs, metaphysical systems, or spiritual identities, but the clear observation of arising and passing away, of conditioning and attachment, of the continual movement through which the mind repeatedly constructs itself anew.

For this reason, the present chapter forms a natural continuation of the previous one.

Where stillness temporarily calmed the coarse movements of the mind, *vipassanā* now investigates what reveals itself within that silence.

Not as speculation or philosophy, but as an exceptionally direct contemplation of experience itself.

Within the early Dhamma, this insight gradually leads to seeing through the Three Characteristics of Existence (*tilakkhaṇa*; *trilakṣaṇa*): impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*). Not as abstract doctrines, but as something that reveals itself directly, moment after moment, within observation.

As the mind becomes sufficiently still, the possibility gradually emerges of approaching experience in an entirely different way.

Until then, human beings generally live immersed in their thoughts, emotions, desires, and reactions without truly seeing through them.

One thinks, feels, desires, fears, and reacts almost automatically, as though the stream of experience were self-evident.

The mind is continually carried away by preference and aversion, by memory and expectation, by hope, fear, and identification.

But when coarse agitation temporarily subsides, space opens for something else.

Not a new belief.  
Not a metaphysical insight.  
Not a spiritual identity.  
But attentive and direct seeing.

Within early Buddhism, this dimension of insight is called *vipassanā* (*vipaśyanā*): directly seeing through the nature of experience itself.

*Vipassanā* does not arise through intellectual analysis alone.

It unfolds when the mind has become sufficiently quiet to observe phenomena without immediately becoming entangled in desire, aversion, or identification.

For this reason, *samādhi* within the Dhamma is never the endpoint of the contemplative path.

A peaceful mind alone does not necessarily liberate one from *dukkha*. Even profound concentration may still coexist with subtle forms of attachment, identification, and spiritual striving.

For this reason, within *vipassanā* the emphasis shifts from tranquility to insight.

From calm to clarity.

From concentration to direct seeing.

Initially, this seeing appears remarkably simple.

A thought arises.

It remains briefly present.

And disappears again.

A sound appears.

It dissolves once more.

A bodily sensation continually changes while it is being experienced.

An emotion arises dependent upon circumstances, memories, bodily reactions, expectations, and conditioning.

Nothing proves stable.

What once seemed solid and self-evident gradually becomes transparent.<sup>49</sup>

Within the early Dhamma, this insight is summarized in the contemplation of the Three Characteristics of Existence: impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*).

Initially, these concepts are understood intellectually. One knows that everything changes and that nothing endures. Within *vipassanā*, however, this shifts from thinking to direct seeing.

Impermanence is no longer a philosophical proposition. It becomes directly visible in every moment of experience.

The practitioner begins to observe that every experience is continually changing.

Breathing is constantly changing.

Physical sensations move incessantly.

Thoughts dissolve while new thoughts are already appearing.

Even emotions prove not to be fixed states, but fluctuating processes continually shifting in intensity, tone, and meaning.

When attention becomes truly stable and clear, the mind can observe this continual stream of arising and passing away ever more directly.

In this way, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* gradually become an ongoing contemplation that extends beyond formal meditation.

As a result, experience slowly loses its apparent self-evidence.

And precisely here something essential begins to shift.

Ordinarily, human beings live as though experience could somehow become stable and controllable.

One attempts to hold on to pleasant experiences and avoid unpleasant ones. One seeks security in possessions, relationships, beliefs, spiritual ideas, or identities.

*Vipassanā* reveals that everything in which the mind seeks foothold is continually changing.

What is pleasant changes.

What is unpleasant changes.

What seemed to offer certainty proves impermanent.

Even the sense of "I am" continually changes in content and intensity.

As a result, the second characteristic of existence also begins to reveal itself: *dukkha*. Within early Buddhism, *dukkha* does not refer exclusively to visible suffering, pain, or sorrow. Rather, it points primarily to the fundamental instability of everything that arises.

Because everything continually changes, nothing can ultimately provide complete satisfaction or lasting security.

Even happiness contains within itself the seed of vulnerability because it depends upon conditions.

For this reason, *dukkha* arises not only through pain, but also through the continual attempt to make the changing stable. The mind attempts to anchor itself in something that is intrinsically fluid.

And it is precisely there that tension arises.

*Vipassanā* reveals this tension not theoretically, but existentially.

The practitioner begins directly to see how desire gives rise to restlessness.

How aversion narrows the mind.

How attachment creates fear of loss.

How identification continually creates vulnerability.

When this is seen deeply, the apparent self-evidence of grasping begins to weaken.

Not because one forces oneself to let go, but because the mind begins to understand that no lasting security can be found anywhere within the conditioned domain.

Perhaps the deepest insight unfolds, however, within the contemplation of *anattā*.

Ordinarily, human beings live from the feeling that somewhere there exists a fixed identity that thinks, feels, perceives, and controls.

It appears as though there is a center that possesses and governs experience.

Yet when experience is carefully investigated, that fixed core cannot be directly found anywhere.

The body appears dependent upon food, breathing, temperature, contact, and change.

Feelings arise dependent upon conditions and stimuli.

Perception arises dependent upon recognition and conditioning.

Thoughts arise dependent upon memory, language, and association.

Consciousness always arises in relation to what is known.

Nothing appears entirely independently.

And nowhere is an autonomous entity ultimately found that exists apart from this continual stream of Dependent Origination.

At first, this insight may feel disorienting. The human mind naturally seeks continuity, certainty, and fixed identity.

As soon as experience proves unstable, the tendency easily arises to search once again for some subtle core:

a lasting self,  
an unchanging consciousness,  
a metaphysical ground,  
a spiritual essence,  
an absolute certainty behind the stream of experience.

Yet the more deeply *vipassanā* unfolds, the more difficult it becomes to find any final ground upon which the mind can fully establish itself.

This does not necessarily mean that the practitioner must adopt a philosophical position in which everything is denied. Within early Buddhism, the issue is not the construction of a new metaphysics of nothingness.

Quite the contrary.

*Vipassanā* shifts attention away from speculation and toward direct experience.

Not: *"Does something absolute ultimately exist?"*

But: *"How does attachment arise?" "How does identification arise?" "How does dukkha arise from moment to moment?"*

Precisely here lies the liberating power of insight.

For as soon as the mind directly sees how it continually binds itself through desire, aversion, and identification, the entire process gradually becomes transparent.

The practitioner gradually discovers that psychological becoming is continuously conditioned.

Every attachment constitutes a subtle movement of *becoming*.

Every identification constructs a center of experience anew.

Every aversion implicitly affirms an "I" that must be protected.

From this perspective, rebirth appears not only as something unfolding across lifetimes, but also as a continual psychological process occurring here and now.

Moment after moment, the mind is reborn in desire.  
Reborn in fear.  
Reborn in memory.  
Reborn in identity.

And it is precisely here that Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*) becomes directly visible.

Nothing arises from itself.

Everything appears dependent upon causes and conditions.

Desire conditions attachment.

Attachment conditions becoming.

Becoming conditions new forms of identification and suffering.

When this process is deeply seen through, the possibility of liberation likewise begins to reveal itself.

Not because the world disappears.

Not because experience ceases.

Not because a metaphysical reality beyond change is discovered.

But because grasping itself gradually begins to fade away. The mind no longer needs continually to establish itself within experience. It no longer needs endlessly to protect, affirm, or complete itself.

A subtle form of freedom emerges, one based not upon possession or certainty, but upon the disappearance of fixation.

From a contemplative perspective, one might say that *vipassanā* ultimately does not add something to experience so much as dissolve something.

Illusions lose their apparent self-evidence.

Identification becomes increasingly transparent.

The desire for absolute certainty loses its force.

What remains is not a new identity, but a growing openness in which the mind feels less and less need to establish itself anywhere definitively.

For this reason, a deeper form of silence begins to emerge.

Not the silence of suppression.

Not the silence of dissociation.

Not the silence of indifference.

But a silence that appears when the continual process of psychological *becoming* gradually comes to rest.

And it is precisely here that an extraordinarily subtle dimension begins to open within the early Dhamma.

Not as an object of experience.

Not as a metaphysical essence.

Not as a cosmic consciousness.

But as the gradual extinguishing of that which continually gives rise to suffering.

It is here that *vipassanā* touches the threshold of the Unconditioned.





## CHAPTER XII — THE UNBORN

Following the direct seeing of arising and passing away discussed in the previous chapter, an even subtler shift gradually unfolds within the contemplative path.

The practitioner no longer sees only the impermanence of phenomena, but also begins to discern the subtle mechanism through which the mind establishes itself within experience.

Where direct seeing primarily rests upon impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*), a deeper insight now emerges into the process of *becoming* itself—the psychological and existential mechanism through which attachment repeatedly gives rise to identity, tension, and the sense of continuity that characterizes *becoming*.

As a result, the perspective on liberation also begins to shift.

Liberation no longer appears merely as the attainment of a special state, but as the gradual extinguishing of the grasping that continually produces new forms of conditioning.

Within this contemplative deepening, the early Dhamma introduces the extraordinarily subtle notion of the Unborn (*ajāta*; id.)—the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*).

As the mind begins to see deeply how experience continually arises and passes away, how attachment

repeatedly conditions itself, and how identification incessantly gives rise to new forms of becoming, a fundamental shift gradually occurs.

Attention no longer focuses primarily upon phenomena themselves, but upon the extinguishing of that which continually attempts to provide these phenomena with a center—with an "I," a "me," or a "mine."

Within the early Dhamma, liberation does not simply refer to understanding impermanence, but to bringing to an end the grasping (*upādāna*; id.) through which the mind continually binds itself within *saṃsāra* (id.).

It is precisely here that the early Dhamma introduces the exceedingly subtle notion of the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*).

The Buddha refers to it in the following passage from the *Udāna* (8.3):

• *There is, monks, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, the Unconditioned. If there were not this Unborn, this Unbecome, this Unmade, this Unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from the born, the become, the made, the conditioned.* •

Within the contemplative path, this passage takes on a special significance.

For the Unborn does not refer here to some hidden metaphysical substance existing behind the world.

Nor does it necessarily refer to an eternal Self, an absolute ground of consciousness, or a cosmic

essence into which the practitioner ultimately merges. The early Dhamma remains remarkably restrained in this regard.

Rather than describing an ultimate reality in positive terms, the texts point primarily toward the extinguishing of conditioning itself.

The Unborn is not presented as an object that can be found. It unfolds where the process of becoming gradually comes to rest.

From a contemplative perspective, this means something at once extraordinarily simple and profoundly significant.

As long as the mind continues to grasp, it continues to condition itself.

As long as desire remains present, the process of becoming continues.

As long as identification continues to function, there likewise remains the sense that there is "someone" who must be protected, affirmed, or completed.

In this way, the mind remains imprisoned within the continual movement of arising and passing away.

Not only biologically.  
Not only across lifetimes.  
But here and now, moment after moment.

Every attachment constitutes a new birth. Every identification constructs anew a sense of self.

Every aversion implicitly confirms a self attempting to defend itself against experience.

Within *vipassanā*, this process becomes ever more directly visible.

The practitioner sees how desire gives rise to tension.

How resistance narrows the mind.

How identification renders the mind vulnerable.

How the mind continually attempts to find some form of foothold.

Initially, human beings usually seek this foothold in the world:

possessions,  
relationships,  
success,  
security,  
beliefs.

Later, the same movement may become more refined:

spiritual experiences,  
meditation,  
inner silence,  
consciousness,  
even ideas about awakening.

Yet as insight deepens, it becomes increasingly apparent that the mind attempts to transform almost everything into a new foothold.

Even emptiness can become a possession.

Even silence can become an identity.  
Even the desire for liberation can generate a subtle form of *becoming*.

For this reason, early Buddhism remains extremely cautious regarding metaphysical formulations.

Not necessarily because every deeper dimension of reality must categorically be denied, but because the human mind easily transforms every conception into an object of attachment.

As soon as the Unborn is presented as an absolute substance, an eternal consciousness, or a hidden essence, the tendency immediately arises to establish oneself within it.

The early Dhamma seeks precisely to reveal this subtle grasping. For this reason, the language surrounding the Unconditioned is often apophatic: not by stating what it is, but by carefully removing what it is not.<sup>50</sup>

Unborn.  
Unbecome.  
Unmade.  
Unconditioned.

As though language itself gradually begins to release its grip upon experience.

Within this contemplative movement, it also becomes clear why the Buddha does not describe liberation as the acquisition of something new.

*Nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*) literally means "extinguishing."

Just as a flame goes out when no further fuel is supplied, so too the continual stream of becoming comes to an end when craving, attachment, and ignorance lose their supporting conditions.

From this perspective, liberation does not refer to constructing a more subtle identity, but precisely to the extinguishing of the tendency to create identity everywhere.

For this reason, it is more accurate to say: it is not a self that is liberated, but the grasping at self that is extinguished.

And precisely there, the question of an ultimate foundation loses its compelling force.

Within early Buddhism, liberation is not made dependent upon holding to an absolute reality behind phenomena.

The emphasis lies upon directly seeing arising, dependency, and cessation, until the need to find an ultimate foothold spontaneously dissolves.

This does not mean that all metaphysical possibilities are denied.

The Buddha remains strikingly silent on such matters. Yet that very silence is essential. For once the mind ceases constructing new metaphysical certainties, space opens for a much more direct form of freedom.

Not the freedom of possession.

Not the freedom of control.

Not the freedom of spiritual superiority.

But the freedom that appears when the mind no longer needs to rest anywhere.

Within the early Dhamma, this dimension is sometimes indicated by the term *appatiṭṭham* (*apraṭiṣṭhitam*): <sup>51</sup> without foundation, without a point upon which to establish oneself.

This does not mean that experience disappears.

The world continues to appear.  
Sounds remain audible.  
Thoughts remain possible.  
The body continues to function.

Yet the psychological grasping through which the mind continually fixes itself loses its force.

As a result, a remarkable simplicity emerges.

The mind no longer needs continually to become someone. It no longer needs endlessly to defend, affirm, or complete itself.

An openness appears in which experience can arise more freely without immediately being transformed into possession, identity, or metaphysical certainty.

Perhaps this is the deepest meaning of the Unborn within the early Dhamma. Not as a hidden essence, but as the cessation of that which continually generates new forms of *becoming*.

Not as an eternal Self, but as the extinguishing of the grasping through which the illusion of a fixed self continually conditions itself anew.

Not as a metaphysical object, but as the possibility of complete liberation from *dukkha* (*duḥkha*).

For this reason, the contemplative path does not ultimately culminate in the accumulation of new knowledge, doctrines, or spiritual identities.

Quite the contrary.

The deeper insight unfolds, the simpler everything becomes.

What remains is not a metaphysical conclusion, but a quiet clarity in which desire, aversion, and identification gradually fade away.

For this reason, one can speak only very cautiously. For as soon as the mind attempts to grasp the Unborn as an idea, an experience, or a possession, a subtle form of becoming arises once again.

Thus the early Dhamma continually returns to simplicity:

direct seeing,  
letting go,  
the extinguishing of grasping,  
and liberation from *dukkha*.

And where grasping completely ceases, becoming likewise comes to rest. There the Unborn unfolds. The Unconditioned. Nibbāna (*nirvāṇa*).

For me, the Unborn, the Unbecome, the Unmade, and the Unconditioned do not refer to a metaphysical reality that must be discovered, but to what becomes

visible when desire, aversion, attachment, identification, and ignorance have completely faded away.

Not because some "thing" suddenly appears that was previously hidden, but because the movement of grasping itself has come to rest.

The central issue is not what the Unborn *is* or *might be*,<sup>52</sup> but that escape from the born, the become, the made, and the conditioned is possible.

The passage from the *Udāna* does not point toward some ultimate reality, but toward the possibility of escape from *dukkha* — toward liberation (*nissaraṇa*; *niḥsaraṇa*) from *saṃsāra*.





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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 characterized by a sustained interest in the earliest strata of Buddhist teaching and 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 Satipaṭṭhāna, the Jhānas, and the sixteen Vipassanā-Ñāṇas. In addition, he has translated and studied several contemplative works from the Sanskrit tradition.

Although deeply influenced by the teachings of the Buddha, 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 the multilingual—English, Spanish, French, and Dutch—website Yatha-Bhuta ([www.yatha-bhuta.com](http://www.yatha-bhuta.com)), allowing readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to engage with the Dhamma through direct study and contemplation. His writings are read by practitioners and independent students of the Dhamma throughout the world who seek a direct and non-sectarian approach to the Buddhist path.

The Mind Without Foothold continues this lifelong exploration of attachment, becoming, identity, and liberation, drawing upon the early Buddhist teachings while inviting the reader into a direct contemplative inquiry of their own experience.

In accordance with the Buddha's teaching that the Dhamma is the highest gift, the author makes his writings freely available and encourages their non-commercial distribution and sharing.



## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Within the early Dhamma, bhava has several meanings. It refers not only to rebirth or becoming within saṃsāra, but also to the ongoing process of psychological becoming and identification that unfolds from moment to moment within experience.*

<sup>2</sup> *Dubois, Guy, Eugène, (2026), The Unborn, Brave New Books, Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

<sup>3</sup> *Within the early Dhamma, “identity” refers to the process of identification (upādāna; id.), through which impermanent phenomena are appropriated as “self” or “mine.”*

<sup>4</sup> *Udāna 8.3 is one of the best-known passages in the Pāli Canon in which the Unborn (ajāta; id.) and the possibility of liberation from the conditioned are explicitly mentioned.*

<sup>5</sup> *This analysis forms the core of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (Saṃyutta Nikāya 22.59), in which the Buddha systematically examines the five khandhas and demonstrates that whatever is impermanent (anicca; anitya) and subject to change cannot be regarded as “This is mine,” “This I am,” or “This is my self.”*

*The insight into anattā (anattā; anātman) appears here not as a metaphysical doctrine, but as the direct penetration of identification and grasping.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ahaṅkāra literally means “I-maker” and refers to the mental process through which a sense of a separate “I” arises. Mamaṅkāra means “mine-maker” and refers to the appropriation of experience as “mine” or “belonging to me.” Within the Buddhist context, neither term refers to a truly existing self, but rather to conditioned processes of identification and appropriation.*

<sup>7</sup> “Possession” implies the absence of possession by another. The very notion of possession implicitly presupposes a possessor, and with it the distinction between “self” and “other.”

<sup>8</sup> Vossagga literally means “letting go,” “relinquishment,” or “giving up.” Within the Pāli Canon, the term does not refer to a forced denial of life, but to the natural falling away of attachment when the impermanent nature of all phenomena is clearly seen.

Vossagga refers to the spontaneous relinquishment of grasping (*upādāna*; *id.*), rather than to an ascetic act of self-suppression.

<sup>9</sup> “Reinvents itself”: this expression highlights that *saṃsāra* is not a static system, but an ongoing process of psychological reconstruction.

<sup>10</sup> Within the early Dhamma, “clear mindfulness” refers to *sati-sampajañña* (*smṛti-saṃprajanya*): an attentive presence that is not only mindful (*sati*; *smṛti*), but also clearly comprehends what is unfolding within experience from moment to moment (*sampajañña*; *saṃprajanya*). It does not refer to intellectual analysis, but to a direct and lucid seeing of conditioning, impermanence, and identification as they occur.

<sup>11</sup> Within the early Dhamma, *upasama* (*upaśama*) frequently appears as part of a contemplative progression leading from *nibbidā* (*nirveda*; disenchantment or the fading of fascination), to *virāga* (*id.*; dispassion, fading, or the cooling of passion), then to *upasama* (*upaśama*; stilling or pacification), and ultimately to *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*).

This sequence does not refer to a metaphysical transformation, but to the gradual fading away of craving, grasping, and conditioning.

<sup>12</sup> By this I do not mean that reflection on reality or existence is inherently problematic. The difficulty arises rather when the Dhamma is dogmatically confined within metaphysical systems and absolute conclusions, causing the original contemplative and liberating orientation of the early texts to recede from view.

<sup>13</sup> Apophatic refers to an approach through negation: not by positively defining what something is, but by indicating what it is not. See also the next footnote.

<sup>14</sup> In Udāna 8.3, the terms “unborn” (*ajāta*; *id.*), “unbecome” (*abhūta*; *id.*), “unmade” (*akata*; *akṛta*), and “unconditioned” (*asaṅkhata*; *asaṃskṛta*) are not used to distinguish between different realities. Rather, they function as synonymous, apophatic designations of that which lies radically beyond the domain of arising and passing away (*saṅkhata*; *saṃskṛta*). “Apophatic” here refers to an approach through negation: not by stating what something is, but by relinquishing what it is not. These terms therefore do not describe an entity, a metaphysical ground, or a form of consciousness. Instead, they function as pointers to the possibility of escape from, or release out of (*nissaraṇa*; *niḥsaraṇa*), conditioned existence (*saṃsāra*; *id.*).

<sup>15</sup> *Ajātaṃ* concerns arising; *abhūtaṃ* concerns becoming. This is an important distinction, for it is precisely this gradual dismantling that constitutes the inner logic of the entire passage from Udāna 8.3.

<sup>16</sup> *Kataṃ* refers to that which has been made, done, fashioned, or constructed. *Akataṃ* is its opposite.

<sup>17</sup> The mind has a deep-seated tendency to transform even insight and liberation into forms of identity or possession. It is precisely for this reason that the early Dhamma remains so restrained in its positive descriptions of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*).

<sup>18</sup> *Jānāti* (“knows”) and *passati* (“sees”) frequently occur together in the Pāli Canon to indicate direct insight. They do not refer to conceptual understanding, but to the immediate seeing and knowing of reality as it truly is (*yathā-bhūta*).

<sup>19</sup> *Paccakkha* (*pratyakṣa*) refers to direct, immediate experience or perception—knowledge that arises through seeing for oneself rather than through belief, reasoning, or received tradition.

<sup>20</sup> *Sandiṭṭhika* literally means “visible here and now” and refers to that which can be directly known and verified through immediate experience.

<sup>21</sup> *Ehipassiko* literally means “come and see.” It emphasizes that the Dhamma invites personal inquiry and direct verification through experience, rather than acceptance based on blind belief.

<sup>22</sup> *Yathā-bhūta-ñānadassana* (*yathā-bhūta-jñāna-darśana*) refers to the direct seeing and knowing of phenomena as they truly are, unclouded by projection, conceptual distortion, or identification.

<sup>23</sup> *Ahaṅkāra* (*id.*) (“I-making”) and *mamaṅkāra* (*id.*) (“mine-making”) refer to the subtle tendency of the mind continually to appropriate experience as “I” or “mine.” Through this process, identification with the five *khandhas* (*skandhas*) arises, and the cycle of attachment and becoming continues to sustain itself.

<sup>24</sup> Within early Buddhism, insight into *anattā* (*anātman*) does not mean that a hidden Self or Absolute Reality is discovered behind the five *khandhas* (*skandhas*). On the contrary, through seeing body, feelings, perception, mental formations, and consciousness as impermanent, dependently arisen, and not-self, identification gradually loses its foundation. It is precisely through this process that the ending of becoming (*bhava*; *id.*), attachment, and *dukkha* becomes possible. In this sense, *anattā* and the “Unborn” (*ajāta*; *id.*) are not identical, yet they are deeply interconnected.

<sup>25</sup> *Paṭivedha* (*prativedha*) refers in Buddhism to a direct and penetrative insight into reality. The term does not denote mere intellectual understanding, but an existential seeing-through in which impermanence (*anicca*; *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*; *duḥkha*), and not-self (*anattā*; *anātman*) become directly evident. Within the Theravāda tradition, a distinction is often made between three levels: *pariyatti* (theoretical understanding), *paṭipatti* (practice), and *paṭivedha* (the direct penetrative realization of the Dhamma).

<sup>26</sup> Whatever appears does not appear independently. No form, thought, or feeling exists apart from conditions. What is experienced as a fixed entity is revealed, upon closer inspection, to be a temporary convergence of causes, circumstances, and relationships that mutually condition one another. A body appears in dependence upon nourishment, breathing, warmth, contact, and change. A thought appears in dependence upon memory, language, conditioning, and sensory stimuli. Even consciousness (*viññāṇa*; *vijñāna*) arises dependently: not as an independent principle that possesses experiences, but in reciprocity with that which is known.

<sup>27</sup> In this sense, this approach resonates with the investigative spirit that is likewise evident in the *Kālāma Sutta*.

<sup>28</sup> *Appatiṭṭhaṃ* (*apraṭiṣṭhitaṃ*) literally means "without foothold" or "without establishing itself anywhere." It points to a mind that no longer seeks permanence, identity, or ultimate security in any experience, state, concept, or metaphysical ground. Rather than indicating absence or nihilism, it refers to freedom from the need to take a stand anywhere within the conditioned domain.

<sup>29</sup> See: *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22), *Majjhima Nikāya*.

<sup>30</sup> *Eternalism* (*sassata-dīṭṭhi*; *śāśvata-dṛṣṭi*) refers to the view that there exists an eternal, unchanging self, soul, or essence that persists independently of conditions and survives death unchanged. In the early Dhamma, this view is regarded as one of the two extremes avoided by the Middle Way.

<sup>31</sup> *Annihilationism* (*uccheda-dīṭṭhi*; *uccheda-dṛṣṭi*) refers to the view that a being is completely destroyed at death, leaving no continuity whatsoever. In the early Dhamma, this view is rejected alongside eternalism as the opposite extreme.

<sup>32</sup> *The causal dynamics of Dependent Origination*<sup>32</sup>: within early Buddhism, rebirth is traditionally understood not as the transmigration of a soul or enduring Self, but as the continuity of conditioning unfolding according to Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; *pratītya-samutpāda*).

<sup>33</sup> Within the early Dhamma, birth (*jāti*; *id.*) is understood not only in a biological or cosmological sense, but also as the continual arising of identification, attachment, and psychological becoming within immediate experience.

<sup>34</sup> According to the early Dhamma, what continues is not a "person," "self," or enduring essence, but the causal stream of conditioning, attachment, craving, and kamma (*karma*) for as long as ignorance (*avijjā*; *avidyā*) persists.

<sup>35</sup> “I,” “me,” and “mine”: within the suttas, attachment frequently manifests as the appropriation of experience through the notions “this is mine,” “this I am,” and “this is my self” (*etaṃ mama, eso’ham asmī, eso me attā*). These three formulations express the tendency of the mind to turn experience into possession, identity, and selfhood.

<sup>36</sup> By “metaphysical foothold,” I refer here to any form of ultimate ground, enduring essence, or absolute reality through which the mind attempts to secure psychological or existential certainty.

<sup>37</sup> “Resting” refers here to the mind’s longing to find a definitive ground in which uncertainty, impermanence, and existential unease would finally come to an end.

<sup>38</sup> See the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) and the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22), where the Buddha describes how the practitioner carefully investigates the presence, arising, disappearance, and non-arising of the Five Hindrances.

<sup>39</sup> Within the early Dhamma, the Five Spiritual Faculties (*indriyāni*; *id.*) constitute an important balancing system between faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

<sup>40</sup> Within the early Dhamma, desire is frequently described as a process that remains dependent upon continual nourishment and clinging (*upādāna*; *id.*).

<sup>41</sup> The fundamental groundlessness and impermanence of experience.

<sup>42</sup> Within the early Dhamma, liberation is often described as the extinguishing of the conditions that continue to nourish desire, attachment, identification, and ignorance.

<sup>43</sup> *Pīti* refers to an energizing and rapturous form of joy.

<sup>44</sup> *Sukha refers to inner well-being, inner peace, and serenity.*

<sup>45</sup> *Upekkhā refers to a profound equanimity in which craving and aversion gradually fade away.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ekaggatā refers to the one-pointedness of mind in deep stillness. In this collected state, the usual sense of separation between observer and observed may temporarily recede, although early Buddhist teachings do not interpret this as a metaphysical union of subject and object.*

<sup>47</sup> *Upādāna refers to the tendency of the mind to cling to experience and appropriate it as “I,” “me,” or “mine.”*

<sup>48</sup> *Although mental stillness and samādhi are closely related, mental stillness refers more specifically to the gradual calming of mental agitation and distraction. Within contemplative practice—particularly through the jhānas—this stillness may gradually deepen into samādhi, a state of stable and collected attention.*

*In itself, however, samādhi does not lead to liberating insight. Only when vipassanā (vipaśyanā)—the direct seeing of impermanence, attachment, and identification—arises from this stability can the possibility of liberation begin to unfold.*

<sup>49</sup> *By “transparent,” I suggest that experience is not destroyed, but becomes more transparent. Less solid. Less absolute. Without a self.*

<sup>50</sup> *The apophatic approach—speaking through negation—is also found in other contemplative traditions. Within the early Dhamma, however, this approach serves primarily to prevent the mind from turning liberation itself into a new object of identification.*

<sup>51</sup> *The term appatitṭhita viññāṇa—“unestablished consciousness” or “consciousness without foothold”—does not refer to the cessation of consciousness, but to the falling away of the mind’s tendency to establish itself anywhere.*

<sup>52</sup> *“Could be” encompasses not only dogmatic metaphysics, but also any form of speculative projection.*

*What remains when the mind no longer seeks a foothold anywhere?*

The human mind is constantly searching for certainty—in thoughts, beliefs, desires, memories, future projections, and identities. Even spirituality can become a subtle attempt to secure itself.

In *The Mind Without Foothold*, Guy Eugène Dubois explores, through the lens of the early Dhamma, how craving, aversion, attachment, identification, and becoming continually give rise to a sense of “I,” “me,” and “mine”—and how it is precisely through this process that dukkha renews itself.

Classical Buddhist themes such as impermanence, dependent origination, anattā, and nibbāna are approached not as abstract philosophy, but as subjects for direct contemplative investigation.

With particular attention to the concept of the Unborn, the author shows that liberation does not lie in discovering a hidden absolute reality, but in the fading away of craving, grasping, and identification.

Written in a calm and contemplative style, this book invites the reader into a direct exploration of human experience and the possibility of a mind free from every need for a foothold.

A thoughtful work for readers who wish not only to understand the Dhamma, but also to investigate it through direct contemplation.