

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a brown, textured robe, likely a Buddhist monk or nun. Their hands are clasped together in a meditative gesture, resting on their lap. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# *Bhāvanā*

An Introduction to the Buddha's Teaching  
and his Original Discourses

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*In the Buddha's Words Series*

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The Nameless Publications  
Nelson, BC  
Canada

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-7777821-3-9  
ISBN: 978-1-7777821-2-2  
Printed in Canada

Revised Edition  
February 2023  
First Edition  
July 2020

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*Teachings from  
The Sāmaññaphala Sutta,  
The Saṅkhadhama Sutta  
and more...*



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*"Monks,*

*Just as the great ocean has but one taste:  
The taste of salt.*

*This Dhamma and way of life have but one taste:  
The taste of Freedom."*

*- Udāna V 5 Soṇa*



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*Introduction*

Ever since his awakening to the way things are, the Buddha himself has always been the most qualified person to teach the Dhamma, his own teaching and discovery, the understanding which he realized on his own journey to liberation. Great solace of wisdom are found in his original words.

Consequently, it is difficult to move away from his original discourses without moving away from his original teaching. Here is a simple guide for seekers, based on the direct discourses of the Buddha himself, which goes to the heart. Here, one will find essential teachings from:

**The DN 2 *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*,**

Discourse on the Truth-Seeking Life

The Buddha's famous and most essential exposition of the  
Gradual Training.

**The SN 42.8 *Sanikhadhama Sutta***

Discourse of the Conch Blower

The original meditation instructions on Boundless Love.

**The *Dhammapāda***

**And many other essential suttas...**

# The Collection of Long Discourses

To begin, let's approach one of the most common questions practitioners will usually ask themselves, when starting to grow an interest for the Buddha's teaching and his original discourses: 'But... where to start?'

The Buddha's words have been preserved through the ages in a vast repository of texts which is known, in early Buddhist schools, as the Pāḷi Canon. This Canon is divided into three main categories, called baskets, they are: the basket of monastic rules and way of life (*Vinaya-pitaka*), the basket of discourses (*Sutta-pitaka*), and the basket of systematic compendiums.

For those interested in the earliest teachings of the Buddha and his most reliable source of wisdom, the basket of discourses is where true seekers of Dhamma want to invest their attention first.

Within this basket of discourses,<sup>1</sup> the Collection of Long Discourses<sup>2</sup> is known to be the first collection, thereby making it the beginning of the entire basket.

In this first collection, which is too often underappreciated because of the length of its discourses, we find speeches that were addressed specially to lay practitioners. In comparison to the Collection of Mid-Length Discourses, which tends to be more popular

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<sup>1</sup> *Sutta Piṭaka*

<sup>2</sup> DN: *Dīgha Nikāya*



nowadays because of the approachable length of the teachings, although it provides more advanced discourses which were mainly directed to monks.

It is in the first chapter of the Collection of Long Discourses that we find a very interesting sequence of discourses which seem to set the tone for the rest of the basket of discourses. These first discourses lay down a strong and clear foundation regarding the entire path that the Buddha taught, on a regular basis, to newcomers in his teaching.

## The Heart Goes Unnoticed

There are thirteen suttas in the first chapter of the Collection of the Long Discourses. To the exception of the first sutta which deals with exceptionally advanced topics,<sup>3</sup> the twelve following suttas, beginning with the Discourse on the Fruits of the Meditative Life,<sup>4</sup> all contain the same method of exposition. That is, the entire path of training that the Buddha taught to the monks and to everyone else who sought it.

This invaluable sequence explains how the path starts with (1) the gaining of faith through hearing the Teaching of the Buddha, (2) the going forth, (2) the practice of virtue, (3) the practice of self-mastery, (4) the practice of seclusion, (5) the blameless bliss that arises from these practices, (6)

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<sup>3</sup> DN 1 *Brāhmaṇa Sutta*: Which is similar to “Beginning with the end of the Teaching.”

<sup>4</sup> DN 2 *Sāmaññaphala sutta*

how the mind enters meditative states through upliftment, joy, relaxing, and (7) ends by a very clear description of awakening.

One problem remains; in most English translations and in the original *Pāḷi* texts, this sequence seems to only appear in Discourse on the Fruits of the Meditative Life. Because this precious sequence is completely abridged in each of the following eleven discourses.

In *Pāḷi*, we find the word: “...pe...”, which is an abbreviation of “*peyyāla*” and means [same] repetition or formula. In English, most translators have simply followed the original *Pāḷi* texts and have opted for the usual ellipsis. Therefore, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sutta until the 13<sup>th</sup> Sutta, at the place where we would expect to find this whole elaboration of the Buddha’s path, we instead find ellipses, and it is usually followed by a brief note referring the reader to the *Sāmaññaphala sutta*.

This obviously saved a lot of ink and paper to the compilers and a lot of effort to the reciters of the Canon.

It makes sense...

But unfortunately, this wonderful sequence, which lays at the heart of the Buddha’s teaching, ends up completely unnoticed and widely underappreciated. This is probably the most important piece of teaching that we still have, to show us exactly how the Buddha taught his path of virtue,

meditation and wisdom, his gradual training<sup>5</sup> in wholesome mental development <sup>6</sup> or at least, how he most often taught.

To understand and realize that twelve out of the first thirteen suttas of the basket of discourses all contain the same sequence of the path, is rather important. A wise seeker should consider it worthwhile to give it proper attention.

Nowadays, much emphasis is given to the discourse on the Four Resting Places of Awareness,<sup>7</sup> a sutta which can be a good reference for advanced meditators who already understand the correct way of practice but can cause many problems if approached too early in one's practice, without proper prior education on the initial stages of the practice.

This elaboration on the path, found in the first twelve discourses, which is the subject for this book, is particularly important since it contains the Buddha's most fundamental explanation on how the mind works. How the mind slowly becomes liberated as it naturally flows from gladness into joy, then into tranquility, then into happiness to then, naturally, enter a calm and collected state. This sequence goes like this:



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<sup>5</sup> *Anupubbasikkhā (Sīla, Samādhi, Pañña)*

<sup>6</sup> *Kusala dhammā bhāvanā*

<sup>7</sup> *DN 22 or MN 10 Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*

***Tassime pañca nīvaraṇe pahīne attani samanupassato***

*Growing increasingly aware of this gradual fading away*

*Of these five hindrances within oneself,*

***Pāmojjaṃ jāyati,***

*Gladness arises,*

***Pamuditassa pīti jāyati,***

*From that gladness, bliss arises,*

***Pītimanassa kāyo passambhati,***

*From this blissful mind, one's body becomes tranquil*

***Passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti,***

*With a tranquil body, one experiences happiness*

***Sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati.***

*And the happy mind becomes collected [naturally].*



## Natural Samādhi

The Buddha explains in many suttas how to uplift the mind with joy and to allow it to release its tension. To open it up, using wisdom and discernment to let go of discontent and eventually, to let go of all “objects” in the mind, as it becomes fully released.

This same sequence on the path, which is found in twelve suttas of the opening chapter in the Long Discourses, also contains a clear description of each level of meditation (*jhāna*) with both exquisite and vivid analogies that explain these states and the way of practice to attain them, with striking eloquence and clarity.

This elaboration on the *jhānas* reveals that the Buddha taught a kind of meditation that was happy and uplifted, using awareness of the body as a foundation. It shows that, awareness of the body was central to his teaching, a blissful abiding, used as a joy-filled vehicle.



"*Seekers,*

Being wise and continuously present,  
develop *samādhi*<sup>8</sup> that is immeasurable.  
Doing so, these five understandings will arise:

- (1) "This present mental collectedness is happy  
and results in future happiness."
- (2) "This mental collectedness is noble and beyond  
matter."
- (3) "Unvirtuous persons cannot practice this kind  
mental collectedness."
- (4) "This mental collectedness is peaceful and sublime,  
obtained through calming down,  
attained by mental unity,  
not by forcefully holding back [the mind]  
and pushing away [with the mind]"

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<sup>8</sup> Meditation, mental unity, see glossary.

(5) “[In this mental collectedness,] I am aware while entering it  
and aware while emerging from it.”<sup>9</sup>



## Avoiding the Tangle

For those who are simply beginning on this wonderful path of liberation and happiness, there is no need to concern yourself about these technical matters. One can simply proceed to reading the instructions.

For the other seekers, who aim to understand a little more about the context in which these instructions have been preserved, this information can be regarded as an interesting and valuable addition that contributes to their own understanding of the teachings nowadays.

## In the Buddha’s Words Series

The goal of this series of books is to let the Buddha’s words shine on their own, with as little change as possible. Readers should first understand that there are more than 2500 years of oral and written transmission that separate us from the Buddha, and that these centuries have seen their share of wars, famines and diseases.

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<sup>9</sup> *AN V 27 Samādhī Sutta*

Even the original *Pāli* texts bear the marks of adaptations and modifications throughout history. Not to mention that the English vocabulary and its cultural context in modern civilization differ considerably from the *Pāli* vocabulary and its own cultural context in Ancient India.

Every translation is bound to be different. Hopefully, these translations will be a good bridge for the Buddha's teaching to cross over the gap left by the centuries, as close to their intended meaning. All translations in this book are my own, therefore I ask your forgiveness for any mistakes or inaccuracies one may encounter.

### Discourses and Commentaries

This series of books, *In the Buddha's Words*, originated out of sheer love for the Buddha's extraordinary wisdom and teaching. The goal of these books is to give Buddhism, its original splendor and value, by going back to the source, the discourses of the Buddha himself.

The teaching of the Buddha has been interpreted in countless different ways throughout the ages. Now, we are left with a colorful spectrum of different Buddhist traditions and different opinions about what the Buddha taught.

In the end, the most qualified person in this field remains the Buddha himself, and the Early Buddhist Texts

(EBTs) have been proven to be a rather valid and credible source for the original teaching of the Buddha.<sup>10</sup>

But over the centuries, a great number of texts which comment on the original discourses have emerged. As time went by, some of these commentaries have become fused to the Pāḷi Canon. Ideas and theories concerning the identity of the author(s) of these commentaries have been suggested, but overall, it remains unclear.

Finally, in the last century, we have seen a tremendous bloom of Buddhist literature, claiming, from far or near, to be from the Buddha's original discourses. Whether from each individual tradition that has emerged since the time of the Buddha, and their respective leaders and teachers, to independent lay individuals, sharing their personal point of view, to the emerging new trend for secular Buddhism or pragmatic Dhamma, all the way to advanced scholarly work based on generations of commentaries and sub commentaries, a great array of diverse and colorful interpretations are accessible to the public.

This can be both a blessing and a curse, as this tends to add many layers of opinions, judgements and ideas over the original teaching and can lead to great confusion. One should be advised, while reading any external sources and commentaries, that there tends to be a great deal of misleading information on the teaching of the Buddha.

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<sup>10</sup> Sujato & Brahmali, "The Authenticity of Early Buddhist Texts" <https://ocbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/authenticity.pdf>



It remains that, any interested seeker does wisely to first invest their attention and faith in the Buddha's original discourses.

Keeping close to the Buddha's discourses, as it is found in the five main collections (*Nikāya*), a person is assured to receive the most reliable information on the topic and tremendously increase their chance of practicing in the right direction.

Commentaries, including my own in this very book, should always be given less importance, keeping in mind that the people who wrote them are simply sharing their own understanding, which might not always be fully accurate. Lastly, hoping they did so in order to help rather than for personal benefit.

## Notes on the Format

In the first section of this book, my goal was to bring the original words of the Buddha to the fore, and to offer some essential explanations and comments in a clearly separate section, hoping that the Buddha's words would stand and shine for themselves. The reader may or may not choose to read my explanations.

The first section is mainly an exploration of the discourse on the fruits of the meditative life or the life of those who choose to go forth and dedicate their entire life to the Buddha's path.

This is an essential teaching for anyone beginning on this path. This discourse is where it all starts. It is the grand opening of the Buddha's teaching! This discourse is the answer to the question: "Where does it start?"

It all starts here!

Not only does this discourse bring to light the whole of the path, but the base topic is also still relevant to this day, as this is a question that most meditation practitioners are likely to face many times in their lives: "So, what's the point of meditation?"

## Impediments

In the original version of this discourse, a few impediments usually discourage new readers from accessing the full potential of this amazing teaching.

First, the sheer length of the full discourse can easily dissuade many who would come upon it as their first reading. Its location is also not the most obvious, as it is categorized as the second discourse of the collection of long discourses of the Buddha, and this collection is often overlooked for the lengthiness of its teachings.

Then, a few passages in the discourse itself are so exhaustive and repetitive that they often turn away those who begin in the practice. These tedious passages tend to also deal with topics irrelevant for beginning practitioners. For the sake of clarity and conciseness, I have carefully omitted three such

lengthy passages, which tend to create more confusion and draw peoples' attention away from the core message of the teaching itself.

The first passage I removed is **the long introductory story**, when the setting is given, where each royal ministers stand on the king's verandah and invite King Ajātasattu to visit different spiritual master, until the king decides to visit the Buddha. They then leave on the back of five hundred elephants to see the Buddha. I have also omitted the first words the King and the Buddha exchanged, which contribute to the unnecessary length of the sutta, and are not particularly relevant for our purpose here.

It is at this moment that I chose to begin the excerpt. **At the third 'fruit' of the meditative life**, which triggers the Buddha to deliver his famous explanation of the path. This is an elaboration of the eight-spoked path of the awakened ones (noble eightfold path) although he does not allude to it in these terms.

Much like Bhante Vimalaramsi would teach his students, before the 6Rs were invented, he simply taught the same principles, without any rigid vocabulary around it. Similarly, the Buddha knew this whole path from early on, although, he did not necessarily corner the exact terms that came to be used later when speaking of the eight-spoked path, which are trending nowadays.

Shortly afterwards, the Buddha launches himself in a very lengthy and elaborate explanation on virtue which is

composed of three sections: the short, medium, and long sections.

The short section is already an exhaustive exposition on virtue, perhaps one of the most beautiful and thorough development on the topic found in the whole canon, and it is relevant to everyone's practice, whether monastic or lay practitioners.

But the following two sections are mostly connected to monastic life, combined with very specific scenarios which are often related to the life of people at the time of the Buddha, in northern India, nearly 2600 years ago. Consequently, **I have omitted the medium and the long sections on virtue**, for clarity's sake and for ease of reading.

Lastly, near the end of the Buddha's exposition, to impress the King a little further, he elaborates on all the psychic abilities that one can develop through this practice. For the pragmatic modern minds, this method to impress usually has the opposite effect on readers. In the meantime, it also tends to move readers away from the core teachings.

Psychic abilities can be developed through meditation, but the Buddha seldom praised them, nor emphasized their development. In my humble opinion, nowadays, it is too easily misleading to put attention on such topics, especially early in the practice. With this in mind, **I have decided to exclude the section on psychic abilities**.

Note must be taken, I have kept the last psychic ability, which the Buddha praised as the highest kind of psychic

power, the knowledge of the stilling of all mental distractions, the drying up of all mental impurities.

This last and most relevant ability is simply the culmination of wise practice and the application of the four understandings of the awakened ones. Since it is a practical and very useful knowledge, which the Buddha praised as the highest, **I deemed important to let it remain.**

Readers might notice that **I have also omitted the conclusion** of the sutta, where the Buddha explains the reason why, King Ajātasattu, did not have the arising of the Dhamma-vision, after hearing such a magnificent discourse on the path. Since, usually, when hearing this precise exposition by the Buddha, listeners would gain vision into the Dhamma and enter the stream (of the Dhamma). More will be found on this topic in the second section of this book, in the chapter on *Entering the Stream*.

I have decided to keep this excerpt concise and to not go further into the narrative of this discourse, as this is simply a template that the Buddha used, very often, to explain his entire path.

What mattered to me in this present work was not the story of the discourse but the fundamental teaching behind it. Readers who wish to read the whole sutta afterwards can easily do at their own convenience. It is, nevertheless, a wonderful discourse in its entirety!

The second section of this book serves a different purpose: To “*Open the Gates to Awakening*” and to provide seekers

with a sound overview of the Buddha's teaching and a wider understanding of basic Dhamma principles. There, meditators will find good advice to make progress on the path, using a broad selection of passages from the Buddha's original discourses. In this section, I have mixed my own explanations and their related suttas together.

May this book bring attention back to the essence of the Buddha's teaching, shedding new light onto this ancient wisdom and open the door to all those interested in the Buddha's most precious gift to the world, the Dhamma.

So that everyone may enjoy,  
Here and now,  
The bliss of Release,  
*Nibbāna.*

***Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta***  
May all beings be happy at heart.

Bhante Ānanda  
Vesak 2020  
Kootenays

# *Part I*

*The Buddha's Path*





## *The Gradual Training*

### *The Purpose of the Meditative Life*

*On this auspicious full-moon night of the uposatha, the King Ajātasattu of Magadha feels inspired and his mind inclines to seek out spiritual guidance. His ministers recommend visiting several other famous spiritual teachers of the time, which he declines one after the other. But one of his ministers remains silent; Ajita Kesakambali.*

*After being asked about his silence, he replies that the Blessed One, the Truth-finder, the Buddha, is living in his mango grove right now. And that if it suits the king, he may pay him visit tonight. The king then accepts and resolves to seek guidance from the Buddha.*

*Once arrived at the mango grove, the king alights from his elephant and is directed to where the Buddha and the monks are sitting very quietly. Amazed by the calm and poise of the assembly of monks, he approached the Buddha and pays homage to him.*

*The king then asks a question, which he admits having asked to various other teachers. He then explains how their answers*

## *The Purpose of the Meditative Life*

*made poor impression on him and left him dissatisfied, and his hopes that perhaps the Buddha could provide a better explanation.*

*Here, the king formulates his question...*

### **[King Ajātasattu]**

Dear Bhante,

There are various professions and crafts such as:

Chefs, barbers and soap-makers,  
Cooks, gardeners and dyers,  
Weavers, reed workers and potters,  
Translators and accountants,  
And all those with similar professions and skills;

They live by the visible fruits of their professions.

They themselves happily enjoy this.  
Their mothers and fathers happily enjoy this.  
Their children and wives happily enjoy this.  
Their friends and relatives happily enjoy this.

They can thereby support the spiritual life,  
And offer to wandering seekers and brahmins.

They stand      In what is divine,  
                    In what has a happy result,  
                    In what is conducive to the celestial abodes.

“Bhante, is it possible to reveal,  
Any visible fruit of the truth-seeking life?

**[The Buddha]**

“It is possible, Great King.”

“Listen carefully and apply your mind to what I say.”

**[King Ajātasattu]**

“Yes Bhante” replied the King.

The Awakened One said this:

“Great King,

A Truth-Finder arises in the world,  
An Arahant, Perfectly All-Awakened  
Endowed with righteous knowledge  
and righteous behavior,

A Blissful One, Knower of the worlds,  
Unsurpassed guide for those who seek peace,  
Teacher of Devas and humans,  
Awakened and Exalted. [...]

He teaches the Dhamma which is

Beautiful in the beginning,  
Beautiful in the middle,  
Beautiful in the ending.  
In the meaning and the phrasing.

He embodies and shines forth,  
The completely perfected and utterly pure Spiritual life. [...]

Then, this Dhamma is heard by someone,  
Reborn in any family or country.

Having heard this Dhamma, that person gains faith and  
inspiration from the Buddha, then thinks:

“The run-of-the-mill life is fettering  
and gives rise to many mental impurities,  
life gone-forth is wide open.”

“It is not easy, while living this busy life,  
to lead a peaceful meditative life,  
which is fully cleansed and pure,  
like a bleached and polished seashell.”

“Let me shave off my hair and beard  
wrap my body in some kind of saffron-colored robe  
and leave this run-of-the-mill life,  
and live the meditative life without possessions.”

Shortly afterwards, leaving a big or small amount of  
possessions, leaving a big or small number of friends and  
relatives, they go forth [and dedicate their lives to  
meditation].

## *The Gradual Training*

[...And one takes on the training...]

One lives,

Self-mastered and protected by the *pātimokkha*  
Continually living in righteous behavior,  
Seeing danger in the smallest lapse of attention  
Undertaking the training in the virtues,  
Skillfully conducted in physical and verbal actions,  
Completely pure in living and good in nature,  
Watchful over the doors of one's sense faculties  
Possessed of presence and full awareness,

Happy and content.

---

### *Explanation*

#### **A Truth-Finder:**

*Tathāgato*: See Glossary

#### **Uposatha:**

Observance day. See Glossary.

#### **Listen carefully:**

Paying attention, which directly implies having a respectful behavior, notably towards monks and teachers is the very first step to learn anything. It is a sign of wisdom, and it also

indicates one's level of mental presence. The Buddha often began important talks by reminding the listener to make a special effort to maintain mental composure, so to receive and understand his teaching, for their own welfare and benefit. (See last section on gratitude, respect, and the ability to listen.)

**An Arahant:**

*Araha:* Truly worthy. This term is very often used to describe a fully awakened person, who has made an end of selfishness.

**Acquires faith in the Buddha:**

Faith is confidence, determination, and inspiration. Faith is based on hearing the Dhamma and being inspired, interested, even impressed by its meaning. This kind of faith is gained through one's own direct understanding. Many have heard of the Buddha. Not everybody knows about the Buddha's Teaching, but this is often how a person will be drawn to meditation retreats for example. Having heard the Dhamma from a friend, or the benefits of meditation practice, faith arises, and the desire to try and practice this wonderful path of wisdom and Liberation springs up. Faith is a very important factor of the path. Without faith, nothing is possible. With faith, possibilities are endless.

**Pātimokkha:**

Rules of good conduct for monks. But translated to a regular life context, this means mainly the five or eight virtues.

**The training in the virtues:**

For lay individuals, the five most basic virtues are:

- (1) Not to hurt any living beings consciously;
- (2) Not to steal;
- (3) Not to commits sexual misbehavior;
- (4) Not to lie;

(5) Not to consume substances that cause negligence.

*General Notes*

**Eight-Spoked Path:**

Even though it is not directly mentioned here, this is an exposition of the Eight-Spoked path of the Awakened (Eightfold Noble Path). Wise Speech, Wise Action, Wise Living, Wise Practice, Wise Awareness, Wise Meditation, Wise Understanding and Wise Thought. This was the method of exposition most commonly used by the Buddha to explain his teaching and the entire path of practice that a noble seeker would go through.



*The Training in Virtue*

*Sila*



*The Training in Virtue*

*Wise Action*

How is a seeker good in nature?

One abandons hurting living beings,  
One turns away from hurting living beings,  
With neither stick nor sword.  
One lives, considerate and kind,  
Friendly and compassionate towards all living beings.

This constitutes one's good nature.

One abandons the taking of what is not given,  
One turns away from taking what is not given.  
Taking only what is offered,  
Expecting only what is offered.  
One lives without stealing, with inner purity,

This constitutes one's good nature.

One abandons [sexual misbehavior,  
[One lives content and at peace,  
[Not obsessed by physical attraction.]

This constitutes his good nature.

## *Wise Speech*

One abandons speaking lies,  
One turns away from speaking lies,  
One is known to speak the truth,  
Filled with truth, firm and trustworthy,  
Not a deceiver of the world.

This constitutes one's good nature.

One abandons hurtful speech,  
One turns away from hurtful speech,

One does not repeat elsewhere  
What one has heard here,  
To divide the people here.

One does not repeat here,  
What one has heard elsewhere,  
To divide the people elsewhere.

One is a unifier of those who are divided,  
A promoter of those who are united.

One enjoys harmony,  
Delights in harmony,  
Rejoices in harmony.

One speaks praise of making peace and harmony.

This constitutes one's good nature.

One abandons coarse speech  
One turns away from coarse speech.  
Speaking with words that are polished,  
Pleasant to the ear, loving,  
Going to the heart and civilized,  
Beloved and dear to many.  
Such are the words that one speaks.

This constitutes one's good nature.

One abandons meaningless talk,  
One turns away from meaningless talk.  
One is a speaker of words that are timely,  
Factual and meaningful.

A speaker of Dhamma,  
A speaker of Vinaya.

One speaks for the purpose of Laying Down the Burden.

Words that are appropriate,  
Reasoned, well defined,  
In connection with the meaning.

This constitutes one's good nature.

## *Wise Living*

One turns away from injuring  
The seed kingdom and  
The plant kingdom.

One is a one-meal eater,  
Not eating in the evening,  
One turns away from eating at improper times. [...]

## *The Blameless Bliss of Virtue*

In this way, Great King,  
For a seeker of a good nature,  
There is no fear arising from anywhere,  
Since one is protected by his virtue.

Just as,  
For a highly celebrated king of the ruling caste,  
Who has conquered his enemies [in the four directions],  
There is no fear arising from anywhere,  
And he lives, protected by his conquest.

In the same way,  
for the good-natured seeker,  
there is no fear arising from anywhere,  
because one is protected by one's own virtue.

Following this entire body of  
the awakened ones' virtuous behavior,

one experiences within oneself  
a completely blameless happiness.

In this way Great King, a seeker is of good nature.

---

*Explanation*

**One lives without stealing:**

For the lay person, this simply means not stealing. The directions about accepting alms food are obviously directed to the monks. Nevertheless, practicing to let go of personal expectations is a very wholesome endeavor and is assuredly part of the Buddha's Teaching.

**Sexual misbehavior:**

This section which usually recommends complete celibacy was adapted to fit a broader audience. Celibacy is the training of monks. If you are not a monk or a nun, and do not plan to be one anytime soon, do not fuss over the things that seem too restrictive. Simply take on what feels appropriate for you right now and leave the rest. Better it is to take on the training partially than not even trying. Otherwise, there will be no chance of understanding. The monk's training can be used as inspiration. For the lay people, the training is to abandon any blameworthy sexual activity, this means: No harm coming to anyone. It also means performing this with someone who is an adult, independent, not under the care of their parents and consenting.

**Wise Lifestyle:**

For lay life, wise living is mainly about having a work that does not entail hurting living beings. Righteous wealth righteously gained.

**The plant kingdom:**

Monks train not to hurt vegetal life. The lay person can also choose to observe this noble training, as much as possible.

**One-meal eater:**

Once again, this is peculiar to the monks training though it is surely a virtuous and uplifting practice for anyone. Eating in the evening is hard on the body. Food doesn't get properly digested before and while sleeping. The body has to work harder in the morning to cleanse the unutilized, undigested food from the gastro-intestinal tract. This causes dullness and heaviness, which are hindrances to meditation and a clear mind.

**Eating at improper times:**

The long list describing virtuous behavior is here abridged since most of the list concerns monks.

*General Notes*

**Bhikkhu as Seeker**

In this book, the word "bhikkhu" which is the Pāli word for a "monk" is purposefully changed for the word "seeker" for the sake of universality. The teaching is usually addressed to monks, but anyone can undertake this practice.



*The Training in Meditation*

*Samādhi'*





*Wise Practice & Wise Awareness*

*Mastery of the Sense Faculties*

How is a seeker, a gatekeeper of one's sense faculties?

*The Eye*

Seeing a shape with the eye,  
One does not dwell on it [with one's mind],  
Nor does one dwell on any of its features.

If one were to live  
with the visual faculty unprotected,  
    longing,  
    impatience  
    and unskillful,  
    unwholesome states  
    would take over [one's mind].

Thus, one practices for its mastery.  
One protects the visual faculty.  
One becomes skilled regarding the visual faculty.

*The Ear*

Hearing a sound with the ear,  
One does not dwell on it [with one's mind]  
Nor does one dwell on any of its features.

If one were to live  
with the auditive faculty unprotected,

## *Wise Practice & Wise Awareness*

longing,  
impatience  
and unskillful,  
unwholesome states  
would take over [one's mind].

Thus, one practices for its mastery.  
One protects the auditive faculty.  
One becomes skilled regarding the auditive faculty.

### *The Nose*

Smelling an odor with the nose,  
One does not dwell on it [with one's mind]  
Nor does one dwell on any of its features.

If one were to live  
with the olfactive faculty unprotected,  
    longing,  
    impatience  
    and unskillful,  
    unwholesome states  
    would take over [one's mind].

Thus, one practices for its mastery.  
One protects the olfactive faculty.  
One becomes skilled regarding the olfactive faculty.

### *The Tongue*

Tasting a flavor with the tongue,

## *The Training in Meditation*

One does not dwell on it [with one's mind]  
Nor does one dwell on any of its features.

If one were to live  
with the gustative faculty unprotected  
    longing,  
    impatience  
    and unskillful,  
    unwholesome states  
    would take over [one's mind].

Thus, one practices for its mastery.  
One protects the gustative faculty.  
One becomes skilled regarding the gustative faculty.

## *The Body*

Touching a tangible with the body,  
One does not dwell on it [with one's mind]  
Nor does one dwell on any of its features.

If one were to live  
with the body faculty unprotected,  
    longing,  
    impatience  
    and unskillful,  
    unwholesome states  
    would take over [one's mind].

Thus, one practices for its mastery.  
One protects the body faculty.  
One becomes skilled regarding the body faculty.

*The Mind*

Aware of a mental object with the mind,  
One does not dwell on it [with one's mind]  
Nor does one dwell on any of its features.

If one were to live  
with the mind faculty unprotected,  
    longing,  
    impatience  
    and unskillful,  
    unwholesome states  
    would take over [one's mind].

Thus, one practices for its mastery.  
One protects the mental faculty.  
One becomes skilled regarding the mental faculty.

*The Blameless Bliss of Self-Mastery*

Possessing this awakened self-mastery,  
One experiences within oneself  
A happiness that is completely blameless.

    This is how a seeker  
is a gatekeeper of one's own sense faculties.

*Explanation*

**One does not dwell on it [with one's mind]:**

This is another way of explaining the Four Resting Places of Awareness, especially awareness of the body, in a practical way, which the Buddha called "Wise Awareness." But this time with the six sense faculties instead of the usual formula: "Observing body as body, feeling as feeling, mind as mind, mental activity as mental activity, letting go of longing and impatience for the world." The first fold of Wise Practice is about preventing unwholesome states to arise, that is "Mastery of the sense faculties." It is also Wise Awareness and the Four Resting Places of Awareness. Wise Practice is included in Wise Awareness. Wise Awareness is included in Wise Practice.

**One becomes skilled regarding the visual faculty:**

This could be summarized as "remembering to relax into life," relaxing into everything that we do. Which is also Wise Attitude (*Sammā-saṅkappa*). Not holding on to anything. Remembering to stay light, not to take on anything on our shoulders. Letting go of any tension that arises at any given time during the day. Not giving into agitated mental states. Therefore, preserving mindfulness and full awareness. Remaining in the happiness of a clear mind. For the wise, the bliss of *samādhi* is maintained and protected by this watchfulness of the sense doors.

**One protects the gustative faculty:**

Just as if someone were trying to fill a bucket of water that has six holes in it; if these six sense faculties are not watched over when someone tries to cultivate a happy wholesome

and collected mind through meditation, the precious water of inner happiness and contentment will leak out. Strong attachments and opinions about food is a good example.

**Aware of a mental object with the mind:**

“Thinking” or “mind” is but another sense faculty which, like the others, we learn to calm down and not become so involved with it through meditation and letting go.

**One becomes skilled regarding the mental faculty:**

This is about learning how to direct our minds to wholesome and skillful ends. Where it can be invested in a beneficial pursuit, in the longer term, in a sustainable, wholesome way which will also benefit us in return. Having the wisdom and mindfulness to not “engage” in trivial pursuits, not getting carried away whimsically by the winds of attractions and repulsions. Renouncing quick reactivity toward all external stimuli to allow sustained stability of mental presence and happiness.

*General Notes*

**Wholesome Mental Development:**

There is a common belief that the Buddha’s Teaching is only about sitting meditation. That is not true. The Buddha’s teaching is about wholesome personality development. Developing wisdom in order to move towards greater happiness. A happiness that is wholesome, all-inclusive, and beneficial.

The Buddha taught that the root of all human problems and distress resides in selfishness or discontent. Selfishness has three roots: greed, anger, and delusion. Where can we see those, where do they arise? At each of the sense doors.

These six sense faculties are the ground for selfishness or tension to arise, in the mind and in the body. Clinging to the pleasant and rejecting the unpleasant, we tear ourselves apart, continually. This creates lapses of mental presence, which is this third root: delusion.

The Buddha's teaching is about breaking free from this maddening circle. Meditation is helping us develop our mind in order to see these unwholesome states with wisdom as they arise and to develop the ability of letting them go in order to experience true lasting happiness, the happiness of a liberated mind. The mastery of the sense faculties is to help us protect this happiness in regular life.



*Presence & Full Awareness*

How is a seeker present and fully aware?

One is fully conscious,  
While going forward and coming back;

One is fully conscious,  
Looking ahead and looking down;

One is fully conscious,  
Moving and extending [one's body];

One is fully conscious,  
Putting on the outer robe,  
One's bowl and one's robes;

One is fully conscious,  
While eating, drinking,  
Chewing and swallowing;

One is fully conscious,  
While evacuating and urinating;

One is fully conscious,  
While walking, standing, sitting,  
Sleeping and waking up,  
Talking and keeping silent.

This is how a seeker is present and fully aware.

*Contentment*

How is a seeker content?

One is happy with robes to cover one's body,  
With alms food to satisfy one's stomach.

Wherever one goes,  
One sets out, taking only these things.

Just as birds, wherever they fly,  
Take nothing but their wings,  
And fly with themselves as only burden.

In the same way,  
One is happy with robes to cover one's body,  
With alms food to satisfy one's stomach.

Wherever one goes,  
One sets out, taking only these things.

This is how Great King, a seeker is content.

*Seclusion*

Following the entire body  
    of the awakened ones' good conduct,  
Possessing the awakened ones'  
    mastery of the sense faculties,  
Endowed with the awakened ones'  
    presence and full awareness,  
Attained to the awakened ones' contentment,

One resorts to a secluded dwelling,  
    To the forest,  
    At the root of a tree,  
    On a hillside,  
    In some cave,  
    A refuge in the mountain,  
    A forest hut,  
    In the open air  
    Or on a pile of straw.

After having eaten, returning from alms round  
One sits down with legs folded and one's body upright.  
Settling down, one attends with presence about oneself.

*Letting go of the Hindrances*

Abandoning longing for the world,  
Dwelling with a mind void of longing,  
One's mind is cleansed from longing.

Abandoning hostility and hatred,  
One dwells with a mind rid of hostility,  
With heart-felt compassion towards all beings that live.  
One's mind is cleansed from hostility and hatred.

Leaving behind laziness and dullness of mind,  
Dwelling with a mind void of laziness and dullness,  
Perceiving clearly,  
Present and fully aware,  
One's mind is cleansed from dull laziness.

Leaving behind agitation and worry,  
One dwells, uplifted,  
With an inwardly relieved mind,  
One's mind is cleansed from agitation and worry.

Leaving behind perplexity,  
One dwells unperplexed,  
Rid of uncertainty towards what is good,  
One's mind is cleansed of perplexity.

[...]

Just as if someone was in debt, sick,  
imprisoned, in servitude,  
on a wild desert journey;

This is how a seeker perceives  
Carrying around the five hindrances within oneself.

\*\*\*

Just as if one were freed from debt,  
Freed from illness,  
Freed from jail,  
Freed from slavery,  
Having come upon a haven on this earth;

This is how, a seeker perceives  
the letting go of the five hindrances within oneself.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Iti 88

*Explanation*

**Carrying around the five hindrances within oneself:**

Mental Presence (Awareness) arises because of Wise Practice, which means letting go of the hindrances. Lack of Mental Presence is the cause for the hindrances to arise and take over the mind. This entails unwholesome hurtful consequences for oneself and others. The ability to see this and to practice away from unwholesome states is what Buddhists call wisdom or discernment.

*General Notes*

**Understanding the Mind:**

Understanding the mind is the cornerstone of the Dhamma. The path of wisdom taught by the Buddha is about understanding how hurtful and unwholesome these impurities of the mind are, for ourselves and everyone around us. Then it is about changing, letting them go and enjoy a blameless, uplifted kind of happiness.

**Let go and open:**

The Buddha's teaching is about letting go, opening up, releasing, relaxing and enjoying a happy collected mind. In this practice, we move away from tension, away from resistance. Letting go of the hindrances that clutter the mind to allow true mental development. This mental freedom comes with great happiness and relief.

*Boundless Love*

*The Conch Blower* <sup>12</sup>

Then, a virtuous seeker,  
void of longing,  
void of impatience,  
void of arrogance,  
fully conscious and continually present,  
  
meditates with a heart filled with love;

Suffusing one direction,  
a second, a third, and a fourth.

Above, below  
and everywhere across.  
to all living beings  
in this boundless universe.

One meditates with a heart filled with Love,  
Vast, expansive, measureless,  
Free from anger and impatience.

*Simile of the Conch Blower*

Imagine a mighty conch blower  
who could effortlessly,

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<sup>12</sup> SN IV 42.8 *Saṅkhaḍḍhama Sutta*

## *The Training in Meditation*

let his sound be known  
to the four directions.

In the same way,  
when the release of mind  
by boundless love  
is developed and cultivated,

If any selfish mental state  
was previously acquired  
none can settle there,  
none can stay.

---

### *Explanation*

#### **Selfish mental states:**

*Pamāṇakataṃ kammaṃ*. Limited *Kamma* here means any mental states included in selfishness, impatience and negligence. (*Lobha, dosa, moha*). The mind is “limited,” or constricted by the hindrances. To speak properly, it is when hindrances reign over the mind that it is “concentrated”, shrunk down, and shriveled up, full of tension. Cultivating Boundless Love will break it open and liberate it.

### *General Notes*

#### **The power of boundless love:**

This is the magnificence of the practice of boundless love. There can only be Love. If a distraction comes in, the love



fades away. It is then easier to discern if the mind slips into unwholesome states because of the powerful nature of Boundless Love. (See section on Sutta References for different variations of the whole path with the *Brāhmanavihāras*).

**Free from anger and impatience:**

This is true love. It is unconditioned. All-inclusive. When there is pride, arrogance, conceit, anger jealousy, envy, infatuation, selfish desires, then there is no Love. Then, there are only unwholesome states. There is no room for True Love. It is either one or the other. Love is happiness. Being able to feel Love for all living beings in fact, directly supports our own and happiness.

*Wise Collectedness*

## *The Samādhī born of Happiness*

Growing increasingly aware of this gradual fading away  
Of these five hindrances within oneself, gladness arises;

From that gladness, joy arises in the mind;  
With a blissful mind, the body becomes calm;  
With a calm body, one experiences happiness;  
With a happy mind comes mental collectedness.

---

### *Explanation*

#### **Samādhī born of happiness:**

This is called *Dhamma Samādhī*. “Natural collectedness” of the mind, as opposed to “forceful one-pointedness”. This sequence is perhaps one of the most important teachings of the Buddha on the nature of the mind and meditation. It illustrates very clearly how the Buddha taught meditation and how to enter the proper kind of *Samādhī*. It is discussed in many suttas throughout the *Pāḷi* Canon. This is the Dhamma. This is “How it works”. It is the nature of the mind. When the mind is rid of the hindrances, it becomes happy. When the mind is happy, it becomes collected and

clear. When craving is abandoned, happiness is bound to take its place, naturally.

**From that gladness, joy arises in the mind:**

This kind of bliss or delight is unique in the sense that it emerges from mental development. It is the bliss of the wholesome mind, a blameless bliss, the bliss of the holy life, the bliss of meditation, the same bliss that also derives from virtue, generosity and performing meritorious deeds that are beneficial for all living beings.

**With a happy mind comes mental collectedness:**

This is how the mind becomes collected: *Samādhī. Sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati.*

## *First Stage of Meditation*

Letting go of all sensory engagement,  
And letting go of unwholesome mental states,  
Still attended by thinking and imagining,  
With blissful happiness born of letting go.

One understands and abides  
in the first level of meditation.

## *Instructions*

One immerses, permeates,  
Suffuses and pervades one's body  
With this blissful happiness born of letting go.

And nowhere, in one's entire body is left untouched  
By this blissful happiness born of letting go.

## *Simile of the Soap*

Imagine a skilled soap-maker  
who would throw some soap powder into a copper bowl.  
He would sprinkle it with water  
and knead it thoroughly.

Then after some time,  
The lump of soap would be filled  
And suffused by moisture, through and through,  
Everywhere, touched by the moisture,

## *The Training in Meditation*

Yet it would not leak.

\*\*\*

In the same way,  
One immerses, permeates,  
Suffuses and pervades one's body,  
With this blissful happiness born of letting go,

And nowhere in one's entire body is left untouched  
By this blissful happiness born of letting go.

This is a visible fruit of the truth-seeking life,  
Beyond and more exalted than the previous ones.

---

### *Explanation*

#### **Stage of meditation:**

I translate *Jhāna* into its original meaning as 'meditation.'  
See explanation below.

#### **Letting go of unwholesome mental states:**

*Akusala dhamma*: These are the hindrances discussed earlier.

#### **Still attended by thinking and imagining:**

*Savitkka savicāra*: The mind has started to unwind, by letting go of tension, though thinking and imagining are still present. This means any visualized object, like bringing up a person, repeating an uplifting sentence is still possible. Thoughts and reflections are now completely wholesome. Otherwise, it is not "Buddha's Jhāna". As these thoughts

and reflections are slowly abandoned, one enters the second *jhāna*.

**Understands and abides....:**

*Jhāna* means meditation, a level of meditation or a level of understanding or a level of insight. This is not the “absorption” kind of *jhāna* like it is taught by many schools and teachers. These are “aware” *jhānas* or levels of meditation. As it was originally taught by the Buddha. These are to be understood through direct experience and practice, not through philosophical debates. *This sequence does work, exactly in this way.* Nothing needs to be added nor subtracted. By relaxing the tension in body and mind, (craving) awareness opens up, it becomes clear and established, no forcing required. And such a mind is naturally joyful and uplifted. Being uplifted, it is ever more content, therefore, it is not running outwards to the senses. It is fully content, here and now. Calm and happy.

**Blissful happiness born of letting go:**

“If by renouncing a lesser happiness one may realize a greater happiness, let the wise man renounce the lesser, having regard for the greater.” Dhp 290. The insight here is the blissful happiness that arises from letting go, itself. The Happiness of disengaging.

**Yet it would not leak:**

The mind is in “*Viveka*” now, seclusion or detachment, it is not “leaking” outwards anymore. This is the beginning of Mental Composure, or the Stilling of the mind (*Samādhi*).

Here, in the Buddha's original instructions, no mentions are made of any preliminary step called access concentration (*Upacāra Samādhi*) or Temporary concentration, (*Khanika Samādhi*) or any comment on "*nimittas*," a light inside the mind, or objects of "focus." These are from later commentaries. Instead, we find the words, letting go, bliss or joy, tranquility, happiness and collectedness in a natural, flowing sequence.

### **Mettā & Jhāna:**

As the Buddha said himself, when there is Love in the heart, there is jhāna, it is quite simple: "If, even for the time of a finger snap, a monk practices to have a Loving mind, then I say, that monk is one who lives practicing jhāna, one who practices the teacher's teaching, one who applies his instructions, one who eats the country's alms undeluded. What to say then of one who would cultivate it." – AN I 53 Finger snap Love Discourse.

### **A Simple Teaching:**

Just reading this first sequence, we already get an amazing glimpse at how the Buddha really taught meditation. Only this first sequence is sufficient to understand. This is what the Buddha taught. This is how he taught meditation. It could not be clearer. A profound and marvelous teaching, as it is.



*Second Stage of Meditation*

With the calming of thinking and reflection,  
With inner tranquilization,  
One's mind becoming unified,  
Without thinking and reflection,  
With the blissful happiness born of mental collectedness,

One understands and dwells  
in the second level of meditation.

*Instructions*

One immerses, permeates,  
Suffuses and pervades one's body,  
With this blissful happiness born of mental harmony,

And nowhere in one's entire body is left untouched  
By this blissful happiness born of mental harmony.

*Simile of the Lake*

Imagine, a deep lake,  
With water, only welling up from within,  
With no other source flowing in,  
from the East or from the West,  
from the North or from the South.  
With no proper rain at any time.

From that cool water spring gushing up from within,

## *The Training in Meditation*

That lake would become immersed, permeated,  
Suffused and pervaded by this fresh and cool water.

And nowhere in this entire lake  
Would be left untouched by this cool spring water.

In the same way,  
One immerses, permeates,  
Suffuses and pervades one's body,  
With this blissful happiness born of mental harmony,

So that nowhere in one's entire body is left untouched  
by this blissful happiness born of mental harmony.

This is a visible fruit of the truth-seeking life,  
Beyond and more exalted than the previous ones.

---

### **Without thinking and reflection:**

*Avitakka avicāra*: Thinking and reflection fades away. The mental collectedness becomes more defined. This is also called "self-confidence". At this stage, mental verbalizing or imagining anything becomes a hindrance to the mind. The Buddha also called this level of meditation "Noble Silence" because of the fading of mental chatter. The inner mob finally quiets down which is a great relief! Any kind of wholesome recollection that was previously used to uplift the mind is, at this point abandoned. Leaving only the blissful happiness of collectedness.

**Blissful happiness born of mental collectedness:**

*Samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ.* One of the salient features of the second *jhāna*. *Samādhi* here is meant as mental collectedness, harmony, stillness or unity of mind, literally: calm-seeing. A keen observer of the Dhamma will notice here that the way to *samādhi* is to develop happiness and that the way to happiness is to develop *samādhi*. The happiness of the Higher Mind, to which nothing in this world can compare.

**Cool water spring gushing up from within:**

This is in India, a very hot country, where the temperature ranges are high most of the year, making this simile much more attractive by giving it a very soothing appeal. This also offers a good insight on how the meditation should feel.

*General Notes*

**Mettā as a Feeling:**

The feeling of Boundless Love is not a “thought,” it is a wholesome, uplifting feeling which is felt in the body, and therefore can remain up to the fourth *jhāna*. The feeling itself will change as it calms down, moving forward in tranquility and becomes more subtle, more sustained, lighter, clearer, and brighter, closer to pure Joy.

*Third Stage of Meditation*

With the calming of bliss,  
One abides in mental steadiness,  
Present and fully aware,

## *The Training in Meditation*

Experiencing happiness within one's body,  
A state which the awakened ones describe as:

“Steady presence of mind:  
This is a pleasant abiding.”

One understands and abides  
in the third level of meditation.

### *Instructions*

One immerses, permeates,  
suffuses and pervades one's body,  
with that happiness beyond bliss.

And nowhere in one's entire body is left untouched  
by the happiness beyond bliss.

### *Simile of the Lotuses*

Imagine water lilies,  
Indian lotuses and white lotuses...

Some of these water lilies,  
Indian lotuses and white lotuses are born in the water,  
grown in the water, not risen above the water,  
nourished while completely immersed.

From their very tip down to their roots,  
submerged, permeated,  
suffused and pervaded by this cool water,  
so that no part of those Water Lilies,

Indian Lotuses and White Lotuses is left untouched  
by cool water.

In the same way,  
one immerses, permeates,  
suffuses and pervades one's body,  
with that happiness beyond bliss.

And nowhere in one's entire body is left untouched  
by this happiness beyond bliss.

This is a visible fruit of the truth-seeking life,  
beyond and more exalted than the previous ones.

---

*Explanation*

**The calming of bliss:**

*Pīti*: Excited bliss or joy at this point becomes too coarse of a feeling for the mind, it is naturally calming down. If practicing the Boundless Love meditation, the feeling of love here softens as it becomes more stable and sustained.

**A pleasant abiding:**

Calm steadiness of mind, cultivated in this natural way, by letting go of tension and developing meditative joy, is far better than the previous kinds of joy, which were coarser. At this point, one is clearly aware of body and steady happiness.

**Beyond and more exalted:**

This kind of meditation continually gets better.

*Fourth Stage of Meditation*

Unattached to pleasant sensations,  
Unstirred by unpleasant ones,  
As mental excitement and heaviness settle,  
One's mind is balanced,  
Purified by unmoving presence,

One understands and abides  
in the fourth level of meditation.

*Instructions*

One sits, with one's body suffused  
With the bright purity of one's own spotless mind.

And nowhere in one's body is left untouched  
By this bright purity of one's own spotless mind.

*Simile of the Cloth*

Imagine a man was sitting  
Wrapped up to the head  
With a sparkling white cloth

So that nowhere on his entire body  
Would be left untouched

By this sparkling white cloth.

In the same way,  
One sits, with one's body suffused  
With that bright purity  
Of one's own spotless mind,

And nowhere in one's entire body is left untouched  
By this bright purity of one's own spotless mind.

This is another visible fruit of the truth-seeking life,  
Beyond this and more exalted than the previous ones.

---

*Explanation*

**Unattached to pleasant sensations:**

Any kind of judgements are abandoned as the mind becomes very steady and composed, which feel too coarse for this brilliant state of mind.

**The fourth level of meditation:**

The Buddha called the fourth *jhāna* "the Beautiful," *subhaṃ*. He also said that this was the limit of *Mettā-Bhāvanā*, Boundless Love.

**One's own spotless mind:**

Presence of mind results from wise practice; which is the result of discernment; which is the result of presence of mind. These three things turn together in a circle (MN 117). This is the training.

*General Notes*

**The Roadmap:**

The *jhānas* simply show the road of happiness by insight into the nature of the mind and by tranquility. They are the “roadmap” of meditation.





*The Training in Discernment*

*Pañña*



*Wise Understanding*

*Calming the Mental Movements*

With this composed and collected mind,  
Wholly cleansed and purified,  
Clear and open, rid of imperfections,  
Having become soft and malleable,  
Straight and unwavering,

One directs and inclines one's mind  
To the complete calming of the mental movements.

One understands [mental movements] as they really are:

"This is tension."  
"This is the increase of the tension."  
"This is the release from tension."  
"This is how to relax the tension."

One understands [mental movements] as they really are:

"These are the mental movements."  
"This is the increase of the mental movements."  
"This is the release from the mental movement."  
"This is how to release the mental movements."

*Explanation*

**The complete calming of the mental movements:**

*Āsavakkhaya*. Conditioned tendencies are profoundly rooted in human psyche through the chain of causality (*Paṭiccasamupāda*). Conditioned, unconscious behavior in the form of likes, dislikes and negligence (*Lobha, dosa, moha*) take root in the deepest corners of the mind. Those unconscious seeds (*Saṅkhāra*) germinate into mental movements, inclinations and habitual tendencies. These are seen and understood at this level and, most importantly, relaxed, let go of, abandoned and released. These tendencies and movements are oppressing the mind, most often without us even knowing. The mind, when it is this pure, experiences nothing but the bliss of relief. It is very close to *Nibbāna*.

**This is unwholesome:**

Distractions allow us a genuine reflection on the true state of our minds and mental habits. If the mind starts wandering after 20 seconds of meditation, that is telling us that the mind's attention span is roughly 20 seconds before it takes off and gets carried away. If the mind becomes angry after one minute, this is telling us that our mind's happiness span is about one minute before it gets angry. Distractions are simply showing us the true behavior of our mind. In meditation, we can see this clearly, whereas in other life circumstances, we usually do not get a chance to see this because of our perpetual involvement in various activities.

### **The increase of the unwholesome:**

Here the word *samudāya* is often translated as “Origin” but it also bears another meaning as “increase” which carries a different but no less valuable perspective.

### *General Notes*

### **Four Understandings of the Awakened ones:**

This sequence is called, the Four Awakened Understandings, or classically translated as the four noble truths. They are the very first spoke of the path, in the training of wisdom. They literally are, what the Buddha called “wisdom”. He said that these understandings, when put into practice, are penetrative. Why? Because as we learn to see the states of our own minds that are unwholesome, our own inner difficulties, we can better let them go. Once we let them go, awareness deepens, and mental clarity arises. And it is then possible to see increasingly deeper-rooted unwholesome, unconscious behavior (*Saṅkhārabhāva*). The more we learn how to use this process, the happier and more aware we become.

### **Alternative Perspectives:**

One understands [mental movements] as they really are:

“This is troublesome.”

“This is the increase of trouble.”

“This is the release from trouble.”

“This is the path to release trouble.”

One understands [mental movements] as they really are:

“This is not *samādhi*.”

“This is the decrease of *samādhi*.”

“This is *samādhi*.”

“This is the path to *samādhi*.”

In this second addition, *samādhi* is used as a clear, balanced, composed state of mind. This *samādhi* truly is the highest form of happiness and therefore, using the sequence of the four Awakened Understandings as our investigation line, we can discern what *samādhi* is and work towards greater mental harmony. I have omitted here the word “release” simply because *samādhi* is the “release” from non-*samādhi*.

**Samatha-Vipassanā:**

“There is no meditation without discernment,  
and no discernment for one who meditates not.  
But the meditative and discerning ones,  
are in the presence of *Nibbāna*.” Dhṛp 372

*Liberation*

*Vimutti'*





## *Liberation*

### *Release*

Continually observing and understanding in this way;

One's mind is released,  
From the inclination for clinging outwardly,  
From the inclination to projecting in the future,  
And from the inclination to negligence.

In that release, one knows:  
"This is Release."

One directly knows:

[Unwholesome states] have been overcome,  
Lived is the spiritual life,  
Done, is what should be done,  
There is no more conceit here.

This is yet another visible fruit of the truth-seeking life.  
And in regards to the fruits of the truth-seeking life,  
There are none beyond or more exalted than this.

*Explanation*

**Continually observing and understanding in this way:**

This truly is the path of practice as taught by the Buddha. That is, understanding how the mind works and abandoning unskillful, unwholesome states of mind in order to move towards greater awareness, happiness and peace. The cultivation of wisdom and release. Samatha-Vipassanā, Tranquility and wise observation, yoked together, supporting each other.

**The inclination to negligence:**

The three inclinations or outflows of the mind. *Kāmāsava*, *bhavāsava*, *avijjāsava*. One's mind is liberated from the inclination to desire for sensory stimulation, the inclination to future becoming and the inclination to negligence.

**Unwholesome states have been overcome:**

I have replaced "Rebirth or "birth" here by the more practical "unwholesome states." For the sake of adapting these instructions to be more accessible to a broader audience. "*Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā"ti abbhaññāsi.*"

**There is no more conceit here:**

Therefore, no more rebirth. Note that this translation is adapted so that people do not feel the need to blindly adhere at a 'rebirth theory.' It is not mandatory to believe in rebirth to experience the Buddha's teaching. Yet, it is still skillful to place a certain level of openness towards this principle, since much of the Buddha's realization around Karma and the fruit of Karma revolve around rebirth.

*Refuge*

Once this was spoken,  
The king Ajātasattu of Magadha exclaimed:

“Excellent Bhante!  
Excellent Bhante!

Just as if what had fallen over had been set upright,  
or as what had been hidden was uncovered,  
or as if the way was shown to someone who was  
lost,  
or as if a light was shone in the darkness, thinking:

“Let those with vision see!”

In the same way Bhante,  
The Awakened One Has brought forth  
And elucidated the Dhamma in countless ways.

Bhante,  
I go to the Awakened One as a refuge,  
to the Dhamma  
and to the bhikkhu saṅgha.

May the Awakened One count me as a lay follower  
from now on,  
who has gone for refuge for life.”



# *Part II*

*Opening the Gates*

*To Awakening*



## *Just as Islands*

First, the Buddha taught that we are responsible for the things that happen to us. That we, only, can change ourselves and become better, happier people. The Buddha taught the Dhamma for personal awakening, for personal development, for personal mastery.

We are responsible for taking the power to grow and change. Excuses and faultfinding only impede us from taking this power, our own innate potential.

He taught the law of cause and effect. Wholesome deeds bring about goodness; unskillful deeds, on the other hand, bring about sorrow. Beings reap what they sow. The decision is up to each of us. Each of us being the masters of their own destinies



*“With determination and careful attention,  
Self-mastery and inner composure,  
Let the sages make an island onto themselves  
That no flood can sweep away.”*

*Dhp 25*





## *Just as Islands*



*“Seekers,  
Live as islands onto yourselves,  
As shelters onto yourselves,  
With no other shelter.*

*Live with the Dhamma as your island,  
The Dhamma as your shelter,  
With no other shelter.”*

*[...]*

*“The accumulation of wholesome states is the cause  
for goodness and merit to grow.”*

*DN 26 The Wheel Turner*



The Buddha continually advised those who valued goodness and sought for happiness and liberation to be “islands upon themselves”. Not to wait for an external savior. Not to wait to do good deeds. And not to expect liberation or happiness to come from outside.



*“Only by one’s own self is one saved,  
Who else could the savior be?  
By mastering oneself,  
One helps oneself gain what is hard to gain.”*

*Dhp 160*



The responsibility for our lives lies within our own hands. Actions from the past build our present. Actions in the present build our future.

There is no fault-finding, no “blame-game” in the way of the awakened ones,<sup>13</sup> all is *Kamma-Vipāka*, cause and effect. All result of a cause. Hence, the conditioned nature of our experience. We are empowered with a choice. We can choose to condition our minds towards the unwholesome, or we can choose to cultivate our minds in wholesomeness.

Whether we like it or not, we are constantly conditioning, programming ourselves, with every single, thought we have, every single action that we perform. Be it towards goodness or towards selfishness. But the choice always remains ours.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ariya*



*“By one’s own self is harm done,  
By one’s own self is one defiled,  
By one’s own self is harm undone,  
By one’s own self is one purified.*

*Mental clarity or mental havoc,  
All depend on one’s own self.  
No one can purify another.”<sup>14</sup>*



## The Garden

Being our own island, we can prepare the ground for our inner garden. This is the first step. Without the island within, there cannot be a garden. Without the island, there is no ground to work with. Without the island, we are adrift in the flood.

By taking responsibility for our own lives, we can begin to work the soil, till the ground, pull the weeds and prepare an appropriate space for each species of plant we will be growing, the wholesome states within our hearts.

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<sup>14</sup> Dhp 165. No One Can Purify Another.

## *Respect*

Since wise understanding is mainly acquired through the voice of a wise person, a sincere seeker should understand how to generate the necessary causes and conditions to come into contact with the voice of wisdom. Then, one can skillfully gain access to the Dhamma and attune to its frequency of goodness.



*“Seekers,  
There are two grounds  
for the arising of wise understanding:*

*The voice of another  
and  
Careful attention.”*

*AN 2.126 Parato Ghoso Sutta*



Yet, careful attention must be given. Otherwise, the sage can speak, teachers can teach, all they can, but if careful attention is not present, the words are not heard, the Dhamma is not understood. Therefore, the voice of wisdom needs the ear of the eager, diligent, and respectful seeker to be heard.

Before any teaching can even take place, a respectful and receiving mind is necessary. This is an essential ingredient of the learning process. Regardless of the subject being learned. Listening carefully, not interrupting, maintaining a respectful amount of mental composure. This means, being present, being mindful, being respectful.



*“An attitude of proper respect is a sign of intelligence.”<sup>15</sup>*



*“At one time,  
some celestial being of exceeding beauty,  
at the waning of the night  
illuminating the whole of Jeta’s grove with her radiance  
went to the Awakened One,  
paid loving respects,  
and stood to the side.*

*Then she said to the Awakened One:*

***[The Devatā]***

*‘Bhante, there are seven things  
That lead a seeker to growth.’*

*What seven?*

---

<sup>15</sup> Respect. BMC Buddhist Monastic Code third edition, revised:  
2013 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

## Opening the Gates to Awakening

*One has respect for the Teacher, (1)*  
*One has respect for the Dhamma, (2)*  
*One has respect for the Saṅgha, (3)*  
*One has respect for the training, (4)*  
*One has respect for meditation, (5)*  
*One has respect for heedfulness, (6)*  
*One has respect for showing respect, (7)*

*[One has respect for modesty, (6)]*  
*[One has respect for moral conscience (7)]*

*[One easily accepts instructions, (6)]*  
*[One has virtuous friends (7)]*<sup>16</sup>

*Bhante, these are the seven things  
That lead a bhikkhu to growth*

*Thus she spoke.  
The teacher approved.*

*Then she thought:  
“The teacher approves of me.”*

*And paying loving homage to the Awakened One,  
She disappeared right there and left.*

[...]

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<sup>16</sup> *Sattugāravatā, dhammagāravatā, saṅghagāravatā, sikkhagāravatā, samādhigāravatā, appamādagāravatā, paṭisanthāragāravatā, hirigāravatā, ottappagāravatā, sovacassatā, kalyāṇamittatā.*

**[Buddha]**

*One who esteems the Teacher and esteems the Dhamma,  
Who sincerely esteems the saṅgha too,  
Who is wide awake, and esteems Samādhi,  
And who sincerely esteems the training.*

*A bhikkhu who esteems heedfulness,  
and who esteems showing respect,*

*[Endowed with modesty and moral conscience,]  
[Having virtuous friends, being easily spoken to,]  
[Respectful and reverential]*

*That person is incapable of falling away,  
and is in the presence of Nibbāna.<sup>17</sup>*



What could mindfulness mean, if not “to care”? What could “caring” mean if not at least to “show respect”? The Buddha’s teaching is about being truly caring. When respect is lacking, negligence is showing.

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<sup>17</sup> This is taken from three different suttas which have the exact same body to the exception of two “things that lead to growth”.

AN 7.32 *Appamādagārava Sutta* - Respect for Heedfulness

AN 7.33 *Hirigārava Sutta* - Respect for Conscience.

AN 7.34 *Paṭhama Sovacassatā Sutta* - Accepting Instructions (1)

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

Without presence of mind or mindfulness, it is hard to act out of respectful consideration. This Dhamma is about respect, to neglect respect is to neglect the Dhamma.

Here is what the Buddha thought for himself, after reaching awakening on his own, without the help of a teacher:



*“Truly, it is disagreeable to live  
without reverence and respect [for a teacher].<sup>18</sup>*

*Now, is there any sāmaṇa or brāhmaṇa, which,  
having revered and respected,  
I could live in dependence upon?*

*[...]*

*[Not finding anyone that could equal him in any regard,  
he turned to the Dhamma.]<sup>19</sup>*

*[...]*

*“Instead, there is this Dhamma  
That I have directly awakened to,*

---

<sup>18</sup> He said this even after having awakened!

<sup>19</sup> Since to live without reverence would simply be a distasteful way to live.



*Just as Islands*

*Which, having revered and respected,  
I could live in dependence upon."*

*SN I 6.2 Gārava Sutta*



It is impossible, or at least extremely difficult and unpleasant to teach disrespectful and ungrateful people. Such people do not listen. Pride and arrogance are taking the entire space in their mind. Teaching such people bears very little fruit, if any. The flow of the Dhamma stops when carelessness and disrespect arise.

One could even say:

*"The path begins with respect,  
and it ends with respect."*



*"Standing on five grounds,  
students should represent and honor their teacher,  
[which represent] the southern direction:*

- By rising for them, (1)*
- By looking after them, (2)*
- By listening carefully, (3)*
- By attending on them with respect, (4)*
- By accepting their teaching. (5)*

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

*Standing in these five grounds,  
students represent and honor their teacher,  
[which represent] the southern direction.*

*Then, teachers are kind to their students thus:*

*They guide them well in what requires guidance, (1)  
They [make sure that they] understand well  
what should be understood, (2)  
They [make sure that they] learn the whole art,  
as it should be, (3)  
They present them to their friends and colleagues, (4)  
and they protect them from all sides. (5)*

*Standing on five grounds  
students represent and honor their teachers,  
[which represent] the southern direction.*

*When students stand on these five grounds,  
teachers are kind to their students.*

*In this way,  
The southern direction is revered,  
Safe and free from danger.”*

*DN 31 To Sīṅgāla, the family man.*



Respect directly leads to awakening. It opens the doors of knowledge and it bestows the seeker with security and protection. Respectful people are naturally protected and they make progress like fire, burning through any obstacle, with the brightness of wisdom and blamelessness.



*“Seekers,  
I do not say that Awakening is accomplished all at once.*

*Rather, I say that it is accomplished by  
a progressive training,  
a progressive practice,  
a progressive path.*

*How?*

*When faith arises,  
one draws near, (1)  
Drawing near,  
one attends with respect (2)  
Attending with respect,  
one gives ear and listens (3)  
Lending an ear and listening,  
one hears the Dhamma (4)  
Having heard the Dhamma,  
one bears it in mind, (5)  
Bearing it in mind,  
one experiences its meaning, (6)*

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

*Experiencing its meaning,  
    one understands and accepts the teachings, (7)  
Aware that the teachings are understood and accepted,  
    determination arises, (8)  
With the arising of determination,  
    one explores, (9)  
By exploring,  
    one compares, (10)  
By comparing,  
    one practices, (11)  
By practicing wholeheartedly, body and mind,  
    One realizes the ultimate Truth, (12)  
And by means of discernment,  
    One breaks through by seeing. (13)''*

*MN 70 Kīṭāgiri Sutta*



## **The Garden**

Generations ago, the first nations of Canada and America, along with many other indigenous peoples of this earth, had tremendous respect for the earth, the elements and nature. For many of them, still to this day, having respect for the earth, the sky, the waters and the winds, which gave them life, naturally came first.

Like a child naturally feels affection and respect for a mother, because without a mother, there cannot be life. In the same way, love and respect is the water of the garden. Without water, there is no hope for life to grow. As important as the ground may be to sow the seeds, without water, the seeds cannot germinate, and the process of growth cannot even begin.

Just like seeds need a steady supply of water, especially in the early stages of growth, wholesome states need a steady supply of love and respect to germinate properly and take root.

## *Gratitude*

One of the most skillful and beneficial, wholesome attitude to develop, which will support all others, is gratitude. Cultivating an attitude of gratitude will elevate anyone, wherever they are, whatever they do. Respect and listening are natural for the grateful person, they are part of the package. Gratitude will bring along with it, countless skillful, heartening qualities.



*“Performing four things,  
one who is foolish, immature, not a person of good,  
keeps oneself severed and uprooted [from the Dhamma]  
that person is blameworthy, and blamable,  
and generates much demerit, that is, performing acts of:*

*Physical misconduct,  
Verbal misconduct,  
Mental misconduct,  
Ingratitude and non-appreciation*

\*\*\*

*Performing four things,*

*One who is wise, mature, a person of good,  
keeps oneself connected and firmly planted [in the Dhamma],*

## *Just as Islands*

*That person is blameless and unblameable,  
and generates much goodness, that is, performing acts of:*

*Physical good conduct,  
Verbal good conduct,  
Mental good conduct,  
Gratitude and appreciation.*

*AN 4.223 Ingratitude*



Gratitude is another word for happiness. Those who fail to feel grateful pass by their own happiness. Gratitude is the doorway of the Dhamma.

Appreciation and gratitude are uplifted, wholesome states of mind to be cultivated. Gratitude, contentment, and happiness, follow and support each other. These states should be cultivated at all times, even in challenging situations, with people who are causing us difficulty. Even difficult situations and people offer us amazing opportunities to become better people, to turn garbage into gold, and become rich in stories and experiences that strengthen our bones, that make us stronger.

The grateful is content.  
The content is happy.  
The happy is grateful.

Arrogance and negligence are imbalances of the mind. They prevent one from gaining access to the good Dhamma. Strong attachments to one's own opinions, views and concepts is unwise, and inevitably lead to strife and quarrels. Even when "one is right" and "the other one is wrong."



*"The apparition of three things  
is rare to witness in this world.*

*What are the three?*

*A Truth-Finder,  
Genuinely worthy  
and Perfectly All-Awakened; (1)*

*One who teaches the Dhamma and Vinaya  
Awoken-to by a Truth-Finder; (2)*

*A grateful, appreciative person. (3)*

*AN III 114 Hard to Come by*



Knowing how to put one's attachments aside for the greater good, is truly wise and it is a sign of advanced practice. Gratitude is the wealth of the heart, it keeps us humble and



safe, a grateful person attracts goodness and protection, happiness, and good relationships.

## The Garden

Just as fruits and vegetable from a garden give us life, from the outside in, the fruits of our meditation practice, the countless wholesome states that grow and reach maturity through development, will nourish our lives from the inside out. When such happiness is found, when these life-giving mental states blossom in the mind and heart, gratitude is unavoidable.

Gratefulness makes us happy gardeners, content gardeners. Gardening is a risky, unpredictable activity, which is greatly affected by the weather and the seasons. Gardening always bears fruits, but many unexpected turns of events are part of the gardening reality. To foster an attitude of gratitude will foster a sense of abundance, of being blessed, and having everything that one needs. Grateful gardeners are always pleasant to be around! Grateful gardeners attract good friends and maintain good relationships.

## *Beautiful Friendship*

The Buddha said that wise friendship<sup>20</sup> was the whole of the path. Wise association is a necessary condition for learning and growing in wisdom. As we previously discussed, the voice of another, the voice of wisdom is required for understanding to grow within us. Choosing wisely the people we surround ourselves with helps us stay on the right path.



*“Not associating with the careless,  
Associating with the wise,  
Revering those worthy of esteem:  
This is the highest blessing.”*

*Khp 5 The Blessings*



Beautiful friendship is the lifeblood of the path. Starting from the Buddha and extending down through the saṅgha of monks, who are dedicating their lives to goodness, and to all virtuous and devoted *upasakas* and *upasikas*<sup>21</sup> who practice the same path amidst their families.

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<sup>20</sup> *Kalyāṇa mittāta*

<sup>21</sup> Male and female lay practitioners



*“Thus I have heard,  
once, the Awakened One was living with the Sakyans,  
in Nagaraka, a Sakyan town.*

*Then, the Elder Ānanda went to the Awakened One,  
Paid loving respects and sat down to one side.  
Sitting thus, the Elder Ānanda exclaimed:*

**[Ānanda]**

*“Bhante, surely, this is at least half of the Spiritual Life:*

*Virtuous friendship,  
virtuous association,  
virtuous company.”*

**[The Buddha]**

*“Surely not Ānanda, surely not...*

*Virtuous friendship,  
virtuous association,  
virtuous company,  
is the whole of the Spiritual Life, Ānanda!”*

*It is by seeking out virtuous friendship,  
that a seeker will develop this  
Eight-Spoked Path of the awakened ones,*

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

*that one will cultivate this  
Eight-Spoked Path of the awakened ones.*

*How?*

*[..]*

*Here Ānanda, a seeker*

*Develops Wise Understanding, which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Attitude which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Speech which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Action which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Living which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Practice which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Presence which comes*

*Just as Islands*

*From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*He develops Wise Meditation which comes  
From letting go, relaxing, and releasing,  
And which culminates in complete surrender.*

*[...]*

*From my help Ānanda,  
Beings [...become...] completely liberated. [...]*

*In this way Ānanda, it should be understood,  
That this is the whole of the Spiritual Life, namely:*

*Virtuous friendship,  
virtuous association,  
virtuous company.*

*SN V 45.2 Half the Spiritual Life*



Often, in his discourses, the Buddha would compare the difference between a person who did not seek the company of the wise and a person who did:

## Opening the Gates to Awakening



*“A person who is not learned  
One who does not visit wise people,  
Who is unaware of the Virtuous Dhamma,  
Who is untrained in the Virtuous Dhamma  
Who does not visit the peaceful ones  
Who is unaware of the peaceful ones’ Dhamma,  
Who is untrained in the peaceful ones’ Dhamma  
[Cannot hope to see and understand things in the proper light].*

*But a person who is learned  
One who visits wise people,  
Who is aware of the Virtuous Dhamma,  
Who is trained in the Virtuous Dhamma  
Who visits the peaceful ones  
Who is aware of the peaceful ones’ Dhamma,  
Who is trained in the peaceful ones’ Dhamma.”<sup>22</sup>  
[Can hope to see and understand things in the proper light]*

*MN 1 Mūlapariyāya Sutta*



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<sup>22</sup> The Buddha used this framework to teach the monks quite often, to show the difference between someone who did not know the Dhamma and others who knew. Revealing each time, the importance of wise association.

## The Garden

Good gardeners know the power of good friendship. When one's seeds are wilted, gardeners with good friends know where to get healthy seeds. When their crop has failed, gardeners with good friends will not be let down. They will receive good advice, good seeds, fertilizer, gardening equipment and even books.

Good friends are also teachers, elders, seasoned gardeners who impart knowledge and experience, to avoid pitfalls and make good progress. Good friends are life's natural life-insurance! They help when needed and they rejoice in our success.

## Listening

The ability to listen is the foundation for learning anything. How could there be teaching and learning if there is no listening? Mindfulness is cultivated through mindfulness. Before he spoke on important matters, the Buddha often reminded his listener:



***“Taṃ suṇātha, sādhukaṃ manasi karotha, bhāssāmī.”***

*Listen and apply your mind carefully to what I will say.*



He did not say this for no reason. Learning to cultivate one’s ability to listen is wisdom in action. This directly leads to one’s welfare and learning. For one’s own good. As we saw in the previous sutta, showing respect and listening go hand in hand on the path to awakening.

Listening means more than just hearing some words with the ears, it is a mental attitude. It is the attitude of receptivity, of openness. It acknowledges, it makes room, it puts aside all ego desires, ‘look-at-me’ attitude, boastful behavior and make room for knowledge to come in. The



wise skill of listening is helped and supported by many qualities and attitudes.



*“Possessing [certain] qualities,  
even if someone were to listen to the True Dhamma,  
that person is unable to understand the practice,  
of righteous [development in] wholesome states.*

*What [qualities]?*

*One denigrates the talk,  
One denigrates the speaker,  
One denigrates himself,  
One has a restless mind,  
One’s mind is not calm,  
One does not carefully apply one’s mind,  
One is unwise, foolish and dull,  
One thinks he has understood what he has not,  
One is enraged, immersed in anger,  
One has a reproaching mind, bent on finding faults,  
One is stubborn and despises the teacher.*

*AN V 151-153 Proper Qualities Series*



Similarly, one who is respectful and esteems the talk, the teacher and even themselves, who harbors a composed mind, which is carefully directed to understanding the

Dhamma, who tries to understand, who has kindness and patience as prominent intentions, who is bent on listening, that person will hear the Dhamma.

Although, here, this advice is specifically related to Dhamma, it is also applicable to all spheres of our lives.

## The Garden

Any dedicated gardener will quickly realize the importance of listening. Listening to the seasons, how they change, how they affect certain plants. Listening to the advice of parents and elders, who have already been gardening for a long time. Who have gardened through many seasons, many different climates and weather patterns.

Listening to their friends, who are also gardening and might have found some ingenious ways to grow. Listening to new ideas, being open and welcoming to different perspectives and approaches.

## *Wise Attention*

This path is for those who care, not the careless. For those who seek the happiness and welfare of the multitude. The happiness of wholesome mental states, which carries within itself, wisdom and careful attention, *yoniso manasikhāra*. Without the light of wisdom, the light of wise attention, there cannot be inner vision into our personal behavior, let alone progress and personality development.



*“Seekers,*

*I say that the stilling of the mental movements is  
for one who is conscious and watchful;  
not for one who is not conscious and not watchful.*

*Conscious and watchful of what?*

*[When there is]  
Wise attention and  
Unwise attention.<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> Wisdom. Constantly remembering (Sati) to be wise. Remembering to be aware. Knowing and seeing the movements of the mind. Using Wise Effort. Seeing when tension (Craving) arises, and relaxing it.

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

*Being unwise with one's attention*

*unexisting mental agitation becomes manifest<sup>24</sup>  
and existing mental agitation increase.*

*Being wise with one's attention*

*unexisting mental agitation do not become manifest  
and existing mental agitation are abandoned.*

*MN 2 All the Distractions*



There is the need for vision. This is the path of the seers, not of the sightless. Fortuitously, this is also the path to cultivate the faculty of “inner-seeing.”

The problem lies in lack of clarity. When someone does not see that their behavior is unwholesome and hurtful for themselves and others, how can there be any desire to change?

To merely forget about our hurt is not forgiveness, nor is it the sign of wisdom and conscious letting go. To temporarily forget about past events does not mean that it has been understood with wisdom, even less forgiven.

This is called ‘burying under,’ which is a template that feeds unconscious behavior patterns. Problems are neatly tucked away, for some time, but this is not a sustainable practice

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<sup>24</sup> Take shape, take form

and eventually, it all needs to come out. This is something I see and guide people through in every retreat, as this is one of the most basic operating principles in human behavior.

As long as these wounds do not resurface, everything looks fine on the outside. As long as we are not faced with our own inner difficulties again, things are good and well.

But when we are confronted to difficulties, then, anger, resentment, jealousy, and the entire spectrum of unwholesome behavior arises. It even arises without a trace of awareness. That is exactly the problem.

These unwholesome states are reactionary. They are unconscious behaviors that we hold on to, beneath the surface of our waking awareness. As we accumulate these behaviors, they merge into the whole field of attachments that we have developed over the time of our life.

Anger is not a mindful state.

Anxiety is not a mindful state.

Boasting pride is not a mindful state.

This is the cornerstone of the path: Understanding wholesome states as partaking of mindfulness, and unwholesome states as partaking of the absence of mindfulness. To know and see this, we must nurture careful attention, and to nurture careful attention, we must develop wholesome states in the mind-heart. And the wheel turns!

## The Garden

Care, love, respect come with attention. Gardeners need to give proper attention to their garden. They must notice when the soil is getting too dry, when it is getting too wet, when the plants are getting too much sun, when they are not getting enough. They must pay attention to the weather patterns, to critters and insects, to deer and other animals who could eat their crop. Tending a garden is a mindful art!

## *Investigation*

Nobody can awaken somebody else.

Others can help and show the path, but it is up to everyone to *walk this path*. For this reason, the skill of investigating mental states is vital, this is the second support of awakening. But this does not mean all kinds of investigations! This is not about investigating what kind of car your neighbor just purchased!

First came awareness (*Sati*), wise attention, in brief, a skillfully directed mind, which is directed at investigating how mind behaves, what are the states that arise and what to do with them. This is wise investigation, which leads to a happy life and liberation.

It means inquiring the Dhamma, *taking interest* in mental release and well-being. Investigation is both knowing and seeing what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, when tension arises and when it does not, and it is also the action to let go of the unskillful and to give rise, to nourish the skillful.

This means, to understand the nature of the mind. The Buddha himself constantly reminded the monk to investigate the Dhamma. *Investigation is the purpose of mindfulness*, it is another word for discernment or wisdom, and it is pulled forward by *chanda* or wholesome desire and it yields into joy, bliss, and liberation.



## The Purpose of a Mirror

**[The Buddha]**

*“What do you think Rāhula,  
What is the purpose of a mirror?”*

**[Rāhula]**

*“It is for the purpose of reflection, Bhante.”*

**[The Buddha]**

*In the same way Rāhula,  
One should continually reflect upon  
[one’ own] bodily actions  
One should continually reflect upon  
[one’s own] verbal actions  
One should continually reflect upon  
[one’s own] mental actions.*



In this way, reflecting upon our actions, leads to true, lasting personality change. It is the basis for wholesome mental development (*Bhāvanā*), which is another word for meditation, in the Buddha’s way.

When the mind becomes distracted, instead of losing patience, one should investigate. One should ask:



“Why does my mind run away?”.

The answer is simple:

Because the mind has been developed in this way.

And it has been for a very long time.

This is the habit pattern of the mind: to run away.

Perhaps, more accurately: to run after...

Meditation is what allows us to slow our minds down by tranquility and joy, allowing us to see (insight) into our own mental behavioral patterning. Meditation is learning how to reprogram our mind and heart to become better, freer and happier human beings.



***[The Buddha]***

*While meditating*

*intent, with open awareness and present,*

*Have you experienced any state beyond the regular human states?*

*A definite understanding and awareness that is completely good?*

***[Anuruddhā]***

*Here, Bhante, while we meditate,*

*intent, with open awareness and present,*

*mental radiance appears and the body is felt.*

*Then, not long after, the mental radiance,*

*and the awareness of body fade away.*

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

*But we have not understood why this happens.*

### **[The Buddha]**

*Anuruddhā, you should try to understand why it happens.*

*Even, I too, Anuruddhā,  
before my full awakening, still not completely awakened,  
when I was still a person in quest of awakening,<sup>25</sup>  
similarly, the mental radiance appeared and I also felt the body.*

*Not long after, they both disappeared.*

*I asked myself:*

*‘What is the cause and the reason for the mental radiance and the  
awareness of body to fade away?’*

*Then, I thought to myself:*

*‘Agitation came up in my mind,  
because of agitation,  
my mental composure started moving.’*

*With the movement of mental collectedness,  
the mental radiance and the awareness of body faded away.*

*Then, I thought:*

*“I should practice so that agitation not come up in my mind.”*

*MN 138 Mental Impurities*



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<sup>25</sup> *Bodhisatta*

This brief excerpt is a wonderful explanation of the process of discernment by investigation of states. Being inquisitive, asking ourselves: “What is the cause for that” or “How does this happen?”

When we sit in meditation, what happens? How long can we sit before we start wiggling, before the mind really starts to feel like *doing something*, and starts to come up with reasons to justify that newly created need?

Would that be discontent? How long does it take for the mind to become discontent in meditation? Whatever the answer is, this is only a reflection of what is underlying in the mind. A reflection of the true state of the mind underneath all activities.

If restlessness and impatience, arise from longing for a different experience after five minutes, this is showing that, the normal state of the mind, when the mind is not distracted with all sorts of activities, only can remain stable for five minutes before it becomes discontent.

Is that truly beneficial? Is this real happiness? In this state, are we able to help others, or to be a loving and supporting presence, for ourselves and others, when after five short minutes the mind loses its countenance?

Investigation is paramount. *Taking interest in the states of our own mind* is another word for the Buddha’s teaching.

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

Without investigation, there is no progress, there is no arising of wisdom and there is no liberation.

One can ask oneself:

Are there unwholesome states present in me?

Is there pride within me?

Is there anger within me?

Am I being careless or careful?

Are my actions for my own good and the good of others?

Am I causing hurt, to myself and others in ways that I fail to recognize?

Then only, a step towards change can be taken. A step towards improvement and happiness.

## The Garden

Investigation, for gardeners, comes in two main aspects. The first is to tend to the plants one wants to grow in their garden, to nurture them with what they need to thrive, and come to maturity. The second aspect is to protect these good plants from being eaten away or damaged, and by removing any obstacle to their growth, like weeds and diseases.

To do this, gardeners need to be diligent and mindful. Care must be taken, to observe the garden and its plants, every day, many times a day, constantly looking after its growth.

# *Obstructions*

*To accessing the Dhamma*



*“Once in Sāvattthi.*

*The Awakened one said this:*

*“This is a complete mass of unwholesomeness, seekers!”*

*If this was stated about the five hindrances,*

*It would be properly stated.*

*For these are a complete mass of unwholesomeness,*

*That is to say;*

*the five hindrances.*

*What five?*

*The hindrances of:*

*Selfishness,*

*Anger,*

*Dullness and Laziness,*

*Restlessness and worry,*

*And Doubt.*

*SN 47.5 A Mass of Unwholesomeness*



The five hindrances are merely unwholesome habits of the mind. They are unskillful states that impede us from growing in goodness. Mainly, the Buddha spoke of five, but do not worry, there are much more! :)

Habits like infatuation with the senses, pride, reactive anger, dull laziness, stressful agitation, and critical skepticism are a few of the prominent ones.

These states, as we will explore them in the next few pages, significantly reduce our chances of encountering and growing in the Dhamma. It is essential to know what they are, so that we can recognize them when they arise and understand their impact on our minds.

Empowered with this precious knowledge of recognition, what the Buddha called discernment,<sup>26</sup> we will then be provided with the ability to let them go. This, in turn, will allow more mental space to grow healthy behavior patterns that are beneficial to our own growth in goodness.

Some of these hindrances and their relationship with meditation were previously discussed in the first section of this book. However, the purpose of this present chapter is different and aims at revealing some general behaviors that create obstructions for people in encountering the Dhamma.

The intention, here, is to ignite the fire of wisdom within the truthful seekers and to encourage the direct application of

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<sup>26</sup> *Pañña*

the factor of investigation into one's life in order to grow in the Dhamma.

## The Garden

There are many obstacles to cultivating a garden. First, gardeners must be aware of them, aware of the dangers, the pitfalls, the impediments. Without knowledge of them, these obstacles will remain and cause many problems.

When the informed gardener recognizes a danger, they will be empowered to avoid it. Too much sun will burn the plants. Too much water will bring along root and stem rot. Poor soils will yield small fruits. Too much fertilizer, of the wrong kind, may bring undesirable insects or ruin certain species of plants. Some insects eat certain plants and spread like wildfire. While some other insects help in maintaining the population of unbeneficial insects down.

In the same ways, there are many obstacles to cultivating the garden in the heart.

*Pride & Selfishness*

One of the first obstacles to our wisdom and presence of mind is pride. As we have seen earlier, respect, gratefulness, and humbleness are leading wholesome qualities in spiritual growth, and conceit is their direct opposite. The sooner one becomes skilled at recognizing it, seeing the danger in it, and then letting it go, the sooner there will be progress and happiness. In order to listen, we must be humble, we must be open, these qualities are necessary to welcome information and learn.



*“One should give up anger and abolish pride,  
One should overcome all shackles.  
Not clinging to objects and concepts,  
Then, wherever one goes, sorrow cannot follow.”*

*Dhp 221*



Presence of mind is clear and open, when our mind is infatuated, it is just as if big clouds were towering up within the heart. We then lose touch with mental clarity and our power of attention sublimates as we are entranced by ‘I.’ At that moment, altruism and serenity are not possible.



Humbleness attracts the Dhamma. The wise knows that a person who hold themselves above everybody else will not listen, therefore, the wise stays away. It is better to spare our energy and help those who will listen respectfully and make an effort to understand.

Pride often takes the shape of competition, these two are synonymous. With a competitive mindset the goal is to be better than the other, to overthrow the other, to win. But the quest for competition and *being the best* is one thing, and the quest for Dhamma, selflessness and virtue is another.

There is either competition or modesty. Pride or humbleness. These states are opposite. The humble is cool, like a still forest pool, happy and at peace within. For the truly happy ones have nothing to prove, since they already are happy!



*“Seekers, two kinds of people are difficult to come by in this world.*

*What Two?*

*One who takes the initiative [to be kind] and*

*One who is grateful and appreciative.*

*AN 2.119 Taking Initiative*



## The Remedy

### *Generosity*

The antidote for pride is to understand that this behavior pattern is self-destructive. This is to realize the first and second understandings of the awakened ones. It is to understand that this behavior pattern originates from hurt and it leads to hurt.

To find truly meaningful happiness, we must remove the blindfold of vanity and become caring of others. Rejoicing in others' welfare and happiness is the remedy for selfishness. This is the happiness of Dhamma. Finding happiness in lowering others, just to put oneself at the front, is the bane of lasting happiness and friendship.

Wise friends will provide opportunities for insight into this behavior. Contemplation on impermanence and impersonality will start to lighten up the mind and loosen the tightness around the hurt. Usually, when pride is found, deep hurt is also found, and forgiveness practice will be necessary. These are all very valuable practices of generosity.

This temperament is allayed by relinquishing, letting go, selfless actions, service, and it is propelled by association with those who are wiser than oneself. Wise people who see the dangers of selfishness and who delight in selflessness.

Generosity is wisdom in action and a direct path to one of the most wholesome kinds of happiness. It is part of the first wise intention, which is to let go or to give (*nekkhama*). Helping others is first helping ourselves. We are the first people to benefit from our own generosity.

Generosity helps us not to remain attached to the things we possess. Also, by being generous, we gain the priceless opportunity to witness the happiness our generosity can bring to others. The generous only needs to recollect previous acts of kindness to appease the mind and quickly enter a collected state of mind (*samādhi*). The mind of a person who practices generosity becomes gradually uplifted.



*“One should speak the truth,  
And never yield to anger,  
Giving, when one is asked,  
Even when having next to nothing.  
Standing on these three grounds,  
One lives in the presence of the Devas.”*

*Dhp 224*



By supporting Dhamma  
One supports all living beings.  
By supporting all living beings,  
One supports the Dhamma.  
And this is inclusive of oneself!

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

The virtues are for the welfare of all beings,  
Boundless Love and compassion also,  
How could it not?  
Those who support the Dhamma  
offer these qualities to all beings,  
they take part of the highest generosity.

For those who support the Dhamma,  
The Dhamma supports them.

Wherever they go, whatever they do.  
They are a refuge to all beings,  
therefore, all beings protect them.



*"Of all gifts, the gift of Dhamma is the highest,  
Of all tastes, the taste of Dhamma is the highest,  
Of all joys, the joy of Dhamma is the highest,  
For ending all hurt, the end of selfishness is the highest."*

*Dhp 354*



That is also called merit.  
or goodness.  
It is a synonym of wisdom.

It is giving,  
and giving is also receiving,  
receiving the happiness of giving.



*“Defeat anger by non-anger,  
Wickedness by virtue,  
Stinginess by generosity,  
And deception by truth.”*

*Dhp 223*



The giver wins,  
The giver is wise!  
This is wholesome happiness.

Money does not always come with happiness.  
But the Dhamma does, it is happy in nature.

*Jhāna* is the full bloom of a mind  
that is entirely open and bountiful.

## *Anger*

Peace is found in stillness and calm, only then, mindfulness has the right causes and conditions to arise and be supported. On the other end, impatience and quick temperedness are not mindful states. The angry only sees anger, they are trapped in an obsessive mind state. Their minds are unstable and imbalanced.



*"One who consistently curbs  
The arising of anger like a swerving chariot,  
That person I call a True Charioteer,  
Others only know how to hold the reins." <sup>27</sup>*



Presence of mind is cool, composed, and serene, while the hateful mind is agitated, churning on itself, as if constantly boiling. Anger is also impatience, reactivity, emotional upheaval, bitterness, quick temperedness. It is what happens when things do not go our way and we take it personal. It arises when we come upon the unpleasant.

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<sup>27</sup> Dhp 222 A True Charioteer



*"This is an ancient way, Atula,  
This is not merely from today,*

*They blame those who sit in silence,  
They Blame those who speak up,  
They blame those who speak in moderation,  
None exist in this world who is not blamed."*

*Dhp 227*



It is difficult and unpleasant to converse with an angry person. Those who are easily prone to anger and resentment will see that friends and wise people do not gravitate around them. Being angry is like spitting venom around us. Who would ever want to be around such behavior? Friendships are fostered through openness, patience, and acceptance.

The wise avoids the angry because all things befalling them are simply burned and consumed: "If I am burning, you should also burn." It is better to avoid the angry altogether, as their behavior is highly flammable and unpredictable. Prevention is foremost, then, once in contact with such individual, other tools can be used to soften the experience.



*“Should a seeker not come upon  
Better or equal to oneself,  
One should continue alone and resolute,  
There is no fellowship with the careless.”*

*Dhp 61*



A prominent feature of anger is to take things personally, as a personal offense. But anger itself is optional, it is our choice, even if an unpleasant situation arises, the way we choose to react is within our power. Given that we possess enough awareness and mental stability to make the choice. This is when mental development comes into play and where meditation makes all the difference.

Anger is simply an impurity of the mind;  
it is not personal.

Anger does not like to take advice, nor does it like to listen; therefore, advice does not come to us when we are angry. Dhamma is far from us when angry. The opportunity to learn and change is not easily grasped by the agitated mind unless some major event comes and forces us.





*“Seekers,*

*If anyone should speak of me disrespectfully  
Should speak of the Dhamma disrespectfully,  
Should speak of the Saṅgha disrespectfully,*

*You should not retaliate nor lose composure,  
Nor should you harbor resentment in your heart.*

*If you were to be agitated and offended,  
This would only be a hindrance to you.*

*Further, if you were to be agitated and offended,  
Could you then tell between what is well-spoken and ill-spoken?*

*“No Bhante”*

*Then, you should only explain  
What is untrue as being untrue thus:*

*‘This is not true,  
This is not the way it is,  
This is not the way we think,  
And this is not the way we understand things.’*

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*And if anyone speaks of me respectfully,  
or speaks of the Dhamma respectfully,  
or speak of the Saṅgha respectfully,*

*You should not become elated or overjoyed,*

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

*Nor should your mind be overrun by excitement.*

*For if you were to be elated, overjoyed, and excited,  
This would only be a hindrance to you.*

*Then, you should only acknowledge  
What is True as being true thus:*

*'That is true  
That is the way it is,  
That is the way we think,  
That is the way we understand things.'"* <sup>28</sup>



## **The Remedy**

### *Love*

The way to get rid of anger is by recognizing how destructive this behavior is, and by developing the will to change, for one's own good, this is called wise understanding, and it always comes first.

Then, meditation on forgiveness, boundless love and compassion will help in washing away the blazing fire of hate and soothe the wounds that lay underneath it. By seeing with wisdom the pain we are causing ourselves and to those

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<sup>28</sup> DN 1 *Brahmajāla Sutta* – The Net of Brahma

around us, most of us will usually develop the will to change.

Not associating with friends that trigger anger but associating with wise and loving friends, attending to loving-kindness meditation retreats will greatly help in reducing this tendency.



*“Never is anger appeased by anger,  
Only by non-anger is it appeased,  
This is an eternal law.”*

*Dhp 5*



*Agitation*



*“Unsettled and unsteady is the mind,  
Hard it is to contain, hard to master.  
The wise straighten their minds,  
Like the fletchers straighten their arrows.”*

*Dhp 33*



Whether it is on a coarser or subtler level, all mental impurities boil down to mental agitation. Presence of mind is calm by nature, it is clear and still, therefore, it is inherently difficult for an unsettled mind to be present and to see clearly.

When our mind is restless, it is not easy to be attentive because the mind is constantly moving about. At that time, we can hardly bear with what is being said, and consequently, information does not get stored properly in the mind.

It is only once mental agitation starts to give way to mental peace and clarity, by meditation practice, that we truly understand how unnecessarily active our minds can be, and how blissful a serene mind feels!



*“Like a fish on dry land,  
Cast out of its water realm,  
Just so, the mind convulses and throbs,  
When cast out of the realm of the senses.”*

*Dhp 34*



Just like if it was sitting on a live coal, the agitated mind wiggles here and there, it does not stand still. Often, this is because there is too much happening inside, too much hurt. When the discomfort becomes too overwhelming, it robs us from mental presence. When fear, dislike and restlessness join forces, their result is worry, which is rampant nowadays. Worry and agitation are very closely intertwined.



*“Those with unsettled minds,  
Who do not know the true Dhamma,  
And whose faith wavers,  
Their wisdom does not come to maturity.”*

*Dhp 38*



## The Remedy

*Calm*



*"Swift and hard to grasp is this mind,  
Going wherever it pleases.  
Its calming is wise,  
A peaceful mind brings happiness."*

*Dhp 35*



The way to quell agitation is by cultivating inner peace, by tranquility and a steady meditation practice. Learning to simplify our lives will help us in keeping a healthy pace in the mind. Nowadays, to know the limits of engagement with communication technologies will play a great role in keeping the mind composed. To wisely choose, not only the amount of communication and media consumption, but also to choose what kind of content we place before our minds, what kind of people we choose to speak to, will also make a tremendous difference in our ability to maintain mental composure.

Reducing the amount of music, television shows and all the various ways available to us now, to engage the mind in

sensory distractions will make a noticeable difference in our level of mental stability.

Developing boundless love and compassion will help enormously as they are soothing for the body and mind. Meditations that lean towards relaxing the body and neutral but joyful bodily awareness will also bear great fruits.

*Complacency & Laziness*

Sometimes, we become forgetful. We forget the good fortune of health, the good fortune of a human birth, the good fortune to have food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. We become complacent.

Because of some past good actions of ours, perhaps things are going well for us at the moment. But once this wholesome karmic force runs its course, what will be left?

The Buddha often emphasized the need for proactivity in wholesomeness, whether by virtue, generosity, or meditation, the three grounds for the generation of merit (or goodness). When the monks became lazy and complacent, the Buddha would arouse a sense of urgency in them.



*“The past should not be pursued  
Nor should the future be longed for.  
For what has passed is left behind,  
And the future cannot be obtained.*

*Wisely observing all present [mental] states,  
One after the other.  
Unagitated and unshakable  
One should constantly know this.*



*Today one should be resolute,  
Who knows, tomorrow, death might come.  
There is no arguing  
With death and its marching troops.*

*Therefore meditate, wide awake  
Not giving up, day and night  
This person is said to have an auspicious night,  
The sage of peace has declared."*

*MN 131 The Auspicious Night*



When our minds become complacent, it is then shrouded by indulgence in present comfort, consuming the fruits of previous good actions. This is not necessarily bad, but if we stop performing skillful deeds and stop developing wholesome states, it will rapidly come to a standstill or it will come to decline in good qualities.

We forget too easily that our life depends on taking others' life. That absolutely everything we take must come from somewhere; some plant, some animal, some place where there is life. That is why *not taking* (*what is not given*), the second training of virtue, is also part of generosity.

There is no magic in taking things, it all comes from somewhere. For our bodies to live, plants and animals must

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

give their lives. How do we honor this sacrifice? How do we spend our days? What do we give back?



*“I came to learn two things, seekers:*

*Never to be satisfied with wholesome states,  
And unrestrained power of will.*

*Seekers, uncurbed my effort was, I went:*

*“Let only my skin, tendons and bones be left,  
And the flesh and blood in this body dry up.  
Whatever is possible by human power  
Human will, human strength,  
that, I will achieve.  
Resolve will not fall away  
But will be firmly established and developed.*



*Seekers,  
By carefully attention, I came to complete awakening,<sup>29</sup>  
By careful attention, I came to the unsurpassable  
Release from the yoke.*

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<sup>29</sup> Full Awakening, Complete Understanding.



*You also, seekers, if by unrelenting effort you would [Practice in the same way...],*

*In no long time, you would attain  
to the purpose for which sons of good families  
honestly leave their home and become homeless,  
seeking for the highest,*

*The complete perfection of the holy life.*

*And having realized it in this present life,  
By your own direct knowledge,*

*You would abide in it.*

*Thus bhikkhus, you should train:*

*'With unabating resolve we will go:  
Let only my skin, tendons and bones be left,  
And the flesh and blood in this body dry up.  
Whatever is possible by human power  
Human will, human strength, that, I will achieve.  
Resolve will not fall away  
But will be firmly established and developed.'*

*Thus you should train seekers.*

*AN II 5 Came to learn*



The highest good is of course, mental development (*Bhāvanā*), which means abandoning selfishness, anger and delusion. Because our mind is the overseer of all that we do. Any action taken, is based upon the quality of our mind.

It is good to always remember that we owe our lives to plants and animals and the environment that supports our natural human habitat. So that we may remain in touch with the need to do good, to be good to all of life and *to give back*, to help and support others as much as we can. This will in turn benefit our own happiness.

Remembering that we owe each of our breath to all living beings, we can remain humble and intent on striving for wholesomeness. That is *sati*, what has come to be called mindfulness. In fact, *sati*, literally means remembering! Its true definition is to not be forgetful.

## The Remedy

### *Determination*

Complacency and laziness are overthrown by arousing a keen sense of urgency. Remembering the work that still needs to be done in wholesome states, calling to mind the dangers of slackening in wholesome deeds. That the actions we perform come back to us, all the time, whether good or

bad. Those who wish for happiness and freedom should be relentless in goodness!

Being energetic and physically fit goes a long way. Going for long meditative walks to stay healthy will help keeping laziness at bay and make meditation even better and more enjoyable.

Being moderate in food consumption is another major factor that the Buddha spoke about to develop a lifestyle conducive for meditation. Eating early in the day and abstaining from eating too late in the afternoon or binge eating in the evenings. Eating takes an incredible amount of energy and it is taxing for the body to always be digesting. Staying light will help energy levels.

Developing an attitude of proactivity in wholesome mental development and meditation. Surrounding oneself with wise friends who also value and love to do good in their own lives will assuredly help us stay in the right direction.

*Lack of Discernment*

The leading quality that impedes our heart's growth in beautiful states is careless attention or simply lacking discernment. This has come to be called delusion or ignorance, but these terms often feel too derogatory to truly convey the exact meaning of the original Pāli word *moha*.

This confusion is better understood as forgetfulness or lacking recognition about the four understandings of the awakened ones, this is; to know what is unwholesome and unbeneficial, how to avoid it and let it go, and how to move towards what is wholesome and beneficial.



*"The careless ones, lacking discernment,  
Behave like enemies onto themselves,  
Perpetrating unwholesome actions,  
The fruit of which ripens in bitterness."*

*Dhp 66*



Another component which is essential to develop the wise understanding or view of the awakened ones is that of impersonality. The illusion of selfhood and ownership plays a center-stage role in distorting every aspect of our lives. The five hindrances together which are rooted in the

ego-belief create a biased perception of our perceived reality.



*"A confused person proclaims:  
'I have sons and I have wealth'  
When not even possessing oneself,  
How much less sons and wealth."*

*Dhp 62*



Confusion is what prevents us from knowing right from wrong, wholesome from unwholesome, truly wise words from mere empty words, not knowing the difference between wise friendship and unwise friendship.

When our minds become familiar with the solid shore of Dhamma and wholesome mental states, it is easy to experience genuine, sincere love and compassion. Wholesome states naturally come with awareness, which leverage wisdom and learning.

Mindfulness or presence of mind *means* to care. Presence of mind, love, compassion, empathetic joy come together. Carelessness is their opposite. Mental steadiness and mental composure act as an anchor in the mind, which is a prerequisite for us to listen attentively and follow instructions.



*"The careless, poor in discernment,  
Indulges in carelessness.  
But the wise protects attentiveness,  
As their most valuable possession."*

*Dhp 26*



## The Remedy

### *Discernment*

Discernment is the antidote, the opposite of confusion. To learn the Dhamma and to know the difference between what is wholesome and what is unwholesome constitute a major part of the awakened ones' discernment.

To apply one's mind to understand actions (*kamma*) and their result (*vipaka*) is the cornerstone of discernment. That our actions bear repercussions. Wholesome actions bring happy results (merit), and selfish actions bear unpleasant consequences (demerit).

Discernment is to understand the law of causality, that all phenomena arise from a cause, and that this 'cause' can be calmed and purified, for a happier life. In short, to



comprehend the four understandings of the awakened ones:

To see tension (when it arises) and its cause;  
To release it and cultivate the path to liberation. :)

Lacking understanding is conquered by wise association and wise attention, by meditative practice and determination. When clarity about the way things truly work (*Dhamma*) arises, the darkness of confusion cannot hinder our vision any longer.



*"Surely, when the nature of things becomes clear,  
To the devoted meditating seeker,  
One stands, shattering death and its troops,  
Like the sun lighting up the sky."*

*Ud 1.3*



Associating with wise companions will play a large role in the development of discernment, and to develop wise friendships, one must be kind and respectful to the people around them. Staying away from competitive attitudes will draw wise company closer.

To be blessed with wise friendship in our lives, a generous amount of wisdom and wholesome qualities must already be found in us, qualities like humbleness and openness.

*Seeking Happiness only in the senses*

Being born in this world, we are brought up to seek happiness in things of this world. But to take sensory stimulation as our main source of happiness is bound to deteriorate the quality of our minds.

After enjoying the smell of a fragrant flower for 5 minutes, the perfume always seems to vanish. The happiness derived from it also quickly dwindles away. It is the same with all pleasures of the senses. The more we indulge in this sensory happiness, the more will be needed next time, and the mind will rapidly become engrossed by this gratification. But the more it will receive, the less enjoyable it will become.

Even if our present situation is pleasant and enjoyable at the six senses, it does not mean that this situation will not come to an end, and that material comforts, material happiness will remain as they are forever. We must be careful not to sink into negligence, only because we have temporarily obtained some favorable conditions.

There can never be enough merits (good actions) performed by a single individual. Holding the opposite view creates ground for excuses to get away with unskillful actions.

The happiness of mental development (*Bhāvanā*) and making merit (*Puñña*), on the other hand, is the safe shore of our well-being. Since these skillful actions, from body,

speech and mind, will continue to uplift us, to bring us happiness, even when external situations change and become less pleasant.

Investing our happiness, more and more, in developing wholesome mental states (meditation) is the wisest investment. For it will benefit us much more, in the short, medium and long term.

This is the powerful message of the Buddha and the monks, they do not speak for personal gains or personal benefits. Those who *truly* relinquished the world (of the senses) do not speak with the bias of personal gains. What they say can be trusted. They act for the welfare and benefit of the whole.



*“Whoever rejects the teaching of the Awakened Ones,  
And the virtuous people who live by the Dhamma,  
This deluded person stands in unbeneficial perspectives,  
Like a reed would produce fruit,  
Only for its own ruin.”*

*Dhp 164*



The teaching of the Buddha is profound, and it is wholly in line with the truth. It is not easy to find cracks in it. After all, Dhamma also means truth... Those who stand against the virtues are for killing living beings, stealing, lying. Those

who stand against the law of actions and their result, stand for nihilism and anarchism. It is either one or the other.

## The Remedy

### *Happiness of Meditation*

It is by slowly redirecting our lives towards the happiness of mental development (*Bhāvanā*) that we start investing in our true happiness, by making meditation an essential part of our lives. Just like watching television has become the norm for a lot of us, we can choose to invest the same time in watching beautiful states of mind grow within us.

One of the biggest hindrances for us to implement meditation in our lives is not knowing how to meditate or being unfamiliar with our own minds. Often, people will simply not know how to go about meditation, how to develop a healthy outlook on a meditative lifestyle, and this is the only thing keeping them from investing more in their own happiness.

Just as we go to school to learn crafts and skills, find a career and get a job, to sustain our family and to continue our lineage, we also must go to 'school' to learn to be happy. But this school is not part of the current model of our schooling system, therefore, we must go out of our way to go and get it. This is called a meditation retreat. :)

Going on retreat, with proper guidance on the development of happy, loving and kind mental states, as the Buddha

taught it, and learning about discerning states and relaxing tensed unbeneficial states, we will quickly learn how to be happy.

You can have a look at our retreats page to see our retreat schedule and think about joining us on a retreat.

This is where it all begins!

[heartdhamma.love/retreats](http://heartdhamma love/retreats)

Of course, you can choose any teacher or tradition, but if you would like to learn more about what you are reading here, this is a good place to start from. You might also want to have a look at my other book called [Open Heart](#).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [heartdhamma.love/open-heart](http://heartdhamma.love/open-heart)

*Doubt*

Doubt, in this context, is lacking trust and understanding about the Dhamma, it is the kind of doubt in regard to the teaching. There are instances where doubt can be a wholesome faculty, especially for one who has not yet entered the middle way.

When it is directed by discernment to sort out what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, doubt is skillful, which we would then be called investigation. This is a question I receive from a lot of students.

But the mind can easily indulge in such a pattern. Then, doubt turns into delusion, confusion and starts feeding unwholesome qualities. For one who has entered the way, doubt is no longer possible since one sees and understands the Dhamma, the way things work.

Doubt is to be overcome by our practice. Doubt in the Buddha's awakening, his teaching and the community of his awakened disciples vanishes with the help of direct experience in meditation practice and witnessing for oneself, the liberation of the mind from unwholesome states.



*3. Having Understood & Abandoned*

*At that time monks,  
Having understood that:*

*Clinging to selfish desires is a stain of the mind,  
Impatience is a stain of the mind,  
Anger is a stain of the mind,  
Holding grudge is a stain of the mind,  
Pretention is a stain of the mind,  
Retaliation is a stain of the mind,  
Jealousy is a stain of the mind,  
Selfishness (Envy) is a stain of the mind,  
Deceit is a stain of the mind,  
Dishonesty is a stain of the mind,  
Obstinacy is a stain of the mind,  
Arrogance is a stain of the mind,  
Pride is a stain of the mind,  
Self-aggrandizement is a stain of the mind,  
Intoxication is a stain of the mind,  
Carelessness is a stain of the mind,*

*They get to be given up.*

## *Opening the Gates to Awakening*

### *4. Uplifted Understanding*

#### *1. Buddha*

*Then, one arrives at the joyful understanding about the Buddha:*

*The Exalted One is an Arahant,  
Perfectly All-Awakened,  
Endowed with knowledge and conduct,  
Living happily,  
Knower of the worlds,  
Unsurpassed guide for those who seek self-mastery,  
Teacher of Devas and humans,  
Awakened and Blessed.*

#### *2. Dhamma*

*One arrives at the joyful understanding about the Dhamma:*

*'The Awakened One's Teaching is:  
Well explained,  
Directly visible,  
Immediate,  
Inviting,  
Leading upwards,  
To be experienced by the wise for oneself.*



### *3. Sangha*

*One arrives at the joyful understanding about the saṅgha:*

*Good is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha,  
Straight is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha,  
Wise is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha,  
Meaningful is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha.*

*That is, the four pairs of people,  
The eight kinds of persons.*

*The saṅgha of the Awakened One is  
Worthy support,  
Worthy of hospitality,  
Worthy of generosity,  
Worthy of respect,  
An unsurpassed field of goodness for the universe."*

*MN 7 Analogy of the Cloth*



Primarily, doubt is not to know how things work, more specifically, not to know the law of cause and effect. Therefore, if doubt is present, we might not understand how the teaching of the Buddha truly works.

Doubt is also lacking the discernment to know what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. Since we do not know the difference between the two, we are not clear about

the nature of our own minds, the nature of happiness and clarity, the result of which is doubt.

Doubt, when combined with arrogance becomes critical skepticism. The constantly critical and skeptical mind is not truly attentive. It is bent on finding fault, on contradiction as we have seen in *Sammattaniyāma Sutta* series, in the section on listening. It is the opposite of openly accepting.



*“One who has overcome this delusive Saṃsāra;  
This treacherous road filled with manifold dangers,  
One who has crossed over  
and stands on the further shore,  
A meditator, gone beyond longing,  
Unconfused, free of tension and quenched,  
That person I truly call ‘spiritual.’”*

*Dhp 414*



## The Remedy

### *Direct Experience*

This does not mean to accept everything blindly. The cure for critical doubt and skepticism is the development of discernment by way of direct experience (mainly meditation). A person of this nature (who is uncertain) will

find answers through direct practice. If the will to practice is not there, then the fault-finding and criticizing is a waste of time which then turns into nihilism. To avoid this pitfall is wise.

Doubt is overcome by attending meditation retreats, where the nature of beautiful states of the mind become much clearer, as a meditator gains momentum and insight into them. Meditation retreats are the most effective way of overcoming this confused, wavering behavior of the mind.

Studying the Dhamma will also help, but to only know the theory about something that needs to be practiced, also comes with certain dangers, especially for the skeptical, pragmatic minds. Please be warned here! ;)

Associating with people who are dedicating their whole lives to this practice, spending time in the company of wise monks who know and see the path, will play the second most important part in the development of faith and understanding.

Direct experience is synonymous with going on retreat. Again, you can have a look at [our retreats page](#) to see our retreat schedule and think about joining one of our retreats. Investigating the ins and outs of meditation in my other book called [Open Heart](#), which is a complete meditation manual and follow up of this book, will also be a great place to start.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [heartdhamma.love/open-heart](http://heartdhamma.love/open-heart)

*Nihilism*

There exists a view on life that is probably as old as the universe, which existed at the time of the Buddha and still carries on today, in the modern world. This view is nowadays known as nihilism; it is basically holding to the opinion that there is no action (*kamma*) and no result from actions (*Kamma-Vipaka*).

The Buddha repeatedly warned his students against such erroneous thinking. Because those who adhere to this view cannot be expected to behave in a wholesome, beneficial manner, following the virtues. Why would they? For such view implies that there are no consequences of actions, good or bad.

This perspective is a straight path to unwholesome behavior and mass confusion. This is perhaps the most fertile ground for humans to behave selfishly.



*“Indeed, wicked actions are like milk,  
They do not curdle all at once.  
But they follow the witless, burning,  
Like ash-covered coals.”*

*Dhp 71*



Like a blind man, blind from birth, who never saw the sky, never saw the earth, never saw the stars, would proclaim: "There is no sky, no earth, no stars!" Would that person still be right?

Nihilists are merely choosing to invest their faith or belief in one of the most unwholesome standpoints or mental perspective there can be. This *also* is a kind of 'blind faith.' Perhaps amongst the best example of blind faith there exists, as protagonists of nihilism also cannot prove that there is no action and no consequence of these actions. Most of their rhetoric will often be based on making excuses for getting away with harmful, unwholesome behavior.

Faith and confidence, which are the foremost qualities to be developed on our path in order to grow in the Dhamma, can be ravaged by such nihilistic views. Nihilism robs us from any sense of direction, it takes away our will power and our innate goodness. It destroys any meaning or purpose; it is arguably one of the most dangerous perspectives on life we can welcome in our hearts.



*"For one who has trespassed the Dhamma once,  
One given to lying openly,  
One who rejects [the idea of] future lives,  
There is no wicked deed this person could not do."*

*Dhp 176*



A favorite topic of nihilists is the afterlife and fatalism. But just as it is hard for us to prove any life after death, in our current state of consciousness, so too, it is equally difficult to prove that there is no life after death. Moreover, the Buddha explained, very logically, that those who choose not to have ‘faith’ or ‘believe’ in any afterlife cannot be expected to behave in a wholesome manner. We might not be able to easily prove an afterlife, scientifically, but we can easily prove that people who do not care about their actions will likely perpetrate selfish, unskillful actions.

For such people, there is no reason to do good because everything ends at the end of this lifetime. At best, it becomes the excuse *par excellence* to develop opposite qualities to the path, as we then tend to *take* the most out of life (materially), to the detriment of everybody else, becoming selfish and careless of others.

## The Remedy

### *Wise Understanding*

Fortunately, by spending time with wise friends on the path, mostly people who dedicate their entire life to the Buddha’s teaching, monks who have fearlessly left everything behind to undertake the whole training and way of life laid down by the Buddha, one can easily overpower nihilism. It will become increasingly clearer for people who

spend time with wise friends, who are advanced on the path, that actions truly do matter.

The laws of action and reaction, cause and effect, are easy to see when we know where to look. The inner workings of karma cannot be fully explained, for they are far too complex, the Buddha said, but it can be seen at work, and this is sufficient.

We can all see that when we do hurtful actions to others, these actions come back to us. When we perpetrate good deeds, we also receive goodness.

We do not need a mathematical formula to know this, we must simply apply enough careful attention and discernment towards seeing this pattern into our own lives. If you walk around shouting insults to everyone you meet, you are probably going to get insults back. If you walk around smiling and telling compliments to everyone you meet, you are likely to get smiles and compliments back to you.

Studying and learning the teaching of the Buddha on wholesome mental development (*Bhāvanā*) will pull us out of the mud of nihilism. Once we stand clear out and above the mud, we can easily tell the mud apart from solid grounds.

But in order to do this at first, we must seek good company, the company of those who have gone beyond the mud and stand on the firm grounds of Dhamma. Going on retreat and spending time learning to hone a wise perspective on life.

## *The Arising of Faith*

Faith or confidence comes before everything that we do. Without faith, conviction, determination or confidence, no action is possible. Faith is indispensable. Faith is what makes us take the first step towards the wholesome. It is the quality that makes us take action, both in the Dhamma and in everything that we do in life.

We all believe in something, and we all act upon this faith, we stand for what we believe in, whether this might be with our career, our hobbies, volunteer work, an NGO, a charity, the way we raise our children, our spiritual practice, and the Dhamma is no exception. Faith comes first, in everything that we do. Symptoms of people deficient in wholesome faith are depression, anxiety, skeptical doubt, which are mental imbalances that are rampant in today's society than ever before.



*“Good is righteous behavior until the end  
Good is faith that is unflagging,  
Good is the growth of discernment,  
Good is the avoidance of what is harmful.”*

*Dhp 333*





Faith is an essential component on the path to freedom. It is one of the five governing skills of the mind which a meditator needs to develop and harmonize in order to reach liberation.<sup>32</sup> Faith and determination arise together and strengthen each other.



*“Constantly meditating, undistracted,  
Master of one’s sense faculties,  
Knowing the right measure in eating,  
Filled with faith, resolute and energetic,  
Even Māra cannot defeat such a person,  
Just as the wind cannot alter  
a mountain of solid rock.”*

*Dhp 8*



Faith is not about believing theoretical doctrines and notions blindly. Yet, when it is wisely invested in matters that are beyond our experience, and still based upon logical evidence, it can be a powerful tool for making progress on the path. For example, one can wisely invest a reasonable amount of faith in the possibility that the law of action and the result of action, which the Buddha taught, actually exists, and to investigate this for oneself, even though it is hard to have full certainty of it from the beginning.

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<sup>32</sup> The five faculties of the mind are: Faith, will power, presence of mind, collectedness, and discernment.

The same principle applies when we have a vision about our future, we project how we see ourselves a few years down the road. We do not actually know what will happen in five years, but we still put the intention out to become a better version of ourselves or to succeed in our profession or fulfill some project or another. This is also faith.

Similarly, some people who have been practicing for a long time and have extensively purified their minds, who have also taken vows of speaking the truth, teach that there is *Kamma*, that there is action and results of action, there is another life and that there are other realms of existence. A wise seeker would perhaps be well advised to invest a certain amount of faith in the likelihood of this truth and invest in performing good actions!



*“Just as the good horse is touched by the whip;  
Meditate, blazing like the sun, self-mastered,  
With faith, righteous behavior, and determination,  
Discerning the Dhamma with samādhi,  
Endowed with rightful knowledge and conduct,  
Continually present,  
Shatter this unlimited mass of trouble.”*

*Dhp 144*



Even if one does not see these things directly, one is still wise to rest some confidence in the words of the seers who dedicate their entire lives to Truth.

Moreover, this provisional faith which is needed at first, to start practicing, will quickly be replaced by unwavering confidence, as the practice deepens and meditators will gain insights into their own mind and understand that what the Buddha taught was true! Then, faith reaches full maturity by thorough understanding and direct experience in meditation. This kind of faith is no longer subject to vacillation, and one becomes most uplifted by direct comprehension of the way things work (*Dhamma*).



*“A monk lives in much joy  
And confidence in the Buddha’s Teaching,  
When he has understood the Way of Peace,  
The blissful dissolution of conditioned processes.”*

*Dhp 381*



## *The Stages of Awakening*

According to the early Buddhist texts and the direct experience and knowledge of many practitioners, there are four stages of awakening. A person who has attained either one of these four stages is called *Ariya*, which is a term I fancy translating as Awakened.<sup>33</sup> These four distinct kinds of people are called Stream-Enterer, Once-Returner, Non-Returner and Arahant.

At each stage, certain wrong modes of thinking and behaving, which are unwholesome and cause a lot of harm around us, are abandoned, gradually:

### 1. At Stream-Entry:

- (1) Believing in a personal Self
- (2) Believing rites and rituals (lead to Nibbāna)
- (3) Doubt in the Dhamma

### 2. At Once-Return:

- (4) Lessening of desire (for the senses and their objects)
- (5) Lessening of anger

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<sup>33</sup> Ariya Puggala: Noble person, righteous person.

### 3. At Non-Return:

- (4) No more desire (for the senses and their objects)
- (5) No more anger

### 4. At Arahantship:

- (6) Desire for a physical rebirth
- (7) Desire for non-physical rebirth
- (8) Pride
- (9) Agitation
- (10) Blindness <sup>34</sup>

These four levels, which are clearly defined by the Buddha, reveal once again that this is a gradual process, a gradual training (*anupubbasikkhā*). They also reveal that the direct result of practice is tangible personality development.

The aim of this book is only to give a very succinct overview of these stages. For a greater elaboration, please refer to my book called [Open Heart](#). <sup>35</sup>

These four kinds of awakened people are often called an unsurpassed field of merit for the world, to whom what is offered bears great fruit, for the donor and for all beings around them.

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<sup>34</sup> *Rūparāgo, Arūparāgo, Māna, Uddhacca, Avijjā.*

<sup>35</sup> [heartdhamma.love/open-heart/](http://heartdhamma.love/open-heart/)

## Opening the Gates to Awakening



*Weeds are the ruin of fields,  
Selfish desires are the ruin of mankind,  
To those who are void of selfishness,  
What is given bears great fruits.*



*Weeds are the ruin of fields,  
Aversion is the ruin of mankind,  
To those who are void of aversion,  
What is given bears great fruits.*



*Weeds are the ruin of fields,  
Delusion is the ruin of mankind,  
To those who are void of delusion,  
What is given bears great fruits.*

*Dhp 356-358*



## *Personal Development*

The path taught by the Buddhas is a path of devoted self-development, true personality changes in the service of goodness. It is not about mere idle acceptance. It is a path of constantly committing to becoming better human beings. It is wisdom at the service of wholesome personality development, which makes us happier, more patient, compassionate and kind human beings. This is beneficial for us, obviously, and for everyone around us as well.

The Buddha called this *Bhāvanā*, or wholesome mental development. This term has been widely translated as *meditation*, but it encompasses a much broader radius than the single narrow activity of sitting meditation. The idea of mental development is vast and far reaching in its implications. It is a living, growing and interacting bionetwork of qualities of the heart and mind which allows beings to thrive in uplifting, beneficial thinking patterns and behavior.

We then must become gardeners of our own lives, gardeners of the heart, and tend to wholesome states with love and attention, so that they may grow strong over time. Like a gardener spends a lot of time looking at its garden, wondering how to organize it so that it may bear beautiful fruits, it is the same with the cultivation of mental states, this whole process is made possible by self-inquiry, self-

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reflexion and spending time in the inner garden  
(*paccavekkhana*).



### *The Purpose of a Mirror*

**[The Buddha]**

*"What do you think Rāhula,  
What is the purpose of a mirror?"*

**[Rāhula]**

*"It is for the purpose of reflection, Bhante."*

**[The Buddha]**

*In the same way Rāhula,  
One should continually reflect upon  
[one's own] bodily actions  
One should continually reflect upon  
[one's own] verbal actions  
One should continually reflect upon  
[one's own] mental actions. [...]*

### *[Purification by Reflection]*

*In the distant past Rāhula,  
whichever spiritual seekers have brought to perfection their own  
physical actions, verbal actions and mental actions;*

*All of them did so  
by constantly reflecting upon their own physical actions,  
by constantly reflecting upon their own verbal actions,*



## Personal Development

*by constantly reflecting upon their own mental actions.*

*In the distant future Rāhula, whichever spiritual seekers will bring to perfection their own physical actions, verbal actions and mental actions;*

*All of them will do so  
by constantly reflecting upon their own physical actions,  
by constantly reflecting upon their own verbal actions,  
by constantly reflecting upon their own mental actions*

*At present Rāhula, whichever spiritual seekers are bringing to perfection their own physical actions, verbal actions, mental actions;*

*All of them are doing so  
by constantly reflecting upon their own physical actions  
by constantly reflecting upon their own verbal actions  
by constantly reflecting upon their own mental actions*

*Rāhula, you should train yourself in this way:*

*Constantly reflecting,*

*I shall perfect my own physical actions,*

*Constantly reflecting,*

*I shall perfect my own verbal actions,*

*Constantly reflecting,*

*I shall perfect my own mental actions*

*MN 61 Advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhika*

## Opening the Gates to Awakening



In the Buddha's teaching, character development is directly correlated with the four successive stages of liberation, which are manifestations of the gradual wearing away of unskillful mental behaviors. That is to say, the stages of awakening taught by the Buddha were clear levels of character improvement by way of kindness, patience, and poise.

In short, behavior must match the practice for there to be true development. Someone can promote oneself as practicing and teaching loving-kindness, but ultimately, if that person loses temper, becomes angry, and fails to treat those around them lovingly, their theory and practice fails the test of real life.

A golden rule in genuine spiritual communities is that; words must be followed through by actions. Looking out for this principle when exploring spiritual traditions and teachings, a wise meditator will not stray too far from the path. To find a teacher and friends that embody what they teach is one of the highest gifts a practitioner can encounter on this earth.

### On Teaching

On the spiritual path, many will try to teach others and want to become teachers. Yet, teaching is a naturally

occurring phenomena, which happens by display of wisdom. Wisdom is attractive, there is no need to prove anything for the wise. If wisdom is truly found in someone, it will naturally be found by those who are looking for it.

The Buddha is the best example for this as he had no desire to teach, but his wisdom was of such magnitude, that people came to see him from all over the continent, seeking his advice.

### Meditation is the Eight-Spoked Path

Those who genuinely practice meditation also genuinely practice the entire eight-spoked path of the awakened ones. Meditation is not separate from the path and its constituents; they are one and the same. A practitioner only practices meditation properly when each spoke of the path are seen withing them.



*“Once, in Sāvattthi.*

*‘Monks, I will teach you,  
this wise meditation of the awakened ones,  
with its supports and requisites...*

*That is, Wise understanding  
Wise attitude  
Wise speech*

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*Wise action*

*Wise living*

*Wise undertaking*

*Wise presence of mind*

*Tranquility of mind,  
Supported by these seven components;  
is the wise meditation of the awakened ones,  
With its supports and requisites.*

SN 45.28 *Wise Meditation*



## Development and Delight

Practitioners who truly have deep wisdom and understanding of the Dhamma will enjoy their meditation! Delighting in the practice is essential, it is a delightful thing after all. To seek delight in wholesome mental development. This wonderful and uplifting process of self-liberation, every step of the way.



*“Seekers, possessing six qualities,  
a seeker abounds in happiness and mental grace,  
here and now,  
and one is thoroughly undertaking the way  
to the stilling of the distractions.*

## Personal Development

*What six?*

*One     delights in the Dhamma, (1)  
           delights in [mental] development, (2)  
           delights in letting go, (3)  
           delights in solitude, (4)  
           delights in non-hatred, (5)  
           and delights in non-proliferation. (6)*

*Possessing these six qualities,  
a seeker abounds in happiness and mental grace here and now, and  
he is thoroughly undertaking the way to the stilling of the  
distractions.*

*AN 6.78 Happiness and mental grace*



We cultivate meditation to become better, happier people, to be more patient, loving and accepting. The practice does not stop when we stand up from the cushion. Extended practice and retreats are necessary to release deeper states of inner tension, but our practice should also be reflected into every sphere of our lives. Meditation is about cultivating the end of mental troublesomeness, that is just another way of saying happiness. Therefore, our meditation practice should be happy and uplifting.

## *Entering the Stream*

As we previously discussed, the Buddha taught four stages of awakening. Following a gradual training, a gradual process of understanding and liberation. The gradual release of agitation, this is also called “seeing the Dhamma.” Stream-entry is the first level of awakening.



*“Compared to single rulership over the earth,  
Going to the heavens,  
And omniscience over all universes,  
The Fruit of stream-entry is truly best.”*

*Dhp 178*



It is difficult to describe the happiness of those who have attained unshakable certainty in the wholesome course of actions, the way the mind operates and the initial principles to liberation. The Buddha compared it to giving up of an ocean of sorrow. For those who have reached the firm grounds of Dhamma, a great lightness and joy is always accessible.

A happiness which is not dependent on anything of this world to be experienced. Imagine how blissful it would be to have a gushing fountain of happiness within, which

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could be turned on simply by sitting down and letting go of everything else, all activities.



*"To those for who you have compassion,  
To those you think could listen and understand--*

*Seekers, to your friends and family,  
Acquaintances and relatives,  
They should be encouraged, explained and helped  
In [acquiring] the four qualities of stream-entry*

*What four?*

### *1. Buddha*

*They should be encouraged, explained and helped in [acquiring]  
confident understanding in the Awakened One [as it is]:*

*The Exalted One is an Arahant,  
Perfectly All-Awakened  
Endowed with knowledge and conduct,  
Blissful, Knower of the worlds  
Unsurpassed guide for those who seek self-mastery  
Teacher of Devas and humans,  
Awakened and Blessed.*

*Seekers, there could be degradation in the four great elements--In  
the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the wind*

## OPENING THE GATES TO AWAKENING

*element, but there cannot be degradation in the [mind of the] awakened meditator who has confident understanding in the Buddha.*

*And if there were degradation [in the mind] this awakened meditator who has confident understanding about the Buddha*

*That they could be reborn in the plane of the fallen, the plane of wild animals, or the plane of the ancestors;*

*This is impossible.*

### *2. Dhamma*

*They should be encouraged, explained and helped in [acquiring] confident understanding in the Dhamma [as it is]:*

*'Well explained is the Awakened One's Teaching,  
Directly visible, Immediate,  
Inviting, Leading upwards,  
To be experienced by the wise for oneself.*

*Seekers, there could be degradation in the four great elements-- ..., but there cannot be degradation in the [mind of the] Awakened meditator who has confident understanding in the Dhamma.*

*And if there were degradation [in the mind] of this awakened meditator who has confident understanding about the Dhamma,*

*That they could be reborn in the plane of the fallen, the plane of wild animals, or the plane of the ancestors;*



## ENTERING THE STREAM

*This is impossible.*

### *3. Saṅgha*

*One should be encouraged, explained and helped in [acquiring]  
confident understanding in the Saṅgha [as it is]:*

*Good is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha,  
Straight is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha,  
Wise is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha,  
Meaningful is the practice of the Awakened One's saṅgha.  
That is, the four pairs of people,  
The eight kinds of persons.*

*The saṅgha of the Awakened One is  
Worthy support, worthy of hospitality,  
Worthy of generosity, worthy of respect,  
An unsurpassed field of goodness for the universe.*

*Seekers, there could be degradation in the four great elements-- ...,  
but there cannot be degradation in the [mind of the] awakened  
meditator who has confident understanding in the Saṅgha.*

*And if there should be degradation [in the mind] of this awakened  
meditator who has confident understanding about the Saṅgha,*

*That they could be reborn in the plane of the fallen, the plane of  
wild animals, the plane of the ancestors;*

*This is impossible.*

## OPENING THE GATES TO AWAKENING

### *4. Virtue of the Awakened*

*One should be encouraged, explained and helped in the good nature of the awakened ones that is*

*Unbroken, unflawed  
Spotless, unsullied  
Liberating, taught by the wise  
Appeasing and turns into mental clarity [Samādhi]*

*Seekers, there could be degradation in the four great elements-- ..., but there cannot be degradation in the [mind of the] awakened meditator who has confident understanding in the virtue of the awakened ones.*

*And if there were degradation [in the mind] of this awakened meditator who has confident understanding about the virtue of the awakened ones*

*That they could be reborn in the plane of the fallen, the plane of wild animals, the plane of the ancestors;*

*This is impossible.*



*To those you have compassion for,  
To those you think could listen and understand--*

*Seekers, to your friends and family,*

## ENTERING THE STREAM

*acquaintances and relatives,*

*They should be encouraged, explained and helped  
in [acquiring] the four qualities of stream-entry*

SN 55.17 Friends and Relatives – Stream-Entry (2)



Wise friends play a crucial role in encountering the four factors of stream entry which are unwavering confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Community of the awakened ones and their set of ethics. To come across such a gift in one's life is to be bestowed the highest generosity.

Since this happiness is not dependent on this world, nothing in this world can buy it or even bring it about, unless one has the good fortune to have wise friends. Therefore, anything that can be done, in this world, to share such a gift, is partaking of the highest goodness, possible on this earth.



*“To those for who you have compassion,  
To those you think would listen and understand--  
Bhikkhus, to your friends and family,  
Acquaintances and relatives,*

*They should be encouraged, explained, and helped*

## OPENING THE GATES TO AWAKENING

*to directly understand existence  
by way of the four understandings of the awakened ones.*

*What four?*

*(1) The awakened understanding of trouble;*

*(2) The awakened understanding of  
the increase of trouble;*

*(3) The awakened understanding of  
the release from trouble;*

*(4) The awakened understanding of  
the practice to release the troublesome.*

*To those for who you have compassion for,  
To those you think would listen and understand--  
Seekers, to your friends and family,  
Acquaintances and relatives,*

*They should be encouraged, explained, and helped  
to directly understand existence  
by way of the four understandings of the awakened ones.*

*Seekers,  
One should continually discern:  
'This is troublesome.'*

*One should continually discern:*

## ENTERING THE STREAM

*'This is the source of trouble.'*

*One should continually discern:*

*'This is the release from trouble.'*

*One should continually discern:*

*'This is the practice to release the troublesome.'*

SN 56.26 To Your Friends



## *King Ajātasattu*

Even though the King Ajātasattu was a rude and murderous individual with base ethical standards, he had enough wit and mental clarity to speak respectfully to the monks and to the Buddha.

His respect gained him this groundbreaking talk on the Dhamma from the Buddha himself,<sup>36</sup> who taught him the Dhamma out of compassion, because he knew of the king's mental affliction.

Previously, King Ajātasattu had deprived his father, the King Bimbisāra, of his life for the sake of the throne. Fully knowing that his father was a highly respected and virtuous man, who loved his son deeply.

The King Ajātasattu only learned how much his father loved him after ordering his killing, completely blinded by selfish hatred. The weight of his actions must have been terrible to bear with in his conscience.

In the complete version of this sutta, the Buddha first answers King Ajātasattu's arrogant question which politely means: "What's the point of this fruitless spiritual life?"

He skillfully returns to him his extreme indulgence in royal luxury, gained from the fruit of his kingdom's workers and

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<sup>36</sup> DN 2 *Sāmaññāphala Sutta* – The Fruits of the Meditative Life

## ENTERING THE STREAM

honest people, to which the King's initial arrogance receives a wholesome reflection. Though patient persistence and maintained composure from the King wins him this discourse.

The Buddha explains, in the full version, that the King's mental affliction, due to remorse, is the reason why the King did not awake to the Dhamma and entered the stream, after being told such a profound discourse on the entire path.

The mental pain was too overwhelming for him to see with clarity, the Goodness of the Dhamma.

## *The Truth*

The truth is,  
underneath all unwholesome mental states  
there is hurt,  
there is tension.

People hurt in all sorts of ways.  
Some of us know how to run away.  
Some of us know how to bury.  
Some of us know how to ignore.  
Some of us know how to divert.

And whether we are aware of it... or not,  
These mental qualities are what we share with the people  
around us.

We never keep our mental states only to ourselves,  
We spread them around,  
knowingly,  
or unknowingly.

When offended, we reply with offenses,  
When attacked, we attack others,  
We react and we retaliate,  
most of the time unconsciously,  
on a gross apparent level,  
or on a subtle one.

An eye for an eye,  
A tooth for a tooth...



And this is our legacy,  
this is our gift,  
To all living beings  
and to future generations.

As the Buddha said, the worthiest gift,  
the highest good in this world is to develop wisdom,  
to learn to recognize unwholesome states  
and to let them go, and to develop a wholesome,  
loving and forgiving mind:



*“Mind precedes all things,  
All are governed by the mind,  
Created by the mind,*

*If, with an unwholesome mind,  
One speaks or acts,  
Trouble follows along the route,  
As the cart, dragged at the ox’s foot.*



*“Mind precedes all things,  
All are governed by the mind,  
Created by the mind,*

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*If, with a wholesome mind,  
One speaks or acts,  
Happiness is bound to come along  
Like a one's own shadow, dragging at one's foot."*

Dhp 1&2



Fortunately, the Buddha's teaching  
helps us to grow under the sun of goodness.

It reveals to us, with the light of wisdom what lies inside  
so that we can learn to heal ourselves thoroughly, lovingly.

To apply the soothing balm of virtue, Universal Love,  
serenity, and discernment directly to our hearts.



*"If, [when struck], you do not resonate,  
Just like a broken gong  
You are partaking of Nibbāna  
For vindictiveness is no longer in you."*

Dhp 134



So we may all enjoy  
the magnificent happiness and bliss of emancipation.<sup>37</sup>

This is the goal of the Buddha's teaching.  
The purpose of the meditative life.

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<sup>37</sup> *Nibbāna*

# Opening the Gates to Awakening

## *Stay Connected*

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## *Glossary*

Akāliko: Immediate. Not delayed in time. Timeless.

Ariya: Righteous, Noble, Virtuous, Wise. From the Ancient Indo-Ariyan culture that flourished in northern India thousands of years ago. People faithful to goodness and truth.

Āsavā: Lit.: Outflow or inflow. Movements of the mind. Distractions. Conditioned state of longing embedded in the mind that have become patterns or habitual tendencies.

Bhikkhu: [Sk. bhikṣu, fr. bhikṣ] Lit.: Alms-eater, a mendicant, a Buddhist monk. The word monk is a borrowed term from ancient Greek and Latin etymology from “Monos” (Alone) and “Monakhos” (Solitary). It is close enough but not exactly fitting.

Bhikkhunī: Buddhist nun.

Brāhmaṇa: Brāhmin. From the priestly caste. Family oriented. They did not leave material possessions. Keepers and reciters of the vedic hymns or mantras.

Brahmāvihāra: The abode of Brahmā, the celestial or divine abidings. In ancient India, Bhahmā, the creator God, was said to live in only four states, Love, Compassion, Joy and Calm.

Catta Ariya-Sacca: The Four Awakened Understandings. (Commonly translated as the four noble truths). The word understanding here is closer to the true meaning and usage of the notions at play than the word truth. In a way, they are “truths” but what matters is that we understand them! Therefore, the word understanding is more relevant, especially in the practical and applied purpose of meditation practice. And the “Ariyas” are those who have entered upon any of the four stages of awakening, therefore making these, the four understandings of the awakened or the four awakened understanding, one who cultivates these understandings is assuredly walking on the path to awakening. They will pull the seekers out of the mud of ignorance, at least temporarily. One who has awakened, has done so by way of the four awakened understandings.

Jhāna: [Sk. Dhyāna]. Lit. “to understand”. Meditation. A level of meditation or a level of understanding or a level of insight.

Samādhi: Depending on the context, the meaning of samādhi may change and be adapted to fit the English vocabulary. There are no English equivalent or counterpart for this word. The word samādhi is perhaps even an invented word from the Buddha since it cannot be found in Pre-Buddhist Vedic literature. The word mainly means tranquility of mind, (Cittass’ekaggatā) mental collectedness or unity, meditation, mental harmony, mental coherence. In very practical terms, samādhi happens through Wise practice, with the abandonment of tension (Craving) the mind becomes spacious, clear, unified, composed and

## Opening the Gates to Awakening

steady, this is the experience of samādhi. Also, mental potency.

Sāmaṇa: Wandering ascetic. From the root “śram” meaning performing austerities / tapas. Jains and Buddhist monks are foremost figures of śrāmaṇa. Spiritual wanderers who dedicated their lives to various spiritual activities and practices. They left all material possessions and “went forth” into “homelessness”. Often in combination with Brāhmaṇa.

Sambodhi: Full awakening.

Sampajañña: Clear knowingness, clear understanding

Sandiṭṭhiko: Directly visible, here and now. One of the qualities of the Buddha’s Teaching. (Often in combination with Akāliko).

Sati: Awareness, presence (of mind), mindfulness. Lit.: Memory. This faculty of awareness is not so different than the faculty of memory. That is why, by cultivating awareness through meditation, meditators will “remember” things they thought was long forgotten. With the abandoning of mental tension (Clinging), the mind opens up and becomes more aware and remembers things very clearly.

Sutta: Lit.: Thread Fig.: Discourse. The Buddha’s original discourses.



Tathāgata: Epithet of the Buddha. The Buddha most often speaks of himself in the third person. He usually uses the word "Tathāgata" when speaking of himself. "The one who has arrived to Truth."

Upasakas and upasikas: Lay practitioner of the Buddha's Teaching.

Uposatha: Observance day of the full moon, new moon, and quarter moons. Time where Dhamma practitioners make a special effort, for one day and night, to devote their time to meditation and taking the five or eight virtues with resolution.

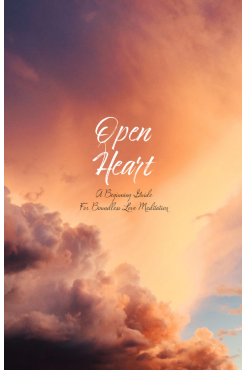
Yoniso Manasikhāra: Wise attention, Careful attention. Attending on the mind with the four Awakened Understandings.

# Opening the Gates to Awakening

## *References*

It is good to keep in mind that the purpose of this brief introductory book is not to elaborate on certain points of controversies between the Early Teaching of The Buddha as it is found in the original discourses (Suttas) and the manifold differences in modern meditation techniques that have evolved through time and taken shape from later commentarial and individual opinions.

For further reference, consult the book *Open Heart and Natural Samādhi*.<sup>38</sup> All references are rooted in the direct discourses of the Buddha.



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<sup>38</sup> Coming out soon.

## *Abbreviations*

**DN: Dīgha Nikāya**

Collection of Long Discourses

**MN: Majjhima Nikāya**

Collection of Medium Discourses

**SN: Saṃyutta Nikāya**

Collection of Discourses by Themes

**AN: Aṅguttara Nikāya**

Collection of Discourses by Numbers

**Dhp: Dhammapāda**

Verses on the Dhamma

# Opening the Gates to Awakening

## *Acknowledgements*

Monks owe their lives to generosity.  
Monks owe their lives to goodness.  
Monks owe their lives to the Dhamma.

Therefore, this is a collective work in skillful deeds. May all merits generated from this book naturally flow to those who have supported its coming into being. Whether by food, shelter, clothing, or medicine or by any other means.

Those who support the Dhamma,  
Are in turn supported by the Dhamma.

Adding that this merit is shared with all living beings.  
Especially those who are in dire need of merit.

I pay my deepest respects and gratitude, with folded hands at the feet of my Teacher, the Awakened One, the unsurpassable Teacher of people who seek happiness, the Buddha. All credit for any of this work goes to him.

My deepest respects and gratitude to all of my teachers, from the beginning of my path until now.

Homage to the entire bhikkhu saṅgha, and to the four pillars of the sāsanā; Monks, nuns, male lay practitioners and female lay practitioners.

To my very devoted supporters, kappiyas and assistants, who are actively working at making this world a better

place. To all generous and wise donors and supporters. To my family and wise friends on the path.

Sabba satta bhavantu sukhitatta  
May all beings be happy at heart

Msit No'Kmaq  
All my relations

Bhante Ānanda  
May 2020  
Kootenays



