



Discernment

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THE BUDDHA'S
STRATEGIES
FOR HAPPINESS : II

a study guide
prepared by

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Introduction

This book is an introduction to the Buddha's teachings on how to use discernment to find an unending happiness. The main body of the book consists of passages selected from the Pali Canon—the earliest extant record of the Buddha's teachings—in which the Buddha and his disciples tell how to develop discernment and apply it to the search for that happiness. The purpose of this introduction is to provide context for the passages, making them more accessible to anyone who wants to put their teachings to use.

The Pali word for happiness, *sukha*, has many levels of meaning: everything from “ease” and “pleasure,” through “happiness,” and on to outright “bliss.” All of these meanings are relevant here. Keep in mind that when any of these words are used in this book, they all refer to the same Pali word. I've chosen the English rendering that seems most appropriate in any given context, but if you prefer, you can replace my choice with any of the others.

The Pali word for discernment, *pañña*, is often translated as “wisdom.” However, there are two connected reasons for translating it as “discernment” instead. The first relates to the place of *pañña* in the Pali language. It's related to the verb *pajanati*, which refers to the mental act that discerns events and actions, detecting when they are distinct from one another and when they are connected as causes and effects. *Pajanati* also refers to the act of judging intentions by their effects and discerning subtle phenomena that are ordinarily hard to detect. Although these mental acts contain an element of wisdom, there is no appropriate English verb related to wisdom that covers all of these functions. The English verb “discern,” however, does cover these functions, and so—to keep the connection between the verb and the noun clear—it seems best to translate *pajanati* as “discern” and *pañña* as “discernment.”

The second reason for translating *pañña* as “discernment” relates to its role in the practice. As we will see, the Buddha's strategy for finding true happiness is to focus discernment on the processes of intentional action, to determine whether they are skillful—conducive to long-lasting happiness—or not. Part of this strategy, especially at the highest stages of the practice, is to regard discernment itself as an intentional action. This helps you gauge when to foster it and when to

abandon it for a higher purpose: total release. Because wisdom is hard to think of as an action, “discernment” seems to work better in practice as a translation for *pañña*.

The Buddha taught that discernment begins by seeking out knowledgeable contemplatives—people who have trained their minds to gain personal experience of the highest happiness—and asking them, “What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?” To do this demonstrates discernment in four important ways:

- It shows that you know enough to ask the advice of people more experienced than you.
- You realize that happiness comes from your own actions.
- You realize that long-term is better than short-term.
- Above all, you realize that the search for long-term happiness is the most worthy use of your discernment—the search for true happiness is a noble pursuit—and that you need discernment to do it right.

As the question makes clear, “doing it right” means searching for a happiness that lasts. The Buddha discovered in the course of his awakening that two kinds of happiness meet these qualifications: one that’s created by your intentional actions, and one that’s totally uncreated. His terms for these two types of experience are *fabricated (sankhata)* and *unfabricated (asankhata)*. These two terms are central to his teachings in general, and to his instructions on happiness in particular, so it’s important to understand them.

The term “fabrication” refers both to intentional actions—mental or physical—as well as to the mental or physical conditions they shape. All experience at the senses—the five physical senses and the mind taken as a sixth sense—is fabricated through past and present intentional actions in thought, word, or deed. Past actions provide the raw material for present experience. From this raw material, your present intentions—sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously—select and shape what you actually experience in the present. These present intentions also add to the range of raw material from which you will select and shape experiences in the future.

Because no intentions are constant or permanent, they can’t create a constant or permanent happiness. The best they can create, when they’re trained to be

skillful, is a happiness that's relatively long-lasting and harmless.

The only happiness not subject to change is unfabricated happiness, a happiness that does not depend on intentional actions for its existence. *Nibbana* (*nirvana*) is the most famous term for this happiness. It literally means “unbinding” or “freeing.” But the Buddha describes this happiness metaphorically with other terms as well. These include: peace, the deathless, exquisite, bliss, rest, the wonderful, the marvelous, security, the unafflicted, purity, the island, shelter, harbor, refuge, the ultimate.

Even though intentional actions cannot create this happiness, they can be trained to a heightened level of skill where they allow all fabrications—even themselves—to fall still, revealing the unfabricated dimension that they've been hiding all along. A traditional metaphor for this process is the desire to go to a park. The desire doesn't cause the park to be, but it's what gets you there. Once you've arrived, the desire is no longer needed and so falls away on its own [§50].

The most skillful use of discernment, of course, is to pursue unfabricated happiness. But this doesn't mean that fabricated happiness has no value on the path. The Buddha gave detailed instructions on how to use discernment in pursuing long-term happiness of both sorts. The skills needed for long-term fabricated happiness he taught under the term, “acts of merit” because they produce happiness while causing no one any harm. These acts include generosity, virtue, and the development of universal goodwill. I have already provided a detailed account of these skills in the companion to this book, the study guide named *Merit*. Here I will provide a short account of what the pursuit of merit and the pursuit of nibbana have in common and where they part ways. Their common features are important, for the pursuit of merit gives preliminary training to discernment in many of the more difficult skills needed to succeed in the pursuit of nibbana. However, their differences are also important, for the pleasant results of meritorious actions can be so satisfying that they can interfere with the desire to go further. When this happens, the Buddha terms the pursuit of merit “ignoble” [§8]. This is why discernment needs further training in realizing the drawbacks of fabricated happiness so that it will be motivated to search for something even more satisfying and reliable, something truly noble and worthwhile.

THE LESSONS OF MERIT

The pursuit of merit is an important precondition for the entire path of practice both internally and externally. On the external level, acts of generosity and virtue done with an attitude of unlimited goodwill help to provide social and physical circumstances that are conducive to the practice. You create an environment where your basic needs are met and you are free from strife. On the internal level, acts of merit function as parts of the path to nibbana. This path is composed of eight factors [§34], of which three are covered by virtue: speech, right action, and right livelihood. The practice of virtue also exercises three of the qualities necessary for the factor of right mindfulness: *ardency*, in the effort to keep to the precepts; *alertness*, in the ability to keep watch over your actions as they're happening to make sure they conform to the precepts; and *mindfulness*, in the ability to keep your precepts in mind at all times. Meditation on universal goodwill can be used to develop the factor of right concentration, and it also plays a role in the factors of right resolve, right effort, and right mindfulness.

Acts of merit also exercise your discernment. To begin with, they show you the value and importance of your own actions: that you have the ability to choose how you act, and that your actions have consequences in bringing about pleasure or pain. You see for yourself that when you choose to do acts of merit, you gain a more long-lasting happiness than the pleasure that would come from choosing to act in opposite ways: being stingy, acting harmfully, and acting from ill will. Although some of these results take time to appear, others appear in the immediate present. For instance, you see that, when dealing with another person, if you bring an attitude of goodwill to the situation, you experience a very different situation than if you had approached that person with hostility. You're shaping your experiences right in the here and now.

Seeing this leads to an attitude that the Buddha calls *heedfulness* (*appamada*): the realization that, given the power of all your actions, you have to be careful in how you choose to act right now, all the time. This, he says, is the attitude underlying all skillful action [§2]. You see the need to use discernment in motivating yourself (1) to act skillfully even in cases where you don't feel like it, and (2) to avoid unskillful actions even when you feel like doing them [§6].

As you develop discernment by acting on this attitude of heedfulness, you foster two aspects of a healthy sense of self that are necessary all along the path:

the ability to delay present gratification for the sake of a more reliable happiness in the future, and a sense of confidence—and competence—that you can withstand any unskillful urges that used to get in the way of acting in your own true best interest.

These are all lessons and abilities that you need to bring to the pursuit of an unfabricated happiness as well. Your sense of the power of your actions, as it gets more refined, gives you insight into the way you fabricate even your immediate experiences in the present—even something as simple as seeing an object or hearing a sound. Because of your many past actions bearing potential fruit in the present, the present offers many different potentials—various feelings in the body and mind. Which potentials you choose to focus on and how you choose to deal with them can radically shape what you perceive as actually happening in the present. A face that you may perceive as friendly when you're in an expansive mood, for instance, might strike you as hostile or ridiculous when you're feeling threatened or snide.

Heedfulness helps you see the need to be careful even on this immediate level, for a moment of desire or dislike can lead you to see things in ways that will impel you to act unskillfully now and on into the future. Heedfulness also teaches you that if you want an unending happiness, you can't depend on happiness created by fabrication. You have to dig deeper, to something unfabricated, if you want to find a happiness that's truly reliable. As passage §7 shows, when you reflect further that all levels of being are subject to the vagaries of action, heedfulness grows stronger, into a sense of urgency (*samvega*) that gives rise to the factors of the path to the unfabricated, leading beyond levels of being of every sort.

As for the healthy sense of self developed in the pursuit of merit, both aspects are useful in the pursuit of nibbana. (1) You need to be able to deny yourself certain pleasures in the present for the sake of the ultimate pleasure of nibbana. This requires the discernment to know how to keep yourself motivated in that direction. When you read the selections from the Canon, take note of how often they discuss ways of keeping your motivation strong. (2) Because the pursuit of nibbana requires overcoming desires that lead in other directions, the sense of your own competence in overcoming unskillful desires while pursuing merit gives a boost to your confidence that you, too, can follow the path all the way to nibbana.

THE DRAWBACKS OF FABRICATION

These are some of the ways in which the pursuit of merit provides the external wellbeing conducive to the pursuit of nibbana and gives training in the internal skills needed for that pursuit. However, the joy of fabricating acts of merit, along with the fabricated happiness they produce, can prove so satisfying that they lead you to put the pursuit of nibbana aside. Rather than gambling on an unfabricated happiness you have yet to experience, you content yourself with fabricated acts of merit and their fabricated results that you already know.

This is why the next stage of discernment is devoted to developing dispassion for all fabrications. This stage is so important that Ven. Sariputta once singled it out as the best first answer when an intelligent newcomer asks, “What does the Buddha teach?” To paraphrase his answer, the Buddha teaches the subduing of passion and desire for fabrications [§10]. Notice that, from this point of view, the Buddha’s central teaching deals with a skill. Subduing these mental states is something you learn to *do*. Everything else in the Buddha’s teachings is aimed at showing you how to do this well. Because the central teaching is a skill, the logical next question focuses on motivation: Why develop this skill? And the answer is that, if you don’t, you suffer when fabrications change. If you do develop the skill, then even though fabrications change, their change won’t cause you to suffer. That’s as far as Ven. Sariputta’s answers go in that particular passage. Other passages make the point that the subduing of passion and desire for fabrications not only avoids suffering, but also leads to the highest happiness [§§18–22], which—because it’s unfabricated—is not subject to change.

All of these passages are based on two pairs of premises about the nature of experience. The first pair is this: that fabrications—both the processes of fabrication and the fabricated experiences that result—inevitably change, and that all experienced change is a sign of fabrication. The second pair is this: that an unfabricated, unchanging happiness is possible, and that lack of change is a sign of the unfabricated [§70]. These two pairs underlie the entire program for developing discernment in pursuit of nibbana. And they’re fairly radical. If every change you experience comes from fabrication, then you’re fabricating your experience in ways you don’t even realize. This gives some idea of how difficult it is to reach the unfabricated, for it will involve sensitizing yourself to many of the deeply hidden processes of your own mind. Yet this very premise is what makes

the experience of a deathless happiness possible, for if change comes from within, then the end of change can come from within as well. If suffering comes from what you do, then you can end it by changing what you do. The path is within your power. Without these premises, the idea of a path to the end of suffering and stress wouldn't make sense. This is why these premises are basic to the path.

These premises also give focus to your practice. You sharpen your discernment by training it to look for change, particularly in any experience that seems to be unchanging. If you catch sight of anything arising or passing away, you've detected an instance of fabrication—a sign that you need to look deeper into the mind to see what's causing that change and how to let it go. When you reach a dimension of experience where fabrication and change are impossible, then you can know for yourself if it's really happiness. That's when you can decide whether the Buddha's premises really work.

Your motivation for doing this, of course, is the fact that the reliability of your happiness is at stake. If unchanging happiness is possible, you don't want to mistake a happiness that changes for one that doesn't. Because there are no outside guarantors for whether you've reached a truly unchanging happiness, your only guarantor is internal: the sharpness and reliability of your own discernment into the presence or absence of change.

The Buddha's program for developing your discernment in this direction follows two simultaneous tracks. The first track is learning to sensitize yourself to the extent that you are already fabricating your experience. The second track is using fabrications to develop the qualities of mind that foster dispassion for all fabrications—including, ultimately, the fabrications underlying those qualities of mind and the qualities themselves. The two tracks often overlap, and are separate only in that the first is focused primarily on the *fact* of fabrication, whereas the second is focused primarily on evaluating fabrications as to their *worth*.

To sensitize you to the *fact* of fabrication, the Buddha employs a two-pronged approach. First he provides several ways of classifying fabrications to help sensitize you to the wide variety of ways in which they function. Then he asks you to fabricate a path of practice so that you can gain direct “hands-on” experience in how fabrications work, how they differ in subtlety, and where their limitations are.

The Buddha's most common way of classifying fabrications is into a set of five *khandhas*, a word that can be translated as "heap," "mass," or—most commonly—"aggregate." The use of the term "aggregate" for *khandha* apparently comes from a distinction popular in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, between conglomerates of things that work together in an organic unity—called "systems"—and conglomerates that are just random collections of things, called "aggregates." This translation conveys the useful point that experiences you might ordinarily see as having an organic unity are actually shaped by discrete choices and their results.

The five aggregates are:

- *form*: any physical phenomenon (although the Buddha's focus here is less on the physical object in itself, and more on your *experience* of the object);
- *feeling*: feeling-tones of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain;
- *perception*: the act of recognizing, mentally labeling, and identifying experiences;
- *fabrication*: the intentional shaping of experience;
- *consciousness*: awareness at the six senses.

There's something of an anomaly in that the term "fabrication" covers all five aggregates and yet is listed as one of the five. Passage §II helps to explain why: The mental act of fabrication shapes the actual experience of all physical and mental experiences in the dimensions of space and time. It chooses among the potentials for any of the aggregates made available by past actions, and turns them into the actual experience of those aggregates in the present. "Fabrication" as a name for one of the aggregates refers specifically to this mental process. As a term for all five aggregates, "fabrication" covers both the processes of fabrication and the fabricated phenomena—physical and mental—that result.

Because the Buddha provides many lists of mental and physical functions, there's the question of why he chose to focus special attention on these five aggregates. The apparent answer is that these are the activities involved in one of life's most basic processes: the act of feeding. This act is one of the Buddha's most pervasive images for how the mind relates to its experiences, so when he talks about feeding he's referring both to the feeding of the body and the feeding

of the mind. The five aggregates are involved in both kinds of feeding in the following ways:

- *Form* covers both the form of the body that needs to be nourished (and that will be used to look for food), as well as the physical objects that will be used as food. When feeding takes place in the mind, “form” applies to whatever form you assume for yourself in the imagination—how you picture yourself—and to whatever imaginary sights, sounds, etc., you take pleasure from.

- *Feeling* covers the painful feelings of lack or hunger that drive you to search for food; the painful feelings of anxiety you feel when you can’t find food; the pleasant feeling of satisfaction that comes when you’ve found something to eat; and the added pleasure when you actually eat it.

- *Perception* covers the ability to identify the type of hunger you feel, and to identify which things in your world of experience will satisfy that hunger. Perception also plays a central role in identifying what is and isn’t food. This, in fact, is one of the ways we first learn to exercise our perceptions as children. Our first reaction on encountering something is to put it into our mouth to see if it’s edible. If it is, we label it with the perception of “food.” If it’s not, we label it as “not food.”

- *Fabrications* relate to feeding in the way we think about and evaluate strategies for finding food, for taking possession of it when we find it, and for fixing it if it’s not edible in its raw state. For example, if you want to enjoy an orange, you have to figure out how to remove the peel. If your first attempt doesn’t work, you have to evaluate why it didn’t and to figure out new strategies until you find one that does.

- *Consciousness* refers to the act of being aware of all these activities.

These five ways of fabricating are so central to our way of relating to the world—both in the way we manipulate the world and in what we get out of it—that we feed mentally off of the five aggregates, just as we feed off the food they procure. To distinguish this second level of feeding, the Buddha gives it a special name: *upadana*, which can mean both the act of taking sustenance from something, and the act of clinging. (The underlying image here is drawn from how people in the Buddha’s time viewed fire. As they saw it, the fire element burned because it fed off fuel to which it clung; if it let go, it was no longer

nourished and so had to go out.) This clinging can take many forms, but the most tenacious is using the five aggregates as the raw material from which we create our sense of who we are. We identify who we are by how we feed. In the Buddha's analysis, this second level of feeding—regardless of how we cling—is where we suffer. In fact, his short definition of stress and suffering is clinging to the five aggregates. We engage in them repeatedly because we feel passion for the food they provide, and yet the very act of engaging in them inevitably leads to stress and suffering—both in the hunger that drives the need to feed and in the anxiety that comes from trying to ensure a lasting source of food.

This gives some idea of why the skill that Ven. Sariputta saw as central to the Buddha's teaching—subduing passion and desire for the five aggregates—is so difficult to master, or even, for a beginner, to see as something positive. The Buddha is asking us to wean ourselves from the food we've been creating—the only food we know—as well as from the identity we've developed around the ways in which we look for and enjoy our mental and physical food. A strong part of the mind will naturally resist.

To help us overcome this resistance, the Buddha's strategy—the second prong of his approach—is to teach us how to use the five aggregates to create a path of practice off of which we can feed, taking us to higher and higher levels of fabricated food. In the course of developing this path, we learn for ourselves that many of the higher levels of happiness can be attained only if we're willing to overcome our tendency to cling to lower forms of food. This teaches the important lesson that letting go leads to better pleasures than those provided by clinging. Then, as we become more familiar with the higher pleasures provided by the aggregates in the form of the path, we see that they, too, have their drawbacks. We begin to sense the stress that even they entail. Thus sensitized, we will become more willing to let them go as well in favor of something unfabricated.

Of the eight factors of the path, right concentration is the one that the Buddha cited explicitly as a type of food. It is also the only one that he cited explicitly as being composed of the five aggregates. Right concentration is defined as the four jhanas: states of strong, single-minded mental absorption in a sense of full-body awareness [§57]. There are also four formless attainments, based on the fourth jhana, that some texts cite as forms of right concentration as well [§III]. Each of the jhanas is characterized by pleasure, although in the levels beginning with the

fourth jhana the pleasure is so subtle that it's formally described as equanimity. In addition, the first two jhanas are characterized by rapture—a sense of intense refreshment—along with the pleasure.

The pleasure and rapture are the food provided by the jhanas. And just as the five aggregates are active in acquiring and enjoying physical food, they are active in acquiring and enjoying the jhanas:

- *Form* here applies to the sense of the body felt from within as the mind settles in concentration. If the object of concentration is the breath, that would come under “form” as well.
- *Feeling* here applies to the feelings of pleasure and equanimity experienced in the jhanas.
- *Perception* covers the mental label that identifies the object of concentration, allowing you to keep it in mind. The role of perception in maintaining concentration is so central that the Buddha calls the four jhanas and the first three formless attainments based on the fourth jhana “perception-attainments.”
- *Fabrications* cover the acts of intention needed to enter jhana and stay there. These acts are present in all levels of jhana. In addition, in the first jhana, “fabrications” also cover acts of directed thought and evaluation that adjust the mind and its object so that they can stay together snugly without further adjustment in the higher jhanas.
- *Consciousness* again refers to the act of being aware of all these activities.

When you first attempt to develop right concentration, your attention is primarily focused on the object of concentration. However, the difficulties in staying with the object begin to sensitize you more and more to the mental fabrications that either help or hinder your attempts to get the mind to settle down. As you grow more skilled in staying settled, you eventually reach a stage where you can pull out slightly from full concentration and observe the activities of fabrication—subtly arising and passing away—there in the concentration itself. Nourished with the sense of wellbeing provided by the jhanas, the mind is now in the best position to observe both the uses and the limitations of fabrication. At this point, the Buddha's two-pronged strategy for sensitizing you

to the *fact* of fabrication—the first track in his program for developing discernment—is now complete.

As you have been following this track, he has also encouraged you to follow a second track alongside it. This track, as noted above, focuses on evaluating the *worth* of fabrications. Its strategy involves fostering the two qualities needed to develop dispassion for fabrications. The first quality is *samatha*, or tranquility. The second is *vipassana*, or insight. These two qualities actually function in both tracks. For example, both tranquility and insight are needed to develop jhana; jhana, in turn, helps both qualities to grow and mature [§65] so that they can be more effective in evaluating not only the pleasure produced by jhana but also the possibility of a higher release.

As the Buddha notes, tranquility is the mental quality that directly enables the mind to develop dispassion for fabrications [§66]. When the mind can find pleasure in growing tranquil, it's in a position to see that pleasure doesn't have to require the effort put into the activity of fabrication. This helps to undercut the passion that drives the mind to keep fabricating. However, tranquility on its own is not enough to overcome the tendency to feed emotionally or intellectually on the pleasure it provides. It's possible, for instance, for the tranquil mind to identify with the tranquility, or to interpret it as a higher reality to which you then become attached.

To overcome this tendency, insight—the quality that directly overcomes ignorance—is also required. Insight is what looks for stress and for the fabrications that cause it. As the mind grows tranquil, insight is able to see subtle levels of fabrication that are invisible when the mind is not still. Its search for the stress arising and passing away in the midst of tranquility helps to uncover levels of fabrication that might be hidden in ignorance. When the mind, seeing these levels, can grow tranquil in the face of any desire to continue participating in them, that brings dispassion to a deeper level. Without this tranquility, insight lacks the strength to bring dispassion about [§56].

This is how these two qualities work together to develop the skill central to the Buddha's teaching: abandoning passion and delight for the five aggregates.

The Buddha's primary tool for developing insight is one of the aggregates itself: perception. This is a common pattern throughout his strategy. You develop and use skillful versions of the fabrications that eventually you will abandon.

Here, the perceptions he encourages are of two sorts: *negative*, those that focus on the drawbacks of fabrication; and *positive*, those that focus on the desirability of letting fabrications cease.

When contemplating the negative perceptions, it's important to remember at all times that only their form is negative, whereas their purpose is positive. They're meant to lead to an experience of the ultimate happiness [§§79, 84, 91–93].

The Pali Canon provides long lists of negative perceptions that can be applied to fabrications [§§42, 71, 72, 78, 103], such as the perceptions of the unattractive aspects of the body and the drawbacks of having a body, to counteract specific unskillful fabrications such as lust and physical pride. But primarily it focuses on three perceptions to be applied to *all* fabrications: the perception of inconstancy, the perception of stress in what's inconstant; and the perception of not-self in what's stressful. Each of these perceptions requires a bit of explanation.

- *Inconstant*. The Pali term here is *anicca*, which is sometimes translated as “impermanent,” but that's not what it really means. Its opposite, *nicca*, describes something that's done constantly and reliably. You can depend on it. If something is *anicca*, it's unreliable. Remember that these perceptions are used to evaluate the happiness provided by fabrications, to question the extent to which that happiness is worth the effort involved in fabricating it. There are many instances in which mind can satisfy itself with things that are only relatively permanent, so impermanence is not automatically a sign that a particular happiness is not worth the effort. But if you focus on the unreliability of a particular happiness, it's easier to develop dispassion for it.

- *Stressful*. The Pali term here—*dukkha*—can also mean “suffering” or “pain.” “Stress” and “stressful” seem to be the best translations in this context because they can be applied even to subtle states of concentration, where blatant pain and suffering are not present. The Buddha doesn't deny that there can be pleasure in fabrications—he even recommends the pleasures of jhana—but he does note that focusing on those pleasures is an obstacle to developing dispassion [§88]. The purpose of the perception of stress is to draw attention to the fact that any pleasure that's inconstant is inherently stressful—like trying to find rest while sitting on a chair with wobbly, uneven legs.

• *Not-self*. The Pali term here is *anatta*. Note that this term is an adjective. The perception of not-self is not meant to assert that there is no self. (As shown by passage §45, the Buddha refused to get involved in the question of whether there is or is not a self.) Instead, this perception is a value judgment: If a pleasure is inconstant and stressful, it's not worth claiming as “me,” “mine,” or “my self.” This judgment holds regardless of how you define your self—as separate or connected, individual or cosmic [§98]—because every sense that “I am this” is an expression of clinging and passion.

The perception of not-self is the one that leads directly from insight to tranquility, as it induces you to let go of any participation in the pleasure you've identified as inconstant and stressful. From this tranquility, two other qualities grow. The first is *nibbida*, disenchantment, a sense that you are no longer hungry for that particular kind of food. When you lose interest in that food, you feel *viraga*, dispassion, toward the idea of putting energy into the fabrication of that food. These two qualities are what allow fabrications to cease.

The perception of not-self differs from the other two in one important respect. The Buddha recommends applying it not only to fabricated phenomena, but also to unfabricated phenomena [§§74–75]. This is because, as passage §103 notes, it's possible, on first experiencing the deathless, to feel passion and delight for it. “Passion-and-delight” is another term for clinging. In other words, the mind has not fully abandoned its habit of feeding, and so perceives the deathless as an object on which to feed. The perception of not-self in this instance is needed to help overcome the last traces of your feeding habit so that dispassion can be complete.

Because the Buddha offers so many different instructions on how to contemplate the negative aspects of fabrications, there is the question as to why he focused so much attention on the perceptions of “inconstant,” “stressful,” and “not-self.”

One explanation is that they form a refinement of the question that underlies the development of discernment: “What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?” The perception of inconstancy is meant to lead to the realization that *long-term* happiness, as long as it's fabricated, is no longer good enough. You want something totally reliable. Because fabricated happiness is unreliable, it's not really *happiness*. It contains elements of stress. And because it's stressful, it's no longer good enough for you to want to call it “*my*.” To discern

these insights removes any motivation to do whatever is needed to keep that happiness going.

Another explanation for why the Buddha focused attention on these three perceptions is suggested by passage §9. There, the perception of inconstancy is related to aging, the perception of stress to illness, and the perception of not-self to death. In this way, these three perceptions connect directly to the Buddha's original search when he was a bodhisatta—a Buddha-to-be—for a happiness free from aging, illness, and death. They are the test questions you apply to any happiness that might be offered to satisfy that search. If any of these characteristics can be discerned in that happiness, then it fails the test.

To help motivate you in applying these negative perceptions to fabrications, the Buddha also has you develop positive perceptions toward the happiness found when fabrications cease. These positive perceptions include not only the perception of dispassion and the perception of cessation mentioned in passage §78, but also any of the statements in the Canon that speak positively of nibbana and of the bliss and freedom coming when fabrications are stilled [§§20–22, III–II8].

Both the negative and the positive perceptions can be developed at any point in the practice of meditation, but *how* you apply them depends on *where* you are in your practice. When your mastery of concentration is still weak, you don't apply the negative perceptions directly to the concentration itself, for that might discourage you from developing it further. After all, in developing concentration, you're actually pushing against these perceptions, to create a state of mind that is relatively constant, pleasant, and under your control. So at this stage you apply the negative perceptions just to distractions that would pull you away from the object of your concentration. Only when your mastery is strong should you apply these perceptions to all fabrications, even those that go into creating and maintaining concentration. As passage §103 shows, this is one of the ways in which full awakening can be attained.

DEVELOPING DISCERNMENT

The mind's first direct experience of the unfabricated is its first taste of awakening. This experience is the result of an act of discernment. Because the unfabricated neither arises nor passes away, it's always potentially discernible.

This is why awakening occurs in the flash of a moment. But because ordinary human discernment is weak and unreliable, it has to be trained and developed to discern for sure the subtlety of what's always there. This is why the path of practice is gradual, and why there are stages in its development [§49].

The Buddha lists three ways of developing discernment: through listening, through thinking, and through the development of the mind through meditation [§23]. He expands on this list in passage §24, where he lists four factors that lead to the first experience of awakening: associating with people of integrity, listening to the Dhamma, applying appropriate attention to what you've heard, and then practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma.

People of integrity. The Buddha places a great deal of emphasis on finding a reliable person to teach you the Dhamma. At present, most people tend to read books about Dhamma rather than learning it directly from a person, but there are at least four reasons why even reliable books are no substitute for reliable people.

- Because many of the values of the Dhamma seem counterintuitive to our normal approach to happiness, we can easily wonder if a person who no longer feeds on mental and physical pleasures could really be happy. An important impetus in the practice comes from associating with such a person and realizing that he or she is actually happy in a very profound and consistent way.

- Many aspects of the Dhamma can't be conveyed in books or verbal teachings, but can be absorbed only through the direct example of a person who has mastered the path.

- A person experienced on the path can gauge your strengths and weaknesses, and recommend the appropriate level of Dhamma for where you are on the path. In particular, because the negative perceptions recommended by the texts can, when misused, lead to depression, apathy, or unhealthy aversion, you need an experienced guide to make sure you don't mishandle these perceptions and cause harm.

- A person with experience can see where your practice is going off path and inform you about what you're doing wrong. This aspect of the teacher/student relationship is so crucial that many teachers regard the ability to take criticism as the most important quality to look for in a student, and a sign of genuine discernment. Only fools don't want to know where they could improve their behavior [§31].

Of course, not all teachers of Dhamma are people of integrity. This is why the Buddha gives explicit instructions for how to exercise your discernment in choosing a reliable teacher [§§27–29]. In addition to being observant and willing to take time in formulating a judgment about a potential teacher’s character, you have to develop the qualities of integrity in yourself if you want to recognize them in someone else. In this way, the act of judging a teacher develops your discernment not only concerning the integrity and reliability of the people around you, but also concerning your own.

Listening to the true Dhamma. In addition to tailoring teachings for your immediate, specific needs, a good teacher will provide you with an overall perspective on the path of practice so that you can begin to judge where you are on the path and to anticipate your own needs yourself.

The primary context taught by all good Dhamma teachers is the Buddha’s first teaching: the four noble truths. These truths are four ways of categorizing fabricated and unfabricated experiences so that you can know how to act toward any particular experience in your quest to subdue passion and desire for all fabrications. Three of these truths—the truth of stress, the truth of the origination of stress, and the truth of the path of practice leading to the origination of stress—cover fabricated phenomena. Although all of these fabrications will ultimately be abandoned at the end of the path in the moment of awakening, your gradual progress on the path requires that, in the meantime, they be treated differently. The truth of stress is to be comprehended to the point of dispassion; the truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned; the truth of the path is to be developed.

The third truth—the truth of the cessation of stress—covers the act of abandoning and feeling dispassion for the second truth, the origination of stress. Because abandoning is an act, it’s a fabrication. The dispassion, however, is unfabricated [§48]. This means that the third noble truth straddles the line between what’s fabricated and what’s not.

The truth of the path is divided into three parts: right view and right resolve come under discernment; right speech, right action, and right livelihood under virtue; right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration under concentration. However, these parts are not mutually exclusive. For instance, right resolve, as it reaches a noble stage of development, translates into the resolves that develop and maintain the first jhana, the first stage of right

concentration. This connection emphasizes the fact that concentration and discernment, just like tranquility and insight, need each other to grow.

Although the path eventually has to be abandoned, it first has to be fully developed. This means that you need to understand its stages—and the stages in your own practice—so that you can gain a sense of when a particular part of the path needs to be held to, and when you’re ready to let it go. Your ability to discern this can come only with practice, but an important part of listening to the true Dhamma lies in being forewarned of issues of this sort that you will face in practice. In fact this is the primary way in which listening to the Dhamma exercises your discernment: You are alerted to issues and possibilities that otherwise might not have occurred to you. By giving you a new vocabulary, it alerts you to distinctions and connections that you otherwise wouldn’t have seen.

Appropriate attention. Once you have listened to the Dhamma, you have to think about it. This is the role of appropriate attention, which is the ability to frame your questions rightly. Applying appropriate attention to the Dhamma means asking questions about the Dhamma that focus on how to see things in terms of the four noble truths and to develop the duties appropriate to each. Applying appropriate attention also means avoiding any questions that would pull you away from actually practicing the path [§§41, 45, 76]. The Canon contains long lists of these distracting questions, which cover many common philosophical and religious issues about the nature or existence of your true self, or the nature or origin of the world. The Buddha compared an interest in these questions to a man who, shot by an arrow, refuses to have it removed until he has learned who made the arrow, who shot it, and so forth. The man would die before finding an answer to his questions. To develop appropriate attention is to focus on removing the arrow as quickly as possible. This is an important exercise in focusing your discernment on detecting what really matters and ignoring issues that would get in the way.

Passage §39 provides instructions in how to think about the Dhamma you’ve listened to in a way that leads to removing the arrow. After committing the Dhamma to memory, you think it over and come to an understanding that encourages you to practice. This means, first, analyzing the teaching on its own to penetrate its meaning. Then you ponder and compare it with other Dhamma teachings to see that it agrees with what you already know. According to the Canon, this is the stage where you learn to identify what counts as true Dhamma

and what doesn't. Only if the teachings new to you agree with what you already know with certainty should you accept them as genuine. To think about the Dhamma in this way exercises your discernment in noticing that what may seem consistent on the surface may, on further reflection, actually be inconsistent, and *vice versa*. You learn not to jump to conclusions.

Once you see that the Dhamma you've heard is in agreement with the Dhamma you already know, that gives rise to a desire and willingness to practice, for you can see that the Dhamma makes sense. The desire here is what allows the path to happen. Based on this desire and willingness, you "compare," which apparently means (1) that you compare your own behavior in body, speech, and mind to the standards set forth in the teaching; and (2) that you compare the differences in the various aspects of your behavior to see which sort of behavior is skillful and which is not. Then you exert yourself to abandon unskillful behavior and develop skillful behavior to the point where you have a direct experience of the truth toward which the teaching is aimed.

As the Canon frequently notes, it's only through exertion that you actually gain discernment of how things work. Although discernment is needed to guide your efforts, your efforts to develop skillful qualities and abandon unskillful one—as they do and don't yield results—teach discernment many lessons that it can't learn in any other way. This is why the practice plays the central role in its training.

Practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma means to practice for the sake of developing disenchantment for all fabrications [§73]. As we have already noted, this practice follows two simultaneous tracks. The first track is to sensitize your mind to the actual occurrence of fabrications in the present by developing the path, and by developing right concentration in particular. The second track is to apply negative perceptions to fabrications, as appropriate, and develop positive perceptions toward the unfabricated. The second track keeps your practice on course; the first track allows you to detect the act of fabrication in experiences where you otherwise might miss it.

This first track develops discernment in two major ways: by forcing you to find the point of *moderation* in all your internal and external actions as they affect the practice of concentration, and by allowing you to witness the *stilling of fabrications* as they fall away, level by level, when your concentration deepens.

These two aspects of the path cooperate in refining your discernment and developing it to the point of disenchantment and dispassion.

The practice of moderation is so central to the path that the Buddha introduced the path to his first listeners as the “middle way.” In particular, the practice of right concentration requires balance in many areas: in your use of the physical requisites, in your ability to avoid excesses and deficiencies in the desire and effort you bring to your practice, and in emphasizing or de-emphasizing different skillful qualities as appropriate to your current state of mind [[§58–64](#)]. A practice that requires you to find the point of “just right” in all your activities is much better at exercising discernment than one that simply pushes you to one extreme or another. To begin with, it requires you to monitor the results of your attempts to find balance; this sensitizes you to subtleties of cause and effect. It requires you to be quick in sensing when the point of balance shifts. It helps you to see that superior states of mind entailing less fabrication require less effort to maintain than inferior states requiring more—an important lesson in developing dispassion for fabrication. And because the point of balance in the circumstances underlying your concentration can shift so easily, it drives home the point that even the solid pleasure of concentration requires diligent effort: another reason to look for a happiness that requires no fabrication at all.

As for the step-by-step stilling of fabrication, this is best illustrated by the Buddha’s instructions for breath meditation—the meditation technique he recommended most frequently in the Canon [[§101](#)]. These instructions give guidance in how to develop tranquility and insight in tandem, for they sensitizes you to the processes of fabrication at the same time directing you to calm them. In these instructions, the Buddha analyzes fabrications into three sorts: bodily (the in-and-out breath); verbal (directed thought and evaluation); and mental (feelings and perceptions). The instructions themselves take the form of verbal fabrications that you can use to direct your attention to various issues as you breathe in and out with mindfulness and alertness. In the first four steps you are instructed to sensitize yourself to the sensation of in-and-out breathing, to its impact on the experience of the entire body, and then to calm that influence. This shows you the extent to which you have a range of choices in how you breathe, and that these choices fabricate your sense of the body, for good or ill, in the present. The more discernment you bring to the way you breathe, the more you will foster a sense of the body in which it’s easy to settle down. In the second set

of four steps, you are directed to develop feelings of rapture and pleasure, to sensitize yourself to the impact of these feelings and their accompanying perceptions on the mind, and then to calm that impact as well. This shows you the extent to which there are potentials in the body and mind from which you can fabricate feelings and perceptions useful in bringing the mind to calm.

As passage [§105](#) demonstrates, these steps lead you through the various stages of right concentration, as verbal, bodily, and then finally mental fabrications fall away. One forest master compares this process to heating a hunk of ore containing different metals: As the temperature reaches the melting point of each metal, that metal will separate from the ore on its own. Passage [§102](#) warns that you can't simply will yourself through these stages, for then you fall off the path entirely. Instead, you have to develop a balanced attitude of desire and skill in moving from one level to the next. The search for this balance, of course, refines your discernment even further. As blatant levels of fabrication fall away, they reveal subtler levels that you otherwise wouldn't detect. And as you learn to see the more blatant levels as disturbances, you develop a sense of disenchantment and dispassion toward them, a process that inclines you to look for ways to divest yourself of fabrications entirely.

These two processes—looking for the point of balanced moderation in your practice and trying to bring fabrications to stillness step-by-step—come together in the moment leading to awakening, when the mind is so balanced that it feels no desire either to move forward or to stay in place [[§64](#)]. This allows an equipoise where all fabrications of every sort fall still. Even the act of discernment itself gets dropped [[§106](#)]. This is how the happiness of the unfabricated is found.

STAGES OF AWAKENING

The first direct experience of the unfabricated is the first stage of awakening, called “steam-entry” because—in the same way that the water in a stream leading to the ocean is destined to reach the ocean—you are now destined for full awakening within at most seven lifetimes. This experience is the result of completely developing virtue, but of developing concentration and discernment only to a moderate extent. The experience of the deathless at this stage cuts through three fetters that cause passion for fabrication: self-identity views, in

which you identify yourself in terms of the five aggregates [§93]; uncertainty as to the truth of the Buddha's teaching; and grasping at habits and practices, i.e., holding onto certain ways of behavior not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. These attitudes are called fetters because, if they're not cut, they keep you tied to the obsession to keep fabricating again and again. However, discernment at this level can't cut through all the fetters that cause passion for fabrication, so you still have more work to do in developing tranquility and insight. After tasting the unfabricated dimension, you return to the experience of fabrication. To go to the next stage, you resume your work of applying negative perceptions to the five aggregates so as to root out any remaining passion for them. This work is required after each of the first three stages of awakening, simply that it grows more thorough and refined with each stage.

The second stage of awakening is called once-return, for—if you gain no higher stage in this lifetime—you are destined to come back to this world only once and gain full awakening then. At this stage, your work at concentration and discernment is still incomplete, no added fetters are cut, but the level of passion, aversion, and delusion in the mind has been reduced.

The third stage of awakening is called non-return, for—if you gain no higher stage in this lifetime—you are destined to appear spontaneously in any of the high levels of heaven called the Pure Abodes, there to attain awakening. At this stage, your work at concentration is complete, and you have cut two added fetters: sensual passion and irritation. However, there is still more work to do in the area of discernment, for you can feel passion for the unfabricated, which creates a subtle sense of identification and clinging in the mind.

The fourth and final stage of awakening is called arahantship, the term “arahant” meaning one who is worthy. At this stage, your work at discernment is complete, and you have cut five added fetters: passion for form (the four jhanas), passion for what is formless (the formless attainments), conceit (the tendency to compare yourself with others), restlessness, and ignorance, i.e., you now fully know that you have fulfilled the tasks of the four noble truths. You are freed from ever suffering birth again, and the mind dwells in total freedom, with no more passion for any fabrication and no passion for the unfabricated. You may still apply negative perceptions to the five aggregates, yet this is not for the sake of any further attainment. It's simply a pleasant pastime that maintains mindfulness

and alertness. The mind experiences total happiness with no hunger, no need to search for anything further, no need to feed on or fabricate anything any more.

TRUE HAPPINESS

The Canon states frequently that the happiness of the unfabricated is the ultimate happiness, totally secure. However, because this happiness is unrelated to any act of feeding, the Canon's descriptions of it can sound strange to anyone whose only experience of happiness is through the act of mental and physical feeding—whose very sense of identity is composed of the acts of feeding. For instance, many of the passages describing the experience of a fully awakened person emphasize the extent to which such a person experiences sights, sounds, etc., and yet is disjoined from them. For anyone whose happiness feeds on a sense of connectedness, this would sound unappealing and cold. But remember that, as the Buddha pointed out [§89], the things we feed on turn around and chew on us in return: in our hunger for them, in our anxiety over the fact that they change. To stop feeding on them is to stop being eaten by them. Only by giving them their freedom can you be free. The awakened person has stopped feeding, not by abandoning any hope of happiness but by experiencing a happiness that fully satisfies your search, removing all hunger for anything at all. Because this happiness lies outside of space and time, it will never be subject to change.

For someone who has yet to practice, these words will be just that: words. Only if you strengthen and sensitize your discernment through the practice will you be in a position to judge if they really point to something supreme.

Readings

THE NOBLE SEARCH

§ 1. “This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term benefit & happiness?’” — [*MN*135](#).

§ 2. As he was sitting to one side, King Pasenadi Kosala said to the Blessed One: “Is there, lord, any one quality that keeps both kinds of benefits secure—benefits in this life & benefits in lives to come?”

“There is one quality, great king, that keeps both kinds of benefits secure—benefits in this life & benefits in lives to come.”

“But what, lord, is that one quality...?”

“Heedfulness, great king. Just as the footprints of all living beings with legs can be encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant’s footprint is declared to be supreme among them in terms of its great size; in the same way, heedfulness is the one quality that keeps both kinds of benefits secure—benefits in this life & benefits in lives to come.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Having said that, the One Well-Gone, the Teacher, said further:

“For one who desires
long life, health,
beauty, heaven, & noble birth,
—lavish delights, one after another—
the wise praise heedfulness
in doing acts of merit.
When heedful, wise,
you achieve both kinds of benefit:

benefits in this life,
& benefits in lives to come.
By breaking through to your benefit,
you're called enlightened,
wise. — *AN 3:17*

§ 3. “Just as the footprints of all legged animals are encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant’s footprint is reckoned the foremost among them in terms of size; in the same way, all skillful qualities are rooted in heedfulness, converge in heedfulness, and heedfulness is reckoned the foremost among them.” — *AN 10:15*

§ 4. They’re addicted to heedlessness
— dullards, fools —
while one who is wise
cherishes heedfulness
as his highest wealth. — *Dhp 26*

§ 5. If, by forsaking
a limited ease,
he would see
an abundance of ease,
the enlightened man
would forsake
the limited ease
for the sake
of the abundant. — *Dhp 290*

§ 6. “As for the course of action that is unpleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is profitable, it’s in light of this course of action that one may be known—in terms of manly stamina, manly persistence, manly effort—as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is

unpleasant to do, still when done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.

“As for the course of action that is pleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is unprofitable, it’s in light of this course of action that one may be known—in terms of manly stamina, manly persistence, manly effort—as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.” — [AN4:115](#).

§ 7. “There are these five facts that one should reflect on often, whether one is a woman or a man, lay or ordained. Which five?

“‘I am subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging.’ This is the first fact that one should reflect on often....

“‘I am subject to illness, have not gone beyond illness.’...

“‘I am subject to death, have not gone beyond death.’...

“‘I will grow different, separate from all that is dear & appealing to me.’...

“‘I am the owner of my actions [*kamma*], heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.’...

“These are the five facts that one should reflect on often, whether one is a woman or a man, lay or ordained.

“Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I am subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging’? There are beings who are intoxicated with a [typical] youth’s intoxication with youth. Because of that intoxication with youth, they conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that youth’s intoxication with youth will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I am subject to illness, have not gone beyond illness’? There are beings who are intoxicated with a [typical] healthy person’s intoxication with health. Because of that intoxication with health, they conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that healthy person’s intoxication with health will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I am subject to death, have not gone beyond death’? There are beings who are intoxicated with a [typical] living person’s intoxication with life. Because of that intoxication with life, they conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that living person’s intoxication with life will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I will grow different, separate from all that is dear & appealing to me’? There are beings who feel desire & passion for the things they find dear & appealing. Because of that passion, they conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that desire & passion for the things they find dear & appealing will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir’? There are beings who conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that bad conduct in body, speech, & mind will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“Now, a disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘I am not the only one subject to aging, who has not gone beyond aging. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging.’ When he/she often reflects on this, the [factors of the] path take birth. He/she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he/she sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed.

“Further, a disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘I am not the only one subject to illness, who has not gone beyond illness’... ‘I am not the only one subject to death, who has not gone beyond death’.... ‘I am not the only one who will grow different, separate from all that is dear & appealing to me’...

“A disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘I am not the only one who is the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator; who—whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.’ When he/she often reflects on this, the [factors of the] path take birth. He/she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he/she sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed.” — [AN 5:57](#)

§ 8. “Monks, there are these two searches: ignoble search & noble search. And what is ignoble search? There is the case where a person, being subject himself to birth, seeks [happiness in] what is subject to birth. Being subject himself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, he seeks [happiness in] just what is subject to illness... death... sorrow... defilement.

“And what may be said to be subject to birth? Spouse & children are subject to birth. Men & women slaves... goats & sheep... fowl & pigs... elephants, cattle, horses, & mares... gold & silver are subject to birth. Subject to birth are these acquisitions, and one who is tied to them, infatuated with them, who has totally fallen for them, being subject to birth, seeks just what is subject to birth.

“And what may be said to be subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement? Spouse & children... men & women slaves... goats & sheep... fowl & pigs... elephants, cattle, horses, & mares... gold & silver are subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement. Subject to aging... illness... death...sorrow... defilement are these acquisitions, and one who is tied to them, infatuated with them, who has totally fallen for them, being subject to birth, seeks just what is subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement. This is ignoble search.

“And what is the noble search? There is the case where a person, himself being subject to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeks the unborn,

unexcelled rest from the yoke: Unbinding. Himself being subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, seeks the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: Unbinding. This is the noble search.

“I, too, monks, before my awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, being subject myself to birth, sought what was likewise subject to birth. Being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, I sought [happiness in] what was likewise subject to illness... death... sorrow... defilement. The thought occurred to me, ‘Why do I, being subject myself to birth, seek what is likewise subject to birth? Being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, why do I seek what is likewise subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement? What if I, being subject myself to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, were to seek the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: Unbinding? What if I, being subject myself to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, were to seek the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke: Unbinding?’

“So, at a later time, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life—and while my parents, unwilling, were crying with tears streaming down their faces—I shaved off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

— [MN 26](#)

§ 9. [Ven. Ratthapala:]“Great king, there are four Dhamma summaries stated by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. Having known & seen & heard them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness. Which four?

“‘The world is swept away. It does not endure’: This is the first Dhamma summary stated by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. Having known & seen & heard it, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.

“‘The world is without shelter, without protector’: This is the second Dhamma summary....

“‘The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind’: This is the third Dhamma summary....

“‘The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving’: This is the fourth Dhamma summary....

“These, great king, are the four Dhamma summaries stated by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. Having known & seen & heard them, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

[King Koravya:] “Master Ratthapala, you say, ‘The world is swept away. It does not endure.’ Now how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?”

“What do you think, great king? When you were twenty or twenty-five years old—an expert elephant rider, an expert horseman, an expert charioteer, an expert archer, an expert swordsman—were you strong in arm & strong in thigh, fit, & seasoned in warfare?”

“Yes, Master Ratthapala, when I was twenty or twenty-five years old... I was strong in arm & strong in thigh, fit, & seasoned in warfare. It was as if I had supernormal power. I do not see anyone who was my equal in strength.”

“And what do you think, great king? Are you even now as strong in arm & strong in thigh, as fit, & as seasoned in warfare?”

“Not at all, Master Ratthapala. I’m now a feeble old man, aged, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life, 80 years old. Sometimes, thinking, ‘I’ll place my foot here,’ I place it somewhere else.”

“It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One... said: ‘The world is swept away. It does not endure.’ Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

“It’s amazing, Master Ratthapala. It’s astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One....

“Now, in this royal court there are elephant troops & cavalry & chariot troops & infantry that will serve to defend us from dangers. And yet you say, ‘The world is without shelter, without protector.’ How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?”

“What do you think, great king? Do you have any recurring illness?”

“Yes, Master Ratthapala, I have a recurring wind-illness [sharp, stabbing pains attributed to the wind energy in the body]. Sometimes my friends &

advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen, stand around me saying, 'This time King Koravya will die. This time King Koravya will die.'"

"And what do you think, great king? Can you say to your friends & advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen, 'My friends & advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen are commanded: all of you who are present, share out this pain so that I may feel less pain'? Or do you have to feel that pain all alone?"

"Oh, no, Master Ratthapala, I can't.... I have to feel that pain all alone."

"It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One... said: 'The world is without shelter, without protector.' Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"It's amazing, Master Ratthapala. It's astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One...."

"Now, in this royal court there is a great deal of gold & silver stashed away underground & in attic vaults. And yet you say, 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king? As you now enjoy yourself endowed & replete with the pleasures of the five senses, can you say, 'Even in the afterlife I will enjoy myself in the same way, endowed & replete with the very same pleasures of the five senses'? Or will this wealth fall to others, while you pass on in accordance with your actions?"

"Oh, no, Master Ratthapala, I can't say, 'Even in the afterlife I will enjoy myself in the same way, endowed & replete with the very same pleasures of the five senses.' This wealth will fall to others, while I pass on in accordance with my actions."

"It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One... said: 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness."

"It's amazing, Master Ratthapala. It's astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One...."

"Now, Master Ratthapala, you say, 'The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

“What do you think, great king? Do you now rule over the prosperous country of Kuru?”

“Yes, Master Ratthapala....”

“What do you think, great king? Suppose a trustworthy, reliable man of yours were to come to you from the east. On arrival he would say to you, ‘May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the east. There I saw a great country, powerful & prosperous, populous & crowded with people. Plenty are the elephant troops there, plenty the cavalry troops, chariot troops, & infantry troops. Plenty is the ivory-work there, plenty the gold & silver, both worked & unworked. Plenty are the women for the taking. It is possible, with the forces you now have, to conquer it. Conquer it, great king!’ What would you do?”

“Having conquered it, Master Ratthapala, I would rule over it.”

“Now what do you think, great king? Suppose a trustworthy, reliable man of yours were to come to you from the west... the north... the south... the other side of the ocean. On arrival he would say to you, ‘May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the other side of the ocean. There I saw a great country, powerful & prosperous, populous & crowded with people. Plenty are the elephant troops there, plenty the cavalry troops, chariot troops, & infantry troops. Plenty is the ivory-work there, plenty the gold & silver, both worked & unworked. Plenty are the women for the taking. It is possible, with the forces you now have, to conquer it. Conquer it, great king!’ What would you do?”

“Having conquered it, Master Ratthapala, I would rule over it, too.”

“It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One... said: ‘The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.’ Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness.”

“It’s amazing, Master Ratthapala. It’s astounding, how well that has been said by the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened: ‘The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.’ For the world really is insufficient, Master Ratthapala. It’s insatiable, a slave to craving.” — [MN 82](#)

§ 10. Ven. Sariputta said, “Friends, in foreign lands there are wise nobles & brahmans, householders & contemplatives—for the people there are wise & discriminating—who will question a monk: ‘What is your teacher’s doctrine? What does he teach?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘Our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire.’

“Having thus been answered, there may be wise nobles & brahmins, householders & contemplatives... who will question you further, ‘And your teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for what?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘Our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness.’

“Having thus been answered, there may be wise nobles & brahmins, householders & contemplatives... who will question you further, ‘And seeing what danger does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing what danger does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘When one is not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for form, then from any change & alteration in that form, there arises sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair. When one is not free from passion... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications... When one is not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for consciousness, then from any change & alteration in that consciousness, there arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair. Seeing this danger, our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing this danger our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness.’

“Having thus been answered, there may be wise nobles & brahmins, householders & contemplatives... who will question you further, ‘And seeing what benefit does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing what benefit does your teacher teach the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness?’

“Thus asked, you should answer, ‘When one is free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for form, then with any change & alteration in that form, there does not arise any sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, or despair. When one is free from passion... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications... When one is free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for consciousness, then with any change & alteration in that consciousness, there does not arise any

sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, or despair. Seeing this benefit, our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for form... for feeling... for perception... for fabrications. Seeing this benefit our teacher teaches the subduing of passion & desire for consciousness.” — [SN 22:2](#)

§ 11. “And why do you call it ‘form’ [*rupa*]? Because it is afflicted [*ruppati*], thus it is called ‘form.’ Afflicted with what? With cold & heat & hunger & thirst, with the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles. Because it is afflicted, it is called form.

“And why do you call it ‘feeling’? Because it feels, thus it is called ‘feeling.’ What does it feel? It feels pleasure, it feels pain, it feels neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Because it feels, it is called feeling.

“And why do you call it ‘perception’? Because it perceives, thus it is called ‘perception.’ What does it perceive? It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white. Because it perceives, it is called perception.

“And why do you call them ‘fabrications’? Because they fabricate fabricated things, thus they are called ‘fabrications.’ What do they fabricate as a fabricated thing? For the sake of form-ness, they fabricate form as a fabricated thing. For the sake of feeling-ness, they fabricate feeling as a fabricated thing. For the sake of perception-hood... For the sake of fabrication-hood... For the sake of consciousness-hood, they fabricate consciousness as a fabricated thing. Because they fabricate fabricated things, they are called fabrications.

“And why do you call it ‘consciousness’? Because it cognizes, thus it is called consciousness. What does it cognize? It cognizes what is sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, alkaline, non-alkaline, salty, & unsalty. Because it cognizes, it is called consciousness.” — [SN 22:79](#)

§ 12. “Now what is old action? The eye is to be seen as old action, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The intellect is to be seen as old action, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. This is called old action.

“And what is new action? Whatever action one does now with the body, with speech, or with the intellect: This is called new action.” — [SN 35:145](#)

§ 13. [Ven. Sariputta:] “Friends, if one who entered & remained in unskillful mental qualities were to have a pleasant abiding in the here & now—unthreatened, undespairing, unfeverish—and on the break-up of the body, after death, could expect a good destination, then the Blessed One would not advocate the abandoning of unskillful mental qualities. But because one who enters & remains in unskillful mental qualities has a stressful abiding in the here & now—threatened, despairing, & feverish—and on the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination, that is why the Blessed One advocates the abandoning of unskillful mental qualities.

“If one who entered & remained in skillful mental qualities were to have a stressful abiding in the here & now—threatened, despairing, & feverish—and on the break-up of the body, after death, could expect a bad destination, then the Blessed One would not advocate entering into skillful mental qualities. But because one who enters & remains in skillful mental qualities has a pleasant abiding in the here & now—unthreatened, undespairing, unfeverish—and on the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a good destination, that is why the Blessed One advocates entering into skillful mental qualities.” — [*SN 22:2*](#)

§ 14. “If the thought should occur to you that—when defiling qualities are abandoned and bright qualities have grown, and one enters & remains in the culmination & abundance of discernment, having known & realized it for oneself in the here & now—one’s abiding is stressful/painful, you should not see it in that way. When defiling qualities are abandoned and bright qualities have grown, and one enters & remains in the culmination & abundance of discernment, having known & realized it for oneself in the here & now, there is joy, rapture, calm, mindfulness, alertness, and a pleasant/happy abiding.” — [*DN 9*](#)

§ 15. “And what is the pleasure more not-of-the-flesh than that not of the flesh? Whatever pleasure arises in a effluent-ended [totally awakened] monk as he is reflecting on his mind released from passion, reflecting on his mind released from aversion, reflecting on his mind released from delusion, that is called pleasure more not-of-the-flesh than that not of the flesh.” — [*SN 36:31*](#)

§ 16. “Now it’s possible, Ananda, that some wanderers of other persuasions might say, ‘Gotama the contemplative speaks of the cessation of perception &

feeling and yet describes it as pleasure. What is this? How is this?’ When they say that, they are to be told, ‘It’s not the case, friends, that the Blessed One describes only pleasant feeling as included under pleasure. Wherever pleasure is found, in whatever terms, the Blessed One describes it as pleasure.’” — [SN 36:19](#)

§ 17. [Some Nigantha ascetics:] “It’s not the case that pleasure is to be attained through pleasure. Pleasure is to be attained through pain. For if pleasure were to be attained through pleasure, then King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha would attain pleasure, for he lives in greater pleasure than you, friend Gotama.”

[The Buddha:] “Surely the venerable Niganthas said that rashly and without reflecting... for instead, I should be asked, ‘Who lives in greater pleasure: King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha or master Gotama?’”

“Yes, friend Gotama, we said that rashly and without reflecting.... but let that be. We now ask you, master Gotama: Who lives in greater pleasure: King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha or master Gotama?”

“In that case, Niganthas, I will question you in return. Answer as you see fit. What do you think? Can King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha—without moving his body, without uttering a word—dwell sensitive to unalloyed pleasure for seven days & nights?” — “No, friend.”

“... for six days & nights... for five days & nights... for a day & a night?” — “No, friend.”

“Now, I—without moving my body, without uttering a word—can dwell sensitive to unalloyed pleasure for a day and a night... for two days & nights... for three... four... five... six... seven days & nights. So what do you think? That being the case, who dwells in greater pleasure: King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha or I?”

“That being the case, master Gotama dwells in greater pleasure than King Seniya Bimbisara of Magadha.” — [MN 14](#)

§ 18. Blissful is solitude
for one who’s content,
who has heard the Dhamma,
who sees.

Blissful is non-affliction
with regard for the world,
restraint for living beings.
Blissful is dispassion
with regard for the world,
the overcoming of sensuality.
But the subduing of the conceit “I am”—
That is truly
the ultimate bliss. — [Ud 2:1](#)

§ 19. Any sensual bliss in the world,
any heavenly bliss,
isn’t worth one sixteenth-sixteenth
of the bliss of the ending of craving. — [Ud 2:2](#)

§ 20. How inconstant are fabrications!
Their nature: to arise & pass away.
They disband as they are arising.
Their total stilling is bliss. — [DN 16](#)

§ 21. Dwelling in kindness, a monk
with faith in the Awakened One’s teaching,
would attain the good state,
the peaceful state:
stilling-of-fabrications bliss. — [Dhp 368](#)

§ 22. There’s no fire like passion,
no loss like anger,
no pain like the aggregates,
no bliss other than peace.
Hunger: the foremost illness.
Fabrications: the foremost pain.

For one knowing this truth
as it actually is,
Unbinding
is the foremost bliss. — *Dhp 202–203*

WAYS TO DEVELOP DISCERNMENT

§ 23. Three types of discernment:

discernment that comes from listening [*sutamaya-pañña*]

discernment that comes from thinking [*cintamaya-pañña*]

discernment that comes from developing [*bhavanamaya-pañña*] — [*DN* 33](#).

§ 24. “Association with people of integrity is a factor for stream entry.

Listening to the true Dhamma... Appropriate attention...

Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream entry.”

— [*SN* 55:5](#)

LISTENING & THINKING

§ 25. “Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of wrong view. Which two? The voice of another and inappropriate attention.” ... “There are these two conditions for the arising of right view. Which two? The voice of another and appropriate attention.” — [AN 2:123–124](#)

§ 26. “With regard to external factors, I don’t envision any other single factor like friendship with admirable people as doing so much for a monk in training, who has not attained the heart’s goal but remains intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A monk who is a friend with admirable people abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful.” — [Iti 17](#)

§ 27. “Monks, could a person of no integrity know of a person of no integrity: ‘This is a person of no integrity?’” — “No, lord.”

“Good, monks. It’s impossible, there’s no way, that a person of no integrity would know of a person of no integrity: ‘This is a person of no integrity.’

“Could a person of no integrity know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity?’” — “No, lord.”

“Good, monks. It’s impossible, there’s no way, that a person of no integrity would know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity.’”....

“Now, monks, could a person of integrity know of a person of no integrity: ‘This is a person of no integrity?’” — “Yes, lord.”

“Good, monks. It is possible that a person of integrity would know of a person of no integrity: ‘This is a person of no integrity.’

“Could a person of integrity know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity?’” — “Yes, lord.”

“Good, monks. It is possible that a person of integrity would know of a person of integrity: ‘This is a person of integrity.’” — [MN 110](#)

§ 28. *“It’s through living together that a person’s virtue may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning”: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?*

“There is the case where one individual, through living with another, knows this: ‘For a long time this person has been torn, broken, spotted, splattered in his actions. He hasn’t been consistent in his actions. He hasn’t practiced consistently with regard to the precepts. He is an unprincipled person, not a virtuous, principled one.’ And then there is the case where one individual, through living with another, knows this: ‘For a long time this person has been untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered in his actions. He has been consistent in his actions. He has practiced consistently with regard to the precepts. He is a virtuous, principled person, not an unprincipled one.’

“‘It’s through living together that a person’s virtue may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.

“It’s through dealing with a person that his purity may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where one individual, through dealing with another, knows this: ‘This person deals one way when one-on-one, another way when with two, another way when with three, another way when with many. His earlier dealings do not jibe with his later dealings. He is impure in his dealings, not pure.’ And then there is the case where one individual, through dealing with another, knows this: ‘The way this person deals when one-on-one, is the same way he deals when with two, when with three, when with many. His earlier dealings jibe with his later dealings. He is pure in his dealings, not impure.’

“‘It’s through dealing with a person that his purity may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.

“It’s through adversity that a person’s endurance may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where a person, suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, doesn’t reflect: ‘That’s how it is when living together in the world. That’s how it is when gaining a personal identity [*atta-bhava*, literally “self-state”]. When there is living in the world, when there is the gaining of a personal identity, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions: gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain.’ Suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, he sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. And then there is the case where a person, suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, reflects: ‘That’s how it is when living together in the world. That’s how it is when gaining a personal identity. When there is living in the world, when there is the gaining of a personal identity, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions: gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain.’ Suffering loss of relatives, loss of wealth, or loss through disease, he doesn’t sorrow, grieve, or lament, doesn’t beat his breast or become distraught.

“It’s through adversity that a person’s endurance may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.

“It’s through discussion that a person’s discernment may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning’: Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said?

“There is the case where one individual, through discussion with another, knows this: ‘From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question, he is dull, not discerning. Why is that? He doesn’t make statements that are deep, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. He cannot declare the meaning, teach it, describe it, set it forth, reveal it, explain it, or make it plain. He is dull, not discerning.’ Just as if a man with good eyesight standing on the shore of a body of water were to see a small fish rise. The thought would occur to him, ‘From the rise of this fish, from the break of its ripples, from its speed, it is a small fish, not a large one.’ In the same way, one individual, in discussion with another, knows this: ‘From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he

applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question... he is dull, not discerning.'

"And then there is the case where one individual, through discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question, he is discerning, not dull. Why is that? He makes statements that are deep, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. He can declare the meaning, teach it, describe it, set it forth, reveal it, explain it, & make it plain. He is discerning, not dull.' Just as if a man with good eyesight standing on the shore of a body of water were to see a large fish rise. The thought would occur to him, 'From the rise of this fish, from the break of its ripples, from its speed, it is a large fish, not a small one.' In the same way, one individual, in discussion with another, knows this: 'From the way this person rises to an issue, from the way he applies [his reasoning], from the way he addresses a question... he is discerning, not dull.'

"It's through discussion that a person's discernment may be known, and then only after a long period, not a short period; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is discerning, not by one who is not discerning': Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said." — [AN 4:192](#)

§ 29. [Canki Bharadvaja:] "To what extent does one awaken to the truth? We ask Master Gotama about awakening to the truth."

[The Buddha:] "There is the case, Bharadvaja, where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village or town. Then a householder or householder's son goes to him and observes him with regard to three mental qualities—qualities based on greed, qualities based on aversion, qualities based on delusion: 'Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on greed that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, "I know," while not knowing, or say, "I see," while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?' As he observes him, he comes to know, 'There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on greed.... His bodily behavior & verbal behavior are those of one not greedy. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's greedy.

“When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on greed, he next observes him with regard to qualities based on aversion: ‘Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on aversion that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, “I know,” while not knowing, or say, “I see,” while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?’ As he observes him, he comes to know, ‘There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on aversion.... His bodily behavior & verbal behavior are those of one not aversive. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can’t easily be taught by a person who’s aversive.

“When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on aversion, he next observes him with regard to qualities based on delusion: ‘Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on delusion that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, “I know,” while not knowing, or say, “I see,” while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?’ As he observes him, he comes to know, ‘There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on delusion.... His bodily behavior & verbal behavior are those of one not deluded. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can’t easily be taught by a person who’s deluded.” — [MN95](#)

§ 30. “When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on delusion, he places conviction in him. With the arising of conviction, he visits him & grows close to him. Growing close to him, he lends ear. Lending ear, he hears the Dhamma. Hearing the Dhamma, he remembers it. Remembering it, he penetrates the meaning of those dhammas. Penetrating the meaning, he comes to an agreement through pondering those dhammas. There being an agreement through pondering those dhammas, desire arises. With the arising of desire, he becomes willing. Willing, he contemplates [lit: “weighs,” “compares”]. Contemplating, he makes an exertion. Exerting himself, he both realizes the ultimate meaning of the truth with his body and sees by penetrating it with discernment.

“To this extent, Bharadvaja, there is an awakening to the truth... But it is not yet the final attainment of the truth.”

[Canki Bharadvaja:] “... But to what extent is there the final attainment of the truth? To what extent does one finally attain the truth? We ask Master Gotama about the final attainment of the truth.”

[The Buddha:] “The cultivation, development, & pursuit of those very same qualities: to this extent, Bharadvaja, there is the final attainment of the truth. To this extent one finally attains the truth. I describe this as the final attainment of the truth.” — [*MN 95*](#).

§ 31. Regard him as one who
points out
treasure,
the wise one who
seeing your faults
rebukes you.
Stay with this sort of sage.
For the one who stays
with a sage of this sort,
things get better,
not worse.
Let him admonish, instruct,
deflect you
away from poor manners.
To the good, he’s endearing;
to the bad, he’s not. — [*Dhp 76–77*](#)

RIGHT VIEW

§ 32. “And what is the faculty of discernment? There is the case where a monk, a disciple of the noble ones, is discerning, endowed with discernment of arising & passing away—noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress. He discerns, as it has come to be: ‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’” — [SN 48:10](#)

§ 33. Ven. Sariputta said: “Friends, just as the footprints of all legged animals are encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant’s footprint is reckoned the foremost among them in terms of size; in the same way, all skillful qualities are included in the four noble truths.” — [MN 28](#)

§ 34. “Now what is the noble truth of stress? Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful; separation from the loved is stressful; not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful....

“And what is the noble truth of the origination of stress? The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—i.e., sensuality-craving, becoming-craving, and non-becoming-craving....

“And what is the noble truth of the cessation of stress? The remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving....

“And what is the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress? Just this very noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“And what is right view? Knowledge in terms of stress, knowledge in terms of the origination of stress, knowledge in terms of the cessation of stress, knowledge in terms of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.

“And what is right resolve? Being resolved on renunciation, on non-ill will, on harmlessness: This is called right resolve.

“And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter: This is called right speech.

“And what is right action? Abstaining from taking life, from stealing, & from sexual misconduct: This is called right action.

“And what is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood. This is called right livelihood.

“And what is right effort? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This is called right effort.

“And what is right mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves... the mind in & of itself... mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called right mindfulness.

“And what is right concentration? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhana:

purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called right concentration.” — [DN 22](#)

§ 35. [Sister Dhammadinna:] “Right speech, right action, & right livelihood come under the aggregate of virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness, & right concentration come under the aggregate of concentration. Right view & right resolve come under the aggregate of discernment.” — [MN 44](#)

§ 36. “‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’ ...

‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’ ...

‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly experienced’ ...

‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed.’” — [SN 56:11](#)

§ 37. “And which qualities are to be comprehended through direct knowledge? ‘The five clinging-aggregates’ ...

“And which qualities are to be abandoned through direct knowledge? Ignorance & craving for becoming...

“And which qualities are to be developed through direct knowledge? Tranquility & insight...

“And which qualities are to be realized through direct knowledge? Clear knowing & release.” — [MN 149](#)

§ 38. “And what is comprehension? Any ending of passion, ending of aversion, ending of delusion: This is called comprehension.” — [SN 22:23](#)

§ 39. “And what is the right view with effluents [*asava*], siding with merit, resulting in acquisitions [of becoming]? ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings [those born in heaven or hell, without mother or father]; there are contemplatives & brahmins who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is the right view with effluents, siding with merit, resulting in acquisitions.

“And what is the right view that is noble, without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path? The discernment, the faculty of discernment, the strength of discernment, analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, the path factor of right view in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without effluents, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right view that is noble, without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“One tries to abandon wrong view & to enter into right view: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong view & to enter & remain in right view: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right view.

“Of those, right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong resolve as wrong resolve, and right resolve as right resolve. And what is wrong resolve? Being resolved on sensuality, on ill will, on harmfulness. This is wrong resolve.

“And what is right resolve? Right resolve, I tell you, is of two sorts: There is right resolve with effluents, siding with merit, resulting in acquisitions; there is right resolve that is noble, without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“And what is the right resolve with effluents, siding with merit, resulting in acquisitions? Being resolved on renunciation, on freedom from ill will, on harmlessness. This is the right resolve with effluents, siding with merit, resulting in acquisitions.

“And what is the right resolve that is noble, without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path? The thinking, directed thinking, resolve, mental absorption, mental fixity, focused awareness, & verbal fabrications in one developing the noble path whose mind is noble, whose mind is without effluents, who is fully possessed of the noble path. This is the right resolve that is noble, without effluents, transcendent, a factor of the path.

“One tries to abandon wrong resolve & to enter into right resolve: This is one’s right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong resolve & to enter & remain in right resolve: This is one’s right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right resolve.”

— MN II 7

APPROPRIATE ATTENTION

§ 40. “With regard to internal factors, I don’t envision any other single factor like appropriate attention as doing so much for a monk in training, who has not attained the heart’s goal but remains intent on the unsurpassed safety from bondage. A monk who attends appropriately abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful.” — *Iti 16*

§ 41. “There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for people of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—does not discern what ideas are fit for attention or what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas fit for attention and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention....

“This is how he attends inappropriately: ‘Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?’ Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’

“As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view *I have a self* arises in him as true & established, or the view *I have no self* ... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self* ... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self* ... or the view *It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self* arises in him as true & established, or else he has a view like this: *This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity*. This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—discerns what ideas are fit for attention and what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas unfit for attention and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention....

“He attends appropriately, *This is stress ... This is the origination of stress ... This is the cessation of stress ... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.* As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identity-view, doubt, and grasping at habits & practices.” — [MN 2](#)

§ 42. On one occasion Ven. Sariputta & Ven. Maha Kotthita were staying near Varanasi in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then Ven. Maha Kotthita, emerging from seclusion in the late afternoon, went to Ven. Sariputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Sariputta, “Sariputta my friend, which things should a virtuous monk attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A virtuous monk, Kotthita my friend, should attend in an appropriate way to the five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Which five? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate. A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a virtuous monk, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of stream-entry.”

“Then which things should a monk who has attained stream-entry attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A monk who has attained stream-entry should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained stream-entry, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of once-returning.”

“Then which things should a monk who has attained once-returning attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A monk who has attained once-returning should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained once-returning, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of non-returning.”

“Then which things should a monk who has attained non-returning attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A monk who has attained non-returning should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained non-returning, attending in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant... not-self, would realize the fruit of arahantship.”

“Then which things should an arahant attend to in an appropriate way?”

“An arahant should attend in an appropriate way to these five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Although, for an arahant, there is nothing further to do, and nothing to add to what has been done, still these things—when developed & pursued—lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here-&-now and to mindfulness & alertness.” — [SN 22:122](#)

§ 43. “There are mental qualities that are skillful & unskillful, blameworthy & blameless, gross & refined, siding with darkness & with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of analysis of qualities... once it has arisen.” — [SN 46:51](#)

§ 44. “There are these four ways of answering questions. Which four? There are questions that should be answered categorically. There are questions that should be answered with an analytical [qualified] answer [defining or redefining the terms]. There are questions that should be answered with a counter-question.

There are questions that should be put aside. These are the four ways of answering questions.” — [AN 4:42](#)

§ 45. “Then Vacchagotta the wanderer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting there he asked the Blessed One, “Now then, master Gotama, is there a self?” When this was said, the Blessed One was silent. “Then is there no self?” A second time the Blessed One was silent. Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left.

Then not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One, “Why, Lord, did the Blessed One not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?”

“Ananda, if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with those contemplatives and brahmans who are exponents of eternalism [the view that there is an eternal, unchanging soul]. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those contemplatives and brahmans who are exponents of annihilationism [the view that death is the annihilation of the self]. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?”

“No, Lord.”

“And if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: ‘Does the self that I used to have now not exist?’” — [SN 44:10](#)

PRACTICING

§ 46. Irrigators guide the water.
Fletchers shape the arrow shaft.
Carpenters shape the wood.
The wise control themselves. — *Dhp 80*

§ 47. [Visakha:] “Is the noble eightfold path fabricated or unfabricated?”

[Sister Dhammadinna:] “The noble eightfold path is fabricated.” — *MN 44*

§ 48. “Among whatever dhammas there may be, fabricated or unfabricated, dispassion—the subduing of intoxication, the elimination of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the breaking of the round, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, the realization of Unbinding—is considered supreme. Those who have confidence in the dhamma of dispassion have confidence in what is supreme; and for those with confidence in the supreme, supreme is the result.

“Among whatever fabricated dhammas there may be, the noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is considered supreme. Those who have confidence in the dhamma of the noble path have confidence in what is supreme; and for those with confidence in the supreme, supreme is the result.” — *Iti 90*

§ 49. “Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch; in the same way this Dhamma & Vinaya has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual practice, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch. The fact that this Dhamma & Vinaya has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual practice, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch: This is the first amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.” — *Ud 5:5*

§ 50. Then Unnabha the brahman went to Ven. Ananda and on arrival greeted him courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to

one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Ananda, “Master Ananda, what is the aim of this holy life lived under Gotama the contemplative?”

“Brahman, the holy life is lived under the Blessed One with the aim of abandoning desire.”

“Is there a path, is there a practice, for the abandoning of that desire?”

“Yes, there is....”

“What is the path, the practice, for the abandoning of that desire?”

“Brahman, there is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on desire & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on persistence... concentration founded on intent... concentration founded on discrimination & the fabrications of exertion. This, brahman, is the path, this is the practice for the abandoning of that desire.”

“If that’s so, Master Ananda, then it’s an endless path, and not one with an end, for it’s impossible that one could abandon desire by means of desire.”

“In that case, brahman, let me question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think: Didn’t you first have desire, thinking, ‘I’ll go to the park,’ and then when you reached the park, wasn’t that particular desire allayed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Didn’t you first have persistence, thinking, ‘I’ll go to the park,’ and then when you reached the park, wasn’t that particular persistence allayed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Didn’t you first have the intent, thinking, ‘I’ll go to the park,’ and then when you reached the park, wasn’t that particular intent allayed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Didn’t you first have [an act of] discrimination, thinking, ‘I’ll go to the park,’ and then when you reached the park, wasn’t that particular [act of] discrimination allayed?”

“Yes, sir.”

“So it is with an arahant whose effluents are ended, who has reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who is released through right gnosis. Whatever desire he first had for the attainment of arahantship, on attaining

arahantship that particular desire is allayed. Whatever persistence he first had for the attainment of arahantship, on attaining arahantship that particular persistence is allayed. Whatever intent he first had for the attainment of arahantship, on attaining arahantship that particular intent is allayed. Whatever discrimination he first had for the attainment of arahantship, on attaining arahantship that particular discrimination is allayed. So what do you think, brahman? Is this an endless path, or one with an end?”

“You’re right, Master Ananda. This is a path with an end, and not an endless one.” — [SN 51:15](#)

§ 51. At the time for initiative
he takes no initiative.
Young, strong, but lethargic,
the resolves of his heart
exhausted,
the lazy, lethargic one
loses the path
to discernment. — [Dhp 280](#)

§ 52. From striving comes wisdom [*bhuri*];
from not, wisdom’s end.
Knowing these two courses
—to development,
decline—
conduct yourself
so that wisdom will grow. — [Dhp 282](#)

§ 53. For a person of unsteady mind,
not knowing true Dhamma,
serenity
set adrift:
discernment doesn’t grow full. — [Dhp 38](#)

§ 54. There's no jhana
for one with no discernment,
no discernment
for one with no jhana.
But one with both jhana
& discernment:
he's on the verge
of Unbinding. — *Dhp 372*

§ 55. “These four devotions to pleasure are base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable. They do not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to unbinding. Which four? There is the case where a certain fool, having killed living beings, is cheered & pleased with himself... having taken what is not given, he is cheered & pleased with himself... having told a lie, he is cheered & pleased with himself... he enjoys himself, supplied & endowed with the five strings of sensuality...

“These four devotions to pleasure lead exclusively to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to unbinding. Which four? There is the case where a monk [practices the four jhanas].” — *DN 29*

§ 56. “Even though a disciple of the noble ones has clearly seen as it actually is with right discernment that sensuality is of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks, still—if he has not attained a rapture & pleasure apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful mental qualities, or something more peaceful than that—he can be tempted by sensuality. But when he has clearly seen as it actually is with right discernment that sensuality is of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks, and he has attained a rapture & pleasure apart from sensuality, apart from unskillful mental qualities, or something more peaceful than that, he cannot be tempted by sensuality.” — *MN 14*

§ 57. “Now what, monks, is five-factored noble right concentration? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters and remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of

seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born from seclusion.

“Just as if a skilled bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without—would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born from seclusion. This is the first development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters and remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation—internal assurance. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration.

“Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and with the skies periodically supplying abundant showers, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration. This is the second development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

“Then, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third jhana, and of him the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture.

“Just as in a blue-, white-, or red-lotus pond, there may be some of the blue, white, or red lotuses which, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those blue, white, or red lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture. This is the third development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

“Then, with the abandoning of pleasure and stress—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters and remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness, so that there is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.

“Just as if a man were sitting wrapped from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating his body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness. This is the fourth development of the five-factored noble right concentration.

“And furthermore, the monk has his theme of reflection well in hand, well attended to, well-pondered, well-tuned [well-penetrated] by means of discernment.

“Just as if one person were to reflect on another, or a standing person were to reflect on a sitting person, or a sitting person were to reflect on a person lying down; even so, monks, the monk has his theme of reflection well in hand, well attended to, well-pondered, well-tuned [well-penetrated] by means of discernment. This is the fifth development of the five-factored noble right concentration.” — [AN 5:28](#)

MODERATION

§ 58. “And how is striving fruitful, how is exertion fruitful? There is the case where a monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not infatuated with that pleasure. He discerns that ‘When I exert a [bodily, verbal, or mental] fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of exertion there is dispassion[see §100]. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of equanimity there is dispassion.’ So he exerts a fabrication against the cause of stress where there comes dispassion from the fabrication of exertion, and develops equanimity with regard to the cause of stress where there comes dispassion from the development of equanimity. Thus the stress where there comes dispassion from the fabrication of exertion is exhausted & the stress where there comes dispassion from the development of equanimity is exhausted...

“Suppose a fletcher were to heat & warm an arrow shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable. Then at a later time he would no longer heat & warm the shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was heating & warming the shaft. That is why at a later time he would no longer heat & warm the shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable.

“In the same way, the monk notices this: ‘When I live according to my pleasure, unskillful mental qualities increase in me & skillful qualities decline. When I exert myself with stress & pain, though, unskillful qualities decline in me & skillful qualities increase. Why don’t I exert myself with stress & pain?’ So he exerts himself with stress & pain, and while he is exerting himself with stress & pain, unskillful qualities decline in him, & skillful qualities increase. Then at a later time he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was exerting himself with stress & pain. That is why, at a later time, he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain.

“This is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.” — [MN 101](#)

§ 59. “And what are the effluents to be abandoned by using? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, uses the robe simply to counteract cold, to counteract heat, to counteract the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles; simply for the purpose of covering the parts of the body that cause shame.

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses alms food, not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification; but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, ‘Thus will I destroy old feelings [of hunger] and not create new feelings [from overeating]. I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort.’

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses lodging simply to counteract cold, to counteract heat, to counteract the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, & reptiles; simply for protection from the inclemencies of weather and for the enjoyment of seclusion.

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses medicinal requisites that are used for curing the sick simply to counteract any pains of illness that have arisen and for maximum freedom from disease.” — [MN 2](#)

§ 60. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rajagaha, on Vulture Peak Mountain. And on that occasion Ven. Sona was staying near Rajagaha in the Cool Wood. Then, as Ven. Sona was meditating in seclusion [after doing walking meditation until the skin of his soles was split & bleeding], this train of thought arose in his awareness: “Of the Blessed One’s disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Now, my family has enough wealth that it would be possible to enjoy wealth & make merit. What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?”

Then the Blessed One, as soon as he perceived with his awareness the train of thought in Ven. Sona’s awareness disappeared from Vulture Peak Mountain—just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—appeared in the Cool Wood right in front of Ven. Sona, and sat down on a prepared seat. Ven. Sona, after bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “Just now, as you were meditating in seclusion, didn’t this train of thought appear to your awareness: ‘Of the Blessed One’s disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from the effluents.... What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?’”

“Yes, lord.”

“Now what do you think, Sona? Before, when you were a house-dweller, were you skilled at playing the lute?”

“Yes, lord.”

“And what do you think? When the strings of your lute were too taut, was your lute in tune & playable?”

“No, lord.”

“And what do you think? When the strings of your lute were too loose, was your lute in tune & playable?”

“No, lord.”

“And what do you think? When the strings of your lute were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned to be right on pitch, was your lute in tune & playable?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, Sona, over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your persistence, attune the pitch of the (five) faculties (to that), and there pick up your theme.”

“Yes, lord,” Ven. Sona answered the Blessed One. Then, having given this exhortation to Ven. Sona, the Blessed One—as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—disappeared from the Cool Wood and appeared on Vulture Peak Mountain.

So after that, Ven. Sona determined the right pitch for his persistence, attuned the pitch of the (five) faculties (to that), and there picked up his theme. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is

nothing further for the sake of this world.” And thus Ven. Sona became another one of the arahants. — [AN 6:55](#)

§ 61. “As I was remaining heedful, ardent, & resolute... it occurred to me, ‘Excessive persistence arose in me, and because of the excessive persistence my concentration fell away.... Just as if a man might hold a quail tightly with both hands; it would die then & there. In the same way, excessive persistence arose in me.... I will act in such a way that uncertainty... & excessive persistence will not arise in me again.’

“As I was remaining heedful, ardent, & resolute... it occurred to me, ‘Sluggish persistence arose in me, and because of the sluggish persistence my concentration fell away.... Just as if a man might hold a quail loosely; it would fly out of his hand. In the same way, sluggish persistence arose in me.... I will act in such a way that uncertainty... excessive persistence, & sluggish persistence will not arise in me again.’” — [MN 128](#)

§ 62. “There is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on persistence & the fabrications of exertion, thinking, ‘This persistence of mine will be neither overly sluggish nor overly active, neither inwardly constricted nor outwardly scattered’....

“And how is persistence overly sluggish? Whatever persistence is accompanied by laziness, conjoined with laziness: That is called overly sluggish persistence.

“And how is persistence overly active? Whatever persistence is accompanied by restlessness, conjoined with restlessness: That is called overly active persistence.

“And how is persistence inwardly constricted? Whatever persistence is accompanied by sloth & drowsiness, conjoined with sloth & drowsiness: That is called inwardly constricted persistence.

“And how is persistence outwardly scattered? Whatever persistence is stirred up by the five strings of sensuality, outwardly dispersed & dissipated: That is called outwardly scattered persistence.” — [SN 51:20](#)

§ 63. “Monks, on any occasion when the mind is sluggish, that is the wrong time to develop calm as a factor for awakening, concentration as a factor for

awakening, equanimity as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The sluggish mind is hard to raise up by those mental qualities. Just as if a man, wanting to make a small fire blaze up, were to place wet grass in it, wet cow dung, & wet sticks; were to give it a spray of water and smother it with dust. Is it possible that he would make the small fire blaze up?”

“No, lord.”

“In the same way, monks, on any occasion the mind is sluggish, that is the wrong time to develop calm as a factor for awakening, concentration as a factor for awakening, equanimity as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The sluggish mind is hard to raise up by those mental qualities.

“Now, on any occasion when the mind is sluggish, that is the right time to develop analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, persistence as a factor for awakening, rapture as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The sluggish mind is easy to raise up by those mental qualities. Just as if a man, wanting to make a small fire blaze up, were to place dry grass in it, dry cow dung, & dry sticks; were to blow on it with his mouth and not smother it with dust. Is it possible that he would make the small fire blaze up?

“Yes, lord.

“In the same way, monks, on any occasion when the mind is sluggish, that is the right time to develop analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, persistence as a factor for awakening, rapture as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The sluggish mind is easy to raise up by those mental qualities.

“Now, on any occasion when the mind is restless, that is the wrong time to develop analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, persistence as a factor for awakening, rapture as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The restless mind is hard to still with those mental qualities. Just as if a man, wanting to put out a large fire, were to place dry grass in it, dry cow dung, & dry sticks; were to blow on it with his mouth and not smother it with dust. Is it possible that he would put it out?”

“No, lord.”

“In the same way, monks, on any occasion when the mind is restless, that is the wrong time to develop analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening, persistence as a factor for awakening, rapture as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The restless mind is hard to still with those mental qualities.

“Now, on occasions when the mind is restless, that is the right time to develop calm as a factor for awakening, concentration as a factor for awakening, equanimity as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The restless mind is easy to still with those mental qualities. Just as if a man, wanting to put out a large fire, were to place wet grass in it, wet cow dung, & wet sticks; were to give it a spray of water and smother it with dust. Is it possible that he would put it out?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, monks, when the mind is restless, that is the right time to develop calm as a factor for awakening, concentration as a factor for awakening, equanimity as a factor for awakening. Why is that? The restless mind is easy to still with those mental qualities.

“As for mindfulness, I tell you, that serves every purpose.” — [*SN*46:53](#)

§ 64. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi in Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s monastery. Then a certain devata, in the far extreme of the night, her extreme radiance lighting up the entirety of Jeta’s Grove, went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to him, she stood to one side. As she was standing there, she said to him, “Tell me, dear sir, how you crossed over the flood.”

“I crossed over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place.”

“But how, dear sir, did you cross over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place?”

“When I pushed forward, I was whirled about. When I stayed in place, I sank. And so I crossed over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place.”

The devata:

“At long last I see
a brahman, totally unbound,
who without pushing forward,
without staying in place,
has crossed over
the entanglements
of the world.” — [*SN*1:1](#)

TRANQUILITY & INSIGHT

§ 65. “If a monk would wish, ‘May I attain—whenever I want, without strain, without difficulty—the four jhanas that are heightened mental states, pleasant abidings in the here-&-now,’ then he should be one who brings the precepts to perfection, who is committed to inner tranquility of awareness, who does not neglect jhana, who is endowed with insight, and who frequents empty dwellings.

“If a monk would wish, ‘May I—with the ending of effluents—remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for myself right in the here-&-now,’ then he should be one who brings the precepts to perfection, who is committed to inner tranquility of awareness, who does not neglect jhana, who is endowed with insight, and who frequents empty dwellings.” — [AN 10:71](#)

§ 66. “These two qualities have a share in clear knowing. Which two? Tranquility [*samatha*] & insight [*vipassana*].

“When tranquility is developed, what purpose does it serve? The mind is developed. And when the mind is developed, what purpose does it serve? Passion is abandoned.

“When insight is developed, what purpose does it serve? Discernment is developed. And when discernment is developed, what purpose does it serve? Ignorance is abandoned.”

“Defiled by passion, the mind is not released. Defiled by ignorance, discernment does not develop. Thus from the fading of passion is there awareness-release. From the fading of ignorance is there discernment-release.”

— [AN 2:29–30](#)

§ 67. Ven. Ananda said: “Friends, whoever—monk or nun—declares the attainment of arahantship in my presence, they all do it by means of one or another of four paths. Which four?

“There is the case where a monk has developed insight preceded by tranquility. As he develops insight preceded by tranquility, the path is born. He follows that path, develops it, pursues it. As he follows the path, developing it & pursuing it—his fetters are abandoned, his obsessions destroyed.

“Then there is the case where a monk has developed tranquility preceded by insight. As he develops tranquility preceded by insight, the path is born. He follows that path, develops it, pursues it. As he follows the path, developing it & pursuing it—his fetters are abandoned, his obsessions destroyed.

“Then there is the case where a monk has developed tranquility in tandem with insight. As he develops tranquility in tandem with insight, the path is born. He follows that path, develops it, pursues it. As he follows the path, developing it & pursuing it—his fetters are abandoned, his obsessions destroyed.

“Then there is the case where a monk’s mind has its restlessness concerning the Dhamma [*Commentary*: the corruptions of insight] well under control. There comes a time when his mind grows steady inwardly, settles down, and becomes unified & concentrated. In him the path is born. He follows that path, develops it, pursues it. As he follows the path, developing it & pursuing it—his fetters are abandoned, his obsessions destroyed.

“Whoever—monk or nun—declares the attainment of arahantship in my presence, they all do it by means of one or another of these four paths.”

— [*AN 4:170*](#)

§ 68. “The individual who has attained internal tranquility of awareness, but not insight into phenomena through heightened discernment, should approach an individual who has attained insight into phenomena through heightened discernment and ask him: ‘How should fabrications be regarded? How should they be investigated? How should they be seen with insight?’ The other will answer in line with what he has seen & experienced: ‘Fabrications should be regarded in this way. Fabrications should be investigated in this way. Fabrications should be seen in this way with insight.’ Then eventually he [the first] will become one who has attained both internal tranquility of awareness & insight into phenomena through heightened discernment.

“As for the individual who has attained insight into phenomena through heightened discernment, but not internal tranquility of awareness, he should approach an individual who has attained internal tranquility of awareness... and ask him, ‘How should the mind be steadied? How should it be made to settle down? How should it be unified? How should it be concentrated?’ The other will answer in line with what he has seen & experienced: ‘The mind should be steadied in this way. The mind should be made to settle down in this way. The

mind should be unified in this way. The mind should be concentrated in this way.' Then eventually he [the first] will become one who has attained both internal tranquility of awareness & insight into phenomena through heightened discernment....

“As for the individual who has attained both internal tranquility of awareness & insight into phenomena through heightened discernment, his duty is to make an effort in establishing [‘tuning’] those very same skillful qualities to a higher degree for the ending of the effluents.” — [AN4:94](#)

FABRICATION

§ 69. “And what are fabrications? There are these six classes of intention: intention aimed at sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas. These are called fabrications.” — [SN 22:56](#)

§ 70. “Monks, these three are fabricated characteristics of what is fabricated. Which three? Arising is discernable, passing away is discernable, alteration while staying is discernable....

“Now these three are unfabricated characteristics of what is unfabricated. Which three? No arising is discernable, no passing away is discernable, no alteration while staying is discernable.” — [AN 3:47](#)

§ 71. On one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Ayojjhans on the banks of the Ganges River. There he addressed the monks: “Monks, suppose that a large glob of foam were floating down this Ganges River, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a glob of foam? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any form that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in form?

“Now suppose that in the autumn—when it’s raining in fat, heavy drops—a water bubble were to appear & disappear on the water, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a water bubble? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any feeling that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in feeling?

“Now suppose that in the last month of the hot season a mirage were shimmering, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a mirage? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any perception that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in perception?

“Now suppose that a man desiring heartwood, in quest of heartwood, seeking heartwood, were to go into a forest carrying a sharp ax. There he would see a large banana tree: straight, young, of enormous height. He would cut it at the root and, having cut it at the root, would chop off the top. Having chopped off the top, he would peel away the outer skin. Peeling away the outer skin, he wouldn’t even find sapwood, to say nothing of heartwood. Then a man with good eyesight would see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a banana tree? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any fabrications that are past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing them, observing them, & appropriately examining them—they would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in fabrications?

“Now suppose that a magician or magician’s apprentice were to display a magic trick at a major intersection, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, observe it, & appropriately examine it. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in a magic trick? In the same way, a monk sees, observes, & appropriately examines any consciousness that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near. To him—seeing it, observing it, & appropriately examining it—it would appear empty, void, without substance: for what substance would there be in consciousness?

“Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with

perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he grows dispassionate. Through dispassion, he's released. With release there's the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

— [*SN 22:95*](#)

§ 72. [A certain monk:] "But how does a monk know, how does a monk see, so that ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing [*vijja*] arises?"

[The Buddha:] "There is the case, monk, where a monk has heard, 'All things are unworthy of attachment.' Having heard that all things are unworthy of attachment, he directly knows every thing. Directly knowing every thing, he comprehends every thing. Comprehending every thing, he sees all themes [all objects] as something separate.

"He sees the eye as something separate [*aññatto*]. He sees forms as something separate. He sees eye-consciousness as something separate. He sees eye-contact as something separate. And whatever arises in dependence on eye-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too he sees as something separate.

"He sees the ear as something separate...

"He sees the nose as something separate...

"He sees the tongue as something separate...

"He sees the body as something separate...

"He sees the intellect as something separate. He sees ideas as something separate. He sees intellect-consciousness as something separate. He sees intellect-contact as something separate. And whatever arises in dependence on intellect-contact—experienced either as pleasure, as pain, or as neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too he sees as something separate.

"This is how a monk knows, this is how a monk sees, so that ignorance is abandoned and clear knowing arises." — [*SN 35:80*](#)

§ 73. "For a monk practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, this is what accords with the Dhamma: that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to form, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to feeling, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to perception, that he keep

cultivating disenchantment with regard to fabrications, that he keep cultivating disenchantment with regard to consciousness. As he keeps cultivating disenchantment with regard to form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. As he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he is totally released from form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. He is totally released from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is totally released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.”

“For a monk practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, this is what accords with the Dhamma: that he keep focused on inconstancy... stress... not-self with regard to form, that he keep focused on inconstancy... stress... not-self with regard to feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. As he keeps focusing on inconstancy... stress... not-self with regard to form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. As he comprehends form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, he is totally released from form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. He is totally released from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is totally released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.” — [SN 22:39–42](#)

§ 74. When you see with discernment,

‘All fabrications are inconstant’—

you grow disenchanted with stress.

This is the path

to purity.

When you see with discernment,

‘All fabrications are stressful’—

you grow disenchanted with stress.

This is the path

to purity.

When you see with discernment,

‘All phenomena are not-self’—

you grow disenchanted with stress.

This is the path
to purity. — *Dhp 277–279*

§ 75. “Whether or not there is the arising of Tathagatas, this property stands—this steadfastness of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma: *All fabrications are inconstant.*

“The Tathagata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain: *All fabrications are inconstant.*

“Whether or not there is the arising of Tathagatas, this property stands—this steadfastness of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma: *All fabrications are stressful.*

“The Tathagata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain: *All fabrications are stressful.*

“Whether or not there is the arising of Tathagatas, this property stands—this steadfastness of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma: *All phenomena are not-self.*

“The Tathagata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain: *All phenomena are not-self.*”

— *AN 3:137*

§ 76. Now at that moment this line of thinking appeared in the awareness of a certain monk: “So—form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is not-self. Then what self will be touched by the actions done by what is not-self?”

Then the Blessed One, realizing with his awareness the line of thinking in that monk’s awareness, addressed the monks: “It’s possible that a senseless person—immersed in ignorance, overcome with craving—might think that he could outsmart the Teacher’s message in this way: ‘So—form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is not-self. Then what self will be touched by the actions done by what is not-self?’ Now,

monks, haven't I trained you in counter-questioning with regard to this & that topic here & there? What do you think? Is form constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord." "And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord." "And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?" "No, lord."

"... Is feeling constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord"....

"... Is perception constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord"....

"... Are fabrications constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord"....

"What do you think, monks? Is consciousness constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord." "And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord." "And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?" "No, lord."

"Thus, monks, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it has come to be with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Any feeling whatsoever....

"Any perception whatsoever....

"Any fabrications whatsoever....

"Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it has come to be with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of sixty monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from the effluents. — [MN 109](#)

§ 77. “Monks, there are these four perversions of perception, perversions of mind, perversions of view. Which four? ‘Constant’ with regard to the inconstant is a perversion of perception, a perversion of mind, a perversion of view. ‘Pleasant’ with regard to the stressful.... ‘Self’ with regard to not-self.... ‘Attractive’ with regard to the unattractive is a perversion of perception, a perversion of mind, a perversion of view. These are the four perversions of perception, perversions of mind, perversions of view.

“There are these four non-perversions of perception, non-perversions of mind, non-perversions of view. Which four? ‘Inconstant’ with regard to the inconstant is a non-perversion of perception, a non-perversion of mind, a non-perversion of view. ‘Stressful’ with regard to the stressful.... ‘Not-self’ with regard to not-self.... ‘Unattractive’ with regard to the unattractive is a non-perversion of perception, a non-perversion of mind, a non-perversion of view. These are the four non-perversions of perception, non-perversions of mind, non-perversions of view.”

Perceiving
constancy in the inconstant,
pleasure in the stressful,
self in what’s not-self,
attractiveness in the unattractive,
beings, destroyed by wrong-view,
go mad, out of their minds.
Bound to Mara’s yoke,
from the yoke they find no rest.
Beings go on to the wandering-on,
leading to birth & death.

But when Awakened Ones
arise in the world,
bringing light to the world,
they proclaim the Dhamma
leading to the stilling of stress.
When those with discernment listen,
they regain their senses,
seeing

the inconstant as inconstant,
the stressful as stressful,
what's not-self as not-self,
the unattractive as unattractive.
Undertaking right view,
they transcend all stress & suffering. — [AN 4:49](#)

§ 78. “And what is the perception of *inconstancy*? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘Form is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, fabrications are inconstant, consciousness is inconstant.’ Thus he remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the five aggregates. This, Ananda, is called the perception of inconstancy.

“And what is the perception of *not-self*? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘The eye is not-self; forms are not-self. The ear is not-self; sounds are not-self. The nose is not-self; aromas are not-self. The tongue is not-self; flavors are not-self. The body is not-self; tactile sensations are not-self. The intellect is not-self; ideas are not-self.’ Thus he remains focused on not-selfness with regard to the six inner & outer sense media. This is called the perception of not-self.

“And what is the perception of *unattractiveness*? There is the case where a monk ponders this very body—from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin, filled with all sorts of unclean things: ‘There is in this body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, gall, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil in the joints, urine.’ Thus he remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to this very body. This is called the perception of unattractiveness.

“And what is the perception of *drawbacks*? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling—reflects thus: ‘This body has many pains, many drawbacks. In this body many kinds of disease arise, such as: seeing-diseases, hearing-diseases, nose-diseases,

tongue-diseases, body-diseases, head-diseases, ear-diseases, mouth-diseases, teeth-diseases, cough, asthma, catarrh, fever, aging, stomach-ache, fainting, dysentery, grippe, cholera, leprosy, boils, ringworm, tuberculosis, epilepsy, skin-diseases, itch, scab, psoriasis, scabies, jaundice, diabetes, hemorrhoids, fistulas, ulcers; diseases arising from bile, from phlegm, from the wind-property, from combinations of bodily humors, from changes in the weather, from uneven care of the body, from attacks, from the result of action; cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, urination.’ Thus he remains focused on drawbacks with regard to this body. This is called the perception of drawbacks.

“And what is the perception of *abandoning*? There is the case where a monk doesn’t acquiesce to an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn’t acquiesce to an arisen thought of ill will. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn’t acquiesce to an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn’t acquiesce to any arisen evil, unskillful qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. This is called the perception of abandoning.

“And what is the perception of *dispassion*? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, Unbinding.’ This is called the perception of dispassion.

“And what is the perception of *cessation*? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, cessation, Unbinding.’ This is called the perception of cessation.

“And what is the perception of *distaste for every world*? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to any world, refrains from them and does not get involved. This is called the perception of distaste for every world.

“And what is the perception of *the undesirability of all fabrications*? There is the case where a monk feels horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with all fabrications.

This is called the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications.”

— [AN 10:60](#)

Inconstant

§ 79. “In seeing six rewards, it’s enough for a monk to establish the perception of inconstancy with regard to all fabrications without exception. Which six? ‘All fabrications will appear as unstable. My mind will not delight in any world. My mind will rise above every world. My heart will be inclined to Unbinding. My fetters will go to their abandoning. I’ll be endowed with the foremost qualities of the contemplative life.’

“In seeing these six rewards, it’s enough for a monk to establish the perception of inconstancy with regard to all fabrications without exception.”

— [AN 6:102](#)

§ 80. “Rahula, develop the meditation of the perception of inconstancy. For when you are developing the meditation of the perception of inconstancy, the conceit ‘I am’ will be abandoned.” — [MN 62](#)

§ 81. “Once, monks, there was a teacher named Araka, a sectarian leader who was free of passion for sensuality. He had many hundreds of students and he taught them the Dhamma in this way: ‘Next to nothing, brahmans, is the life of human beings—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as a dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass quickly vanishes with the rising of the sun and does not stay long, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a dewdrop—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as when the rain-devas send rain in fat drops, and a bubble on the water quickly vanishes and does not stay long, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a water bubble—limited, trifling, of much stress & many

despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as a line drawn in the water with a stick quickly vanishes and does not stay long, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a line drawn in the water with a stick—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as a river flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it, so that there is not a moment, an instant, a second where it stands still, but instead it goes & rushes & flows, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a river flowing down from the mountains—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as strong man forming a drop of spit on the tip of his tongue would spit it out with little effort, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a drop of spit—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as a sliver of meat thrown into an iron pan heated all day quickly vanishes and does not stay long, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a sliver of meat—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.

“Just as a cow to be slaughtered being led to the slaughterhouse, with every step of its foot closer to its slaughtering, closer to death, in the same way, brahmans, the life of human beings is like a cow to be slaughtered—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.’

“Now at that time, monks, the human life span was 60,000 years, with girls marriageable at 500. And at that time there were [only] six afflictions: cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, & urination. Yet even though people were so long-lived, long-lasting, with so few afflictions, that teacher Araka taught the Dhamma

to his disciples in this way: ‘Next to nothing, brahmans, is the life of human beings—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.’

“At present, monks, one speaking rightly would say, ‘Next to nothing is the life of human beings—limited, trifling, of much stress & many despairs. One should touch this [truth] like a sage, do what is skillful, follow the holy life. For one who is born there is no freedom from death.’ At present, monks, one who lives a long time is 100 years old or a little bit more. Living 100 years, one lives for 300 seasons: 100 seasons of cold, 100 seasons of heat, 100 seasons of rain. Living for 300 seasons, one lives for 1,200 months: 400 months of cold, 400 months of heat, 400 months of rain. Living for 1,200 months, one lives for 2,400 fortnights: 800 fortnights of cold, 800 fortnights of heat, 800 fortnights of rain. Living for 2,400 fortnights, one lives for 36,000 days: 12,000 days of cold, 12,000 days of heat, 12,000 days of rain. Living for 36,000 days, one eats 72,000 meals: 24,000 meals in the cold, 24,000 meals in the heat, 24,000 meals in the rain—counting the taking of mother’s milk and obstacles to eating. These are the obstacles to eating: when one doesn’t eat while angered, when one doesn’t eat while suffering or stressed, when one doesn’t eat while sick, when one doesn’t eat on the observance [*uposatha*] day, when one doesn’t eat while poor.

“Thus, monks, I have reckoned the life of a person living for 100 years: I have reckoned the life span, reckoned the seasons, reckoned the years, reckoned the months, reckoned the fortnights, reckoned the nights, reckoned the days, reckoned the meals, reckoned the obstacles to eating. Whatever a teacher should do—seeking the welfare of his disciples, out of sympathy for them—that have I done for you. Over there are the roots of trees; over there, empty dwellings. Practice jhana, monks. Don’t be heedless. Don’t later fall into regret. This is our message to you all.” — [AN 7:70](#)

§ 82. [Ven. Nandaka:] “Just as when the oil in a burning oil lamp is inconstant & subject to change, its wick is inconstant & subject to change, its flame is inconstant & subject to change, its light is inconstant & subject to change. If someone were to say, ‘The oil in that burning oil lamp is inconstant & subject to change, its wick is inconstant & subject to change, its flame is inconstant &

subject to change, but as for its light, that is constant, everlasting, eternal, & not subject to change': would he be speaking rightly?"

[Some nuns:] "No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because the oil in that burning oil lamp is inconstant & subject to change, its wick is inconstant & subject to change, its flame is inconstant & subject to change, so how much more should its light be inconstant & subject to change."

"In the same way, sisters, if someone were to say, 'My six internal media are inconstant, but what I experience based on the six internal media—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—that is constant, everlasting, eternal, & not subject to change': Would he be speaking rightly?"

"No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because each feeling arises dependent on its corresponding condition. With the cessation of its corresponding condition, it ceases."

"Good, good, sisters. That's how it is for a disciple of the noble ones who has seen it as it has come to be with right discernment.

"Just as when the root of a great, standing tree—possessed of heartwood—is inconstant & subject to change, its trunk is inconstant & subject to change, its branches & foliage are inconstant & subject to change, its shadow is inconstant & subject to change. If someone were to say, 'The root of that great, standing tree—possessed of heartwood—is inconstant & subject to change, its trunk is inconstant & subject to change, its branches & foliage are inconstant & subject to change, but as for its shadow, that is constant, everlasting, eternal, & not subject to change': Would he be speaking rightly?"

"No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because the root of that great, standing tree—possessed of heartwood—is inconstant & subject to change, its trunk is inconstant & subject to change, its branches & foliage are inconstant & subject to change, so how much more should its shadow be inconstant & subject to change."

"In the same way, sisters, if someone were to say, 'My six external media are inconstant, but what I experience based on the six internal media—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—that is constant, everlasting, eternal, & not subject to change': Would he be speaking rightly?"

"No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because each feeling arises dependent on its corresponding condition. With the cessation of its corresponding condition, it

ceases.”

“Good, good, sisters. That’s how it is for a disciple of the noble ones who has seen it as it has come to be with right discernment.” — [MN 146](#)

§ 83. “There is the case, Moggallana, where a monk has heard, ‘*All things are unworthy of attachment.*’ Having heard that all things are unworthy of attachment, he fully knows all things. Fully knowing all things, he fully comprehends all things. Fully comprehending all things, then whatever feeling he experiences—pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain—he remains focused on inconstancy, focused on dispassion, focused on cessation, focused on relinquishing with regard to that feeling. As he remains focused on inconstancy, focused on dispassion, focused on cessation, focused on relinquishing with regard to that feeling, he is unsustained by [doesn’t cling to] anything in the world. Unsustained, he isn’t agitated. Unagitated, he is unbound right within. He discerns: ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’” — [AN 7:58](#)

Stressful

§ 84. “In seeing six rewards, it’s enough for a monk to establish the perception of stress with regard to all fabrications without exception. Which six? ‘The perception of disenchantment will be established within me with regard to all fabrications, like a murderer with a drawn sword. My mind will rise above every world. I’ll become one who sees peace in Unbinding. My obsessions will go to their destruction. I’ll be one who has completed his task. The Teacher will have been served with good will.’

“In seeing these six rewards, it’s enough for a monk to establish the perception of stress with regard to all fabrications without exception.”
— [AN 6:103](#)

§ 85. [Ven. Sariputta:] “There are these three forms of stressfulness, my friend: the stressfulness of pain, the stressfulness of fabrication, the stressfulness of change. These are the three forms of stressfulness.” — [SN 38:14](#)

§ 86. Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “Just now, lord, while I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in my awareness: ‘Three feelings have been spoken of by the Blessed One: a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of pain [stress], & a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. These are the three feelings spoken of by the Blessed One. But the Blessed One has said: “Whatever is felt comes under stress [pain].” Now in what connection was this stated by the Blessed One: “Whatever is felt comes under stress [pain]?”’”

“Excellent, monk. Excellent. These three feelings have been spoken of by me: a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of pain [stress], & a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. These are the three feelings spoken of by me. But I have also said: ‘Whatever is felt comes under stress [pain].’ That I have stated simply in connection with the inconstancy of fabrications. That I have stated simply in connection with the nature of fabrications to end... in connection with the nature of fabrications to fall away... to fade away... to cease... in connection with the nature of fabrications to change.” — [*SN 36:11*](#)

§ 87. [Visakha:] “In what way is pleasant feeling pleasant, lady, and in what way painful?”

[Sister Dhammadinna:] “Pleasant feeling is pleasant in remaining, & painful in changing, friend Visakha. Painful feeling is painful in remaining & pleasant in changing. Neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling is pleasant in occurring together with knowledge, and painful in occurring without knowledge.” — [*MN 44*](#)

§ 88. [Ven. Mahali:] “And what, lord, is the cause, what the requisite condition, for the defilement of beings? How are beings defiled with cause, with requisite condition?”

[The Buddha:] “Mahali, if form were exclusively stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings would not be infatuated with form. But because form is also pleasant—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings are infatuated with form. Through infatuation, they are captivated. Through captivation, they are

defiled. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. And this is how beings are defiled with cause, with requisite condition.

“If feeling were exclusively stressful....

“If perception were exclusively stressful....

“If fabrications were exclusively stressful....

“If consciousness were exclusively stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings would not be infatuated with consciousness. But because consciousness is also pleasant—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings are infatuated with consciousness. Through infatuation, they are captivated. Through captivation, they are defiled. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. And this is how beings are defiled with cause, with requisite condition.”

“And what, lord, is the cause, what the requisite condition, for the purification of beings? How are beings purified with cause, with requisite condition?”

“Mahali, if form were exclusively pleasant—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings would not be disenchanted with form. But because form is also stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings are disenchanted with form. Through disenchantment, they grow dispassionate. Through dispassion, they are purified. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the purification of beings. And this is how beings are purified with cause, with requisite condition.

“If feeling were exclusively pleasant...

“If perception were exclusively pleasant....

“If fabrications were exclusively pleasant....

“If consciousness were exclusively pleasant—followed by pleasure, infused with pleasure and not infused with stress—beings would not be disenchanted with consciousness. But because consciousness is also stressful—followed by stress, infused with stress and not infused with pleasure—beings are disenchanted with consciousness. Through disenchantment, they grow dispassionate. Through dispassion, they are purified. This is the cause, this the requisite condition, for the purification of beings. And this is how beings are purified with cause, with requisite condition.” — [SN 22:60](#)

§ 89. “A well-instructed disciple of the noble ones reflects in this way: ‘I am now being chewed up by form. But in the past I was also chewed up by form in the same way I am now being chewed up by present form. And if I delight in future form, then in the future I will be chewed up by form in the same way I am now being chewed up by present form.’ Having reflected in this way, he becomes indifferent to past form, does not delight in future form, and is practicing for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to present form.

“[He reflects:] ‘I am now being chewed up by feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness. But in the past I was also chewed up by consciousness in the same way I am now being chewed up by present consciousness. And if I delight in future consciousness, then in the future I will be chewed up by consciousness in the same way I am now being chewed up by present consciousness.’ Having reflected in this way, he becomes indifferent to past consciousness, does not delight in future consciousness, and is practicing for the sake of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation with regard to present consciousness.” — [*SN 22:79*](#)

§ 90. “Magandiya, suppose that there was a leper covered with sores and infections, devoured by worms, picking the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a pit of glowing embers. His friends, companions, & relatives would take him to a doctor. The doctor would concoct medicine for him, and thanks to the medicine he would be cured of his leprosy: well & happy, free, master of himself, going wherever he liked. Then suppose two strong men, having seized hold of him by both arms, were to drag him to a pit of glowing embers. What do you think? Wouldn’t he twist his body this way & that?”

“Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? The fire is painful to the touch, very hot & scorching.”

“Now what do you think, Magandiya? Is the fire painful to the touch, very hot & scorching, only now, or was it also that way before?”

“Both now & before is it painful to the touch, very hot & scorching, Master Gotama. It’s just that when the man was a leper covered with sores and infections, devoured by worms, picking the scabs off the openings of his wounds

with his nails, his faculties were impaired, which was why, even though the fire was actually painful to the touch, he had the skewed perception of ‘pleasant.’”

“In the same way, Magandiya, sensual pleasures in the past were painful to the touch, very hot & scorching; sensual pleasures in the future will be painful to the touch, very hot & scorching; sensual pleasures at present are painful to the touch, very hot & scorching; but when beings are not free from passion for sensual pleasures—devoured by sensual craving, burning with sensual fever—their faculties are impaired, which is why, even though sensual pleasures are actually painful to the touch, they have the skewed perception of ‘pleasant.’

“Now suppose that there was a leper covered with sores & infections, devoured by worms, picking the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a pit of glowing embers. The more he cauterized his body over the pit of glowing embers, the more disgusting, foul-smelling, & putrid the openings of his wounds would become, and yet he would feel a modicum of enjoyment & satisfaction because of the itchiness of his wounds. In the same way, beings not free from passion for sensual pleasures—devoured by sensual craving, burning with sensual fever—indulge in sensual pleasures. The more they indulge in sensual pleasures, the more their sensual craving increases and the more they burn with sensual fever, and yet they feel a modicum of enjoyment & satisfaction dependent on the five strands of sensuality.

“Now what do you think, Magandiya? Have you ever seen or heard of a king or king’s minister—enjoying himself, provided & endowed with the five strands of sensual pleasure, without abandoning sensual craving, without removing sensual fever—who has dwelt or will dwell or is dwelling free from thirst, his mind inwardly at peace?”

“No, Master Gotama.”

“Very good, Magandiya. Neither have I ever seen or heard of a king or king’s minister—enjoying himself, provided & endowed with the five strands of sensual pleasure, without abandoning sensual craving, without removing sensual fever—who has dwelt or will dwell or is dwelling free from thirst, his mind inwardly at peace. But whatever contemplatives or brahmans who have dwelt or will dwell or are dwelling free from thirst, their minds inwardly at peace, all have done so having realized—as it has come to be—the origination & disappearance, the

allure, the danger, & the escape from sensual pleasures, having abandoned sensual craving and removed sensual fever.”

Then at that moment the Blessed One exclaimed,

“Freedom from disease: the foremost good fortune.
Unbinding: the foremost ease.
The eightfold: the foremost of paths
going to the
Deathless,
Secure.’

When this was said, Magandiya the wanderer said to the Blessed One, “It’s amazing, Master Gotama. It’s astounding, how this, too, is well-stated by Master Gotama: ‘Freedom from disease: the foremost good fortune. Unbinding: the foremost ease.’ We have also heard this said by earlier wanderers in the lineage of our teachers: ‘Freedom from disease: the foremost good fortune. Unbinding: the foremost ease.’ This agrees with that.”

“But as for what you have heard said by earlier wanderers in the lineage of your teachers, Magandiya—‘Freedom from disease: the foremost good fortune. Unbinding: the foremost ease’—which freedom from disease is that, which Unbinding?”

When this was said, Magandiya the wanderer rubbed his own limbs with his hand. “This is that freedom from disease, Master Gotama,” he said. “This is that Unbinding. For I am now free from disease, happy, and nothing afflicts me.”

“Magandiya, it’s just as if there were a man blind from birth who couldn’t see black objects... white... blue... yellow... red... or pink objects; who couldn’t see even or uneven places, the stars, the sun, or the moon. He would hear a man with good eyesight saying, ‘How wonderful, good sirs, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.’ He would go in search of something white. Then another man would fool him with a grimy, oil-stained rag: ‘Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.’ The blind man would take it and put it on. Having put it on, gratified, he would exclaim words of gratification, ‘How wonderful, good sirs, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.’ Now what do you think, Magandiya? When that man blind from birth took the grimy, oil-stained rag and put it on; and, having put it on, gratified, exclaimed words of gratification, ‘How

wonderful, good sirs, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean’: Did he do so knowing & seeing, or out of faith in the man with good eyesight?”

“Of course he did it not knowing & not seeing, Master Gotama, but out of faith in the man with good eyesight.”

“In the same way, Magandiya, the wanderers of other sects are blind & eyeless. Without knowing freedom from disease, without seeing Unbinding, they still speak this verse:

‘Freedom from disease: the foremost good fortune.
Unbinding: the foremost ease.’

This verse was stated by earlier worthy ones, fully self-awakened:

‘Freedom from disease: the foremost good fortune.
Unbinding: the foremost ease.
The eightfold: the foremost of paths
going to the
Deathless,
Secure.’

“But now it has gradually become a verse of run-of-the-mill people.

“This body, Magandiya, is a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction. And yet you say, with reference to this body, which is a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction: ‘This is that freedom from disease, Master Gotama. This is that Unbinding,’ for you don’t have the noble vision with which you would know freedom from disease and see Unbinding.”

“I’m convinced, Master Gotama, that you can teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I would know freedom from disease, that I would see Unbinding.”

“Magandiya, it’s just as if there were a man blind from birth who couldn’t see black objects... white... blue... yellow... red... the sun or the moon. His friends, companions, & relatives would take him to a doctor. The doctor would concoct medicine for him, but in spite of the medicine his eyesight would not appear or grow clear. What do you think, Magandiya? Would that doctor have nothing but his share of weariness & disappointment?”

“Yes, Master Gotama.”

“In the same way, Magandiya, if I were to teach you the Dhamma—‘This is that freedom from disease; this is that Unbinding’—and you on your part did not know freedom from disease or see Unbinding, that would be wearisome for me; that would be troublesome for me.”

“I’m convinced, Master Gotama, that you can teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I would know freedom from disease, that I would see Unbinding.”

“Magandiya, it’s just as if there were a man blind from birth who couldn’t see black objects... white... blue... yellow... red... the sun or the moon. Now suppose that a certain man were to take a grimy, oil-stained rag and fool him, saying, ‘Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.’ The blind man would take it and put it on.

“Then his friends, companions, & relatives would take him to a doctor. The doctor would concoct medicine for him: purges from above & purges from below, ointments & counter-ointments and treatments through the nose. And thanks to the medicine his eyesight would appear & grow clear. Then together with the arising of his eyesight, he would abandon whatever passion & delight he felt for that grimy, oil-stained rag. And he would regard that man as an enemy & no friend at all, and think that he deserved to be killed. ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, & deceived by that man & his grimy, oil-stained rag! —“Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.”’

“In the same way, Magandiya, if I were to teach you the Dhamma—‘This is that freedom from Disease; this is that Unbinding’—and you on your part were to know that freedom from Disease and see that Unbinding, then together with the arising of your eyesight you would abandon whatever passion & delight you felt with regard for the five clinging-aggregates. And it would occur to you, ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, & deceived by this mind! For in clinging, it was just form that I was clinging to... it was just feeling... just perception... just fabrications... just consciousness that I was clinging to. With my clinging as a requisite condition, there arises becoming... birth... aging & death... sorrow, lamentation, pains, distresses, & despairs. And thus is the origin of this entire mass of stress.’”

“I’m convinced, Master Gotama, that you can teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I might rise up from this seat cured of my blindness.”

“In that case, Magandiya, associate with men of integrity. When you associate with men of integrity, you will hear the true Dhamma. When you hear the true Dhamma, you will practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. When you practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, you will know & see for yourself: ‘These things are diseases, cancers, arrows. And here is where diseases, cancers, & arrows cease without trace. With the cessation of my clinging comes the cessation of becoming. With the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. With the cessation of birth then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering & stress.’ — [MN 75](#)

Not-self

§ 91. “In seeing six rewards, it’s enough for a monk to establish the perception of not-self with regard to all phenomena without exception. Which six? ‘I won’t be fashioned in connection with any world. My I-making will be stopped. My my-making will be stopped. I’ll be endowed with uncommon knowledge. I’ll become one who rightly sees cause, along with causally-originated phenomena.’

“In seeing these six rewards, it’s enough for a monk to establish the perception of not-self with regard to all phenomena without exception.”

— [AN 6:104](#)

§ 92. “Monks, do you see any clinging/sustenance in the form of a doctrine of self which, in clinging to, there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief & despair?”

“No, lord.”

“...Neither do I... What do you think, monks? If a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches & leaves here in Jeta’s Grove, would the thought occur to you, ‘It’s us that this person is gathering, burning or doing with as he likes’?”

“No, lord. Why is that? Because those things are not our self, nor do they pertain to our self.”

“In the same way, monks, whatever is not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit. And what isn’t yours? Form isn’t yours... Feeling isn’t yours... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness isn’t yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness & benefit.” — [MN 22](#)

§ 93. “There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He is obsessed with the idea that ‘I am form’ or ‘Form is mine.’ As he is obsessed with these ideas, his form changes & alters, and he falls into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair over its change & alteration.

“He assumes feeling.... perception.... fabrications.... He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. He is obsessed with the idea that ‘I am consciousness’ or ‘Consciousness is mine.’ As he is obsessed with these ideas, his consciousness changes & alters, and he falls into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair over its change & alteration.

“This, householder, is how one is afflicted in body and afflicted in mind.

“And how is one afflicted in body but unafflicted in mind? There is the case where a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—does not assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He is not seized with the idea that ‘I am form’ or ‘Form is mine.’ As he is not seized with these ideas, his form changes & alters, but he does not fall into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair over its change & alteration.

“He doesn’t assume feeling to be the self.... perception to be the self.... fabrications to be the self....

“He doesn’t assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. He is not seized with the idea that ‘I am consciousness’ or ‘Consciousness is mine.’ As he is not seized with these ideas, his consciousness changes & alters, but he

does not fall into sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair over its change & alteration.

“This, householder, is how one is afflicted in body but unafflicted in mind.”

— [SN 22:1](#)

§ 94. “Form, monks, is not self. If form were the self, this form would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to form, ‘Let my form be thus. Let my form not be thus.’ But precisely because form is not self, this form lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to form, ‘Let my form be thus. Let my form not be thus.’

“Feeling is not self.... Perception is not self.... Fabrications are not self....

“Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ ...

“Thus, monks, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Any feeling.... Any perception.... Any fabrications....

“Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being

given, the minds of the group of five monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from the effluents. — [SN 22:59](#)

§ 95. “Monks, suppose there were a river, flowing down from the mountains, going far, its current swift, carrying everything with it, and—holding on to both banks—kasa grasses, kusa grasses, reeds, birana grasses, & trees were growing. Then a man swept away by the current would grab hold of the kasa grasses, but they would tear away, and so from that cause he would come to disaster. He would grab hold of the kusa grasses... the reeds... the birana grasses... the trees, but they would tear away, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.

“In the same way, there is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. That form tears away from him, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.

“He assumes feeling... perception... fabrications to be the self...

“He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That consciousness tears away from him, and so from that cause he would come to disaster.” — [SN 22:95](#)

§ 96. “Just as a dog, tied by a leash to a post or stake, keeps running around and circling around that very post or stake; in the same way, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for people of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He assumes feeling.... perception.... fabrications.... He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

“He keeps running around and circling around that very form... that very feeling... that very perception... those very fabrications... that very consciousness. He is not set loose from form, not set loose from feeling... from perception... from fabrications... not set loose from consciousness. He is not set loose from birth,

aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is not set loose, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“But a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for people of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—doesn’t assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He doesn’t assume feeling to be the self.... perception to be the self.... fabrications to be the self....

“He doesn’t assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

“He doesn’t run around or circle around that very form... that very feeling... that very perception... those very fabrications... that very consciousness. He is set loose from form, set loose from feeling... from perception... from fabrications... set loose from consciousness. He is set loose from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is set loose, I tell you, from suffering & stress.” — [SN 22:99](#)

§ 97. “Suppose there were a king or king’s minister who had never heard the sound of a lute before. He might hear the sound of a lute and say, ‘What, my good men, is that sound—so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling?’ They would say, ‘That, sire, is called a lute, whose sound is so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling.’ Then he would say, ‘Go & fetch me that lute.’ They would fetch the lute and say, ‘Here, sire, is the lute whose sound is so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling.’ He would say, ‘Enough of your lute. Fetch me just the sound.’ Then they would say, ‘This lute, sire, is made of numerous components, a great many components. It’s through the activity of numerous components that it sounds: that is, in dependence on the body, the skin, the neck, the frame, the strings, the bridge, and the appropriate human effort. Thus it is that this lute—made of numerous components, a great many components—sounds through the activity of numerous components.’

“Then the king would split the lute into ten pieces, a hundred pieces. Having split the lute into ten pieces, a hundred pieces, he would shave it to splinters. Having shaved it to splinters, he would burn it in a fire. Having burned it in a fire,

he would reduce it to ashes. Having reduced it to ashes, he would winnow it before a high wind or let it be washed away by a swift-flowing stream. He would then say, ‘A sorry thing, this lute—whatever a lute may be—by which people have been so thoroughly tricked & deceived.’

“In the same way, a monk investigates form, however far form may go. He investigates feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, however far consciousness may go. As he is investigating form... feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, however far consciousness may go, any thoughts of ‘me’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’ do not occur to him.” — [SN 35:205](#)

§ 98. “Monks, where there is a self, would there be [the thought,] ‘belonging to my self’?” — “Yes, lord.”

“Or, monks, where there is what belongs to self, would there be [the thought,] ‘my self’?” — “Yes, lord.”

“Monks, where a self or what belongs to self are not pinned down as a truth or reality, then the view-position—‘This cosmos is the self. After death this I will be constant, permanent, eternal, not subject to change. I will stay just like that for an eternity’—Isn’t it utterly & completely a fool’s teaching?” — [MN 22](#)

§ 99. “If one stays obsessed with form, monk, that’s what one is measured by [or: limited to]. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“If one stays obsessed with feeling.... perception.... fabrications....

“If one stays obsessed with consciousness, that’s what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that’s how one is classified.

“But if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, monk, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling.... perception.... fabrications....

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified.”

— [SN 22:36](#)

THE STILLING OF FABRICATIONS

§ 100. [Visakha:] “And what, lady, are bodily fabrications, what are verbal fabrications, what are mental fabrications?”

[Sister Dhammadinna:] “In-&-out breathing is bodily, bound up with the body, therefore is it called a *bodily fabrication*. Having directed one’s thought and evaluated [the matter], one breaks into speech. Therefore directed thought & evaluation are called *verbal fabrications*. Perception & feeling are mental, bound up with the mind. Therefore perception & feeling are called *mental fabrications*.”

— *MN* 44.

§ 101. “Now how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit?

“There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

“[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ [3] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’ [4] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.’

“[5] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.’ [6] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.’ [7] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.’ [8] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.’

“[9] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.’ [10] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in gladdening the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out gladdening

the mind.’ [11] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in steadying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out steadying the mind.’ [12] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in releasing the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out releasing the mind.’

“[13] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.’ [14] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on dispassion [*literally, fading*].’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.’ [15] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on cessation.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on cessation.’ [16] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.’

“This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit.” — [*MN 118*](#)

§ 102. “Suppose there was a mountain cow—foolish, inexperienced, unfamiliar with her pasture, unskilled in roaming on rugged mountains—and she were to think, ‘What if I were to go in a direction I have never gone before, to eat grass I have never eaten before, to drink water I have never drunk before!’ She would lift her hind hoof without having placed her front hoof firmly and [as a result] would not get to go in a direction she had never gone before, to eat grass she had never eaten before, or to drink water she had never drunk before. And as for the place where she was standing when the thought occurred to her, ‘What if I were to go where I have never been before... to drink water I have never drunk before,’ she would not return there safely. Why is that? Because she is a foolish, inexperienced mountain cow, unfamiliar with her pasture, unskilled in roaming on rugged mountains.

“In the same way, there are cases where a monk—foolish, inexperienced, unfamiliar with his pasture, unskilled in... entering & remaining in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation—doesn’t stick with that theme, doesn’t develop it, pursue it, or establish himself firmly in it. The thought occurs to him, ‘What if I, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, were to enter & remain in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance.’ He is not able... to enter & remain in the second jhana.... The thought occurs to him, ‘What if I...

were to enter & remain in the first jhana.... He is not able... to enter & remain in the first jhana. This is called a monk who has slipped & fallen from both sides, like the mountain cow, foolish, inexperienced, unfamiliar with her pasture, unskilled in roaming on rugged mountains.

“But suppose there was a mountain cow—wise, experienced, familiar with her pasture, skilled in roaming on rugged mountains—and she were to think, ‘What if I were to go in a direction I have never gone before, to eat grass I have never eaten before, to drink water I have never drunk before!’ She would lift her hind hoof only after having placed her front hoof firmly and [as a result] would get to go in a direction she had never gone before... to drink water she had never drunk before. And as for the place where she was standing when the thought occurred to her, ‘What if I were to go in a direction I have never gone before... to drink water I have never drunk before,’ she would return there safely. Why is that? Because she is a wise, experienced mountain cow, familiar with her pasture, skilled in roaming on rugged mountains.

“In the same way, there are some cases where a monk—wise, experienced, familiar with his pasture, skilled in... entering & remaining in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation—sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, & establishes himself firmly in it.

“The thought occurs to him, ‘What if, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I were to enter & remain in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance.’ Without jumping at the second jhana, he—with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations—enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. He sticks with that theme, develops it, pursues it, & establishes himself firmly in it. [Similarly with the remaining concentration attainments.]” — [AN 9:35](#).

§ 103. “Suppose that an archer or archer’s apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought &

evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, a void, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite — the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding.’

“Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the effluents. Or, if not, then through this very Dhamma-passion, this Dhamma-delight, and through the total wasting away of the first five fetters [self-identity views, grasping at habits & practices, uncertainty, sensual passion, and irritation]—he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“‘I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhana.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

“[Similarly with the second, third, and fourth jhana.]

“... Suppose that an archer or archer's apprentice were to practice on a straw man or mound of clay, so that after a while he would become able to shoot long distances, to fire accurate shots in rapid succession, and to pierce great masses. In the same way, there is the case where a monk... enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness, as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the property of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite — the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding.’

“Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the effluents. Or, if not, then—through this very Dhamma-passion, this very Dhamma-delight, and from the total wasting away of the first five fetters—he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world....

“[Similarly with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness and the dimension of nothingness.]” — [AN 9:36](#)

§ 104. Ven. Ananda: “There is the case, householder, where a monk, secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He reflects on this and discerns, ‘This first jhana is fabricated & intended. Now whatever is fabricated & intended is inconstant & subject to cessation.’ Staying right there, he reaches the ending of the effluents. Or, if not, then—through this very Dhamma-passion, this Dhamma-delight, and from the total wasting away of the five lower fetters [self-identity views, grasping at habits & practices, uncertainty, sensual passion, and irritation]—he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world....

“[Similarly with the second, third, and fourth jhanas.]” — *AN 11:17*

§ 105. “And I have also taught the step-by-step cessation of fabrications. When one has attained the first jhana, speech has ceased. When one has attained the second jhana, directed thoughts & evaluations have ceased. When one has attained the third jhana, rapture has ceased. When one has attained the fourth jhana, in-and-out breathing has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of the infinitude of space, the perception of forms has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of space has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of nothingness, the perception of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness has ceased. When one has attained the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, the perception of the dimension of nothingness has ceased. When one has attained the cessation of perception & feeling, perception & feeling have ceased. When a monk’s effluents have ended, passion has ceased, aversion has ceased, delusion has ceased.” — *SN 36:11*

§ 106. “This, monks, the Tathagata discerns. And he discerns that these standpoints, thus seized, thus grasped at, lead to such & such a destination, to such & such a state in the world beyond. And he discerns what is higher than this. And yet discerning that, he does not grasp at that act of discerning. And as he is not grasping at it, unbinding [*nibbuti*] is experienced right within. Knowing, as they have come to be, the origin, ending, allure, & drawbacks of feelings, along

with the escape from feelings, the Tathagata, monks—through lack of clinging/sustenance—is released.” — [DN 1](#)

STAGES OF AWAKENING

§ 107. “There are these ten fetters. Which ten? Five lower fetters & five higher fetters. And which are the five lower fetters? Self-identity views, uncertainty, grasping at habits & practices, sensual desire, and ill will. These are the five lower fetters. And which are the five higher fetters? Passion for form, passion for what is formless, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. These are the five higher fetters. And these are the ten fetters.” — [AN 10:13](#).

§ 108. “There are in this community of monks, monks who, with the wasting away of [the first] three fetters, are stream-enterers, never again destined for states of woe, steadfast, headed for self-awakening....

“There are... monks who, with the wasting away of [the first] three fetters and the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, are once-returners. After returning only once to this world they will put an end to stress....

“There are... monks who, with the wasting away of the five lower fetters, are due to be spontaneously reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world....

“There are... monks who are arahants, whose effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis.” — [MN 118](#)

§ 109. “There is the case where a monk is wholly accomplished in virtue, moderately accomplished in concentration, and moderately accomplished in discernment.... With the wasting away of [the first] three fetters, he is a stream-enterer, never again destined for states of woe, steadfast, headed for self-awakening.

“There is the case where a monk is wholly accomplished in virtue, moderately accomplished in concentration, and moderately accomplished in discernment.... With the wasting away of [the first] three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, he is a once-returner, who—after returning only once to this world—will put an end to stress.

“There is the case where a monk is wholly accomplished in virtue, wholly accomplished in concentration, and moderately accomplished in discernment.... With the wasting away of the five lower fetters, he is due to be spontaneously reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“There is the case where a monk is wholly accomplished in virtue, wholly accomplished in concentration, wholly accomplished in discernment.... With the ending of the effluents, he enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release and discernment-release, having directly known and realized them for himself right in the here-&-now.” — [AN 3:87](#)

§ 110. Unimpassionate for passion,
not impassioned for dispassion,
he [the arahant] has nothing here
that he’s grasped as supreme. — [Sn 4:4](#)

THE BLISS OF TOTAL FREEDOM

§ III. I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Sariputta was staying near Rajagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Sanctuary. There he said to the monks, "This Unbinding is pleasant, friends. This Unbinding is pleasant."

When this was said, Ven. Udayin said to Ven. Sariputta, "But what is the pleasure here, my friend, where there is nothing felt?"

"Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is nothing felt. There are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing; sounds cognizable via the ear... smells cognizable via the nose... tastes cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. Whatever pleasure or joy arises in dependence on these five strings of sensuality, that is sensual pleasure.

"Now there is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *sensuality*, that is an affliction for him. Just as pain arises as an affliction in a healthy person for his affliction, even so the attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality that beset the monk is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how Unbinding is pleasant.

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *directed thought*, that is an affliction for him....

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the fading of rapture, remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *rapture*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joy & distress—enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *equanimity*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *form*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of the infinitude of space*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness*, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with *the dimension of nothingness*, that is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how Unbinding is pleasant.

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his effluents are completely ended. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how Unbinding is pleasant.” — [AN 9:34](#).

§ 112. With the stilling of consciousness, the monk

free from hunger
is totally unbound....
While those who comprehend contact,
delighting in stilling through discernment,
they, by breaking through contact,
free from hunger,
are totally unbound....
See the world, together with its devas:
conceiving not-self to be self.
Entrenched in name & form,
they conceive that 'This is true.'
In whatever terms they conceive it
it turns into something other than that,
and that's what's false about it:
changing,
it's deceptive by nature.
Undeceptive by nature
is Unbinding:
That the noble ones know
as true.
They, by breaking through
to the truth,
free from hunger,
are totally unbound. — [Sn 3:12](#)

§ 113. Centered,
alert,
mindful,
the Awakened One's
disciple
discerns searches,
how searches come into play,
where they cease,
& the path to their ending.

With the ending of searches, a monk
free from hunger
is totally unbound. — *Iti 54*

§ 114. [Ven. Nandaka:] “Just as if a skilled butcher or butcher’s apprentice, having killed a cow, were to carve it up with a sharp carving knife so that—without damaging the substance of the inner flesh, without damaging the substance of the outer hide—he would cut, sever, & detach only the skin muscles, connective tissues, & attachments in between. Having cut, severed, & detached the outer skin, and then covering the cow again with that very skin, if he were to say that the cow was joined to the skin just as it had been: would he be speaking rightly?”

[Some nuns:] “No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because if the skilled butcher or butcher’s apprentice, having killed a cow, were to... cut, sever, & detach only the skin muscles, connective tissues, & attachments in between; and... having covered the cow again with that very skin, then no matter how much he might say that the cow was joined to the skin just as it had been, the cow would still be disjoined from the skin.”

“This simile, sisters, I have given to convey a message. The message is this: The substance of the inner flesh stands for the six internal media; the substance of the outer hide, for the six external media. The skin muscles, connective tissues, & attachments in between stand for passion & delight. And the sharp knife stands for noble discernment—the noble discernment that cuts, severs, & detaches the defilements, fetters, & bonds in between.” — *MN 146*

§ 115. “Monks, an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person feels feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. A well-instructed disciple of the noble ones also feels feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain. So what difference, what distinction, what distinguishing factor is there between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person?”

“For us, lord, the teachings have the Blessed One as their root, their guide, & their arbitrator. It would be good if the Blessed One himself would explicate the meaning of this statement. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will remember it.”

“In that case, monks, listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows. In the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental.

“As he is touched by that painful feeling, he is resistant. Any resistance-obsession with regard to that painful feeling obsesses him. Touched by that painful feeling, he delights in sensuality. Why is that? Because the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person does not discern any escape from painful feeling aside from sensuality. As he is delighting in sensuality, any passion-obsession with regard to that feeling of pleasure obsesses him. He does not discern, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling. As he does not discern the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then any ignorance-obsession with regard to that feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain obsesses him.

“Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it as though joined with it. Sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it as though joined with it. Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he senses it as though joined with it. This is called an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person joined with birth, aging, & death; with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is joined, I tell you, with suffering & stress.

“Now, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones, when touched with a feeling of pain, does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, does not beat his breast or become distraught. So he feels one pain: physical, but not mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, did not shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pain of only one arrow. In the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, does not beat his breast or become distraught. He feels one pain: physical, but not mental.

“As he is touched by that painful feeling, he is not resistant. No resistance-obsession with regard to that painful feeling obsesses him. Touched by that painful feeling, he does not delight in sensuality. Why is that? Because the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns an escape from painful feeling aside from sensuality. As he is not delighting in sensuality, no passion-obsession with regard to that feeling of pleasure obsesses him. He discerns, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, and escape from that feeling. As he discerns the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, and escape from that feeling, no ignorance-obsession with regard to that feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain obsesses him.

“Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, he senses it disjoined from it. This is called a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones disjoined from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is disjoined, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“This is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person.” — [SN 36:6](#)

§ 116. “Just as an oil lamp burns in dependence on oil & wick; and from the termination of the oil & wick—and from not being provided any other sustenance—it goes out unnourished; even so, when sensing a feeling limited to the body, one discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.’ When sensing a feeling limited to life, one discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to life.’ One discerns that ‘With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is sensed, not being relished, will grow cold right here.’

“Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for discernment, for this—the knowledge of the passing away of all suffering & stress—is the highest noble discernment.

“His release, being founded on truth, does not fluctuate, for whatever is deceptive is false; Unbinding—the undeceptive—is true. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for truth, for this—Unbinding, the undeceptive—is the highest noble truth.” — [MN 140](#)

§ 117. “Even so, Vaccha, any form by which one describing the Tathagata would describe him: That the Tathagata has abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, Vaccha, the Tathagata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does & does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.

“Any feeling.... Any perception.... Any fabrication....

“Any consciousness by which one describing the Tathagata would describe him: That the Tathagata has abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of consciousness, Vaccha, the Tathagata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean.” — [MN 72](#)

§ 118. “Freed, dissociated, & released from ten things, Bahuna, the Tathagata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Which ten? Freed, dissociated, & released from form, the Tathagata dwells with unrestricted awareness. Freed, dissociated, & released from feeling... Freed, dissociated, & released from perception... Freed, dissociated, & released from fabrications... Freed, dissociated, & released from consciousness... Freed, dissociated, & released from birth... Freed, dissociated, & released from aging... Freed, dissociated, & released from death... Freed, dissociated, & released from stress... Freed, dissociated, & released from defilement, the Tathagata dwells with unrestricted awareness.

“Just as a red, blue, or white lotus born in the water and growing in the water, rises up above the water and stands with no water adhering to it, in the same way the Tathagata—freed, dissociated, & released from these ten things—dwells with unrestricted awareness.” — [AN 10:81](#)

Glossary

Arahant: A “worthy one” or “pure one”; a person whose mind is free of defilement and is thus not subject to further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and his highest level of noble disciples.

Asava: Effluent; fermentation. Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that “flow out” of the mind and create the flood of the round of death and rebirth.

Bodhisatta: A being (*satta*) intent on awakening (*bodhi*). The Buddha’s term for himself prior to his awakening.

Brahman: A member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth. In a specifically Buddhist usage, “brahman” can also mean an arahant, conveying the point that excellence is based not on birth or race, but on the qualities attained in the mind.

Deva (devata): Literally, “shining one.” An inhabitant of the heavenly realms.

Dhamma: (1) Event; action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) *nibbana* (although there are passages describing nibbana as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma*.

Gotama: The Buddha’s clan name.

Jhana: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion. This term is related to the verb *jhayati*, which means to burn with a still, steady flame.

Nibbana: Literally, the “unbinding” of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. In the time of the Buddha, the fire property was believed to cling to its fuel while burning, and to be released when it let go. Used to describe the liberated mind, the implication is that the mind is not trapped by fabrications. Rather, it is trapped by its own clinging to fabrications and will find freedom when it learns to let go. Sanskrit form: *Nirvana*.

Tathagata: Literally, “one who has become authentic (*tatha-agata*)” or “one who is truly gone (*tatha-gata*).” An epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline. The Buddha’s name for his own teaching was “this Dhamma-&-Vinaya.”

Abbreviations

<i>AN</i>	<i>Anguttara Nikaya</i>
<i>Dhp</i>	<i>Dhammapada</i>
<i>DN</i>	<i>Digha Nikaya</i>
<i>Iti</i>	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
<i>MN</i>	<i>Majjhima Nikaya</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Samyutta Nikaya</i>
<i>Sn</i>	<i>Sutta Nipata</i>
<i>Ud</i>	<i>Udana</i>

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