



THROUGH  
THE DOORS  
TO THE  
DEATHLESS

# *Through the Doors to the Deathless*

AWAKENING WHILE  
LISTENING TO THE DHAMMA

Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

*“Open are the doors to the deathless.  
Let those with ears show their conviction.”*  
— [MN 26](#)

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ISBN: 979-8-90281-187-9 (ebook)

ISBN: 979-8-90281-186-2 (print)

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Valley Center, CA 92082-1409  
U.S.A.

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## *Acknowledgements & Notes*

- As the Buddha once said, all things are rooted in desire ([AN 10:58](#)). This book is no exception. It was born of a desire to see what could be learned by collecting all the cases in the Pāli Canon—the oldest extant complete canon of the Buddha’s Dhamma, or teachings—where people gained awakening while listening to the Dhamma. What was distinctive about those Dhamma talks? What qualities of attention and intention did the listeners have to bring to the act of listening in order to get such results?

After organizing the relevant passages, I tried to draw some conclusions, which I have gathered here. But I have also included full texts of the passages so that other readers could draw additional conclusions of their own.

- I could not have completed this book without the help of many individuals. In addition to the monks here at the monastery, these include: Andrea Kessler, Virginia Lawrence, Georgi Lyapkin, Xeying Ng, Addie Onsanit, Julia Uddèn, and Xiaoxi Wang. Any mistakes that remain in the book are, of course, my own responsibility.

- The text of the book contains many references to the Pāli Canon. References to where these passages can be found in the Canon are placed in parentheses ( ). If the passages can also be found in the readings included in this book, they have the passage number placed in brackets [ ]. So, for instance, ([MN 2](#) [[§32](#)]) indicates a passage from Majjhima Nikāya 2 that is also passage [§32](#) in this book.

- Finally, when the Buddha first decided to teach, he said that the doors to the deathless were open. This means that the attainment of the



deathless is the central focus of his teachings. It's what constitutes awakening, and so is the central focus of this book as well. However, the Buddha's approach to reaching the deathless was based on one of his most original insights: It could be found by recognizing and solving the problem of *dukkha*. In fact, the act of solving this problem was so central to his message that he once said that all he taught was *dukkha* and the ending of *dukkha* ([MN 22](#); [SN 22:86](#)). This means that *dukkha* is a good word to know if you want to understand his teachings and use them for their intended purpose.

Its primary meaning is simple enough—*pain*—but it covers all levels of pain and discomfort, from acute physical suffering and mental anguish to subtle levels of stress in very refined, even blissful, states of mind. Unfortunately, there's no single English word that can encompass all these levels of intensity. For this reason, in the course of this book, I will usually translate *dukkha* as *suffering*, but there are also times when I use *pain* or *stress* where appropriate, to make the point that the Buddha is referring to pain on every level. Keep in mind that these words denote different levels of the same thing.

*Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*  
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

METTA FOREST MONASTERY  
SEPTEMBER, 2026

# *Introduction*

The Pāli Canon contains records of some of the most remarkable communications ever:

- The Buddha or one of his noble disciples is giving a Dhamma talk or conducting a conversation.
- Listeners take his words, use them to examine their own minds,
- and gain a noble attainment, or level of awakening, on the spot.

This means that they experience a deathless dimension, outside of space and time, and cut through some or all of the ten fetters that bind the mind to the process of repeated becoming and birth.

We read these records and sometimes forget how extraordinary they are. They show the power of words in space and time to bring about an experience beyond space and time. They're evidence that the Buddha not only attained the deathless in line with his aspirations, but was also able to use words strategically to bring others to experience that dimension as well.

These records are important not only in reference to the past, but also for us in the present. They highlight the Buddha's purpose in teaching the Dhamma and the means by which he achieved that purpose. From them, we can gain lessons in how to master those means so as to achieve that purpose within ourselves.

This book is an attempt to draw out those lessons by gathering all the Canonical records of these communications in one place, analyzing them in line with the Buddha's own observations about what's needed



for this sort of communication to yield an experience of awakening then and there.

In some cases, the records convey only the outline of what was said on those occasions. In others, they seem to be more complete. Some give a bare minimum of a background on the listeners; others provide more. Using the Buddha's own analysis of what's going on in the mind of a person who gains a noble attainment, plus other information from the Canon or our knowledge of Indian thought in the Buddha's time, we can fill in some of the blanks in the individual accounts.

But we have to be clear from the start that many blanks simply cannot be filled in. When people gain awakening while listening to the Dhamma, they're not coming with empty slates, and they're not just listening. They're bringing their own assumptions and questions to the Dhamma, along with their own ability to engage in what the Buddha identified as the two qualities needed to nourish the Dhamma within them: commitment and reflection ([AN 10:73](#)). They commit to bringing their minds to concentration while listening, and then use their discernment to reflect on where they can detect any suffering or stress, along with its causes, there in that steady state of mind. On top of that, the Buddha tells us that their karmic background—which can extend to past lives—also plays a role in determining how capable they will be in putting the Dhamma to the best use.

Those are some of the unknowns on the side of the listeners. Then there are the unknowns on the side of the speakers. Only rarely do the accounts give us a glimpse of what's going on, say, in the Buddha's mind as he prepares to speak on occasions of this sort. The glimpses they do afford us are these: On some occasions, he sees that a particular person has faculties ripe for understanding the Dhamma ([Ud 5:3](#)) or for gaining full release ([MN 147 \[§47\]](#)). On another, he questions himself

as to the best way to bring a group of listeners to full awakening ([SN 15:13](#) [[§52](#)]). There's even a case where we're told that he suffused a particularly difficult person with goodwill before leading that person to a first glimpse of awakening ([Mv 6:36](#).1–5). However, it's hard to imagine that the Buddha didn't reflect in these ways in other cases, or that he didn't extend strong goodwill to everyone he taught. There's also the question of exactly how much he could read in the minds of his listeners and how much he adjusted his message to fit with what he read. On top of that, there's the question of what karmic relationships the Buddha and the listener had with each other in the past.

So it's not the case that the Buddha was simply speaking, and a listener simply listening, when their communication resulted in the listener's awakening while the Buddha spoke. The written records don't tell us everything that was going on. Much of the communication must have been non-verbal, taking place in the context of multi-life stories that we can only guess at.

Still, there's a lot that *can* be learned from the fragmentary records we do have, both in terms of common patterns they show of the process of awakening, and in terms of the variations that different teaching strategies can work on those patterns.

The common patterns indicate the dynamic of awakening in any mind. Prominent examples include the graduated discourses, or step-by-step talks, with which the Buddha introduced lay listeners to the four noble truths. We have no full account of any of these discourses. We don't even have an outline. All we have is a list of the topics: giving, virtue, heaven; the drawbacks of, degradation in, and defilement in sensuality; and the rewards of renunciation. The Canon records 30 instances in which the Buddha gave a discourse based on this list, leading his listeners to their first glimpse of the deathless. Because he

gave these discourses to a wide variety of people—everywhere from kings to lepers and would-be assassins—it's safe to assume that the details differed, sometimes radically, from case to case. But what's important is the sequence of the underlying list: It shows the dynamic by which a mind normally immersed in sensuality can be brought, step by step, to a state where it can benefit fully from the Buddha's core teaching.

Similarly, there's the Buddha's questionnaire applying the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self to the five aggregates, past, present, and future. We'll discuss this questionnaire in more detail in Chapter 4. Here we can simply note that its purpose is to highlight the drawbacks of the aggregates so that the listeners will comprehend the suffering involved in clinging to them. Reflecting on these drawbacks, they'll be inclined to abandon any craving for the aggregates, thus fulfilling the duties with regard to the noble truths. We'll see that this questionnaire, or variations on it, is employed again and again in the passages collected here.

We should also note, though, that when the Buddha or one of his disciples is bringing a listener to awakening, he uses this questionnaire only when the listener is already familiar with the noble truths and the duties appropriate to them. Seeing this pattern helps us to understand the role of the three perceptions: as strategies for carrying out the duties of the noble truths, inducing dispassion in those who are already aware of the positive role of dispassion in bringing suffering to an end. In other words, the four noble truths provide the context for the three perceptions, and not the other way around. This is a point we will encounter repeatedly in this book. For the purposes of understanding and attaining awakening, it's important to keep in mind.

As for the variations on the patterns: There's sometimes a tendency to define the Dhamma in terms of lists of qualities said to be the Buddha's basic teachings, the belief being that if you want to know the Dhamma, you have to know all the names on the lists. And it is true that the Buddha did tend to explain things in terms of lists, with each name on each list precisely defined. A prime example is the group of seven lists of dhammas in the Wings to Awakening that the Buddha encouraged all his monks to know in order to keep the Dhamma alive ([DN 16](#)).

However, the suttas (discourses) and Vinaya (collections of monastic rules) contain many stories of how people gained awakening when learning only a few concepts or fragments of a framework—such as the causal framework of the four noble truths. In some cases, awakening was induced even just through the use of vivid similes—showing that the similes in these texts are not purely decorative, but play a crucial role in transmitting the Dhamma. In other cases, a listener was presented with a riddle and gained awakening by exercising his ingenuity and intuition in figuring out how the riddle applied to his own mind.

What mattered in every case was that the teaching strategy employed was successful in getting the listener to thoroughly eradicate clinging of every sort.

This observation is what justifies many practice traditions in devising their own techniques for putting an end to clinging. Not all the Dhamma is in the Canon. Whatever other teachings get the same effect count as Dhamma as well.

As we'll see, one of the Buddha's master lists—dependent co-arising, his explanation of the causes leading to suffering—explains why a variety of approaches can work in freeing the mind ([SN 12:20](#) [[§13](#)]).

The list contains many feedback loops, making all the factors mutually dependent. This means that developing dispassion for any pair of factors in the list can unravel the whole sequence and bring it down.

There's some irony in the fact that the structure of this master list—the most complicated and extensive of the Buddha's teachings—shows why there were cases where the Buddha's listeners could gain awakening without knowing any of the names of the factors in any list at all. But the Buddha didn't let that irony get in his way. He used the complexity of dependent co-arising in such a direct manner that he could get even some of his most uneducated listeners to abandon their clingings and achieve awakening.

So the passages here show both the common dynamic of the process of awakening and the wide variety of strategies by which that process can be induced. In doing so, they show the Dhamma, not as a body of words to define, but as a collaborative communication between real human beings so as to free hearts and minds. To understand the Dhamma, you always have to remember this living human context. It's within that context, heart to heart, that the Dhamma stays alive.

This book is divided into two parts.

The first part—Chapters 1 through 3—deals with theory. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a general background on the noble attainments, covering what can be gleaned from the suttas about the insights required for the various levels and about the fetters abandoned with each. Chapter 3 examines the Buddha's own analysis of what a listener has to bring to the Dhamma in order to awaken while listening to it. Readings from the suttas supplement the discussions in these chapters.

The second part—Chapters 4 through 8—contains readings from the suttas and Vinaya, gathering the accounts we have of people gaining a

noble attainment while listening to the Dhamma and dividing them by categories. I haven't included all the instances where the Buddha taught the graduated discourse, as those accounts are all identical. Otherwise, all the relevant accounts are here.

In this part of the book, the readings form the core of each chapter. In every chapter, they are prefaced by a commentary aimed at highlighting what seem to be the most important features of the readings, adding background information wherever that helps to make the readings clearer. Central to this background information are the lessons derived from Chapter 3, analyzing what happens in these passages in the Buddha's own terms.

Chapter 4 treats the earliest instances in which the Buddha brought his listeners to awakening, establishing many teaching strategies that he and his disciples continued to use in the following years. Chapters 5 through 8 contain passages reporting the remaining instances where listeners gained awakening while listening to the Dhamma, divided according to the level(s) of awakening gained.

I've included only the passages where the Canon itself clearly says that the listeners achieved particular noble attainments. There are passages where the Canon is more vague about the listeners' attainments—such as [Sn 5](#)—and those for which the Commentary makes specific claims, but I haven't included those passages, so as to keep the discussion clearly focused.

I hope that the material gathered here helps to open the doors to the deathless for you.

# 1 : Noble Attainments

To appreciate what happens when a person gains a noble attainment while listening to the Dhamma, it's good first to have an idea of what, in general, the noble attainments entail.

The Pāḷi Canon describes four noble attainments, which differ from one another primarily in terms of the number of lifetimes remaining before the total unbinding (*nibbāna*) of the person who has attained them. From the lowest to the highest, these levels are:

*stream-entry*, which guarantees that rebirth will occur no more than seven more times before total unbinding, and never on a level lower than the human;

*once-return*, which guarantees that there will be only one more rebirth, on the human level, before total unbinding;

*non-return*, which guarantees rebirth in a Brahmā world, there to gain total unbinding; and

*arahantship*, which entails total unbinding here and now, and guarantees absolute freedom from rebirth.

These attainments also differ from one another in terms of the fetters cut at each attainment.

At stream-entry, three fetters are cut: self-identity views, doubt, and grasping at habits and practices.

At once-return, no extra fetters are cut, but passion, aversion, and delusion are weakened.

At non-return, two extra fetters are cut: sensual desire and ill will.



At arahantship, five extra fetters are cut: passion for form, passion for what is formless, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

In the cases recorded in the Canon, the people who gain a noble attainment while listening to a talk fall into only three of these categories: stream-entry, non-return, and arahantship. So those are the only three attainments we'll focus on here.

As we'll see, each of the attainments has its own variations in the path leading there, but they also have certain patterns in common. The next chapter will focus on the variations. This chapter will focus on commonalities.

Each level of attainment follows on the coming together of all the factors of the noble eightfold path:

right view,  
right resolve,  
right speech,  
right action,  
right livelihood,  
right effort,  
right mindfulness, and  
right concentration.

The path to arahantship adds two further factors:

right knowledge and  
right release.

A path composed of this many factors may seem like a lot to keep in mind, especially while listening to a Dhamma talk, but in practice, as

the path matures, its factors come down to two sorts: attention and intention.

Attention—the choice of which questions you pay attention to—covers right view ([MN 2](#) [§32]).

Intention—what you purposefully do in response to an act of attention—covers all the remaining factors.

Right view places the issue of stress and suffering front and center. It's expressed in the four noble truths of—

suffering,  
its cause or origination,  
the fact that it can cease, and  
the path of practice leading to its cessation.

For acts of attention to be in line with right view, you have to direct them at understanding the four noble truths—in their *definitions*, in the overall *structure* of their interactions, and in their *duties*—and then at questioning your experience in line with that framework.

The *definitions* are these:

Suffering is the act of clinging to the five aggregates: activities of form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness.

Its cause or origination is three types of craving:

craving for sensuality—passion and desire for sensual fantasies;  
craving for becoming (*bhava*)—passion and desire for an object  
in a particular world of experience, along with the desire to  
take on an identity in that world so as to gain that object;  
and

craving for non-becoming—the desire to see a particular becoming destroyed.

The cessation of suffering is attained through total dispassion for those three types of craving.

The path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering is the noble eightfold path.

The *overall structure* of these truths follows a standard problem-solving approach, such as a doctor would take when approaching a disease. You start with the symptoms, find the cause, state the prognosis that the symptoms can be ended by ending the cause, and show the path of action that's needed to end the cause. One of the Buddha's most distinctive insights was that the path to the highest spiritual goal, unconditioned happiness, began by approaching the problem of suffering in this way.

To solve the problem of suffering, each of the four truths entails a *duty*. Suffering is to be comprehended, its origination abandoned, its cessation realized or verified, and the path to its cessation developed.

Notice that the type of attention the Buddha recommends in terms of right view is not bare attention. For him, all attention is selective, and boils down to two types: *appropriate*, paying attention to questions that help solve the problem of suffering; and *inappropriate*, paying attention to questions that get in the way of solving that problem.

That's right view.

The remaining factors of the noble eightfold path carry out the intention to fulfill the duties appropriate to each truth. If you look carefully at those factors, you see that—beginning with right resolve—they all aim at developing right concentration, which the Buddha identifies as the heart of the path, with all the other factors its supports ([MN 117](#)).

It's important to note at the outset, however, that even though right view emphasizes issues of attention, and the remaining factors emphasize intention, these two qualities are not entirely distinct in practice. After all, the Buddha said that his intention in teaching the four noble truths—focused on how to solve the problem of suffering—was to achieve the compassionate aim of helping others to bring their sufferings to an end ([SN 56:31](#)). As for the remaining factors of the path, they require that you pay attention to becoming more and more observant of the mind for the purpose of bringing it into concentration. Once the mind is in right concentration, it can observe itself most clearly. This enables right view to see subtle aspects of the four noble truths in action that it wouldn't have seen otherwise.

This means that right view and right concentration, working together, are the most important factors of the path. They are also the most important factors that need to be brought to the act of listening to the Dhamma, as you learn to adjust and refine your powers of attention and intention to benefit from the act of listening. As we'll see in Chapter 3, these are precisely two of the three main factors that the Buddha himself identified as essential for gaining the most out of listening to the Dhamma. The third factor, joyful conviction, is what energizes the other two.

Right concentration plays a role in attaining all four levels of the noble attainments, even though it's not fully mastered until the level of non-return.

As for right view, when it's based on right concentration, it plays the most decisive role in reaching all the noble attainments. Its level of subtlety is what determines which noble attainment is reached, although the issues it deals with are basically the same on all levels: focused on mastering the duties of the four noble truths.

This is shown by the passages that discuss how appropriate attention is applied in practice. [SN 46:51](#) [[§33](#)] explains how appropriate attention functions in starving the hindrances to concentration—in line with the duty of abandoning the causes of suffering—and in feeding the factors for awakening, in line with the duty of developing the path. The hindrances are fully starved at the level of non-return; the factors for awakening, when fully developed, can take the mind all the way to arahantship.

[SN 22:122](#) [[§34](#)] is especially clear in showing how appropriate attention functions with regard to each level of noble attainment. It focuses on the duty related to the first noble truth: comprehending suffering in terms of the five clinging-aggregates.

Comprehension is defined in [SN 22:23](#) as knowing something to the point of ending all passion, aversion, and delusion around it. [SN 22:5](#) and 22:26, taken together, show that the discernment needed to put an end to passion involves five steps. Noticing that you have passion for particular fabrications—i.e., any phenomena put together by the mind—you look for the:

1. *origination* of the fabrications in question—in other words, what events in the mind give rise to them; then you look for their
2. *passing away*; for their
3. *allure*; for their
4. *drawbacks*; and for the
5. *escape* from them, which is the subduing of desire and passion around them.

Keep this five-step program in mind, because we'll encounter it frequently in the course of this book. The first two of these steps focus on the *fact* of fabrication; the last three, on the *value* of those

fabrications. Discerning the origination and passing away of the fabrications in question, you realize that they don't just happen on their own. You're involved in the effort of producing them. You also realize that, because they're assembled by causes, they'll have to fall apart when those causes end. By comparing their drawbacks with their allure, you come to the value judgment that they're not worth the effort that goes into them. When this judgment inspires dispassion for that effort, you stop fabricating them. They cease—and when they cease, there's total release.

The eleven perceptions recommended in [SN 22:122](#) play a role in this five-step program, in the step of focusing on the drawbacks of clinging to the five aggregates. Even though these aggregates may have their positive side, you have to focus on their negative side if you want to be free of the clinging that turns them into suffering ([SN 22:60](#)).

The eleven perceptions in [SN 22:122](#) do just that: They focus on the negative side of the aggregates. The eleven are these: seeing the aggregates as “inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self.” The best way to remember them is to regard them as expansions of the three perceptions typically recommended in the Canon for the purpose of developing dispassion:

*inconstant* — a dissolution;

*stressful* — a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction;

*not-self* — alien, an emptiness.

By using any of these perceptions to foster dispassion for the aggregates, you fulfill the duty of comprehending the first noble truth. At the same time, that dispassion inspires you to fulfill two other duties:

abandoning the craving that constitutes the second noble truth and realizing the dispassion that constitutes the third.

It's important to note that [SN 22:122](#) throws light on two points that are specifically relevant to the issue of gaining awakening while listening to the Dhamma.

- First, it recommends applying the same perceptions to the same aggregates regardless of whether you've already attained a noble attainment, or—if you have—regardless of what level you've already attained.

- Second, it shows how the three perceptions and their variations are used to fulfill the duties of the noble truths. In other words, as we noted in the Introduction, the four noble truths and their duties provide the context for understanding the three perceptions, and not the other way around, as is sometimes assumed.

As we'll see, both of these points will be reflected in the talks that inspire their listeners to gain a noble attainment while listening: a) None of the talks seem to be aimed at one level of attainment rather another. A talk that inspires stream-entry in one listener can also inspire arahantship in another listener. b) The talks that include the three perceptions are given only to listeners already familiar with the four noble truths.

These are some points that can be gleaned from [SN 22:122](#). However, that sutta gives only a partial picture of how useful the Buddha's five-step program can be. In actual practice, the program has to be applied not only to the first noble truth, but also to the fourth—the path to the end of suffering—after that path has completed its work. After all, the path is fabricated ([Iti 90](#)). If you want to find a happiness free from the drawbacks of fabrication, you can't allow for there to be

any clinging to any fabrication at all. Now, you do have to begin the practice with a sense of passion for the path, because it won't develop on its own. But once it's done its work, you have to let go of that passion if you want to be truly free. Because each level of noble attainment involves an experience of the deathless, this letting go has to occur at every level: temporarily at the lower levels, once and for all at the highest.

As we'll see below, the Canon makes this point quite explicitly in two prominent passages. Unfortunately, it provides no similes to give an idea of how passion for the path is temporarily abandoned at each of the lower levels, only to be fostered again to reach the higher levels. But it does provide a simile for how passion for the path is abandoned once and all at the attainment of arahantship:

It's as if you're on the bank of a river. The shore where you find yourself—the five clinging-aggregates—is a place of danger, as is the river itself, which stands for the flood of sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance. The further shore is unbinding, a place of safety, but there's no bridge or nibbāna yacht to take you across the flood. You have to make a raft from the branches and vines you find on this side of the river—in other words, from the same aggregates that you've been clinging to, but now you're skilled in turning them into the path away from suffering. Then, relying on the raft, you make an effort with your hands and feet to get to the further shore. If you don't hold on tight to the raft while you're on the river, you get swept away by the flood. If you don't let go of the raft when you reach the further shore, you weigh yourself down pointlessly and won't be free to go where you like ([MN 22](#); [SN 35:197](#)).

Although the Canon provides this simile only for the attainment of arahantship, it does—as we mentioned—state clearly that the Buddha's



five-step program for abandoning passion has to be applied to the path with each of the noble attainments. The following two passages make this point with reference to stream-entry and arahantship. The other attainments are implied. In each case, you apply the program to the five faculties, which are equivalent to the factors of the noble eightfold path:

“When a disciple of the noble ones discerns, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks, and the escape from these five faculties, he is called a disciple of the noble ones who has attained the stream: never again destined for the lower realms, certain, headed for self-awakening.” — [SN 48:3](#)

“When—having discerned, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks, and the escape from these five faculties—a monk is released from lack of clinging/sustenance, he is called an arahant whose effluents [*āsava*] are ended, who has reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who is released through right gnosis.” — [SN 48:4](#)

In this case, the allure of the faculties lies both in the pleasures they provide as you develop them—such as the pleasures of concentration—and in the fact that, when they’re fully developed, they lead to an experience of the deathless. Their drawbacks lie in the fact that they’re fabricated: a fact established by discerning their origination and passing away. The escape from them is dispassion for them—when you see, after they’ve done their work, that there’s no reason to keep fabricating them.

This dispassion allows for the cessation of the faculties and on to an all-around cessation of all things subject to origination. That cessation, in turn, allows for an experience of unbinding. The following passage

makes this point with regard to a stream-enterer. The same point implicitly applies to the higher noble attainments, too.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones... discerns that, ‘When I cultivate, develop, and pursue this view, I personally obtain tranquility, I personally obtain unbinding.’ This is the second knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.” — [MN 48](#)

Here the important term is “unbinding.” In ordinary Pāli usage, “unbinding” was used to describe the extinguishing of a fire. To understand why the Buddha would borrow this term to describe the goal of the practice, we have to understand his description of how fire worked.

Individual fires, he said, were caused by provoking the fire property, which existed, to a greater or lesser degree, in a calm, latent state in all things. When you provoked it—say, by using a fire-starter—it would grab hold and cling to the fuel that would sustain it. (Here, for *fuel*, the Buddha used the word *upādāna*, the same word for clinging that he used in the definition of suffering in the first noble truth. The term also means *sustenance*.) As long as the fire burned, it was trapped in a state of heat and agitation. When it went out, it let go of its fuel, grew calm, and was released.

The Buddha used the term “unbinding” for the goal both to indicate that it was a state of freedom and calm, and also to suggest how to get there. Just as fuel doesn’t cling to the fire, it’s not the case that the aggregates cling to you. You’re the one clinging to them. You gain freedom by letting them go, just as a fire goes out and is released when it lets go of its fuel.

The main difference between the unbinding of a fire and the unbinding experienced by the mind is that the fire property can be provoked repeatedly and so give rise to other fires. The full and final release of the mind, though, is said to be unprovoked ([MN 29](#)). Because this release is uncaused, there's no reason for it to end. At the same time, nothing can provoke the mind into clinging to anything ever again.

The Buddha also used the metaphor of an extinguished fire to make the point that the person who has gained release can't be described. Just as a fire, when it goes out, can't be described as going east, west, north, or south, in the same way, a person fully released can't be described as existing, not existing, both, or neither ([MN 72](#); [SN 44:1](#)). That's because people are measured and defined as beings in terms of their attachments. When they have no more attachments, they can't be defined, and so can't be properly described ([SN 22:36](#); [SN 23:2](#)).

This means that when you no longer define yourself as a being in this way, you're not bringing about annihilation. Instead, you're no longer limited by attachments. You're free.

So these are some of the features that all the noble attainments have in common:

- The factors of the noble eightfold path, with an emphasis on the factors of attention and intention—right view and right concentration—all come together.
- The discernment of right view is developed through the Buddha's five-step program for developing dispassion, fulfilling—partially, on the lower levels, and completely on the highest—the duties of the first three noble truths.

- The same five-step program is then applied to the purpose of developing dispassion for the fourth noble truth.
- And there's an experience of unbinding—again, partial on the lower levels, total on the level of arahantship.

Those are the main features that all the noble attainments have in common. Where they differ is in the level of concentration and discernment you bring to the Buddha's five-step program for inducing dispassion. The more solid your concentration and the more all-around your discernment, then the more all-around the resulting dispassion—and the more all-around the resulting release.

So, keeping in mind the larger patterns of commonalities and differences among the attainments, we can look at the differences in more detail.

## READINGS

§ 1. “There are these three trainings. Which three? The training in heightened virtue, the training in heightened mind, the training in heightened discernment.

“And what is the training in heightened virtue? There is the case where a monk is virtuous. He dwells restrained in accordance with the Pātimokkha, consummate in his behavior & sphere of activity. He trains himself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest fault. This is called the training in heightened virtue.

“And what is the training in heightened mind? There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the

stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: 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 jhāna, 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 jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called the training in heightened mind.

“And what is the training in heightened discernment? There is the case where a monk, through the ending of the effluents, enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now. This is called the training in heightened discernment.

“These are the three trainings.”

— [AN 3:91](#)

§ 2. “There are these ten fetters. Which ten? Five lower fetters & five higher fetters. And which are the five lower fetters? Self-identity views, doubt, grasping at habits & practices, sensual desire, & 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, & ignorance. These are the five higher fetters. And these are the ten fetters.”

— [AN 10:13](#)

§ 3. “Monks, this recitation of more than 150 training rules comes every fortnight, in reference to which sons of good families desiring the goal train themselves.<sup>1</sup> There are these three trainings under which all

that is gathered. Which three? The training in heightened virtue, the training in heightened mind, the training in heightened discernment. These are the three trainings under which all that is gathered.

“There is the case where a monk is wholly accomplished in virtue, moderately accomplished in concentration, and moderately accomplished in discernment. With reference to the lesser and minor training rules, he falls into offenses and rehabilitates himself. Why is that? Because I have not declared that to be a disqualification in these circumstances. But as for the training rules that are basic to the holy life and proper to the holy life, he is one of permanent virtue, one of steadfast virtue. Having undertaken them, he trains in reference to the training rules.

“With the ending of (the first) three fetters, he is one who has seven more times at most. Having transmigrated and wandered on among devas and human beings, he will put an end to stress.

“(Or) he is one going from good family to good family [i.e., rebirth in the human realm or any of the deva realms]. Having transmigrated and wandered on among two or three good families, he will put an end to stress.

“(Or) he is one with one seed. Having arisen only once more in the human realm, he will put an end to stress.

“(Or), with the ending of (the first) three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, he is a once-returner who—on returning only once more 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 reference to the lesser and minor training rules, he falls into offenses and rehabilitates himself. Why is that? Because I have not declared that to be a disqualification in these circumstances. But as

for the training rules that are basic to the holy life and proper to the holy life, he is one of permanent virtue, one of steadfast virtue. Having undertaken them, he trains in reference to the training rules.

“With the ending of the five lower fetters, he is one going upstream to the Peerless [the Akaniṭṭha heaven, the highest of the Pure Abodes].<sup>2</sup>

“(Or), with the ending of the five lower fetters, he is one unbound with fabrication (of exertion).

“(Or), with the ending of the five lower fetters, he is one unbound without fabrication (of exertion).

“(Or), with the ending of the five lower fetters, he is one unbound on arrival (in a Brahmā world).<sup>3</sup>

“(Or), with the ending of the five lower fetters, he is one unbound in between.

“There is the case where a monk is wholly accomplished in virtue, wholly accomplished in concentration, wholly accomplished in discernment. With reference to the lesser and minor training rules, he falls into offenses and rehabilitates himself. Why is that? Because I have not declared that to be a disqualification in these circumstances. But as for the training rules that are basic to the holy life and proper to the holy life, he is one of permanent virtue, one of steadfast virtue. Having undertaken them, he trains in reference to the training rules. With the ending of effluents, he dwells in the effluent-free awareness-release and discernment-release, having directly known and realized them for himself right in the here-and-now.

“Those who are partially accomplished attain a part; those who are wholly accomplished, the whole. The training rules, I tell you, are not in vain.”

— [AN 3:88](#)

## NOTES

1. This statement refers to the Pāṭimokkha recitation, which contains 227 rules. Some have argued that this statement is proof that the Pāṭimokkha currently contains some rules that it didn't contain in the Buddha's time. However, this assertion ignores two points: (a) The sutta texts are notoriously vague about large numbers, and—given their manner in reporting large numbers—"more than 150" could cover anything from 150 to 250 rules. (b) The Buddha added rules to the Pāṭimokkha over the course of many years. This sutta may record an event that took place before he had brought the Pāṭimokkha to its current size. ↩

2. According to the Commentary, this category of non-returner first appears spontaneously in any of the first four levels of the five Pure Abodes—among the Aviha (Not Falling Away) devas, the Atappa (Untroubled) devas, the Sudassa (Good-looking) devas, or the Sudassī (Clear-seeing) devas—and then appears spontaneously in progressively higher levels until reaching the highest, the Akaniṭṭha (Peerless) Pure Abode, there to be unbound. ↩

3. The Commentary defines this category and the following one with this example: Suppose that a non-returner appears spontaneously in the Aviha (Not Falling Away) Pure Abode, where the lifespan is 1,000 eons. If he/she attains unbinding after the first 100 eons, he/she is classed as one unbound on arrival. If he/she attains unbinding anywhere from between the first day in that Pure Abode up through the first 400 eons, he/she is classed as one unbound in between. For a non-returner appearing spontaneously in any of the higher Pure Abodes, where the lifespans get progressively longer, the same proportions would hold.

This way of classifying these two categories, however, doesn't make much sense, for two reasons. (a) The sutta lists the categories in ascending order, and there's little reason to class one who takes 400 eons to attain unbinding higher than one who takes only 100 eons to do so. (b) The



second category actually includes the first, so there would seem to be little reason to distinguish them as two separate categories.

It would make better sense to define the categories this way: One who attains unbinding relatively soon after arriving in a Brahmā world is one unbound on arrival. One who attains unbinding after leaving the human realm but before reaching a Brahmā world would be one unbound in between. [←](#)

§ 4. “In this Saṅgha of monks 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, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: Such are the monks in this Saṅgha of monks.

“In this Saṅgha of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of the five lower fetters, are due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, destined never again to return from that world: Such are the monks in this Saṅgha of monks.

“In this Saṅgha of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of (the first) three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, are once-returners, who—on returning only once more to this world—will make an ending to stress: Such are the monks in this Saṅgha of monks.

“In this Saṅgha of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of (the first) three fetters, are stream-enterers, certain, never again destined for the lower realms, headed for self-awakening: Such are the monks in this Saṅgha of monks.”

— [MN 118](#)

§ 5. “This noble eightfold path is the stream: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right

mindfulness, right concentration....

“Anyone endowed with this noble eightfold path is a stream-enterer.”

— [SN 55:5](#)

§ 6. “There is the case where the disciple of the noble ones is endowed with verified confidence in the Awakened One... verified confidence in the Dhamma... verified confidence in the Saṅgha.... He/she is endowed with virtues that are appealing to the noble ones: untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, leading to concentration.”

— [AN 10:92](#)

§ 7. “And how is there the view that is noble, leading outward, that leads those who act in accordance with it to the right ending of suffering & stress?

“There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, considers thus: ‘Is there any internal subjugation unabandoned in me that, subjugated by which, my subjugated mind would not know or see things as they have come to be?’ If a monk is subjugated by sensual passion, monks, then his mind is subjugated. If he is subjugated by ill will, then his mind is subjugated. If he is subjugated by sloth & torpor, then his mind is subjugated. If he is subjugated by restlessness & anxiety, then his mind is subjugated. If he is subjugated by uncertainty, then his mind is subjugated. If a monk is absorbed in speculation about this world, then his mind is subjugated. If a monk is absorbed in speculation about the other world, then his mind is subjugated. If a monk is given to arguing and quarreling and disputing, stabbing others with weapons of the mouth, then his mind is subjugated.

“He discerns that, ‘There is no subjugation unabandoned in me that, subjugated by which, my subjugated mind would not know and see things as they have come to be. My mind is well directed for awakening to the truths.’ This is the first knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘When I cultivate, develop, and pursue this view, do I personally obtain tranquility, do I personally obtain unbinding?’

“He discerns that, ‘When I cultivate, develop, and pursue this view, I personally obtain tranquility, I personally obtain unbinding.’ This is the second knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘Is there, outside of this (Dhamma & Vinaya), any other contemplative or brahman endowed with the sort of view with which I am endowed?’

“He discerns that, ‘There is no other contemplative or brahman outside (the Dhamma & Vinaya) endowed with the sort of view with which I am endowed.’ This is the third knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘I am endowed with the character of a person consummate in view?’<sup>3</sup> And what, monks, is the character of a person consummate in view? This is the character of a person consummate in view: Although he may commit some kind of offence for which a means of rehabilitation has been laid down, still he immediately confesses, reveals, and discloses it to the Teacher or to observant companions in the holy life; having done that, he undertakes restraint for the future. Just as a young, tender infant lying on his back, when he has hit a live ember with his hand or his foot, immediately draws back; in the same way, this is the character

of a person consummate in view: Although he may commit some kind of offence for which a means of rehabilitation has been laid down, still he immediately confesses, reveals, and discloses it to the Teacher or to observant companions in the holy life; having done that, he undertakes restraint for the future.

“He discerns that, ‘I am endowed with the character of a person consummate in view.’ This is the fourth knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘I am endowed with the character of a person consummate in view?’ And what, monks, is the character of a person consummate in view? This is the character of a person consummate in view: Although he may be active in the various affairs of his companions in the holy life, he still has a keen regard for training in heightened virtue, training in heightened mind, & training in heightened discernment. Just as a cow with a new calf watches after her calf all the while she is grazing on grass, in the same way, this is the character of a person consummate in view: Although he may be active in the various affairs of his companions in the holy life, he still has a keen regard for training in heightened virtue, training in heightened mind, & training in heightened discernment.

“He discerns that, ‘I am endowed with the character of a person consummate in view.’ This is the fifth knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘I am endowed with the strength of a person consummate in view?’ And what, monks, is the strength of a person consummate in view? This is the strength of a person consummate in view: When the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata is being taught, he heeds it, gives it

attention, engages it with all his mind, hears the Dhamma with eager ears.

“He discerns that, ‘I am endowed with the strength of a person consummate in view.’ This is the sixth knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones considers thus: ‘I am endowed with the strength of a person consummate in view?’ And what, monks, is the strength of a person consummate in view? This is the strength of a person consummate in view: When the Dhamma & Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata is being taught, he gains understanding of the meaning, gains understanding of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma.

“He discerns that, ‘I am endowed with the strength of a person consummate in view.’ This is the seventh knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.

“A disciple of the noble ones thus endowed with seven factors has well examined the character for the realization of the fruit of stream-entry. A disciple of the noble ones thus endowed with seven factors is endowed with the fruit of stream-entry.”

— [MN 48](#)

§ 8. “Monks, there are these five faculties. Which five? The faculty of conviction, the faculty of persistence, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, the faculty of discernment. When a disciple of the noble ones discerns, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks, and the escape from these five faculties, he is called a disciple of the noble ones who has attained the

stream: never again destined for the lower realms, certain, headed for self-awakening.”

— [SN 48:3](#)

§ 9. “Monks, there are these five faculties. Which five? The faculty of conviction, the faculty of persistence, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, the faculty of discernment. When—having discerned, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks, and the escape from these five faculties—a monk is released from lack of clinging/sustenance, he is called an arahant whose effluents are ended, who has reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who is released through right gnosis.”

— [SN 48:4](#)

## 2 : *Specific Attainments*

### STREAM-ENTRY

The first of the noble attainments—portrayed metaphorically as stream-entry in some contexts, as the arising of the Dhamma eye in others—is a momentous event for anyone who experiences it. This is a point that has to be emphasized, because many interpretations of the event make it sound very ordinary and everyday. But when we look at what the Canon actually says about it, we can see that there’s nothing ordinary about it at all.

To begin with, the Canon describes it as immediately blissful—giving access to a personal experience of tranquility and unbinding ([MN 48](#) [[§7](#)])—and as having a radical long-term impact in at least three ways.

- First, it marks a new stage in your relationship to the Dhamma. In line with the image of the Dhamma eye, you’ve actually seen the Dhamma and are said to be *consummate in view*. One passage in the Canon illustrates this point with the simile of a well: Standing at the edge of the well, you see for sure that there is water in the well, even though you don’t yet touch the water with your body ([SN 12:68](#) [[§15](#)])—the implication being that touching it with your body would stand for full awakening.

But even just seeing the Dhamma makes a strong impact. Your confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha has been confirmed. You have no more perplexity or doubts about the Dhamma because you’ve seen how it works in taking you to the deathless. For this reason,

you're said to be independent of others with regard to the Buddha's message. In other words, you know for sure what the Buddha was talking about, that it gives true results when put into practice, that those members of the Saṅgha who have practiced rightly have seen the same Dhamma, and that you're mature enough to direct your own practice from that point on.

- Second, this attainment has an indelible impact on your behavior, in that you've completed your training in virtue, although you still have further work to do in developing concentration and discernment ([AN 3:87](#)). In the words of the Canon, your virtues are now pleasing to the noble ones: unbroken, untorn, and conducive to concentration. The noble ones are also pleased because your virtues are *not grasped at* and you yourself are *not made of virtue*, meaning that you don't take hold of your virtues to create a sense of conceit or self around them ([AN 10:92](#) [[86](#)]; [MN 78](#)). You embody the virtues of the five precepts not out of pride, but out of a natural reaction to what you've seen in seeing the Dhamma: If you're careless in your actions, you'll cause harm for yourself and for others. So, out of a pure desire to be harmless, you're careful in all you do.

- Finally, the first noble attainment has a decisive impact on your future course through the cycles of death and rebirth. Prior to stream-entry, you face the possibility of an unlimited number of rebirths, and you could be reborn in any of the levels of the cosmos, from the highest to the lowest. After stream-entry, though, you're freed from three of the ten fetters that bind you to those cycles: self-identity views, doubt, and grasping at habits and practices. (These fetters will be explained below.) As a result, you face a maximum of only seven more lifetimes, none of them below the human level. You're also now bound for awakening for sure, which appears to be the reason why the attainment is called



stream-entry: Just as a person who has entered the flow of a stream will inevitably reach the ocean, a person who has achieved stream-entry will inevitably reach unbinding.

Each of these last two points is illustrated with a simile. The first simile is a variant on the stream image. Instead of flowing along with a stream, you're trying to cross over a stream to the safety on the further shore. In this image, the first noble attainment is where you "gain a footing" ([MN 56](#); [AN 10:58](#)). In other words, you haven't yet reached the further shore, but you have reached the point near the shore where the stream is so shallow that your feet can be firmly planted on the streambed. From this point on, you won't be swept away by the current.

The second simile highlights the fact that the amount of suffering you potentially face in the cycle of death and rebirth is now drastically reduced. Prior to stream-entry, that suffering can be compared to all the dirt in the world. After stream-entry, it's like the amount of dirt under a fingernail ([SN 13:1](#)).

**The Nature of the Experience.** For an experience to yield such radical results, it must be extraordinary. The Canon gives some idea of what the stream-entry experience involves in its explanations of what the stream is and what the Dhamma eye sees.

The explanation of the stream is the shorter and less controversial of the two. The stream is simply the noble eightfold path ([SN 55:5](#) [[§5](#)]). Because the stream-enterer still has further work to do in developing concentration and discernment—which are covered by five of the factors of the path—this equation of the path with the stream seems to mark the point where all eight factors of the path come together, even though not all of them are fully mastered.

As for the Dhamma eye, its expression in the Canon is also fairly short, but it has given rise to a wide variety of contradictory interpretations. This means that we will have to sort through some of the more common ones to see where they do and don't accord with what's said in the larger context of the Canon. The disadvantage of this discussion is that it will take time. The advantage is that it will yield a sharper and more focused picture of what the Dhamma eye sees.

Every time the Dhamma eye arises in the Canon, it's expressed in the same formula: "*Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.*" The fact that the experience is always expressed in the same formula is striking, because the Canon tells of its occurring to a wide variety of people listening to the Buddha's teachings—everyone from the group of five monks, the long-term ascetics who had attended to the Buddha-to-be during his austerities, to the would-be assassin who, in the Buddha's later years, had been hired by Devadatta to kill the Buddha, along with the would-be assassins hired to then kill the first would-be assassin, and the would-be assassins hired to kill *them*. So obviously there's something universal about what this formula expresses.

To understand what it means, it's good to look at the context: both the events that induce the Dhamma eye to arise, and the impact that the arising of the Dhamma eye has on the mind.

Stream-entry can occur in a variety of situations—such as when you're meditating on your own—but the Canon tends to use the simile of the Dhamma eye in instances where a person gains that eye while listening to a Dhamma talk. In fact, there's only one passage in the entire Canon—[AN 9:35](#)—that mentions the arising of the Dhamma eye without clearly putting it in that context. As we'll see in Chapter 4, the talks that induce the arising of the Dhamma eye usually focus on the framework of the four noble truths.

In some cases, where the Buddha deems that the listener isn't immediately ready to hear and accept the four noble truths, he prefaces that teaching with what's termed a graduated or step-by-step talk, in which he describes generosity, virtue, and the rewards of generosity and virtue in heaven. Then he reverses course to describe the drawbacks of even heavenly sensuality. When the listener is ready to regard renunciation of sensuality positively as a state of rest in a firmly concentrated mind, the Buddha finally presents the four truths.

Again, we'll return to this talk—and the Buddha's reasons for using it—in Chapter 4.

The two major exceptions to this pattern are contained in the famous story where Sāriputta—who, at that point, is a wanderer in another sect—gains the Dhamma eye when hearing the following verse from Ven. Assaji, and then again when Moggallāna in turn gains the Dhamma eye after hearing the verse from Sāriputta:

“Whatever phenomena arise from cause:  
their cause  
& their cessation.

Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata,  
the Great Contemplative.”

— [\*Mv 1:23.5\*](#)

What this short teaching has in common with the four noble truths is the framework: the notion of causation and its relationship to cessation.

The formula for the Dhamma eye is sometimes followed by a description of its impact. In the case of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, this takes the form of a poem that the narrator of their story addresses rhetorically to them:

Just this Dhamma,  
just this much,  
and you experienced  
the sorrowless state—  
unseen, neglected,  
for many ten-thousands of eons.

— [\*Mv 1:23.5\*](#)

Here the emphasis is on the attaining of a sorrowless state—one of the attributes of the goal of the noble search for the deathless.

In other cases, the impact of the arising of the Dhamma eye is described by a standard passage focusing on the overcoming of doubt, as in the case of Upāli the householder:

“Then—having seen the Dhamma, having reached the Dhamma, known the Dhamma, gained a footing in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having had no more questioning—Upāli the householder gained fearlessness and was independent of others with regard to the Teacher’s message.” — [\*MN 56\*](#)

In short, these passages show that the Dhamma eye arises after learning about cause, effect, and cessation. It then leads to the overcoming of doubt and to a sorrowless state. When we understand the context of the Dhamma eye’s arising in these terms, we can evaluate the different interpretations that have been offered for what the Dhamma-eye formula actually means.

**Origination & its range.** One interpretation that’s currently widespread asserts that the Dhamma eye is simply the act of assenting

to the principle of impermanence or inconstancy: All things that arise must pass away. But this interpretation is based on three mistakes in reading the texts. The first mistake is simply a question of mistranslation. The second is a failure to take into account what the Buddha himself said qualifies as valid grounds for affirming a truth. The third mistake is a failure to take into consideration other passages in the Canon that describe in more detail what a stream-enterer directly knows.

1) To begin with the mistranslation: The formula for the Dhamma eye doesn't make reference to "all that arises." Instead, it speaks of "all that's subject to origination." The difference is crucial. "Arising" is simply an issue of appearing. "Origination," as we've already noted, is an issue of causality: The Dhamma eye speaks of all that arises because of a cause.

But not just any cause: "Origination" is most often used throughout the Canon to refer to processes originating in one's own mind. Given that the Dhamma eye most frequently follows on hearing the four noble truths, and given that the word "origination" in the context of those truths refers to the causes of stress and suffering within the mind, it follows naturally that anyone listening to these truths would naturally look for the causes of stress in his or her own mind.

So the formula for the Dhamma eye refers to what is seen when a listener does just that. You look for the craving mentioned in the second noble truth, and in bringing right view—and all the other factors of the path, hence the "stream"—to bear on it, you can put an end to it.

At the same time, [MN 9](#) and [AN 10:92](#) indicate that in doing so, you not only see the end of stress, but you also see how all the factors of dependent co-arising prior to craving—through feeling, sensory contact, the six sense media, name and form, sensory consciousness, fabrication,

all the way back to ignorance—unravel as well. Stress, you come to realize, is not the only thing internally originated. The same holds true for what the Buddha calls the *All*: the experience of the sense media—the five senses plus the mind as the sixth ([SN 35:23](#)).

This is one of the most radical aspects of gaining the Dhamma eye: seeing the extent to which sensory contact is dependent on events in the mind. This is the *All* that ceases when its internal causal conditions cease. And the cessation of this *All* is nothing other than an experience of the deathless ([Ud 8:1](#); [SN 35:117](#)).

2) In [AN 3:66](#) and [MN 95](#), the Buddha listed various ways of affirming belief in a truth, none of which count as genuine proofs that the belief is true. These include logical inference and agreement after pondering views. To simply agree, based on logical inference, that all things that arise must pass away would not, in the Buddha's eyes, count as a valid basis for confirmed conviction. We have to remember that such a view would be based on perceptions, which the Buddha said were no more substantial than mirages ([SN 22:95](#)) and which are subject to the vagaries of dependent co-arising ([SN 12:2](#)). Any conviction based on perceptions would, by its nature, be no more reliable than the perceptions on which it was based. Only an experience outside of the vagaries of dependent co-arising would, for him, count as valid grounds for confirming a belief. In [MN 49](#), the Buddha affirms that there is such a consciousness that is “not known through the *All*.” So the Dhamma eye, to be genuine knowledge, would have to at least glimpse an experience of that sort.

3) The points in (1) and (2) are corroborated by three other passages in the Canon that describe, in general terms, what a person who has entered the stream comes to know directly as part of that experience.

- The first passage states that, at stream-entry,

“One discerns, as it has come to be, ‘This is stress.’ One discerns, as it has come to be, ‘This is the origination of stress.’ One discerns, as it has come to be, ‘This is the cessation of stress.’ One discerns, as it has come to be, ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’” — [AN 3:74](#)

To understand this passage, it’s first necessary to focus on the phrase, “as it has come to be”—*yathābhūtaṃ* in Pāli. This phrase is used to indicate a direct experience of something, instead of theoretic knowledge about it. In this case, it means that the stream-enterer has had direct knowledge not only of stress, but also of the cessation of stress: That’s the reason for the repeated, “This, this, this” in the above passage. But *yathābhūtaṃ* also means more than direct knowledge in general. It means direct knowledge of the processes of origination ([SN 12:31](#)). It’s not surprising that this phrase would apply to seeing how stress and its origination are originated. What’s noteworthy is that the phrase is also applied to the cessation of stress and the path leading to that cessation.

Now, the unbinding that’s realized along with the cessation of stress is not originated—if it were, it wouldn’t be deathless—but the act of realizing it can be induced by the path. This is why the Buddha distinguishes between unbinding itself and the realization of unbinding. Unbinding is not a phenomenon (*dhamma*). Instead, it’s the ending of all phenomena ([AN 10:58](#)). The realization of unbinding, which is an action, he classes along with dispassion and cessation as the highest possible dhammas ([Iti 90](#)). Because these dhammas can be induced by the path, they can, in that sense, be said to be originated.

Of course, the path itself is fabricated ([Iti 90](#)), so it, too, is subject to origination. This suggests that the Dhamma eye must see the cessation not only of suffering and its cause, but also of the path after it has come together and done its work.

- This suggestion is confirmed by the second passage, which we’ve already encountered in Chapter 1:

“When a disciple of the noble ones discerns, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks, and the escape from these five faculties, he is called a disciple of the noble ones who has attained the stream: never again destined for the lower realms, certain, headed for self-awakening.” — [SN 48:3](#)

As we’ve already noted, the five faculties mentioned here are another way of expressing the noble eightfold path. The escape from the path lies in the dispassion that comes from comparing its allure—the happiness it provides—with its drawbacks: the fact that it’s fabricated and thus inconstant, stressful, and not-self, not worthy of being claimed as “me” or “mine.” This dispassion allows for the cessation of the faculties and on to the cessation of all things subject to origination.

- That cessation, in turn, allows you to directly see unbinding, a point confirmed by the third passage, which we’ve also encountered in Chapter 1:

“And further, the disciple of the noble ones ... discerns that, ‘When I cultivate, develop, and pursue this view, I personally obtain tranquility, I personally obtain unbinding.’ This is the second knowledge attained by him that is noble, transcendent, not held in common with run-of-the-mill people.” — [MN 48](#)



So the experience leading to the Dhamma eye is one in which you pursue the question of where within the mind stress originates, and in doing so, you unravel not only the immediate cause of stress—craving—but also the internal origination of your experience of the six sense media. In seeing the cessation that results—the cessation of the All, including the path—you naturally come to realize that whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. That’s because you also see what lies outside the category of “whatever is subject to origination”: what’s *not* subject to origination or cessation, the sorrowless state in which there’s no arising or passing away ([Ud 8:1](#); [SN 35:117](#)). It’s only in seeing what’s not subject to origination—the deathless—that the category “all that is subject to origination” naturally and legitimately occurs to the mind.

This is why, when Sāriputta—after experiencing the Dhamma eye—was asked by Moggallāna if he had attained the deathless, he replied, “Yes, I have.”

And this was something that he could legitimately know based on examining his own experience: He may not have been able to draw conclusions about all things arising in the universe, but he could—because he was observant enough—draw legitimate conclusions about what does and doesn’t originate from within his own mind.

Now, the deathless he experienced is not a blanking out. If it were, the Buddha wouldn’t have used so many metaphors of light, knowing, and awakening to describe it ([SN 56:11](#); [SN 1:7](#); [AN 10:81](#)). In actuality, the deathless is the opposite of blanking out. It’s an endless consciousness that’s not known through the All ([MN 49](#)) and is not dependently co-arisen. The Buddha calls it “consciousness without surface.” In [SN 12:64](#) he gives an image that helps to explain this term: Ordinary consciousness, affected by clinging, is like a beam of sunlight

that can be detected because it lands on a surface; this non-clinging consciousness is like a beam of sunlight that doesn't land on any surface at all.

**Cutting three fetters.** As we've already noted, all the factors of the noble eightfold path are present in the steps leading up to the first experience of this consciousness, but the concentration and discernment factors are not yet fully developed. For this reason, the stream-enterer simply sees the Dhamma of the deathless but without fully touching it.

Still, seeing just this much is enough to cut through the first three of the ten fetters that lead to rebirth: self-identity views, doubt, and grasping at habits and practices. The fact that the glimpse of the deathless is what cuts the fetters is a point that has to be emphasized: The fetters are not cut by a decision or an act of will to drop them after agreeing with a belief, which could easily be reversed. And the experience of the deathless does not come from cutting them. In fact, the relationship is the other way around. They're cut once and for all by the overwhelming experience of seeing the deathless—and it's easy to understand why.

To begin with, now that you've seen that the deathless is a reality and that the path is what led you there, you have no more doubt or uncertainty about the Buddha or the truth of his teaching. It really does lead those who practice it to a sorrowless state totally free from suffering and stress. With this experience, your confidence in the Triple Gem has been confirmed. The experience of the deathless thus cuts through the fetter of *doubt*.

Second, you've seen that the experience came about through the skillfulness of your own actions, and that what had prevented you from seeing it earlier were your own unskillful actions. For this reason, you

would never intentionally break the five precepts ever again. At the same time, though, you see that the experience of the deathless required more than just following the rules of the precepts. It also entailed a radical act of internal discernment and of letting go that didn't follow any rules. These realizations, combined, cut through the fetter of *grasping at habits and practices*: From now on, you're virtuous but not "made" of virtue.

Third, when all that is subject to origination falls away, the five aggregates fall away as well—and yet there is a consciousness of the deathless that remains. It's for this reason that you would never again hold to a view in which you would define yourself around any of the aggregates. This is what cuts through the fetter of *self-identity views*.

This last fetter relates to another common misinterpretation of the stream-entry experience. There are those who say that because stream-entry cuts through this fetter, stream-entry is the point in the practice where you realize that there is no self. But here there are both contextual and textual reasons for calling this interpretation into question.

To start with the contextual reasons: It's hard to see what kind of experience would legitimately lead to the conclusion that there is no self—just as it's hard to see what kind of experience would legitimately lead to the conclusion that there *is* a self. When people claim that they've seen the truth of no self, what they've actually seen is just the passing away of whatever they had previously identified as self. But that still leaves open the possibility that their actual self could be something else.

Now, it is possible, in the course of meditation, to experience a total blanking out, but again, that's no proof of the meditator's non-existence. It's simply a blanking out. The Canon identifies a state of non-perception, which—if you maintain it—leads to rebirth in the dimension

of non-percipient beings who are not sensitive to anything at all ([DN 1](#); [DN 15](#); [AN 9:24](#)). This dimension is not a noble attainment—in fact, when you regain consciousness and are reborn, you can develop serious wrong view, because nothing is known or remembered while in that dimension. So there’s no legitimate reason to conclude from such an experience that there is no self. It’s simply proof that it’s possible to deliberately bring yourself to a state in which you don’t perceive anything at all.

As for the textual reasons, the first is that the Buddha consistently avoided giving an answer to the question of whether there is or isn’t a self—saying that either answer would side with an extreme wrong view ([SN 44:10](#)). He also stated that the questions of what you are and whether you exist or not are not worthy of attention, in that they pull you off the path into a jungle of views, including the views that “I have a self” and “I have no self,” with all the entanglements that those views entail ([MN 2](#) [[§32](#)]).

Second, after the Buddha brought his first disciples, the group of five monks, to an experience of the Dhamma eye, he then gave them a Dhamma talk in which he taught that the five aggregates should be regarded as not-self. If, in experiencing the Dhamma eye, they had already come to the conclusion that there is no self, there would have been no reason for him to address this topic. They would have already seen it for themselves.

The reason he *did* have to address the topic is because cutting the fetter of self-identity views doesn’t entirely remove from the mind all traces of stress related to the act of clinging to a sense of self. The views covered by self-identity all come down to the sense that “I am this,” where “this” can be either an aggregate, the owner of an aggregate, something within an aggregate, or something containing an aggregate

within it (such as a sense of self identified with a cosmic consciousness) ([MN 109](#) [[§55](#)]). However, even after abandoning the sense that “I am this,” you don’t necessarily abandon the conceit “I am”—a fetter that’s cut only with the final noble attainment. As [SN 22:89](#) explains, even after self-identity views are removed, there’s still a lingering sense of “I am” with regard to the aggregates, just as when a cloth has been thoroughly washed, there’s still a lingering scent of the cleaning agent used in washing the cloth.

So it was to get rid of the lingering sense of “I am” around the aggregates that the Buddha taught the group of five monks that all five aggregates should be regarded as not-self. That was part of the work that still remained to be done even though they had gained stream-entry.

## NON-RETURN

The third of the noble attainments is called non-return because of the long-term impact it has on the course of your future lives. If you reach no higher attainment, you will never return to the human realm after death. Instead, you will be reborn after death in one of the Brahmā heavens and will attain unbinding there.

The Commentary states that there are five Brahmā realms, called the Pure Abodes, that are exclusively the realms of non-returners. The Canon mentions the Pure Abodes ([AN 4:124](#)), but also indicates that non-returners can be reborn in other Brahmā heavens as well ([AN 4:123](#)).

The Canon’s treatment of non-return is much more cursory than its treatment of stream-entry. According to [AN 3:87](#), a non-returner surpasses a stream-enterer in being fully accomplished not only in virtue

but also in concentration—although, as we’ll see, for some meditators this can simply mean fully accomplished in the first jhāna, the first of the four levels of right concentration. Still, like stream-enterers, non-returners still have more work to do in order to become consummate in discernment.

Beyond the three fetters cut at stream-entry, two extra fetters are cut at non-return: sensual desire and ill will. The cutting of the fetter of sensual desire and the mastery of concentration on this level of attainment are two connected facts. That’s because, as the mind enters right concentration, it’s secluded from sensual thoughts. As it gets more proficient in concentration, it’s provided with a level of pleasure and rapture that weaken its attachment to sensuality ([MN 14](#)). If, with this background, it attains an experience of the deathless, it’s in a position to fully see the drawbacks of sensuality on emerging from that experience. And because sensuality is the main obstacle to right concentration, when that fetter is cut, there are no more obstacles to concentration.

Four principle passages describe the practices leading to non-return. (A fifth, [Sn 3:12](#), will be discussed in Chapter 8.) One of the four, [SN 12:63](#), focuses on how to contemplate physical food, the most basic object of sensual desire, so as to overcome that desire. The other three passages—[DN 22](#), [AN 3:95](#), and [AN 9:36](#) [[§17](#)][—focus on the practice of right mindfulness and right concentration. We’ll start with the latter three first.](#)

Contrary to a popular belief that mindfulness and concentration are two separate practices, the Canon actually treats them as two aspects of a single one. In the popular belief, mindfulness means a broad, non-judging acceptance of all objects that appear in your awareness, whereas concentration is a narrow, exclusive, one-pointed focus on a single object.

In many ways, however, this is a reversal of how the Canon discusses the role of these practices. Mindfulness is the ability to keep a framework in mind ([SN 47:10](#)), and has to be sharply focused to avoid letting the mind wander outside of that framework into sensuality or other unskillful thoughts ([SN 47:6](#); [SN 47:20](#); [AN 10:51](#)). And instead of simply accepting whatever arises, it has to remember to recognize skillful and unskillful qualities as they arise, and to foster the former and abandon the latter ([MN 117](#); [AN 4:245](#)).

Concentration, even though it's based on a single object, develops into a broad, full-body awareness. This fact is shown by the similes the Buddha uses to describe the four *jhānas*, or states of absorption, that constitute right concentration:

*The first jhāna:* “Just as if a dexterous bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without—would nevertheless not drip; in the same way, the monk permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There’s nothing of his entire body unpermeated by rapture & pleasure born of seclusion.”

*The second jhāna:* “Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time & again, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate & pervade, suffuse & fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpermeated by the cool waters; in the same way, the monk permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There’s nothing of his

entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration.”

*The third jhāna:* “Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born & growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated & pervaded, suffused & filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; in the same way, the monk permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There’s nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture.”

*The fourth jhāna:* “Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth didn’t extend; in the same way, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There’s nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.” — [DN 2](#)

As we’ll see, the fact that concentration produces such a broad, solidly-based awareness allows you to apply appropriate attention to the mind in concentration in a way that lets you see directly, as it has come to be, that “This is the path to the cessation of suffering.”

Many passages in the Canon show that mindfulness practice and concentration practice are intimately intertwined. The four establishments of mindfulness are the themes of right concentration ([MN 44](#); [AN 8:70](#)); mindfulness becomes pure only in the fourth jhāna ([SN 45:8](#)); and for mindfulness to develop into right mindfulness, you have to develop all eight factors of the noble eightfold path, which include right concentration ([SN 47:40](#)).



The passages describing how mindfulness and concentration practice can lead to non-return are repeated at several points in the Canon. Because they're standardized, we can focus on two instances.

The first instance, [DN 22](#), gives the basic formula for establishing mindfulness:

1) “There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings... mind... mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.”

The sutta then gives long, detailed answers on questions that deal with only one part of the formula: what it means to remain focused on each of these four frames of reference. This, in fact, may be one of the reasons why there is so much misunderstanding about mindfulness. The sutta is so long that it gives the impression of being a complete description of mindfulness practice. But it doesn't discuss the more active side of the practice: what it means to be ardent, alert, or mindful, or how you should subdue greed and distress with reference to the world. As a result, if you assume that the sutta's discussion is complete, you can easily conclude that mindfulness means simply being aware of whatever comes into the range of your awareness.

However, if you look at what the Canon has to say about the parts of the formula not discussed in the sutta, you can see that the entire mindfulness formula is basically giving instructions on how to get the mind into concentration: You focus on one topic, subdue thoughts about the world outside, and you do this by being mindful (keeping the topic in mind ([SN 48:10](#))), alert (knowing what you're doing while you're

doing it ([SN 36:7](#); [SN 47:35](#)), and ardent (in developing skillful qualities and abandoning unskillful ones ([SN 16:2](#))).

In its conclusion, the sutta states the rewards of developing this practice:

“Now, if anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for seven years, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.

“Let alone seven years. If anyone would develop these four establishings of mindfulness in this way for six years... five... four... three... two years... one year... seven months... six months... five... four... three... two months... one month... half a month... seven days, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

However, the sutta doesn't specify what would cause there to be a remnant of clinging-sustenance, or what the clinging would be focused on.

Those questions are answered in two suttas that show how the practice of jhāna can form the basis for the attainment of non-return: [AN 3:95](#) and [AN 9:36](#). The first of the two treats a special case: what happens when a stream-enterer dies while in the first jhāna.

2) “Monks, just as in autumn, when the sky is clear & cloudless, the sun, on ascending the sky, overpowering the space immersed in darkness, shines, blazes, & dazzles; in the same way, when the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arises in a noble disciple, together with its arising, three fetters are abandoned by the noble disciple:

self-identity view, doubt, and grasping at habits & practices. Afterwards, when he leaves two qualities—greed & ill will—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. If the noble disciple passes away at that time, there is no fetter bound by which he would return to this world.”

Unfortunately, this passage doesn’t explain how radically the person in question has to leave greed and ill will so as to have this effect. Nor does it say where in this sequence the fetters that lead to a return to this world are definitively cut.

[AN 9:36](#) [§17] treats a more general case: how to attain an experience of the deathless in such a way as to attain non-return and to continue living in this lifetime after the experience. It’s also more informative in explaining how the practice of jhāna can form a basis for the arising of discernment.

The sutta shows how each of the four jhānas and the first three of the formless attainments can provide such a basis. As [MN 111](#) makes clear, it is possible to apply this sort of discernment to the mind while it’s in these states of concentration without destroying the concentration. In other words, you can apply appropriate attention to the concentrated mind, not in the abstract, but in real time as it’s on the path to the cessation of suffering.

Because the discussion in [AN 9:36](#) is virtually the same for each of these concentration attainments, we can focus on just one instance, its treatment of the first jhāna.

3) “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's the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, 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 the deathless: 'This is peace, this is exquisite—the pacification of all fabrications; the relinquishment 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 from the total ending of the five lower fetters—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā realm), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

"I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna.' Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said."

The sequence of actions described in this passage is noteworthy for two reasons.

First, it shows in detail how appropriate attention can be applied to the mind as it pursues its intention to stay concentrated. Because skillful attention and intention embody the factors of the noble eightfold path, the way they come together here allows us to see more clearly how the factors of the path merge on the verge of awakening.

Second, the sequence outlined here follows the same five-step pattern we saw earlier in [SN 48:3](#)—discerning the origination, the

passing away, the allure, the drawbacks, and the escape from concentration. The details provided by the sequence given in [AN 9:36](#) help to flesh out the more general pattern provided by the five steps.

In this case, the steps of discerning the *origination*, *passing away*, and *allure* of the first jhāna come with mastery of the jhāna: That's the meaning of the simile of the archer or archer's apprentice. The monk in question hasn't simply experienced the first jhāna, as could be the case with a stream-enterer. He has mastered it as a skill. This skill—in which he has learned to master the steps for giving rise to jhāna and keeping it from passing away—gives him the deeper insight into the workings of cause and effect in the mind, along with deeper insight into the drawbacks of sensuality. This is part of what allows him to cut five fetters rather than just three.

The *allure* of the first jhāna lies in the pleasure and rapture that defines it. Insight into the *drawbacks* of the jhāna begins when you see that it's composed of the same aggregates that, when clung to, can constitute suffering. This insight is further deepened when you apply any of the eleven perceptions to those aggregates.

The *escape* comes when the monk turns his mind away from those phenomena and inclines it to the deathless. As a result of experiencing the deathless, he becomes either an arahant or a non-returner, depending on whether there's any remaining Dhamma-passion and Dhamma-delight. He becomes an arahant if there isn't, a non-returner if there is.

There's a question as to whether Dhamma-passion and Dhamma-delight on this level are aimed at the insight that led to the experience of the deathless or at the deathless itself. Because [SN 48:3](#) indicates that dispassion for discernment is induced at each level of noble attainment, it would seem that the passion and delight here is for the deathless.

But that raises a further question: Is it truly aimed at the deathless itself or at subtle perceptions and fabrications *around* the deathless? To regard the deathless as a dhamma would be to make it an object of the intellect, the sixth of the six senses, whereas unbinding is the ending of all dhammas ([AN 10:58](#)). So it would seem that the passion is actually for the *perception* of the deathless, and that non-returners haven't yet developed the discernment needed to tell that perception apart from the deathless itself. Because non-returners are said to still be fettered by the fetter of becoming ([AN 2:35](#)), and because becoming has to be based on clinging to fabricated phenomena, it would appear that they develop a state of becoming around their passion and delight for the perception of the deathless that follows on their experience of the deathless. That's what prevents them from gaining total awakening.

But even so, as we have noted, they have abandoned two fetters—sensual desire and ill will—in addition to the stream-enterer's three. These two fetters form a pair: You could have ill will only toward someone who gets in the way of the fulfillment of your sensual desires.

It's worth noting that, in the Buddha's recorded instructions to stream-enterers aiming to go further in their practice, he doesn't make specific reference to the drawbacks of sensual desire in order to prime them to cut that fetter. He seems to have felt that an emphasis on mastering concentration would be enough to foster an attitude ready to see those drawbacks, as we explained at the beginning of this section. But it's also worth noting that his instructions on how to reflect on the drawbacks of sensuality permeate the Canon, so a person on the path would most likely have been exposed to them. An example of such a reflection directly related to the attainment of non-return—the fourth of the four passages we referred to above—is this:

4) “And how is physical food to be regarded? Suppose a couple, husband & wife, taking meager provisions, were to travel through a desert. With them would be their only baby son, loved & endearing. Then the meager provisions of the couple going through the desert would be used up & depleted while there was still a stretch of the desert yet to be crossed. The thought would occur to them, ‘Our meager provisions are used up & depleted while there is still a stretch of this desert yet to be crossed. What if we were to kill this only baby son of ours, loved & endearing, and make dried meat & jerky? That way—chewing on the flesh of our son—at least the two of us would make it through this desert. Otherwise, all three of us would perish.’

“So they would kill their only baby son, loved & endearing, and make dried meat & jerky. Chewing on the flesh of their son, they would make it through the desert. While eating the flesh of their only son, they would beat their breasts, (crying,) ‘Where have you gone, our only baby son? Where have you gone, our only baby son?’ Now what do you think, monks? Would that couple eat that food playfully or for intoxication, or for putting on bulk, or for beautification?”

“No, lord.”

“Wouldn’t they eat that food simply for the sake of making it through that desert?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of physical food to be regarded. When physical food is comprehended, passion for the five strings of sensuality is comprehended. When passion for the five strings of sensuality is comprehended, there is no fetter bound by which a disciple of the noble ones would come back again to this world.” — [SN 12:63](#)

A non-returner—one whose sensitivities to the drawbacks of sensuality had been further strengthened through contemplations like this, as well as through mastery of concentration—would, on withdrawing from an experience of the deathless, be more capable of seeing the affliction inherent in sensuality: not only for the one fed on, but more importantly for the one who feeds on sensual fantasies. That’s why such a person would be released from the fetter of sensual desire and the accompanying fetter of ill will.

However, that person would still be fettered by the fetter of becoming. And although the states of becoming to which this fetter would now lead are relatively refined—in the heavens of form and formlessness—the Buddha wouldn’t praise even such refined states.

“Monks, just as even a tiny amount of feces is foul-smelling, in the same way, I don’t praise even a tiny amount of becoming—even as much as a finger-snap.” — [AN 1:329](#)

So non-returners still have more work to do in order to free themselves from the five higher fetters that keep them fettered to becoming: passion for form, passion for what is formless, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

## ARAHANTSHIP

These five higher fetters exist in all who have yet to attain arahantship, but for someone who has attained non-return, they remain in a refined form, as follows:

*Passion for form* is passion for the pleasure and equanimity found in the four jhānas.



*Passion for what is formless* is passion for the equanimity of the formless concentration attainments, such as the dimension of the infinitude of space or the infinitude of consciousness.

*Conceit* is the sense “I am” that still lingers around the five aggregates, even though there is no sense of “I am this” with regard to those aggregates.

*Restlessness* on this level is not the same thing as the restlessness that’s a hindrance to concentration. Instead, it’s an eagerness for your practice to bear full fruit.

*Ignorance* is lack of knowledge in terms of the four noble truths. Now, the four noble truths and their duties have already been seen clearly at stream-entry, so on this level, what remains to be known is what’s involved in fully completing those duties, and the full experience—and not just the vision—of what is uncovered when they’re complete.

The subtle nature of the fetters on this level of the practice is shown in the following conversation:

Then Ven. Anuruddha went to Ven. Sāriputta 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. Sāriputta, “Here, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos. And my persistence is aroused & unsluggish. My mindfulness is established & unmuddled. My body is calm & unaroused. My mind is concentrated & gathered into singleness. And yet my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance.”

Ven. Sāriputta: “My friend, when the thought occurs to you, ‘By means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos,’ that is related to your conceit. When the thought occurs to you, ‘My persistence is aroused & unsluggish. My

mindfulness is established & unmuddled. My body is calm & unaroused. My mind is concentrated & gathered into singleness,’ that is related to your restlessness. When the thought occurs to you, ‘And yet my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance,’ that is related to your anxiety. It would be well if—abandoning these three qualities, not attending to these three qualities—you directed your mind to the deathless property.”

So after that, Ven. Anuruddha—abandoning those three qualities, not attending to those three qualities—directed his mind to the deathless property. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time entered & remained in the unexcelled goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, directly 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. Anuruddha became another one of the arahants. — [AN 3:131](#)

In all of these cases, the fetter of becoming shows itself in the subtle sense of me and mine that underlies these fetters. And as we’ve seen in [AN 9:36](#) [[§17](#)], this subtle becoming has to be abandoned through dispassion not only for your concentration and discernment attainments, but also for the perception of the deathless that results when the mind is inclined in that direction.

The Canon notes that, whereas the path to the lower noble attainments has eight factors, the path to arahantship has ten ([MN 117](#)). The two added factors are right knowledge and right release. [SN 48:46](#) identifies right knowledge as a higher development of the faculty of discernment, and right release as a higher development of concentration.

*Right knowledge* is never explicitly defined in the Canon. However, the descriptions of full awakening scattered through the suttas show that it consists of several components:

First is knowledge that the duties with regard to the four noble truths have been completed ([SN 56:11](#)).

Second is the knowledge that the effluents—of sensuality, becoming, and ignorance—have also been comprehended under the same fourfold rubric as the four truths about suffering: the effluents themselves, the origination of effluents, the cessation of effluents, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of effluents ([DN 2](#)). The effluent of sensuality was already ended with non-return. The arahant’s knowledge now removes the remaining two. There is no longer anything to flow out of the mind into new states of becoming and birth.

The knowledge that all phenomena are not-self—in which “phenomena” covers both fabricated and unfabricated phenomena—may also be related to this stage of the path ([Dhp 279](#)). As we noted earlier, the non-returner’s attachment to the unfabricated property of the deathless appears actually to be focused on subtle aggregates: perceptions and thought-fabrications of the deathless. As we’ll see, some of the Buddha’s listeners must have understood this point without having been alerted to it, which was why they were able to attain arahantship simply on perceiving all the aggregates as not-self.

However, those who did not perceive this point were able only to reach stream-entry or non-return. For their benefit, the Buddha directed their attention to their attachment to the deathless, so that they could detect the aggregates they were still attached to and learn to abandon any passion for them. This taught them to be more reflective of their attachments even to good things. And that, in turn, would induce them to develop dispassion even for the teaching that “All phenomena are not-

self,” because it’s composed of aggregates, too. In that way, their act of letting go could be all-around.

Similar considerations surround the teaching that “All phenomena (*dhammas*) are unworthy of adherence”: This sentence, too, is a phenomenon that first encourages you to let go of all other phenomena and then, once it has done its work, turns around and encourages you to let go of itself ([MN 37](#)).

Every teaching aimed at people on the verge of arahantship aims at a letting go that is utterly complete. For example:

When this was said, Ven. Moggallāna said to the Blessed One: “Briefly, lord, in what respect is a monk released through the ending of craving, utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, a follower of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate: foremost among devas & human beings?”

“There is the case, Moggallāna, where a monk has heard, ‘All dhammas are unworthy of adherence.’ Having heard that all dhammas are unworthy of adherence, he directly knows every dhamma. Directly knowing every dhamma, he comprehends every dhamma. Comprehending every dhamma, 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 totally unbinds right within. He discerns: ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“It’s in this respect, Moggallāna, that a monk, in brief, is released through the ending of craving, utterly complete, utterly free from

bonds, a follower of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate: foremost among devas & human beings.” — [AN 7:58](#)

A crucial part of this passage is the four-step sequence, in italics, of being focused on inconstancy, dispassion, cessation, and relinquishing. These four steps also form the last four steps in the Buddha’s instructions for mindfulness of breathing ([MN 118](#)). The first two steps fall under the five-step program we’ve seen earlier: Focusing on inconstancy falls under the step of looking for the drawbacks; dispassion is the escape. Because passion is what drives the process of fabrication, dispassion allows it to cease. That’s why cessation follows on dispassion. But what’s left to do after the fabrications you’ve been examining—in this case, feelings—have gone to their cessation? You have to relinquish any remaining passion you may feel, either for the discernment that brought about dispassion or for any perceptions surrounding the experience of the deathless that follows. That act of relinquishing marks the point where your training in discernment has become complete.

Following on the arising of this right knowledge comes the tenth factor in the arahant’s path: *right release*. This—as we noted above—is identified in SN 46:48 as falling under the faculty of concentration. As with right knowledge, the concentration that corresponds to right release is nowhere explicitly defined in the Canon, but it appears to be identical with the concentration described below. This description shows how it differs from the four jhānas. It comes from a discourse in which Ven. Ānanda is listing the types of concentration that don’t partake of the five senses or their objects. Unlike the four jhānas, which are fabricated, and where it’s still possible to detect the five senses in the background, here there’s no fabrication and no awareness of those senses at all:

Ven. Ānanda: “Once, friend, when I was staying near Sāketa at the Game Refuge in the Black Forest, the nun Jaṭila Bhāgikā went to where I was staying, and on arrival—having bowed to me—stood to one side. As she was standing there, she said to me: ‘The concentration whereby—neither pressed down nor forced back, nor with fabrication kept blocked or suppressed—still as a result of release, contented as a result of standing still, and as a result of contentment one is not agitated: This concentration is said by the Blessed One to have what as its fruit?’

“I said to her, ‘Sister, the concentration whereby—neither pressed down nor forced back, nor kept in place by the fabrications of forceful restraint—still as a result of release, contented as a result of standing still, and as a result of contentment one is not agitated: This concentration is said by the Blessed One to have gnosis [arahantship] as its fruit.’ Percipient in this way, too, one is not sensitive to that dimension [i.e., the dimension of the five physical senses and their objects].” — [AN 9:37](#)

What follows on this concentration is total awakening.

When the Buddha describes the knowledge that then followed on his experience of that total awakening, the first point that occurred to his mind was that his release was unprovoked, birth was ended, and there now was no further becoming ([SN 56:11](#)).

We’ve already touched on why he called total release “unprovoked,” but the term bears further explanation. It comes from the Buddhist theory of *dhātu*, or properties, underlying events in nature and in the mind. According to this theory, the physical properties are four: earth (solidity), liquid, heat, and wind (motion or energy). Three of them—liquid, heat, and wind—are potentially active. When they’re aggravated, agitated, or provoked—the Pāli term here, “*pakuppati*,” is used also on

the psychological level, where it means angered or upset—they act as the underlying cause for natural activity. When the provocation ends, the corresponding activity subsides ([MN 28](#)).

A similar theory attributes the arising of mental states to the provocation of the properties of sensuality, form, or formlessness (SN 14:12).

Even unbinding is described as a property ([Iti 44](#)). However, there's a crucial distinction in how unbinding is attained, in that the unbinding property is never provoked. Any events that depend on the provocation of a property are inherently unstable and inconstant, subject to change when the provocation ends. But because true release isn't caused by the provocation of anything, it's not subject to change at all. That's why one of its names is permanence ([SN 43](#)).

The Buddha stated repeatedly that, although the property or dimension of unbinding could be described as existing, arahants cannot be described as existing, not existing, both, or neither ([Ud 8:1](#); [SN 22:86](#)). We've already noted why: Beings are defined by their attachments and passions ([SN 23:2](#); [SN 22:36](#)), whereas arahants have no attachments or passions by which they can be defined. When they can't be defined, they can't properly be described. The Buddha speaks of them, not in terms of what they *are*, but in terms of what they *have done* and *can do*.

“In this Saṅgha of monks 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, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: Such are the monks in this Saṅgha of monks.” — [MN 118](#)

Arahants experience the six senses, along with the pleasures and pains of the senses, but they experience them “disjoined” from them ([MN 140](#)). They can engage in intentional actions, but they can “burn” the seeds for any karmic results coming from those actions ([AN 3:34](#)). In terms of putting an end to their suffering, the Buddha has nothing more to teach them. As depicted in the simile of crossing over the river, they have reached high ground and are free to go wherever they like ([MN 22](#); [SN 35:197](#); [AN 4:5](#)).

The following passages show that they still practice mindfulness, concentration, and the exercises of discernment, but not in the way of other people, and not to further perfect their awakening.

“Monks, even those 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—even they remain focused on the body in & of itself—being ardent, alert, unified, clear-minded, concentrated, & gathered into one, disjoined from the body. They remain focused on feelings in & of themselves... on the mind in & of itself... on dhammas in & of themselves—being ardent, alert, unified, clear-minded, concentrated, & gathered into one, disjoined from dhammas.” — [SN 47:4](#)

“One enters & remains in the first jhāna... the second jhāna... the third jhāna... the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. Such is my instruction, brahman, to those monks who are in training, who have not attained the heart’s goal but remain intent on the unsurpassed safety from the yoke. But as for those 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—these dhammas lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here & now and to mindfulness & alertness.”

— [MN 107](#)

Ven. Sāriputta: “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](#)

In this lifetime, arahants experience unbinding as the ending of passion, aversion, and delusion. At death, all the senses grow cold, and they are everywhere released ([Iti 44](#); [Thag 14:1](#)). Like the great ocean, they can’t be measured ([MN 72](#); [SN 44:1](#)). In the Buddha’s words, their path, like that of birds through space, can’t be traced ([Dhp 92](#)).

## READINGS

§ 10. “Monks, a person consummate in view<sup>1</sup> is incapable of giving rise to six things. Which six? Self-identity view, doubt, grasping at habits & practices, passion that would lead to a lower realm, anger that would lead to a lower realm, delusion that would lead to a lower realm.

“A person consummate in view<sup>1</sup> is incapable of giving rise to these six things.”

— [AN 6:91](#)

## NOTE

1. Consummate in view, *diṭṭhi-sampanna*, is an epithet for a person who has attained stream-entry. ↩

§ 11. “Monks, these six are impossible cases. Which six?

“It’s impossible for a person consummate in view to live without respect or deference for the Teacher. It’s impossible for a person consummate in view to live without respect or deference for the Dhamma. It’s impossible for a person consummate in view to live without respect or deference for the Saṅgha. It’s impossible for a person consummate in view to live without respect or deference for the Training [heightened virtue, heightened concentration, heightened discernment]. It’s impossible for a person consummate in view to return to that which should not be gone to.<sup>1</sup> It’s impossible for a person consummate in view to produce an eighth state of becoming.<sup>2</sup>

“These six are impossible cases.”

— [AN 6:92](#)

## NOTES

1. According to the Commentary, this means that the stream-enterer cannot intentionally break any of the five precepts or adopt any of the 62 wrong views listed in [DN 1](#). ↩

2. In other words, the stream-enterer has, at most, no more than seven future births before gaining full awakening. ↩

§ 12. “Monks, there are these six rewards in realizing the fruit of stream-entry. Which six? One is certain of the true Dhamma. One is not subject to falling back. There is no suffering over what has had a limit placed on it.<sup>1</sup> One is endowed with uncommon knowledge.<sup>2</sup> One rightly sees cause, along with causally-originated phenomena.

“These are the six rewards in realizing the fruit of stream-entry.”

— [AN 6:97](#)

## NOTES

1. *Pariyanta-katassa na dukkham hoti*: In other words, one has no regret over the fact that one will experience rebirth only a limited number of times, and that a limit has been placed on the amount of suffering one is still subject to (see [SN 13:1-2](#), 8). This statement counteracts the notion, sometimes expressed even in Buddhist circles, that a person can get “stuck” in release against his or her will, or that an awakened person might regret putting an end to saṃsāra.

This statement may also refer to the realization, mentioned in [MN 140](#) and many other suttas, that pains are limited to life and limited to the body. Seeing these limits, and what lies beyond them, allows one not to suffer over those pains. ↩

2. According to the Commentary, uncommon knowledge is knowledge in which unawakened people have no share. ↩

§ 13. The Blessed One said: “Now, what is dependent co-arising? From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death. Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands—this regularity of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma, this this/that conditionality. The Tathāgata 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, & says, ‘Look.’ From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.

“From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth....

“From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming....

“From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance....

“From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving....

“From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling....

“From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact....

“From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media....

“From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form....

“From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness....

“From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands—this regularity of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma, this this/that conditionality. The Tathāgata 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, & says, ‘Look.’ From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. What’s there in this way is a reality, not an unreality, not other than what it seems, conditioned by this/that. This is called dependent co-arising.

“And what are dependently co-arisen phenomena? Aging-&-death are dependently co-arisen phenomena: inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation.

“Birth is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Becoming is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Clinging/sustenance is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Craving is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Feeling is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Contact is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“The six sense media are dependently co-arisen phenomena....

“Name-&-form is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Consciousness is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon....

“Fabrications are dependently co-arisen phenomena....

“Ignorance is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon: inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to passing away, subject to fading, subject to cessation. These are called dependently co-arisen phenomena.

“When a disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be, it isn’t possible that he would run after the past, thinking, ‘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?’ or that he would run after the future, thinking, ‘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 that he would be inwardly perplexed about the immediate present, thinking, ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’ Such a thing isn’t possible. Why is that? Because the disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be.”

— [SN 12:20](#)

§ 14. Then Anāthapiṇḍika the householder went to where the wanderers of other persuasions were staying. On arrival he greeted them courteously. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the wanderers said to him, “Tell us, householder, what views the contemplative Gotama has.”

“Venerable sirs, I don’t know entirely what views the Blessed One has.”

“Well, well. So you don’t know entirely what views the contemplative Gotama has. Then tell us what views the monks have.”

“I don’t even know entirely what views the monks have.”

“So you don’t know entirely what views the contemplative Gotama has or even that the monks have. Then tell us what views you have.”

“It wouldn’t be difficult for me to expound to you what views I have. But please let the venerable ones expound each in line with his position, and then it won’t be difficult for me to expound to you what views I have.”

When this had been said, one of the wanderers said to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, “*The cosmos is eternal*. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless. This is the sort of view I have.”

Another wanderer said to Anāthapiṇḍika, “*The cosmos is not eternal*. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless. This is the sort of view I have.”

Another wanderer said, “*The cosmos is finite...*...”*The cosmos is infinite...*...”*The soul & the body are the same...*...”*The soul is one thing and the body another...*...”*After death a Tathāgata exists...*...”*After death a Tathāgata does not exist...*...”*After death a Tathāgata both does & does not exist...*...”*After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist*. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless. This is the sort of view I have.”

When this had been said, Anāthapiṇḍika the householder said to the wanderers, “As for the venerable one who says, “*The cosmos is eternal*. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless. This is the sort of view I have,” his view arises from his own inappropriate attention or in dependence on the words of another. Now, this view has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently originated. Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently originated,

that is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stress. This venerable one thus adheres to that very stress, submits himself to that very stress.”

[Similarly with the other positions.]

When this had been said, the wanderers said to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, “We have each & every one expounded to you in line with our own positions. Now tell us what views you have.”

“Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently originated, that is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stress. Whatever is stress is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. This is the sort of view I have.”

“So, householder, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently originated, that is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stress. You thus adhere to that very stress, submit yourself to that very stress.”

“Venerable sirs, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently originated, that is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stress. Whatever is stress is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. Having seen this well with right discernment as it has come to be, I also discern the higher escape from it as it has come to be.”

When this was said, the wanderers fell silent, abashed, sitting with their shoulders drooping, their heads down, brooding, at a loss for words. Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, perceiving that the wanderers were silent, abashed... at a loss for words, got up & went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he told the Blessed One the entirety of his conversation with the wanderers.

[The Blessed One said:] “Well done, householder. Well done. That is how you should periodically & righteously refute those foolish men.” Then he instructed, urged, roused, and encouraged Anāthapiṇḍika the

householder with a talk on Dhamma. When Anāthapiṇḍika the householder had been instructed, urged, roused and encouraged by the Blessed One with a talk on Dhamma, he got up from his seat and, having bowed down to the Blessed One, left, keeping the Blessed One on his right side. Not long afterward, the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, even a monk who has long penetrated the Dhamma in this Dhamma & Vinaya would do well, periodically & righteously, to refute the wanderers of other persuasions in just the way Anāthapiṇḍika the householder has done.”

— [AN 10:93](#)

§ 15. [Ven. Nārada:] “My friend, although I have seen properly with right discernment, as it has come to be, that ‘The cessation of becoming is unbinding,’ still I am not an arahant whose effluents are ended. It’s as if there were a well along a road in a desert, with neither rope nor water bucket. A man would come along overcome by heat, oppressed by the heat, exhausted, dehydrated, & thirsty. He would look into the well and would have knowledge of ‘water,’ but he would not dwell touching it with his body. In the same way, although I have seen properly with right discernment, as it has come to be, that ‘The cessation of becoming is unbinding,’ still I am not an arahant whose effluents are ended.”

— [SN 12:68](#)

§ 16. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. There he addressed the monks: “Monks!”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded to him.

“Monks, do you remember the five lower fetters as taught by me?”



When this was said, Ven. Mālun̄kyaputta said to the Blessed One, “Lord, I remember the five lower fetters as taught by the Blessed One.”

“And how, Mālun̄kyaputta, do you remember the five lower fetters as taught by me?”

“Lord, I remember self-identity view as a lower fetter taught by the Blessed One. I remember doubt as a lower fetter taught by the Blessed One. I remember grasping at habits & practices as a lower fetter taught by the Blessed One. I remember sensual desire as a lower fetter taught by the Blessed One. I remember ill will as a lower fetter taught by the Blessed One. That’s how I remember the five lower fetters as taught by the Blessed One.”

“And to whom, Mālun̄kyaputta, do you remember my having taught the five lower fetters in that way? Wouldn’t the wanderers of other sects make a rebuttal with the simile of the youngster? For even the thought ‘self-identity’ doesn’t occur to a stupid baby boy lying on its back, so from where would self-identity view arise in it, even though a latent tendency to self-identity view lies latent within it? Even the thought ‘dhammas’ doesn’t occur to a stupid baby boy lying on its back, so from where would doubt about dhammas arise in it, even though a latent tendency to doubt lies latent within it? Even the thought ‘habits’ doesn’t occur to a stupid baby boy lying on its back, so from where would grasping at habits & practices arise in it, even though a latent tendency to grasping at habits & practices lies latent within it? Even the thought ‘sensuality’ doesn’t occur to a stupid baby boy lying on its back, so from where would sensual desire for sensuality arise in it, even though a latent tendency to sensual passion lies latent within it? Even the thought ‘beings’ doesn’t occur to a stupid baby boy lying on its back, so from where would ill will for beings arise in it, even though a latent tendency to ill will lies latent within it?”

When this was said, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “This is the time, O Blessed One. This is the time, O One Well-Gone, for the Blessed One to teach the five lower fetters. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks will remember it.”

“In that case, Ānanda, listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” Ven. Ānanda responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said, “There is the case, Ānanda, 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—remains with his awareness possessed by self-identity view, overcome by self-identity view. He doesn’t discern, as it has come to be, the escape from an arisen self-identity view. For him, that self-identity view—fixed & unsubdued in him—is a lower fetter.

“He remains with his awareness possessed by doubt...

“He remains with his awareness possessed by grasping at habits & practices...

“He remains with his awareness possessed by sensual passion...

“He remains with his awareness possessed by ill will, overcome by ill will. He doesn’t discern, as it has come to be, the escape from arisen ill will. For him, that ill will—fixed & unsubdued in him—is a lower fetter.

“But 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 people of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—remains with his awareness not possessed by self-identity view, not overcome by self-identity view. He discerns, as it has come to be, the escape from an arisen self-identity view. For him, that self-identity view—together with its latent tendency—is abandoned.

“He remains with his awareness not possessed by doubt...

“He remains with his awareness not possessed by grasping at habits & practices...

“He remains with his awareness not possessed by sensual passion...

“He remains with his awareness not possessed by ill will, overcome by ill will. He discerns, as it has come to be, the escape from arisen ill will. For him, that ill will—together with its latent tendency—is abandoned.

“For one who has not followed the path, the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters to know, to see, or to abandon the five lower fetters: That is impossible. It’s just as if there were a great tree standing, possessed of heartwood. For its heartwood to be cut without first cutting through the bark, without cutting through the sapwood: That is impossible. In the same way, for one who has not followed the path, the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters to know, to see, or to abandon the five lower fetters: That is impossible.

“For one who has followed the path, the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters to know, to see, or to abandon the five lower fetters: That is possible. It’s just as if there were a great tree standing, possessed of heartwood. For its heartwood to be cut after first cutting through the bark and cutting through the sapwood: That is possible. In the same way, for one who has followed the path, the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters to know, to see, or to abandon the five lower fetters: That is possible.

“Suppose that the River Ganges were full of water up to the brim so that crows could drink out of it, and a weak man were to come along, (thinking,) ‘I will go across this River Ganges, cutting the current with my arms, safely to the further shore.’ He would not be able to go across the River Ganges, cutting the current with his arms, safely to the further

shore. So it is with anyone whose mind, when the cessation of self-identity is being taught, doesn't take to it, isn't calmed by it, doesn't resolve on it, and isn't released in it: That person is to be seen as like the weak man.

“But suppose that the River Ganges were full of water up to the brim so that crows could drink out of it, and a strong man were to come along, (thinking,) ‘I will go across this River Ganges, cutting the current with my arms, safely to the further shore.’ He would be able to go across the River Ganges, cutting the current with his arms, safely to the further shore. So it is with anyone whose mind, when the cessation of self-identity is being taught, takes to it, is calmed by it, resolves on it, and is released in it: That person is to be seen as like the strong man.

“And what, Ānanda, is the path, what is the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters? There is the case where a monk—from being secluded from acquisitions, from the abandoning of unskillful qualities, from the entire calming of bodily discomfort, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, 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 relinquishment 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 from the total ending of the five lower fetters—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“This, Ānanda, is the path, this is the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters.

[Similarly with the second, third, and fourth jhāna.]

“And further, Ānanda, the monk—with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space’—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 relinquishment 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 ending of the five lower fetters—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“This, Ānanda, is the path, this is the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters.”

[Similarly with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness and the dimension of nothingness.]

“But, lord, if this is the path, if this is the practice, for the abandoning of the five lower fetters, then why are some monks (said to

be) ‘released through awareness,’ and some monks are (said to be) ‘released through discernment’?”

“I tell you, Ānanda: That is the difference in their faculties.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Ānanda delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

— [MN 64](#)

§ 17. “I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna... the second jhāna... the third... the fourth... the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness. I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

“I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said? There’s the case where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, 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 relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.’

“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's the case where a monk... enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, 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 relinquishment 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 from the total ending of the five lower fetters—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

"I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the first jhāna.' Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

[Similarly with the second, third, and fourth jhāna.]

"I tell you, the ending of the effluents depends on the dimension of the infinitude of space.' Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said? There's the case where a monk—with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) 'Infinite space'—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 relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.’

“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’s 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 relinquishment 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 ending of the five lower fetters—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

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

[Similarly with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness and the dimension of nothingness.]

“Thus, as far as the perception-attainments go, that is as far as gnosis-penetration goes. As for these two dimensions—the attainment of



the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception & the attainment of the cessation of perception & feeling—I tell you that they are to be rightly explained by those monks who are meditators, skilled at attainment, skilled at attainment-emergence, who have attained & emerged in dependence on them.”

— [AN 9:36](#)

§ 18. Then Dasama the householder from Aṭṭhakanagara, on completing his business at Pāṭaliputta, went to Ven. Ānanda at Veḷuvagāma near Vesālī. On arrival, having bowed down to him, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Ānanda: “Venerable sir, is there a single quality declared by the Blessed One—the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened—where the unreleased mind of a monk who dwells there heedful, ardent, & resolute becomes released, or his unended effluents go to their total ending, or he attains the unexcelled security from the yoke that he had not attained before?”

“Yes, householder, there is....”

“And what is that one quality, venerable sir...?”

“There’s the case, householder, where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born from seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He reflects on this and discerns, ‘This first jhāna 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—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a

Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“This, householder, is a single quality declared by the Blessed One—the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened—where the unreleased mind of a monk who dwells there heedful, ardent, & resolute becomes released, or his unended effluents go to their total ending, or he attains the unexcelled security from the yoke that he had not attained before.

[Similarly with the second, third, and fourth jhānas.]

“Then again, a monk keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with goodwill, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, enlarged, unlimited, without hostility, without ill will. He reflects on this and discerns, ‘This awareness-release through goodwill 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—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“This too, householder, is a single quality declared by the Blessed One—the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened—where the unreleased mind of a monk who dwells there heedful, ardent, & resolute becomes released, or his unended effluents go to their total ending, or he attains the unexcelled security from the yoke that he had not attained before.

[Similarly with awareness-release through compassion, through empathetic joy, & through equanimity.]

“Then again, a monk—with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space’—enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. He reflects on this and discerns, ‘This attainment of the infinitude of space 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—he is due to arise spontaneously (in a Brahmā world), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.

“This too, householder, is a single quality declared by the Blessed One—the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened—where the unreleased mind of a monk who dwells there heedful, ardent, & resolute becomes released, or his unended effluents go to their total ending, or he attains the unexcelled security from the yoke that he had not attained before.

[Similarly with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness and the dimension of nothingness.]

When this was said, Dasama the householder from Aṭṭhakanagara said to Ven. Ānanda, “Venerable Ānanda, just as if a man seeking a single opening onto treasure were all at once to come upon eleven openings onto treasure, in the same way I—seeking a single doorway to the deathless—have all at once come to hear of eleven doorways to the deathless. And just as if a man whose house had eleven doors could take himself to safety by means of any one of those doors, in the same way I

can take myself to safety by means of any one of these eleven doors to the deathless.”

— [MN 52](#)

§ 19. [Ven. Udāyin:] “Released through discernment, released through discernment,’ it is said. To what extent is one described by the Blessed One as released through discernment?”

[Ven. Ānanda:] “There’s the case, my friend, where a monk, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. And he knows it through discernment. It’s to this extent that one is described by the Blessed One as released through discernment, though with a sequel.

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna... the third jhāna... the fourth jhāna... the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. And he knows it through discernment. It’s to this extent that one is described by the Blessed One as released through discernment, though with a sequel.

“Then, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And as he sees (that) with discernment, effluents are completely ended. And he knows it through discernment. It’s to this extent that one is described by the Blessed One as released through discernment without a sequel.”

— [AN 9:44](#)

§ 20. [Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita:] “The immeasurable awareness-release, the nothingness awareness-release, the emptiness awareness-release, the theme-less awareness-release: Are these qualities different in meaning & different in name, or are they one in meaning and different only in name?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “The immeasurable awareness-release, the nothingness awareness-release, the emptiness awareness-release, the theme-less awareness-release: There is a way of explanation by which these qualities are different in meaning & different in name, and there is a way of explanation by which these qualities are one in meaning and different only in name.

“And what is the way of explanation by which these qualities are different in meaning & different in name? There is the case where a monk keeps pervading the first direction [the east]—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with goodwill. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill: abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with compassion... an awareness imbued with empathetic joy...

“He keeps pervading the first direction—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“This is called the immeasurable awareness-release.

“And what is the nothingness awareness-release? There is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, ‘There is nothing,’ enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. This is called the nothingness awareness-release.

“And what is the emptiness awareness-release? There is the case where a monk, having gone into the wilderness, to the root of a tree, or into an empty dwelling, considers this: ‘This is empty of self or of anything pertaining to self.’<sup>6</sup> This is called the emptiness awareness-release.

“And what is the theme-less awareness-release? There is the case where a monk, through not attending to all themes, enters & remains in the theme-less concentration of awareness. This is called the theme-less awareness-release.

“This is the way of explaining by which these qualities are different in meaning & different in name.

“And what is the way of explaining whereby these qualities are one in meaning and different only in name?

“Passion, friend, is a making of measurement. Aversion is a making of measurement. Delusion is a making of measurement. In a monk whose effluents are ended, these have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Now, to the extent that there is immeasurable awareness-release, the unprovoked awareness-release is declared the foremost. And this unprovoked awareness-release is empty of passion, empty of aversion, empty of delusion.

“Passion is a something. Aversion is a something. Delusion is a something. In a monk whose effluents are ended, these have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived

of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Now, to the extent that there is nothingness awareness-release, the unprovoked awareness-release is declared the foremost. And this unprovoked awareness-release is empty of passion, empty of aversion, empty of delusion.

“Passion is a making of themes. Aversion is a making of themes. Delusion is a making of themes. In a monk whose effluents are ended, these have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Now, to the extent that there is theme-less awareness-release, the unprovoked awareness-release is declared the foremost. And this unprovoked awareness-release is empty of passion, empty of aversion, empty of delusion.

“This, friend, is the way of explaining whereby these qualities are one in meaning and different only in name.”

— [MN 43](#)

### *3 : The Skills of Listening*

There are cases in the Canon where several people listening to the same talk arrive at very different results: Some of them gain arahantship, others a lower noble attainment, others no noble attainment at all. This shows that the talk itself is not the only determining factor. The results are also determined by what the listeners bring to the talk.

This point is confirmed by several passages in the Canon that describe what is necessary for awakening to take place. Some of the passages deal with the noble attainments in general—i.e., regardless of whether they're attained while listening to a talk—and others specifically with what a person needs to bring to a talk in order to gain a noble attainment while listening to it.

No single passage offers a complete, definitive picture of the factors that are needed. Instead, the various passages come at the issue from different angles, overlapping in some instances and offering distinctive details in others.

However, before we look at the passages, it's important to note that the talk and what the listener brings to the talk are not always entirely separate. In some cases, listeners came to the Buddha's Dhamma lacking in only one thing: the discernment that would bring about a noble attainment. All the other factors needed to open and steady their minds in a way that would support that discernment were already in place. Yet there were other cases where the supporting factors were also weak, but the Buddha or his disciples saw that they could inspire those factors in



their listeners in an effective way. In cases like this, they faced two challenges:

- how to sense when these factors had the potential to be strengthened, and
- how to act and speak in a way that would strengthen them.

So, as we survey the passages describing these factors, try to view them from two perspectives: that of the speaker and that of the listener. From the speaker's perspective, you're looking to see how the Dhamma can be effectively presented. From the listener's, you're looking to see how to absorb the lessons of the Dhamma and apply them to the actions of your own mind.

## **THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK**

The closest to an overall framework of qualities needed for gaining a noble attainment is provided by three passages that deal with the issue in general, regardless of whether you're listening to a talk or meditating on your own. Two of the passages deal with mental qualities you have to develop in the present; one concerns your karmic background—past actions that would make you incapable of reaching any of the noble attainments in this lifetime.

Of the two passages that deal with mental qualities that have to be developed, the first lists the prerequisites for stream-entry, and thus for all the noble attainments.

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

“Listening to the true Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry.

“Appropriate attention is a factor for stream-entry.

“Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. — [SN 55:5](#)

In this passage, what you bring to the practice falls under the last two of the four factors—appropriate attention and practice in accordance with the Dhamma—so we’ll focus on those.

*Appropriate attention*, as we noted in Chapter 1, means making an inquiry to see what you’re directly experiencing in the mind in terms of the four noble truths. It’s the *focused activity* of discernment. As we’ll see in the course of this book, the crucial feature of appropriate attention is the way it applies the framework of the noble truths to the problem of suffering, a framework that can be expressed in a variety of extended or succinct ways. In its shortest form, the framework comes down to origination and cessation: looking into the mind for the cause of suffering and for how suffering can be ended by ending the cause.

*Practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma* means to practice for the purpose of disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation ([SN 12:67](#)). It’s your *motivation* for developing discernment. The four suttas at [SN 22:39–42](#) [§35] add that you arrive at disenchantment by regarding the five aggregates in terms of the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self.

The fact that you’re aiming at disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation, means that you won’t be satisfied with the pleasures of concentration and discernment. In this, you follow the example set by the Buddha, who didn’t allow his mind to be overcome by any of the pleasures encountered on the path ([MN 36](#)), and who said that one of the secrets to his awakening was discontent with skillful qualities ([AN 2:5](#)). In other words, he aimed high, remaining heedful all along the path and not resting satisfied until he had reached total unbinding.

As we noted in Chapter 1, the path, as it develops, boils down to skillful use of attention and intention acting closely together. Appropriate attention is clearly an instance of skillful attention. The principle of practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma shows how attention and skillful intention are combined at this stage of the practice. Your intention is to arrive at the release that comes with disenchantment, dispassion, and cessation. You do that by applying appropriate attention to the aggregates, as we explained in Chapter 1.

These two factors show the challenges that faced the Buddha in bringing his listeners to the noble attainments. Appropriate attention conveys the good news that suffering can be ended, but it identifies the causes of suffering as coming from within. This means, on the one hand, that you don't have to fight off outside forces to stop your suffering, but on the other hand it also means that you have to accept responsibility for your sufferings if you want to bring them to an end.

At the same time, the four noble truths show that you suffer because of things you hold dear, and even because of things you identify as your self. This means that the Buddha would have to convince his listeners to step back from their preferences, their habits, and even their self-identities, and to work at seeing the drawbacks of holding on to those things. In other words, he had to teach his listeners not only to be responsible but also to change their internal allegiances.

The need for his listeners to aim at disenchantment meant that the Buddha had to persuade them to aim high, just as he did. As we'll see, this involved showing that he appreciated the pleasures offered by the world—he wasn't a killjoy—but it also involved inspiring an acute sense of the dangers in resting satisfied with those pleasures.

Some of the steps by which the Buddha could accomplish these tasks are suggested in more detail in the second passage mentioned above

and quoted below. This passage builds on the standard list of factors given in dependent co-arising. Unlike the standard list, though, it doesn't stop with suffering and stress. Instead, it takes suffering and stress as the jumping-off point for a sequence of mental factors that should ideally be inspired by the experience of suffering and that culminate in the knowledge of ending—apparently, the ending of the effluents.

“Conviction has stress as its prerequisite.

“Joy has conviction as its prerequisite.

“Rapture has joy as its prerequisite.

“Calm has rapture as its prerequisite.

“Pleasure has calm as its prerequisite,

“Concentration has pleasure as its prerequisite.

“Knowledge & vision of things as they have come to be has concentration as its prerequisite.

“Disenchantment has knowledge & vision of things as they have come to be as its prerequisite.

“Dispassion has disenchantment as its prerequisite.

“Release has dispassion as its prerequisite.

“Knowledge of ending has release as its prerequisite.”

— [\*SN 12:23\*](#)

This sequence starts with the fact of *dukkha*: pain, suffering, stress. As the Buddha noted, the natural reaction to suffering is twofold: bewilderment as to why it's happening, and a search for someone who might know how to put an end to it ([AN 6:63](#)).

The experience of pain, and the search for knowledge on how to end it, leads to conviction when you see a potential opportunity to end your pain that seems reliable. This means that the Buddha, when teaching his

listeners, had to establish the fact that he was a reliable and trustworthy guide. As we'll see in the following chapters, he had a variety of ways of doing this.

The Buddha explained conviction as meaning not only a sense of faith in him and the Dhamma, but also the act of putting the Dhamma into practice ([SN 48:8](#); [AN 10:92](#)). In other words, conviction doesn't mean just assenting to ideas. It also means acting on them. When you see that the Buddha's instructions clear up obscure matters in the mind, and that following his recommendations gives results, the natural response is joy. You've found what you've instinctively been looking for. This joy gives rise to the rapture, pleasure, and calm that can provide the basis for concentration. Concentration then establishes the mind in a state where it's more able and willing to see the steps by which it has been creating suffering and to stop following those steps. That's what enables the mind to attain release.

So this passage shows not only what the listener has to do in order to attain a noble attainment, but also what the Buddha had to do in order to influence the listener in that direction: He had to inspire conviction in the listener and nurture the joy that would lead the listener to settle down in the type of concentration that could provide a good foundation for discernment to arise. This type of concentration, though, requires that the listener put aside all thoughts of sensuality. So the need to induce joy is also accompanied by a need to get the listener to put aside, for the time being at least, any fascination with sensual thoughts and fantasies. For some of his listeners this wouldn't have been hard, but others would have required strong medicine.

The need to induce joy here raises two further issues. On the one hand, it shows that the Buddha's reputation as a pessimist is extremely misguided. His listeners, if they were earnest in wanting to put an end

to suffering, found his explanations a source of hope and relief. Again and again, they would exclaim that his teachings were magnificent in shining a light into the dark. The darkness they were referring to was probably the confusion and discouragement caused by the other teachings available in the Buddha's time, many of which denied the power of human action to put an end to suffering ([DN 2](#); [AN 3:62](#)). By proclaiming that human action *could* put an end to suffering, the Buddha's teachings could be a source of genuine joy.

That joy was strengthened by the fact that those teachings clearly delineated right and wrong ways of ending suffering. Here again, they provided a useful contrast with the teachings available during the Buddha's time that denied that ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, had any objective reality ([DN 2](#)).

Here we confront another mistaken popular notion: that the Buddha was non-dualist in moral issues, that he refused to draw a line between right and wrong. Actually, he saw that a teacher has to provide students with a solid basis for deciding what actions should and shouldn't be done. Only then can that teacher end the bewilderment that comes from suffering, and protect the students from causing further suffering for themselves and others ([AN 3:62](#)). When you understand his mature perspective, you can appreciate how ideas of right and wrong are not oppressive. When you sincerely want to end your suffering, learning how to distinguish between right and wrong ways of accomplishing that aim can excite joy.

The second issue related to the issue of joy deals with the fact that, as the Buddha noted, many of his listeners would respond only to harsh teachings—teachings that focused on the negative effects of unskillful actions more than on the positive effects of skillful ones ([AN 4:111](#) [[§30](#)]). As we'll see, there were at least two explicit cases where the

Buddha's listeners become arahants after he pointed out the terrifying aspects of saṃsāra and their complicity in the actions that make saṃsāra so dangerous. The fact that they would feel joy in having their complicity called out may seem paradoxical and even illogical, but it relates to two possibilities: One, they appreciated the fact that the Buddha was a straight-shooter, fearless enough to treat them frankly and honestly. Two, in being forced to recognize their complacency and to see its inherent dangers, they found joy in taking refuge in the only alternative that offers genuine safety: the deathless.

As for the phrase, “knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be,” that refers to insight into the processes by which suffering is caused and the processes by which it can be ended. In other words, this knowledge and vision is identical to a direct experience of the four noble truths.

Those are some of the general outlines of the qualities of mind that have to be brought to any noble attainment. It's useful to note that these qualities fall under three headings: conviction, concentration, and discernment.

Under conviction there's joy.

Under concentration there's rapture, pleasure, and calm.

Under discernment there's appropriate attention, practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, and knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be.

When we consider that, in the noble eightfold path, training in concentration also includes right effort and right mindfulness, we can see that the qualities needed for any noble attainment require all of the five faculties: conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and

discernment. This point is supported by [SN 46:38](#) [[§29](#)], which notes that all seven factors for awakening—which cover the same ground as the last four of the faculties—go to the completion of their development when a disciple of the noble ones listens to the Dhamma, “receptive, attentive, focusing his entire awareness, lending ear.”

However, there’s a certain logic to the way in which the passages we have cited above emphasize conviction, concentration, and discernment: Discernment is the crucial factor that does the work in gaining an opening to the deathless; conviction is needed to open the mind to the Dhamma that will spark that discernment; and concentration is needed to steady the mind so that discernment can see how the lessons of the Dhamma apply to subtle movements actually going on in the mind.

The remaining qualities listed in [SN 12:23](#) after knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be, by the way, are results. You don’t bring them to the noble attainments. You take them away.

As for the karmic background you bring to the Buddha’s teachings, [AN 5:129](#) states that there are five types of inhabitants of hell who are in agony and incurable—in other words, they have to complete the lifespan of that particular hell before they can be released from it. Cv.VII.5.4 says that a person who has, in this lifetime, committed one of the five acts listed here—he has caused a schism in the Saṅgha—is destined to boil in hell for an eon. This means that the noble attainments are entirely off-limits to him in this lifetime in any circumstances. [DN 2](#) makes a similar point: A person who has killed his father can’t gain a noble attainment, and the same point would apparently apply to the other actions mentioned here as well:



“There are these five inhabitants of the states of deprivation, inhabitants of hell, who are in agony & incurable. Which five? One who has killed one’s mother, one who has killed one’s father, one who has killed an arahant, one who—with a corrupted mind—has caused the blood of a Tathāgata to flow, and one who has caused a split in the Saṅgha.” — [AN 5:129](#)

## HOW TO LISTEN

As for the various passages that deal specifically with the attitudes and karmic background a listener has to bring to the act of listening to a Dhamma talk so as to reach a noble attainment, they tend to be fairly patchwork. Each passage focuses on some of the details listed in [SN 55:5](#) and [SN 12:23](#), omitting some points and expanding on others. The passages in question, which overlap with one another to some extent, are [AN 5:151](#); [AN 5:152](#); [AN 6:86](#); [AN 6:87](#); and [AN 6:88](#) [§§24–28]. When we collate their points, we come up with the following lists.

The points dealing with your karmic background focus on the fact that you haven’t committed any of the five acts mentioned above in [AN 5:129](#) that would obstruct an attainment in this lifetime, and that you’re discerning: In the words of [AN 5:152](#), you’re “neither dim-witted nor a drooling idiot.”

As for the attitudes you have to bring to the act of listening, they fall under the same three headings that, as we just saw, apply to gaining the noble attainments in general: conviction, concentration, and discernment.

- First, *conviction*:

You don’t hold the talk in contempt.

You don't hold the speaker in contempt.  
You don't hold yourself in contempt.  
Your mind isn't obstructed by defilement.  
You're endowed with the patience [or: preference] to comply  
with the teaching.

Some of these points require very little explanation. If you have contempt for the talk or for the speaker, you're not going to listen carefully or with an open heart, so you won't be able to absorb the message. If your mind is obscured by defilement—such as greed, aversion, or sensuality—you won't be paying proper attention.

The factor of patience to comply with the teaching is an issue of willingness. Convinced of the value of the Buddha's message, you're willing to give his teaching a try. This point reflects the Buddha's discussion of what conviction means: You not only give intellectual assent to what he has to say, but you also believe in it enough to try putting it into practice.

Especially interesting is the need not to feel contempt for yourself. To get the most out of the talk, you have to apply its message to what's going on in your mind—in the Buddha's terms, “seeing what has come to be as come to be”—and then responding appropriately. For this, you need to believe that you're capable of understanding the Buddha's message, that it applies to what's going on in your mind right then and there, that you're capable of applying his lessons to direct what your mind is doing, and that you'll benefit when you do. If you believe that you're incapable of doing these things, the most crucial element of gaining a noble attainment while listening will be missing.

It's for this reason that Ven. Ānanda recommended a healthy level of conceit on the path:

“The thought occurs to one: ‘The monk named such-&-such, they say, through the ending of the effluents, has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now. Then why not me?’ Then, at a later time, one abandons conceit, having relied on conceit.” — [AN 4:159](#)

- The second set of attitudes you need to bring to the act of listening has to do with *concentration*:

You have desire.

You listen well.

You give ear.

You listen to the Dhamma with an unscattered mind, a mind gathered into one [*ek’agga-citto*].

Here, two points are worthy of note.

The first is that desire is necessary to get the most out of listening. You have to want to listen, you have to want to get the mind into concentration, and—as we’ll see in the next set—you have to want to go beyond concentration for the discernment that’s needed for awakening to arise. If you’re satisfied with where you are, you may decide that you’re exercising discernment in simply accepting and being present for what is. You won’t get any further on the path.

This is a point that’s widely misunderstood. Some people, on seeing that the three forms of craving are the cause of suffering, assume that all craving has to be put aside to follow the path. But the path isn’t something that happens on its own. You have to do it—and to muster the effort to do it, you have to want to do it.

Ven. Ānanda: “‘This body comes into being through craving. And yet it is by relying on craving that craving is to be abandoned.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said? There is the case, sister, where a monk hears, ‘The monk named such-&-such, they say, through the ending of the effluents, has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having known & realized them for himself in the here & now.’ The thought occurs to him, ‘I hope that I, too, will—through the ending of the effluents—enter & remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for myself right in the here & now.’ Then, at a later time, he abandons craving, having relied on craving.” — [AN 4:159](#)

The important role of craving on the path—which the Buddha equates with desire—is underlined by the fact that desire is an integral part of the path factor of right effort. This is also why Ven. Ānanda made the comparison: To get to a park, you have to desire to get to the park. When you’ve arrived, you can put that desire aside ([SN 51:15](#)).

The second point of interest under the heading of concentration is the word the Buddha uses to describe the mind state that’s fully concentrated on listening: *ek’agga*. This is sometimes translated as “one-pointed,” and because this term is used to define the state of mind in concentration, this translation is often cited to argue that a mind in right concentration has to be reduced to a single, narrow point of concentration—so extremely narrow that you have no awareness of your body or of the other physical senses, and no ability to think.

There are two ways of showing that this interpretation is wrong. The first is to look at the term *ek’agga* itself. It’s a compound of two words, *eka* and *agga*. *Eka* means “one” or “single.” *Agga* has two primary clusters of meanings, in neither of which is “point” the central focus.

The first cluster centers on the fact that a summit of a mountain is called its *agga*. Clustered around this meaning are ideas of *agga* as the topmost part of something (such as the ridge of a roof), the tip of something (such as the tip of a blade of grass), and the best or supreme example of something (such as the Buddha as the *agga* of all beings). [AN 5:80](#) plays with these meanings of *agga* when it criticizes monks of the future who will “search for the tiptop flavors (*ras’agga*) with the tip of the tongue (*jivh’agga*).”

The second cluster of meanings for *agga* centers on the idea of “meeting place.” A hall where monks gather for the uposatha, for example, is called an *uposath’agga*. The spot where they gather for their meals is called a *bhatt’agga*.

Given that the object of concentration is said to be a dwelling (*vihāra*), and that a person enters and dwells (*viharati*) in the levels of jhāna, this second cluster of meanings seems to be the more relevant one here. A mind with a single *agga*, in this case, would simply be a mind gathered around one object or activity, and need not be reduced to a single point.

Moving from the term *ek’agga* to the more general context of the Canon as a whole, we’ve seen that the similes used by the Buddha to illustrate the practice of right concentration all point to a full-body awareness. If right concentration were so narrow that you couldn’t experience the body at all, the similes would be misleading, and probably wouldn’t have occurred to the Buddha in the first place.

But perhaps a more relevant way to show that *ek’agga* can’t mean so narrowly focused that you can’t think or hear is this: Such a meaning would make no sense in the context we’re considering here. In [AN 5:151 \[§27\]](#), from which we’ve taken this term, your mind is said to ideally be *ek’agga* while listening to the talk, and at the same time you’re engaged

in appropriate attention. If *ek'agga* meant so one-pointed that you can't hear or think, that would defeat the purpose of listening. You wouldn't be able to hear what the speaker is saying, and you wouldn't be able to observe the mind on the path in real time. If you were in the first *jhāna* while listening, there would be no way that you could observe, as it's actually happening, that "This is the path to the cessation of stress."

So the translation for *ek'agga* we've given here—"gathered into one"—seems more warranted than "one-pointed": You're single-mindedly focused while listening to the talk.

However, your focus is not just on listening. To apply appropriate attention, you have to focus on applying the lessons of the talk to the mind—to get it into concentration and then to observe the mind in concentration, in line with the duties of the four noble truths. In other words, you have to bring attention and intention together in a skillful way.

- This is how the second set of attitudes you need to bring to the act of listening melds into the third, which has to do with *discernment*.

You set your mind on gnosis.

You attend appropriately.

Not understanding, you don't assume you understand.

You reject what's worthless.

You grab hold of what's worthwhile.

The factor of setting your mind on gnosis means aiming at the knowledge of total liberation. It's primarily an act of intention, one that's needed to give rise to appropriate attention on the ultimate level. In other words, here we have another example of how intention and attention have to work together in giving rise to liberating discernment.

As we noted above when considering what it means to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, you have to aim high if you're going to develop the discernment that will lead to release. The level of attention required to gain that discernment has to be highly motivated.

We've already seen, in Chapter 1, one way of attending appropriately: regarding the five clinging-aggregates in line with the eleven perceptions listed in [SN 22:122](#) [§34]. [AN 9:36](#) [§17] shows how you can do that while the mind is properly concentrated even in the levels of jhāna. While you're listening to a talk, appropriate attention means asking the right questions as to how the talk applies to what's going on in the mind, noticing the four noble truths as they appear internally, and following the appropriate duties to each instance as it appears. In other words, you develop concentration and discernment so as to comprehend the clinging-aggregates as you detect them in the concentration. Then you further develop discernment to abandon any craving for those objects of clinging and to realize the cessation that results.

The factor of not assuming that you understand when you don't is especially interesting. It relates to the Buddha's characterization of his style of teaching: He said that he trained his following, not in bombast, but in cross-questioning ([AN 2:46](#)). Training in bombast means teaching elegant concepts but being unwilling to answer questions about the meaning of the terms you use. Training in cross-questioning is the opposite: You teach in terms connected to the path leading to the goal, and you answer questions to make their meaning plain.

What the Buddha is suggesting when he says you shouldn't assume you understand when you don't is that if you have any doubts, you should feel free to ask questions. He himself embodies this principle in

practice by freely asking questions of his listeners. In fact, it's noteworthy, in the talks where his listeners gain awakening while listening to the talk, how often he questions them and expects them to give answers. But it's also noteworthy that, of these talks, there are only four where listeners ask questions of the Buddha ([DN 21](#); [SN 46:56](#); [MN 109](#); [SN 22:89](#) [[§§42–43](#); [§§55–56](#)]).

However, as we'll see, there was one talk—the graduated discourse—that the Buddha used frequently to prepare his listeners to best benefit from learning the four noble truths. We have only the bare outline of the talk, and never a full text. Because he gave the talk to a wide variety of people, he probably tailored the general outline to the specific needs of those he was talking to. This means that he may have answered his listeners' questions in the course of this talk, establishing the atmosphere of openness and helpfulness that his training in cross-questioning could provide, but we simply don't have a record of what those questions and answers were.

Finally, the factor of rejecting what's worthless and grabbing hold of what's worthwhile means, basically, that you're wise in following through with the duties of the four noble truths as you approach events in your own mind with appropriate attention. You reject the causes of suffering, along with any attitudes that would foster those causes, and instead grab hold of the path—until you reach the point where you have to let go of that, too.

This factor shows the direct connection among discernment, right effort, and the sub-factor of ardency in the practice of right mindfulness: Discernment means not just seeing things as they are, but seeing them as they function, and how their way of functioning can be directed to putting an end to suffering.



So, all in all, the qualities you have to bring to listening to the Dhamma so as to reach a noble attainment while listening fall under the three headings of conviction, concentration, and discernment. When we review them, we can see that they follow—and in some cases expand on—the Buddha’s observations on what’s needed to gain a noble attainment in general: opening the mind, steadying it, observing it while applying the lessons of the Dhamma to it. We can also see the challenges faced by the Buddha if he wanted to induce his listeners to gain a noble attainment while listening to him speak.

Of course, these challenges would have varied from case to case. In some instances—as when he was teaching lepers and outcastes—he had to emphasize the point that they not hold themselves in contempt. In other instances—as when teaching lay people in general—he had to get their minds away from sensual thoughts, establish them in concentration, and inspire them to aim high.

In every case, though, he would have to teach his listeners how to foster their discernment, because that was what even those endowed with strong conviction and concentration would still be lacking. But even here, his task would vary depending on the individual. Some people needed to have the four noble truths explained in detail. Others—such as Bāhiya, Sāriputta, and Moggallāna—needed only brief hints of the principles and the framework underlying the truths, and they were able not only to penetrate the implications of those truths but also to put their duties into practice then and there.

So, keeping in mind the general principles of what attitudes a listener needs to bring to a talk in order to reach a noble attainment while listening to it, we can now turn to specific examples of how the Buddha and his disciples nurtured those attitudes in the hearts and minds of their listeners in actual practice.

## READINGS

§ 21. “Association with people of integrity is a factor for stream-entry. Listening to the true Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry. Appropriate attention is a factor for stream-entry. Practice in accordance with the Dhamma is a factor for stream-entry.”

— [SN 55:5](#)

§ 22. “There is the case, monks, where the Teacher or a fellow person leading the holy life teaches the Dhamma to a monk. And in whatever way the Teacher or a fellow person leading the holy life teaches the Dhamma to the monk, in just that way the monk, with regard to that Dhamma, is sensitive to the meaning, is sensitive to the Dhamma. In him—sensitive to the meaning, sensitive to the Dhamma—joy is born. When he is joyful, rapture is born. In one who is enraptured at heart, the body grows calm. When the body is calm, one feels pleasure. Feeling pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated. This, monks, is the first opening to release where a monk—dwelling heedful, ardent, & resolute—releases his unreleased mind, or where his as-yet-unended effluents go to their total end, or he reaches the as-yet-unreached unexcelled safety from bonds.”

[Similarly in the cases where: “The monk teaches the Dhamma to others in detail, as he has heard it, as he has learned it ... he recites the Dhamma in detail, as he has heard it, as he has learned it ... in his awareness he directs his thoughts to the Dhamma in detail, as he has heard it, as he has learned it; he evaluates it, & mentally examines it ... he has well grasped a certain theme of concentration, has attended to it well, sustained it well, has penetrated it well with discernment.”]

— [AN 5:26](#)

§ 23. “Just as when the devas pour rain in heavy drops & crash thunder on the upper mountains: The water, flowing down along the slopes, fills the branches of the mountain ravines & gullies. When the branches of the mountain ravines & gullies are full, they fill the little lakes. When the little lakes are full, they fill the large lakes... the little rivers... the large rivers. When the large rivers are full, they fill the great ocean. In the same way:

fabrications have ignorance as their prerequisite,  
consciousness has fabrications as its prerequisite,  
name-&-form has consciousness as their prerequisite,  
the six sense media have name-&-form as their prerequisite,  
contact has the six sense media as its prerequisite,  
feeling has contact as its prerequisite,  
craving has feeling as its prerequisite,  
clinging has craving as its prerequisite,  
becoming has clinging as its prerequisite,  
birth has becoming as its prerequisite,  
stress has birth as its prerequisite,  
conviction has stress as its prerequisite,  
joy has conviction as its prerequisite,  
rapture has joy as its prerequisite,  
calm has rapture as its prerequisite,  
pleasure has calm as its prerequisite,  
concentration has pleasure as its prerequisite,  
knowledge & vision of things as they have come to be has  
concentration as its prerequisite,  
disenchantment has knowledge & vision of things as they have come  
to be as its prerequisite,  
dispassion has disenchantment as its prerequisite,

release has dispassion as its prerequisite,  
knowledge of ending has release as its prerequisite.”

— [SN 12:23](#)

**§ 24.** “Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“He is endowed with a (present) kamma obstruction, a defilement obstruction, a result-of-(past)-kamma obstruction; he lacks conviction, has no desire (to listen), and has dull discernment.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful mental qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“He is not endowed with a (present) kamma obstruction, a defilement obstruction, or a result-of-(past)-kamma obstruction; he has conviction, has the desire (to listen), and is discerning.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful mental qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma.”

— [AN 6:86](#)

**§ 25.** “Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“He has killed his mother; he has killed his father; he has killed an arahant; he has, with corrupt intent, caused the blood of a Tathāgata to

flow; he has caused a split in the Saṅgha; or he is a person of dull discernment, slow & dull-witted.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“He has not killed his mother; he has not killed his father; he has not killed an arahant; he has not, with corrupt intent, caused the blood of a Tathāgata to flow; he has not caused a split in the Saṅgha; and he is a discerning person, not slow or dull-witted.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma.”

— [AN 6:87](#)

§ 26. “Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“When the Dhamma & Vinaya declared by the Tathāgata is being taught, he doesn’t listen well, doesn’t give ear, doesn’t set his mind on gnosis, grabs hold of what’s worthless, rejects what’s worthwhile, and isn’t endowed with the patience [or: preference] to comply with the teaching.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is incapable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even when listening to the true Dhamma.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma. Which six?

“When the Dhamma & Vinaya declared by the Tathāgata is being taught, he listens well, gives ear, sets his mind on gnosis, rejects what’s worthless, grabs hold of what’s worthwhile, and is endowed with the patience [or: preference] to comply with the teaching.

“Endowed with these six qualities, a person is capable of alighting on the lawfulness, the rightness of skillful qualities even while listening to the true Dhamma.”

— [AN 6:88](#)

§ 27. “Monks, endowed with five qualities, even though listening to the true Dhamma, one is incapable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities. Which five?

”One holds the talk in contempt.

“One holds the speaker in contempt.

“One holds oneself in contempt.

“One listens to the Dhamma with a scattered mind, a mind not gathered into one [*anek’agga-citto*].

“One attends inappropriately.”

“Endowed with these five qualities, even though listening to the true Dhamma, one is incapable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities.

“Endowed with (the) five (opposite) qualities when listening to the true Dhamma, one is capable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities. Which five?

“One doesn’t hold the talk in contempt.

“One doesn’t hold the speaker in contempt.

“One doesn’t hold oneself in contempt.

“One listens to the Dhamma with an unscattered mind, a mind gathered into one [*ek’agga-citto*].

“One attends appropriately.”

“Endowed with these five qualities when listening to the true Dhamma, one is capable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities.”

— [AN 5:151](#)

§ 28. “Monks, endowed with five qualities, even though listening to the true Dhamma, one is incapable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities. Which five?

”One holds the talk in contempt.

“One holds the speaker in contempt.

“One holds oneself in contempt.

“One is undiscerning, dim-witted, a drooling idiot.

“Not understanding, one assumes one understands.

“Endowed with these five qualities, even though listening to the true Dhamma, one is incapable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities.

“Endowed with (the) five (opposite) qualities when listening to the true Dhamma, one is capable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities. Which five?

“One doesn’t hold the talk in contempt.

“One doesn’t hold the speaker in contempt.

“One doesn’t hold oneself in contempt.

“One is discerning, neither dim-witted nor a drooling idiot.

“Not understanding, one doesn’t assume one understands.

“Endowed with these five qualities when listening to the true Dhamma, one is capable of alighting on the orderliness, on the rightness of skillful qualities.”

— [AN 5:152](#)

§ 29. “Monks, whenever a disciple of the noble ones listens to the Dhamma—receptive, attentive, focusing his entire awareness, lending ear—on that occasion his five hindrances don’t exist, and seven factors for awakening go to the completion of their development.

“And which of his five hindrances don’t exist on that occasion? The hindrance of sensual desire doesn’t exist on that occasion. The hindrance of ill will... The hindrance of sloth & drowsiness... The hindrance of restlessness & anxiety... The hindrance of uncertainty doesn’t exist on that occasion.

“His five hindrances don’t exist on that occasion.

“And which seven factors for awakening go to the completion of their development on that occasion? Mindfulness as a factor for awakening goes to the completion of its development on that occasion. Analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening... Persistence as a factor for awakening... Rapture as a factor for awakening... Calm as a factor for awakening... Concentration as a factor for awakening... Equanimity as a factor for awakening goes to the completion of its development on that occasion. These are the seven factors for awakening that go to the completion of their development on that occasion.

“Monks, whenever a disciple of the noble ones listens to the Dhamma—receptive, attentive, focusing his entire awareness, lending ear—on that occasion his five hindrances don’t exist, and these seven factors for awakening go to the completion of their development.”

— [SN 46:38](#)



§ 30. Then Kesin the horse trainer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him: “You, Kesin, are well-known as a trainer of tamable horses. How do you train a tamable horse?”

“Lord, I train a tamable horse (sometimes) with mildness, (sometimes) with harshness, (sometimes) with both mildness & harshness.”

“And if a tamable horse doesn’t submit either to a mild training or to a harsh training or to a mild & harsh training, Kesin, what do you do?”

“If a tamable horse doesn’t submit either to a mild training or to a harsh training or to a mild and harsh training, lord, then I kill it. Why is that? (I think:) ‘Don’t let this be a disgrace to my lineage of teachers.’ But the Blessed One, lord, is the unexcelled trainer of tamable people. How do you train a tamable person?”

“Kessin, I train a tamable person (sometimes) with mildness, (sometimes) with harshness, (sometimes) with both mildness & harshness.

“In using mildness, (I teach:) ‘Such is good bodily conduct. Such is the result of good bodily conduct. Such is good verbal conduct. Such is the result of good verbal conduct. Such is good mental conduct. Such is the result of good mental conduct. Such are the devas. Such are human beings.’

“In using harshness, (I teach:) ‘Such is bodily misconduct. Such is the result of bodily misconduct. Such is verbal misconduct. Such is the result of verbal misconduct. Such is mental misconduct. Such is the result of mental misconduct. Such is hell. Such is the animal womb. Such the realm of the hungry ghosts.’

“In using mildness & harshness, (I teach:) ‘Such is good bodily conduct. Such is the result of good bodily conduct. Such is bodily

misconduct. Such is the result of bodily misconduct. Such is good verbal conduct. Such is the result of good verbal conduct. Such is verbal misconduct. Such is the result of verbal misconduct. Such is good mental conduct. Such is the result of good mental conduct. Such is mental misconduct. Such is the result of mental misconduct. Such are the devas. Such are human beings. Such is hell. Such is the animal womb. Such the realm of the hungry ghosts.”

“And if a tamable person doesn’t submit either to a mild training or to a harsh training or to a mild & harsh training, what do you do?”

“If a tamable person doesn’t submit either to a mild training or to a harsh training or to a mild & harsh training, then I kill him, Kesin.”

“But it’s not proper for our Blessed One to take life! And yet the Blessed One just said, ‘I kill him, Kesin.’”

“It is true, Kesin, that it’s not proper for a Tathāgata to take life. But if a tamable person doesn’t submit either to a mild training or to a harsh training or to a mild & harsh training, then the Tathāgata doesn’t regard him as being worth speaking to or admonishing. His observant companions in the holy life don’t regard him as being worth speaking to or admonishing. This is what it means to be totally destroyed in the Dhamma & Vinaya, when the Tathāgata doesn’t regard one as being worth speaking to or admonishing, and one’s observant companions in the holy life don’t regard one as being worth speaking to or admonishing.”

— [AN 4:111](#)

## **Appropriate Attention**

§ 31. “Monks, there are these two conditions for the arising of right view. Which two? The voice of another and appropriate attention. These

are the two conditions for the arising of right view.”

— AN 2:124

§ 32. “There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person...doesn’t discern which ideas are fit for attention, or which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas fit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention. And which are the ideas unfit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen effluent of sensuality arises, and the arisen effluent of sensuality increases; the unarisen effluent of becoming... the unarisen effluent of ignorance arises, and the arisen effluent of ignorance increases....

“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 stress.

“The well-instructed noble disciple... discerns which ideas are fit for attention, and which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention.... And which are the ideas fit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen effluent of sensuality doesn’t arise, and the arisen effluent of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen effluent of becoming... the unarisen effluent of ignorance doesn’t arise, and the arisen effluent of ignorance is abandoned....

“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. These are called the effluents that are to be abandoned by seeing.”

— [MN 2](#)

§ 33. *Feeding the factors for awakening*. “Now, what is the food for the arising of unarisen *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of mindfulness... once it has arisen? There are dhammas that act as a foothold for mindfulness as a factor for awakening [well-purified virtue & views made straight—[SN 47:16](#)]. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of mindfulness... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *analysis of dhammas* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of analysis of dhammas... once it has arisen? There are dhammas 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 dhammas as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of analysis of dhammas... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *persistence* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of persistence... once it has arisen? There is the potential for effort, the potential for exertion, the potential for striving. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen persistence as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of persistence... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *rapture* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of rapture... once it has arisen? There are dhammas that act as a foothold for rapture as a factor for awakening. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen rapture as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of rapture... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *calm* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of calm... once it has arisen? There is physical calm & there is mental calm. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen calm as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of calm... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *concentration* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of concentration...

once it has arisen? There are themes for tranquility, themes for non-distraction [these are the four establishings of mindfulness]. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen concentration as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of concentration... once it has arisen.

“And what is the food for the arising of unarisen *equanimity* as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of equanimity... once it has arisen? There are dhammas that act as a foothold for equanimity as a factor for awakening. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is the food for the arising of unarisen equanimity as a factor for awakening, or for the growth & increase of equanimity... once it has arisen.

*Starving the hindrances.* “Now, what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *sensual desire*, or for the growth & increase of sensual desire once it has arisen? There is the theme of unattractiveness. To foster appropriate attention to it: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen sensual desire, or for the growth & increase of sensual desire once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *ill will*, or for the growth & increase of ill will once it has arisen? There is awareness-release [through goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, or equanimity]. To foster appropriate attention to that: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen ill will, or for the growth & increase of ill will once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *sloth & drowsiness*, or for the growth & increase of sloth & drowsiness once it has arisen? There is the potential for effort, the potential for exertion, the potential for striving. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is

lack of food for the arising of unarisen sloth & drowsiness, or for the growth & increase of sloth & drowsiness once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *restlessness & anxiety*, or for the growth & increase of restlessness & anxiety once it has arisen? There is stillness of awareness. To foster appropriate attention to that: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen restlessness & anxiety, or for the growth & increase of restlessness & anxiety once it has arisen.

“And what is lack of food for the arising of unarisen *doubt*, or for the growth & increase of doubt once it has arisen? There are dhammas that are skillful & unskillful, blameworthy & blameless, gross & refined, siding with darkness & with light. To foster appropriate attention to them: This is lack of food for the arising of unarisen doubt, or for the growth & increase of doubt once it has arisen.”

— [\*SN 46:51\*](#)

§ 34. Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: “Sāriputta my friend, which things should a virtuous monk attend to in an appropriate way?”

Ven. Sāriputta: “A virtuous monk, Koṭṭhita 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... perception... fabrications... 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.”

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

Ven. Sāriputta: “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.”

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

Ven. Sāriputta: “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.”

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

Ven. Sāriputta: “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.”

Ven. MahāKoṭṭhita: “Then which things should an arahant attend to in an appropriate way?”



Ven. Sāriputta: “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](#)

§ 35. “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](#)

## 4 : *Setting the Standards*

The instructions with which the Buddha inspired noble attainments in his first six noble disciples—the group of five monks and Yasa the householder—established precedents in terms of *what* he taught and *how* he taught it. These are precedents that he followed throughout his career in bringing others to the noble attainments as well, showing that the content and style of his teachings were mature from the very start.

By examining these early instructions, we can clearly grasp the context in which all his other teachings and teaching methods should be viewed and understood. This is helpful in two ways. One, we can use these precedents as a baseline for understanding later incidents where, on the surface, a talk that inspired a noble attainment seems to depart from the established pattern. Two, we can also see where later generations, up to the present day, have misinterpreted his teachings by taking them out of context. When we can reestablish the right context, many obscured issues become clear.

These early instructions fall into four episodes: the Buddha's preliminary remarks to the group of five monks, his two discourses to that group, and the graduated discourse he gave twice to Yasa.

### PRELIMINARY REMARKS

When, after his awakening, the Buddha decided to teach, he first thought of teaching his former teachers, on the grounds that they would quickly understand the Dhamma. But then he realized that they had died and been reborn in the formless realms, where they were

impossible to reach because they had withdrawn from the five physical senses.

The next group he thought of teaching were the five monks who had attended to him during his six years of austerities. Here, though, he faced a challenge: They had left him in disgust when he had abandoned his austerities. So he would have to reestablish their faith in him.

He did this in two ways. On the one hand, when he first met with them, he didn't refer to himself in the usual way as "I." He now referred to himself as "the Tathāgata"— meaning one who had reached the highest spiritual goal—and he chided them for calling him "friend." On the other hand, when they objected that he had abandoned the true path, he insisted that that was not the case. He had actually found the true path to the deathless. When they remained skeptical, he reminded them of his truthfulness: He had never made a claim like this before. So even though he was a changed person, that aspect of his character remained the same. When they reflected on his past truthfulness, they decided to lend ear to what he said. In that way, he inspired within them the beginning level of *conviction* needed to open their hearts to his message.

But he also tried to inspire another quality, *joy*, with his first statement of what he was going to teach:

"The deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now."

The Buddha's reference to the deathless here echoes his first statement to Sahampati Brahmā when he accepted the Brahmā's

invitation to teach the Dhamma to human and divine beings:

“Open are the doors to the deathless.

Let those with ears show their conviction.” — [MN 26](#)

It’s hard to overstate how positive these first messages were. The deathless had long been the goal of spiritual quests in India. The ancient Vedas and the Upaniṣads had framed their quest in terms of a search for a deathless happiness sustained by an unending source of physical or mental food. Centuries later, the ideal of transcending death was still a strong inspiration in the Buddha’s time. He himself had framed his search in terms of a deathless that transcended all things negative:

“When I was still just an unawakened Bodhisatta... the thought occurred to me, ‘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, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding?’” — [MN 26](#)

And he wasn’t the only one. Sāriputta and Moggallāna, before meeting with the Buddha, had expressed their spiritual yearning in the same terms, associating it, like the Buddha-to-be, with a deathless happiness:

And at that time Sāriputta & Moggallāna were living the holy life under Sañjaya. They had made this pact: “Whoever attains the deathless first will inform the other.” — [Mv I.23.1](#)

After Sāriputta had reached the first stage of awakening while hearing a synopsis of the Buddha's teaching, he sought out Moggallāna:

Moggallāna the wanderer saw Sāriputta the wanderer coming from afar and, on seeing him, said to him, "Clear, my friend, are your faculties—pure your complexion, and bright. Have you attained the deathless, my friend?"

"Yes, my friend, I have attained the deathless." — [\*Mv I.23.6\*](#)

So the Buddha's first teaching to the group of five monks was joyous in two ways: The deathless had been attained, and he could teach them the path of practice by which they, too, could attain it in the here and now.

When we view this double claim as forming the context for the rest of the Buddha's teachings, we can clear up three major misunderstandings about those teachings that have developed over the centuries.

1) The first misunderstanding has to do with the question of what kinds of happiness can be realistically pursued. All too often, the teachings on the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self—which the commentaries turned into metaphysical principles by naming them the three *characteristics* (*lakkhaṇa*)—are taken to be the Buddha's basic description of the nature of reality. This would mean that they form the context in which we should search for happiness. In other words, we would have to content ourselves with trying to find a happiness that's marked by inconstancy and stress, outside of our control. Thus the Buddha's message would be that he was opening the

door to reduced expectations. We'd have to lower our sights and accept the limitations that the world places on the possibility of true happiness.

Yet by placing the possibility of the deathless as his most basic message, the Buddha established the context in the opposite order: We don't have to content ourselves with a happiness constrained by the vagaries and shortcomings of the world. We can realistically set our sights high, viewing all the rest of his teachings as aids in attaining that higher aim. In other words, our desire for a happiness unlimited by death takes priority. All the rest of the Buddha's teachings—including the three perceptions—instead of placing restrictions on that desire, actually function as tools in the service of realizing it.

2) The second misunderstanding has to do with the general tenor of the Buddha's teachings. His emphasis on the issue of suffering in the first discourse has all too often been seen as a sign of pessimism. This interpretation has been compounded by the mistaken belief that, because the first noble truth states that birth, aging, and death are suffering, that negative valuation must apply to all of life in between. This, to many people, is an unfair valuation, in that it shows no appreciation for life's positive joys. But as we'll see when we consider the first discourse, this view is misinformed. The Buddha didn't say that life is suffering, and the four noble truths aren't simply suffering, suffering, and more and more suffering. They point out that suffering has a cause, its cause can be identified and abandoned, and there's a path of practice for abandoning it. It's hard to think of a teaching more useful, positive, and joyful than that.

The fact that the Buddha mentioned the possibility of the deathless as an introduction to the four noble truths changes the emphasis of the four truths right from the start. Instead of focusing on the suffering

mentioned in the first noble truth, the possibility of the deathless focuses attention on the potential for freedom found in the third. The possibility of a path of practice to the deathless focuses attention on the fourth. These are the two truths that give hope. And coming from the possibility of a deathless happiness, the emphasis on the suffering in birth, aging, and death in the first truth is entirely fair: Why content yourself with things subject to these limitations when something so much better is attainable?

3) The third misunderstanding has to do with the question of what role there can be on the path for action motivated by desire. Three of the Buddha's teachings have been melded in such a way that they seem to discourage the idea that a path of action would be a positive thing, or even possible. Two teachings—(a) the teaching that the craving that leads to becoming is a cause of suffering; and (b) the Buddha's general recommendation of contentment as a virtue—have sometimes been interpreted to mean that the Buddha would not have approved of the idea of a path of action based on a desire to change things. The third teaching, on the influence of past karma, is sometimes interpreted in such a deterministic way that a path of action to change things wouldn't even be possible. With no room for changing things in the present, you couldn't choose to follow any path of practice toward any goal at all. You'd be doomed to be overpowered by influences from the past. So the conclusion is sometimes drawn that people should live without goals and simply accept the present moment as it comes, devoid of any desires for things to be different from what they are.

All of these interpretations are misguided.

a. The Buddha never said that all desire is bad. Skillful desires, he said, are part of the path factor of right effort, and a basis for success in



concentration practice ([SN 45:8](#); [SN 51:13](#)).

b. He taught contentment with material things but, as we've already noted, he said that being discontent even with skillful mental qualities was the secret to his awakening ([AN 2:5](#)).

c. The Buddha was severely critical of deterministic views, saying that they left a person unprotected because they rendered meaningless any idea that some actions should be done and other actions shouldn't ([AN 3:62](#)). He described causality in such a way that there were patterns of cause and effect that could be learned, but that those patterns could also be manipulated through your choices to make a difference in the present moment so as to lead to worthwhile goals.

It's important to keep in mind the fact that the Buddha taught the goal first, and only then did he explain the path leading there. Without the goal, the path is meaningless. Looking at the Buddha's life—both in his quest for awakening and then in his efforts to establish the true Dhamma and Vinaya for posterity—it's hard to think of a more goal-oriented person. Looking at what he taught, it's hard to think of a more goal-oriented path.

When we give priority to the Buddha's teaching that, if his listeners acted in line with his instructions, they could attain the deathless, we can avoid falling for the three above misunderstandings. The group of five monks didn't even think of them. They were prepared to aim at the highest goal and to open their minds to the Buddha's words, to learn what they should and shouldn't do to arrive at that goal.

## THE FIRST DISCOURSE

They didn't have to wait long. The very first sentence of the talk delivered a two-fold "should" about the two extremes that should be avoided: devotion to sensual pleasures and devotion to self-affliction. This was followed by a description of what could be accomplished by following the middle path that avoided these two extremes, and then by a description of the eight factors that comprised the middle path. Next came a description of the first factor of the path, right view: a quick description of the four noble truths and then a "wheel" covering full knowledge of those truths.

The fact that the discourse is named "Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion" points to the fact that the wheel is the central part of the discourse. So it's important to understand what ancient Indians meant by the term, "wheel" (*cakka*).

In addition to its ordinary meaning as a physical wheel—say, on a chariot—*cakka* was also used symbolically in two ways.

The first way was as a technical term for what we would call a "table," in which two variables are placed against each other—one horizontally and one vertically—and all the possible combinations of those variables are filled in the spaces of the resulting rectangle. The image of a wheel seems to come from visualizing the spokes of a wheel, in which the spokes stand for the various permutations. To run through the permutations of a wheel of this sort, you could imagine yourself at the hub, while you named the permutations as they rotated around you.

Wheels of this technical sort were most commonly used in legal treatises to cover all possibilities related to a particular rule or law. So a wheel would carry the implication that it gave complete knowledge of the topic at hand.

In this case, the Dhamma wheel covers all four noble truths set against three levels of knowledge for each truth: knowing the truth, knowing the duty associated with the truth, and knowing that the duty has been completed. The duties—another list of things that should be done—are these: Suffering is to be *comprehended*, its origination *abandoned*, its cessation *realized*, and the path to its cessation *developed*.

In the course of setting this wheel in motion—the action that gave the discourse its name—the Buddha noted that his awakening came when he had knowledge and vision, as it had come to be, of all twelve permutations of the wheel. By using a wheel to describe his awakening, the Buddha was delivering the message that his awakening was complete.

That was the explicit message. The implicit message was that the group of five monks should follow his example in completing the four duties appropriate to the four noble truths as well. Carrying through with the promise that he would instruct them in how to attain the deathless in the here and now, the Buddha is here giving a more comprehensive picture of what the group of five should do and directly know while they are listening.

The fact that this message was delivered as part of the wheel emphasized the importance of these four duties. And because the entire discourse was framed as a description of the truth of the path, the duty of developing the path would probably have held the most interest for them. This would have been appropriate. As Ven. Sāriputta later noted in a series of discourses recorded in [SN 38](#), the duties with regard to the first three noble truths are fulfilled by completing the duty with regard to the fourth.

It was while the Buddha delivered this message that the leader of the group of five monks, Koṇḍañña, gained the Dhamma eye: *Whatever is*

*subject to origination is all subject to cessation.* He thus became the Buddha's first noble disciple.

There are a number of points worth noting about this discourse:

- Its first sentence, about the extremes to be avoided, was aimed directly at a misunderstanding under which the group of five monks were operating. It provided the corrective they needed in order to be willing to receive the rest of the Buddha's message. As far as they saw, there were only two paths of practice: the ignoble path of sensual indulgence and the noble path of self-torture. In their eyes, the fact that the Buddha had abandoned the path of severe self-torture was no proof that the path was a dead end. It was simply a sign that he had failed to follow it all the way.

So it probably would have come as a shock to hear the path of self-torture relegated to the same status as the path of sensual indulgence as an ignoble and unprofitable extreme to be avoided. It would have also surprised them to learn that there was a third alternative, a middle path between the two extremes. Simply hearing this reframing of the issue may have not been enough to convince them that it was true, but it at least opened their minds to new possibilities.

- When the Buddha set out the four noble truths as the expression of right view, he was departing from a general tendency among philosophers of his time, who liked to base their teachings on a foundation of first principles. Instead, he focused on a problem: the problem of suffering. This was unique in two ways:

- a) The idea that the deathless could be found by focusing on this particular problem was original with him. Other philosophers of his time

relegated the problem of suffering to the side, and in many cases argued from first principles about reality either that suffering was unreal or that nothing could be done about it. Other ascetics—the group of five included—actually viewed suffering and pain in a positive light, as the means for purifying the mind. But the Buddha was now proclaiming that suffering was definitely a problem—a real and important problem—that human action was capable of solving it, and that the solution could take you far: all the way to the deathless.

That’s because we create suffering through our clingings and cravings, and in doing so we create more birth, aging, and death. If we want to find the deathless, we can’t just contemplate it. We have to stop producing the mental activities that lead to more death. So our focus has to be on the skills in the path of practice that stops those mental activities.

This is a pattern that we find repeated again and again in the Buddha’s teachings: He’s less concerned with the *what* than with the *how-to*—the skills needed to get the desired effect. He conveyed this point in his first talk by not even mentioning the word “deathless,” and instead focusing entirely on the four truths that explained the problem of suffering and how it could be solved.

He further emphasized the importance of those truths by calling them “noble” (*ariya*). This term connected the truths to the goal of the noble search for what doesn’t die. Some people have asked what’s noble about suffering and craving, but that’s missing the point. These mental actions aren’t noble. It’s the truths about these facts that are noble, in that they take a noble approach to suffering and craving, pointing out that the things we crave and cling to are bound up in suffering and stress, and recommending a course of action that leads to the deathless by abandoning them. The mind state that sees its cravings and clingings

in this light steps back from them, adopts a mature, noble attitude toward them, and so is on the noble path.

b) Many of the philosophers of the time presented their theories as scientific—some were actually based on the astronomy or physics of the time—and it's been popular to this day to present the Buddha's teachings as scientific, too. But it's important to qualify that assertion by noting that his teachings are not a pure science, like physics or chemistry. Instead, they're like an applied science, like medicine or engineering. Pure sciences aspire to a coherent body of knowledge whose first principles are taken from fundamental natural laws that have been experimentally verified, along with some underlying assumptions about the nature of physical laws. In some cases, those assumptions could actually assert that all experience is totally predetermined.

Applied sciences, however, focus on solving problems. Their reason for being is that they can arrive at solutions, drawing on first principles only when those are relevant to the problem at hand. And they never draw on the idea that experience is totally predetermined. If it were, there would be no way your actions could make a difference in solving a problem.

This is why the Buddha actively sought out and argued against philosophers who taught strict determinism, as it would have made the solution of the problem of suffering meaningless and actually impossible.

The parallel between the Dhamma and applied science is reflected in the Buddha's own image of himself as a doctor ([Iti 100](#), [AN 3:22](#), [MN 63](#), [MN 75](#)), in the resemblance of the four noble truths to a doctor's approach to diagnosing and curing a disease, and in the Buddha's image

of the noble eightfold path as a chariot, one of the most complex pieces of engineering of his time ([SN 45:4](#)).

- In setting out the four noble truths, the Buddha showed that the path to the deathless lay in focusing on things that were immediately present to awareness, with many of them appearing directly in the mind itself. Suffering, its cause, and the path to its cessation required focusing on things of which his listeners were already aware in their present-moment experience. If they brought the proper knowledge to that level of experience, they could directly experience the end of suffering as well.

However, the Buddha didn't simply point the group of five to their present-moment experience, telling them just to be here and now. He provided them with a new vocabulary and a new frame of reference for detecting, analyzing, and shaping what was going on in their here-and-now experience.

The first purpose of the vocabulary and the framework was to alert them to the fact that present-moment experience wasn't simply a given. It was shaped by present-moment actions informed by your views.

Within that context, the vocabulary named events in the mind that were relevant to putting an end to suffering. By naming them, you could step back from them and see them as parts of ongoing processes.

The framework provided by the duties of the four noble truths provided standards for passing judgment on those events and processes so that you would know what to do with them so as to arrive at the deathless.

Here, though, we run into one of the major paradoxes of the Buddha's first discourse. Although he states in his preliminary remarks that he's going to explain the path to the deathless—i.e., the noble

eightfold path—when he gets to the body of the discourse, he simply names the eight factors of the path and explains only one of them, right view. And even with that factor, he leaves many of the terms unexplained: He identifies the essence of suffering as the five clinging-aggregates, but he doesn't explain what a clinging-aggregate is, or which five they are. In the second noble truth, he doesn't explain the three types of craving that cause suffering, even though the noble eightfold path is aimed at developing dispassion for precisely those three things.

It's unlikely that the group of five monks would have been familiar with these terms. They may have picked up on some of the implications of the Buddha's words in Pāli that don't carry over in English translation. For instance, they probably knew the meaning of craving—*taṇhā*, or thirst; and of clinging—*upādāna*, or sustenance. And they might have caught the underlying imagery of those two terms: Thirst leads to taking sustenance, meaning that suffering can be understood as similar to the act of feeding. Also, Koṇḍañña may have seen that the need to go beyond becoming (*bhava*) meant that passion for the path had to be dropped once it was developed (*bhāvita*). And regardless of language, he may have picked up on the implication of the image of the path: that you have to follow the path but then go beyond it when you arrive at the goal. Still, even though all of them would have known such terms as *view*, *resolve*, all the way to *concentration*, there would have been no way that they would have known what made the seven last factors of the noble eightfold path *right*.

So two possibilities present themselves: 1) Perhaps Koṇḍañña was able to draw the correct conclusions from the Buddha's brief explanation of right view and fill in all he needed to know of the remaining factors of the path and of how to apply the path to the cause of suffering. After



all, as we'll see in the course of this book, other people gained noble attainments after hearing even less of the Dhamma. Or (2) what we have here is only the outline of the actual discourse that the Buddha gave to the group of five.

Here we have to think of the discourse as we have it not as the words heard by the group of five, but as a text passed down after the event. A common feature of teaching texts in the oral culture of ancient India was that a person would memorize the main outline of a teaching and then, when later reciting it to others, would fill in the details as was appropriate to the needs of the audience. This may have been the way the message of the first discourse was passed on by members of the early Saṅgha as they spread the Dhamma to others.

But regardless of whether the text we have was a complete transcription of the first discourse or simply an outline, the outline gives us an idea of how the four noble truths were taught for the remainder of the Buddha's career. [MN 28](#) and [MN 141](#) show how Ven. Sāriputta explained the four noble truths in detail to the monks, and in both cases the explanation follows, with only minor variations, the outline given here. The Canon tells of 30 times that the Buddha taught the four noble truths to lay people who gained the Dhamma eye while listening to his explanation, and although we don't have the text of these talks, it's very likely that they followed the outline of the Buddha's explanation of the truths and their duties as given in the first discourse.

These facts relate to the second symbolic meaning of the Pāli word *cakka*, or wheel. It stands for power. In ancient India, a ruler's power was said to extend as far as the wheels of his chariot could go unimpeded by others. In the same way, once the Buddha had set the Dhamma wheel in motion, it was powerful in two ways: First, it established the standards for judging all other teachings of the

Dhamma, determining how they should be used. This may have been what Ven. Sāriputta had in mind when he said that the four noble truths were like the footprint of an elephant: Just as the elephant's footprint could contain all the other footprints of legged animals, the four noble truths contained all the rest of the Dhamma ([MN 28](#)).

Second, the Dhamma wheel could conquer all other teachings in all parts of the world where people with ears showed their conviction that the main problem in life—suffering—could be brought to an end through a path of action.

## THE SECOND DISCOURSE

When the Buddha gave his first discourse, all five of his listeners delighted in it, but only one of them gained the Dhamma eye. In the succeeding days, the Buddha gave the remaining members of the group further teachings that were not recorded, and which may have involved explaining the five clinging-aggregates, the three forms of craving, and the right factors of the noble eightfold path. In any event, after all five had gained the Dhamma eye, the Buddha gave them his second discourse.

To understand this discourse and the impact it had on the group of five, we have to keep in mind their background. In gaining the Dhamma eye, they had directly seen all four of the noble truths. In particular, with regard to the third noble truth, they had already had their first glimpse of the deathless, and from that point on, they would view pleasure and suffering from that perspective: No pleasure offered by fabricated experiences could compare with the happiness they had seen. In fact, all fabricated pleasures would actually appear stressful in comparison with the deathless. With regard to the first noble truth, they

had seen how suffering boiled down to the five clinging-aggregates. They no longer assumed any sense of “I am this,” around the aggregates, but they still had a lingering sense of “I am,” which was a subtle object of clinging ([SN 22:89](#)). That subtle clinging was still a limitation on their minds.

The Buddha aimed his second discourse at that lingering sense of self, and once he had directed their attention to it, the group of five would have understood it as pertaining to the first noble truth: something to be comprehended so that any lingering desire and passion for it should be abandoned. This is why, as we’ll see, they so readily agreed to what he had to say.

The discourse is devoted to the premise that the five aggregates should be seen as not-self—a perception we’ve already encountered above. The Buddha gives two arguments for this premise.

- The first is that the aggregates don’t respond to your wishes that they be like this or not be like that.

It might be possible to take immediate issue with this argument: There are, for example, plenty of ways that you can create perceptions and thought-fabrications as you might like. And as the Buddha himself pointed out elsewhere, you create the path out of aggregates ([AN 9:36 \[§17\]](#)). If you couldn’t choose to manipulate them in that way, the path to the end of suffering wouldn’t be possible. It could also be argued further that this partial ability to control the aggregates might be taken as a sign that, to at least some extent, they are related to your self.

But if, like the group of five, you had already gained an experience of the deathless, your standards for what you might want out of the aggregates—that they could effortlessly provide the happiness of the deathless—would be heightened. You would see clearly that the limited

amount of control you might have over them would not justify clinging to them, especially when that clinging would get in the way of a full experience of the deathless.

So the first argument derives its force from the verified confidence the group of five already had in the deathless.

- The Buddha's second argument starts with a questionnaire, in which he asks the group of five to examine the five aggregates, one by one, as they experience them. For each aggregate, he asks: Is this aggregate constant or inconstant. "Inconstant," they reply. If it's inconstant, is it easeful or stressful? "Stressful." "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."

Notice that—contrary to some interpretations of this argument—the Buddha here is not asking the group of five to come to the conclusion that there is no self. Instead, he's simply asking them to pass a value judgment: If something is inconstant and stressful, is it worth clinging to as "me" or "mine"? In other words, is it worth the desire and passion required to cling to it?

Here he's asking the group of five to focus on one of the steps of his five-step program for dealing with any defilement: discerning its drawbacks. From there, they could judge that the drawbacks outweigh the allure, and so gain escape by developing dispassion for the allure.

And here again, if you believed that the only prospect for happiness in this life lay in clinging to the aggregates, despite the stress and inconstancy that would adulterate that happiness, you might easily judge that it would be worth your while to keep on clinging. But this is another case where we have to remember what the group of five have seen: the happiness of the deathless that comes from letting go. So for

them—and for anyone who, lacking a direct experience of the third noble truth, nevertheless believes in it—the obvious judgment is No: The aggregates are not worth clinging to as “me” or “mine.”

The Buddha then continues his second argument by drawing two conclusions. The first is that all instances of the aggregates—near or far; past, future, or present; gross or sublime—should be seen with right discernment, as they have come to be, as “This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.” In other words, no matter where or when you might experience an aggregate within the range of the “All”—the six senses and the mental processes dependent on them—you should perceive it as “not-self” so as to avoid suffering.

This part of the argument serves the purpose of cutting off any tendency to hold out hope that even though present aggregates aren’t worth identifying with, there might be better aggregates worth identifying with: either those remembered from the past, or those anticipated in the future. By extending the net of his argument this far, the Buddha closes off any attempt by the mind to remain attached even to subtle aggregates in the higher heavens, for example, or to any aggregates surrounding the experience of the deathless.

This leads to the second conclusion: The noble disciple, seeing this, grows disenchanted with all aggregates of any sort. From disenchantment comes dispassion; from dispassion, release, followed by knowledge of release and the realization that there is no more birth. The holy life has been fulfilled.

On hearing this discourse, the group of five were totally released from the effluents.

There are several points worth noting here.

1.

The first is a question of context. As we mentioned above, the Buddha's arguments using the three perceptions derive their force from the fact that the group of five had already directly experienced the four noble truths. This shows that the four truths provide the context for the perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, and not the other way around, as has often been assumed. On their own, these three perceptions carry no inherent duties. They can—and have been—applied in the service of purposes diametrically opposed to those of the Dhamma. One popular example is the idea that we should embrace the fleeting pleasures of life in all their bitter-sweetness, knowing that we'll soon be parted from them. But when the three perceptions are viewed and used in the context of the duties of the four noble truths, their role in service of the Dhamma is clear: to develop dispassion for the objects of clinging and craving, so as to lead to the realization of the third noble truth.

2.

A related point is that the Buddha labels the terms, “inconstant,” “stressful,” and “not-self” as perceptions (*saññā*). He never calls them characteristics (*lakṣhaṇa*), a label they acquired in later commentaries on the Canon, when—as we mentioned above—they were converted from tools for developing dispassion into metaphysical principles for describing reality. Although these perceptions are true descriptions of fabricated phenomena ([AN 3:137](#)), they are at best partially true ([SN 22:60](#); [SN 22:95](#)) and not always beneficial to apply in the course of the practice ([MN 109 \[§55\]](#); [MN 136](#)). As tools, they are meant to be picked

up when useful, and put down when not. And because they are perceptions, they're not the goal of the path. They have to be put down just as all other dhammas must be put down when the goal is reached.

3.

In focusing attention on the five aggregates, the Buddha was not telling the group of five that the five aggregates constituted what they *were*. He was simply pointing out, as he said many times elsewhere, that people create their sense of self out of these aggregates, *assume* that that's what they are, and then suffer as a result of clinging to that assumption ([SN 22:2](#)). To stop that suffering, the perception of not-self serves to deconstruct that assumption and any passion and desire related to it. The Buddha did state that attachment to the aggregates led to there being a “being,” but in recommending that you end that attachment, he never said he was getting you to go out of existence ([SN 23:2](#)). Instead, he said that you would no longer be limited by that attachment ([SN 22:36](#)), and it would be for your long-term welfare and happiness to let it go ([MN 22](#)).

4.

It's worth noting that when the Buddha gave this questionnaire, he never mentioned the broader application of the perception of not-self, to all phenomena, fabricated or unfabricated, in line with the statement, “All phenomena are not-self” (AN 3:17; [Dhp 279](#)). Instead, he limited the questionnaire to fabricated phenomena: most frequently, the five aggregates, as in the case of the group of five, or the six sense spheres plus the aggregates, as in the case of Ven. Rāhula ([MN 147](#)). Why he

limited it in this way, he never explained, but perhaps the reason was connected to a point we noted under his first conclusion: by reminding his listeners to apply the perception to all instances of the aggregates, no matter how subtle, they might catch sight of any desire or passion around the experience of the deathless and let go of that, too.

5.

Finally, there's the question of what was going on in the minds of the group of five as they listened to this discourse. As we've already noted, the Buddha said that the ideal listener is in concentration while listening to a talk. He also said that if you're in jhāna and break into speech, you leave the jhāna. So what state of mind were the group of five in when they were answering the Buddha's questions?

There's no definitive answer to this question, aside from noting that it's possible to leave jhāna long enough to answer a question, and then, when you fall silent, to immediately return to your concentration and pick up where you left off. Because the Buddha was asking the group of five to apply appropriate attention to their minds while listening to the talk, we can assume that they were in the sort of jhāna where you're in a jhāna but analyzing it at the same time—in other words, not fully absorbed, but absorbed enough to count as being gathered into oneness. And because the questions concerned events directly experienced while in jhāna, any disturbance required to give an answer would have been minimal. The group of five could then immediately return their focus to their concentration.

The questionnaire that the Buddha gave to the group of five proved to be so useful that he and his disciples gave it to many others. The



Canon lists 49 times in all that they did so. Not all of those to whom the questionnaire was addressed gained a noble attainment, but it appears that people or heavenly beings benefitted in one way or another in every case.

## **THE GRADUATED DISCOURSE**

The Buddha's next noble disciple, after the group of five monks, was a young layman named Yasa. The son of a moneylender, he had lived a delicate life in three palaces, one for each of the seasons of the Indian year: hot, rainy, and cool. One night, as his lady minstrels were entertaining him with song and instrumental music, he fell asleep. They fell asleep soon after, sprawled across the floor, while an oil lamp continued to burn. Yasa happened to be the first to awaken. He saw the minstrels drooling and babbling in their sleep, and the mass of their bodies appeared to him like a charnel ground. Struck by the drawbacks of sensuality, he exclaimed to himself, "How distressing! How oppressive!"

Putting on his golden slippers, he left the house feeling a strong sense of disillusionment and dismay. Non-human beings—probably devas—opened the doors and gates leading to the Isipatana game reserve, where the Buddha was staying.

There the Buddha had already awakened and was doing walking meditation. Seeing Yasa coming in the distance, he sat down. As Yasa drew near, the Buddha called him by name, saying, "Yasa, this isn't distressing. This isn't oppressive. Come, Yasa. Sit down. I'll teach you the Dhamma."

Yasa, thrilled at the Buddha's words, took off his slippers, approached the Buddha, bowed down to him, and sat to one side. There

the Buddha gave him a graduated or step-by-step discourse (*anupubbī-kathā*). We don't have a transcript or even an outline of what he said. All we have is a list of the topics:

giving,  
virtue,  
heaven;  
the drawbacks of, degradation in, and defilement in sensuality; and  
the rewards of renunciation.

When the Buddha saw that Yasa, following the thread of this discourse, was of ready, malleable, and unhindered mind, he taught him the four noble truths. Then, in the words of the Canon,

Just as a clean piece of cloth, free from grime, would properly take dye, in the same way, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose for Yasa as he was sitting right there: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.” — [\*Mv 1:7.6\*](#)

This graduated discourse became another standard teaching that the Buddha gave repeatedly to lay people throughout his teaching career. The Canon lists 30 times that he gave it in all, and in each case there were those who gained the Dhamma eye. So it's worth considering why he would use this particular list of topics.

It's also worth considering why we have only the list. The apparent reason is that the Buddha tailored his discussion of these topics to the mind state of his listeners. This would have been necessary because, as the Canon shows, they were quite varied: They included, among others, men and women householders, a king, two wealthy adherents of the Jains, an outcaste, a leper, and even groups of hired assassins. In some

cases, the Buddha's explanations of these topics would have had to be quite long. In others, short. The fact that we have just the list helps to underscore the underlying dynamic of how the Buddha led even some apparently unlikely listeners to an experience of the Dhamma eye.

From the list, we can see that it was designed to foster in the listener the three qualities that we noted, in Chapter 3, were ideal for getting the most out of a Dhamma talk: conviction, concentration, and discernment.

The list begins with topics aimed at inspiring *conviction*:

By affirming the value of giving and virtue, the Buddha showed his listeners that he was a principled teacher, unlike many of the teachers of his day who taught that giving and virtue were fruitless conventions and a waste of time ([DN 2](#)). If his listeners had any sense of integrity—even hired killers can have a sense of right and wrong—they would recognize that the Buddha was affirming values worthy of respect. This would help to keep them from regarding the Buddha with contempt.

If they themselves were already practicing giving and virtue, the affirmation that these activities were rewarded in heaven would encourage them not to regard themselves with contempt. In fact, it would inspire joy: They were engaging or had engaged in activities worthy of praise and of reward. On hearing this, they would be unlikely to regard the Buddha's talk with contempt.

The particular way in which the Buddha taught giving and virtue would also be a source of joy, especially to his listeners who were poor. The rewards of generosity, for instance, didn't depend on the material value of the gift. Instead, they depended on the motivation behind the act of giving, the appropriateness of the gift, the sense that you were doing something fruitful, and the joy you felt after the gift was given ([AN 5:148](#); [AN 7:49](#); [AN 6:37](#)). For the Buddha, the fact that the gift

was voluntary was especially important. Brahmins were known for their insistence that the only fruitful gifts were those given to brahmins, and it was written into the script of their funeral rites that they would insist that the mourners had to keep giving more. In contrast, when the Buddha was asked where a gift should be given, he didn't say to give to him or his followers. Instead, he said to give wherever the heart feels inspired with confidence ([SN 3:24](#)).

Similarly with virtue: Unlike the ritualistic precepts of some of the other religions of his time—which could count as broken even if they were broken unintentionally or unknowingly, thus leading to a great deal of anxiety—the Buddha's precepts could be broken only intentionally. You could be confident that—once you knew a precept—if you didn't intend to break it, it wasn't broken.

As for the discussion of heaven: The fact that the Buddha could describe the sensual pleasures of heaven in positive terms showed that he wasn't a killjoy. This would inspire his lay listeners to trust him when he later pointed out the drawbacks even of heavenly sensual pleasures. In fact, his listeners might feel joy when the Buddha treated them as mature, heedful agents in warning them of the drawbacks of those pleasures and of the safety in renunciation.

They could also derive joy from his explanation of what renunciation entailed: that abandoning the pleasures of sensuality didn't mean abandoning pleasures of all kinds. Instead, it meant replacing the pleasures of sensuality with the more refined, reliable, and harmless pleasures of the mind in right concentration. The path to safety was one that provided joy along the way.

In explaining these five topics, the Buddha most likely had to explain his teachings on kamma and rebirth, which—when compared with the

teachings given by other schools of his time on these topics—would also be a source of joy.

In terms of kamma, he taught that actions were real, you were free to choose them, they gave results, and those results were determined by the state of your mind both while doing the action and while receiving the results ([AN 3:62](#); [AN 3:101](#)). All of this was empowering.

As were his teachings on rebirth: Your rebirth was determined, not by your current caste, nor by the wealth you could lavish on sacrifices. Instead, it was determined by the purity of the state of mind with which you acted—something anyone can manage.

Those are just a few of the ways in which the topics of the graduated discourse could inspire conviction and its attendant joy in the hearts of the Buddha's listeners.

As for the *concentration* and *discernment* inspired by the discourse, these two qualities have to be discussed together because they're developed together. In brief, the discourse establishes the listener in the principles of the first discernment factor, mundane right view—the right view leading to a good rebirth—in speaking of the rewards of giving and virtue in this life and in heaven. Then, when moving to the topic of the drawbacks of sensuality, the discourse tends toward the transcendent right view that aims to go beyond rebirth.

At the same time, the discourse establishes the listener in the principles of the second discernment factor, mundane right resolve. The discussion of virtue inspires the resolve on non-ill will and harmlessness, and the discussion of the drawbacks of sensuality and the rewards of renunciation inspires the resolve on renunciation. If the listener follows along with these instructions—nurturing these resolves in the mind instead of just hearing about them—the mind becomes malleable and unhindered, two qualities associated with right concentration ([MN](#)

[119](#)). In this way, mundane right resolves grow into transcendent right resolve—the directed thought and evaluation in the first jhāna ([MN 117](#)). The mind is now ready to receive and benefit from the four noble truths.

Actually, the mind of the listener has already begun to embark on some of the factors of the noble eightfold path even before learning of the noble truths. The dynamic of the list of topics replicates, on a mundane level, the dynamic of the noble path itself, starting with right view, and then developing right resolve and the other factors of the path for the sake of right concentration. This dynamic would lay the groundwork for the noble version of the path—the stream—to come together in the listener’s heart.

This is why the graduated discourse was such an ideal tool for preparing the Buddha’s listeners to get the most out of the four noble truths. It provided them not only with the conceptual framework for accepting the truths, but also with a psychological preparation for seeing the truths in action in their own hearts and minds.

## READINGS

§ 36. Then, wandering by stages, the Blessed One arrived at Vārāṇasī, at the Isipatana game reserve, where the group of five monks were staying. They saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, made a pact with one another, (saying,) “Friends, here comes Gotama the contemplative: living luxuriously, straying from his exertion, backsliding into abundance. He isn’t to be bowed down to, to be greeted by standing up, or to have his robe & bowl received. Still, a seat should be laid out; if he wants to, he can sit down.” But as the Blessed One approached, the group of five monks, unable to keep to their pact, went

out to greet him. One received his robe & bowl. Another laid out a seat. Another set out water for washing his feet. Another set out a foot stand. Another set out a pebble foot-washer.

The Blessed One sat down on the seat laid out and, seated, washed his feet. Still, they addressed the Blessed One by name and as “friend.” When this was said, the Blessed One said to them, “Monks, don’t address the Tathāgata by name and as ‘friend.’ The Tathāgata, monks, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, monks: The deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.”

When this was said, the group of five monks replied to the Blessed One, “But, friend Gotama, by that practice, that conduct, that performance of austerities you didn’t attain any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. So how can you now—living luxuriously, straying from your exertion, backsliding into abundance—have attained any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one?”

When this was said, the Blessed One replied to them, “The Tathāgata, monks, is not living luxuriously, has not strayed from his exertion, has not backslid into abundance. The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: The deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.”

A second time... A third time, the group of five monks said to the Blessed One, “But, friend Gotama, by that practice, that conduct, that performance of austerities you didn’t attain any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. So how can you now—living luxuriously, straying from your exertion, backsliding into abundance—have attained any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one?”

When this was said, the Blessed One replied to the group of five monks, “Do you recall my ever having said this before now?”

“No, lord.”

“The Tathāgata, monks, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, monks: The deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.”

And so the Blessed One was able to convince them. Then the group of five monks listened carefully to the Blessed One. They lent their ears and determined their minds for the sake of knowledge.

The Blessed One then addressed the group of five monks:

“There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth: that which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathāgata—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding.



“And what is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding? Precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding.

“Now this, monks, 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 this, monks, 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., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of stress.’ Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This noble truth of stress is to be

comprehended.’ Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before.’ This noble truth of stress has been comprehended.’

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the origination of stress’... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’ ... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress has been abandoned.’

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the cessation of stress’... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly experienced’... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress has been directly experienced.’

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress’... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed’... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress has been developed.’

“And, monks, as long as this—my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be—was not pure, I didn’t claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & common people. But as soon as this—my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be—was truly pure, then I did claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Māras & Brahmās, with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty &

common people. Knowledge & vision arose in me: ‘Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further-becoming.’”

And while this explanation was being given, there arose for Ven. Koṇḍañña the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

And when the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the Earth Devas cried out: “Near Vārāṇasī, in the Isipatana game reserve, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by contemplative or brahman, deva, Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone at all in the cosmos.” On hearing the Earth Devas’ cry, the Devas of the Four Great Kings took up the cry... the Devas of the Thirty-three... the Devas of the Hours... the Contented [Tusita] Devas... the Devas Delighting in Creation... the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others... the Devas of Brahmā’s Retinue took up the cry: “Near Vārāṇasī, in the Isipatana game reserve, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by contemplative or brahman, deva, Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone at all in the cosmos.”

So in that moment, that instant, the cry shot right up to the Brahmā worlds. And this ten-thousand fold cosmos shivered & quivered & quaked, while a great, measureless radiance appeared in the cosmos, surpassing the effulgence of the devas.

Then the Blessed One exclaimed: “So you really know, Koṇḍañña? So you really know?” And that is how Ven. Koṇḍañña acquired the name Aññā-Koṇḍañña—Koṇḍañña who knows.

Then Ven. Aññā-Koṇḍañña—having seen the Dhamma, having attained the Dhamma, having known the Dhamma, having gained a footing in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having no

more perplexity, having gained fearlessness, independence of others with regard to the Teacher's message—said to the Blessed One, “May I receive the Going-forth in the Blessed One's presence? May I receive the Acceptance?”

“Come, monk,” said the Blessed One. “Well taught is the Dhamma. Live the holy life for the right ending of stress.” That was the venerable one's Acceptance.

Then the Blessed One taught and admonished the remaining monks with a talk on Dhamma. Then, for Ven. Vappa & Ven. Bhaddiya—as they were being taught and admonished by the Blessed One with a talk on Dhamma—there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

They—having seen the Dhamma, having attained the Dhamma, having known the Dhamma, having gained a footing in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having no more perplexity, having gained fearlessness, independence of others with regard to the Teacher's message—said to the Blessed One, “May we receive the Going-forth in the Blessed One's presence? May we receive the Acceptance?”

“Come, monks,” said the Blessed One. “Well taught is the Dhamma. Live the holy life for the right ending of stress.” That was the venerable ones' Acceptance.

Then the Blessed One, subsisting on food brought to him, taught and admonished the remaining monks with talk on the Dhamma. Whatever three monks brought back, having gone on their almsround, all six of the group sustained themselves with that. Then, for Ven. Mahānāma and Ven. Assaji—as they were being taught and admonished by the Blessed One with talk on Dhamma—there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.” They—having seen the Dhamma, having attained the

Dhamma, having known the Dhamma, having gained a footing in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having no more perplexity, having gained fearlessness, independence of others with regard to the Teacher's message—said to the Blessed One, “May we receive the Going-forth in the Blessed One's presence? May we receive the Acceptance?”

“Come, monks,” said the Blessed One. “Well taught is the Dhamma. Live the holy life for the right ending of stress.” That was the venerable ones' Acceptance.

Then the Blessed One addressed the group of five monks:

“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's 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's not possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’

“What do you think, monks? 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 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 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 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 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 effluents.

At that time there were six arahants in the world.

— [Mv 1:6](#)

§ 37. “Then the group of five monks—thus exhorted, thus instructed by me—being subject themselves to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeking the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, reached the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Being subject themselves to aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging... illness... death... sorrow... defilement, seeking the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, they reached the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Knowledge & vision arose in them: ‘Unprovoked is our release. This is the last birth. There is now no further-becoming.’”

— [MN 26](#)

§ 38. At that time in Vārāṇasī there was a young man of good family named Yasa—delicate, a moneylender’s son. He had three palaces: one for the cold season, one for the hot season, and one for the rainy season. During the four months of the rainy season he was entertained in the

rainy-season palace by minstrels without a single man among them, and he didn't come down once from the palace.

Then the young man Yasa, enjoying himself, provided & endowed with the five strings of sensuality, fell asleep first. Then his retinue fell asleep afterward. An oil lamp was left burning the whole night.

Then Yasa, waking up first, saw his retinue sleeping—one with a lute under her arm, another with a mudiṅga drum around her neck, another with an ālambara drum on her chest, another with disheveled hair, another drooling, another babbling in her sleep—like a charnel ground, as it were, right within reach. Seeing this, the drawbacks [of sensuality] became apparent, and his mind became established in disenchantment. He exclaimed: “How distressing! How oppressive!”

Then Yasa put on his golden slippers and went to the door of the residence. Non-human beings opened the door, (thinking,) “May there not be any obstacles to Yasa's Going-forth from home into homelessness.” Then Yasa went to the gate of the city. Non-human beings opened the gate, (thinking,) “May there not be any obstacles to Yasa's Going-forth from home into homelessness.” Then Yasa went to the Isipatana game reserve.

At that time, the Blessed One, having gotten up as the night was ending, was walking back and forth in the open air. He saw Yasa coming from afar and, on seeing him, got down from the walking path and sat down on a seat laid out.

Yasa, not far from the Blessed One, exclaimed: “How distressing! How oppressive!”

Then the Blessed One said to Yasa, “Yasa, this isn't distressing. This isn't oppressive. Come, Yasa. Sit down. I'll teach you the Dhamma.”

Then Yasa, (thinking,) “He says this isn't distressing, this isn't oppressive,” thrilled & exultant, took off his golden slippers, went to the



Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One gave him a graduated talk: a talk on giving, a talk on virtue, a talk on heaven; he proclaimed the drawbacks of, degradation in, & defilement in sensuality, and the rewards of renunciation. Then—when he knew that Yasa was of ready mind, malleable mind, unhindered mind, exultant mind, confident mind—he proclaimed to him the distinctive teaching of the Buddhas: stress, origination, cessation, path. Just as a clean piece of cloth, free from grime, would properly take dye, in the same way, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose for Yasa as he was sitting right there: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

— [\*Mv 1:7.1-6\*](#)

## *5 : Talks Inspiring Stream-Entry*

Most of the cases in which people gained the Dhamma eye while listening to a Dhamma talk fall into the pattern of the graduated discourse. Because the accounts of these talks all follow the standard form the Buddha used when teaching Yasa—always word-for-word—we won’t include them in our discussion here. Instead, we’ll focus on the talks that don’t follow the standard pattern.

Before looking at those talks, though, we first have to examine in more detail one of the attributes of stream-enterers that we mentioned in Chapter 2: the fact that they are consummate in view. We need to know this in more detail because it helps to explain some of the unusual features in the talks we’ll be considering here.

We noted in Chapter 1 that those who have gained stream-entry have directly seen all four noble truths. Even though they still have more work to do in terms of discernment, this direct vision of the four noble truths is what makes them consummate in view.

However, the suttas also mention another way in which this consummation can be described. In [AN 10:92](#), the Buddha says that there is a noble method that stream-enterers have “rightly seen and ferreted out through discernment.” That noble method is dependent co-arising in its description of the many steps by which ignorance gives rise to suffering, and of the steps by which suffering ends when there is a total dispassion for and cessation of ignorance.

These two ways of describing what it means to be consummate in view—in terms of the four noble truths and in terms of dependent co-

arising—are actually very closely connected. Their mutual relationship is explained by the suttas in two major ways.

The first is that dependent co-arising can be viewed as an extended version of the four noble truths. In its description of how suffering is originated, it contains the central connection between craving and clinging, but then elaborates on this connection in two directions: Prior to craving, it traces the series of conditions giving rise to craving back through ignorance. After clinging, it traces the conditions that clinging sets in motion, leading to the pain, sorrow, and despair of birth, aging, and death.

In reverse order, dependent co-arising states that dispassion for ignorance leads to its cessation, which in turn brings about, one by one, the cessation of the factors dependent on it. In the course of this mass cessation, there comes to be the cessation of craving, clinging, and their attendant sufferings.

What's missing in this description is an explanation of how dispassion for ignorance can be developed.

That crucial detail is provided by the second way in which the relationship between the four noble truths and dependent co-arising is explained: Ignorance is defined as not knowing “in terms of” the four noble truths. The suttas show that this means two things: not having direct knowledge of the four noble truths, and not applying the framework of the four noble truths to the factors of dependent co-arising.

With regard to the first meaning, i.e., direct knowledge of the truths, ignorance cannot be ended until there has been an experience of the third and fourth noble truths. In other words, you can't cut the sequence of the factors of dependent co-arising simply through an act of will or through observing their connections. You have to develop all the factors

of the noble eightfold path so that you can develop the dispassion that actually makes the connections fall apart.

With regard to the second meaning, applying the framework of the truths, two suttas—[MN 9](#) and [Sn 3:12](#)—show how the framework of the truths can be applied to any pair of factors in dependent co-arising, leading to dispassion for those factors. For instance, seeing that feeling is conditioned by contact, and observing how ephemeral contact is, you develop the factors of the noble eightfold path around this connection, leading to dispassion both for the contact and for the feeling. This causes feeling to cease. Similarly, the same approach can be applied to fabrication and its immediate condition, ignorance; or to craving and its immediate condition, feeling.

When any one pair of factors is contemplated in this way, it can cause the entire sequence of factors to cease. That's because of a special feature of how all the factors are interrelated. Even though the standard description of dependent co-arising is linear—i.e., the factors are listed in a straight line—a detailed analysis of its factors, such as the one provided in [SN 12:2](#), shows that the list actually contains many feedback loops, in which factors can turn around and condition factors earlier in the line-up. This leads to a non-linear system with many feedback loops. In such a system, when one pair of factors falls away through dispassion, the interdependence of all the factors connected by those loops means that the whole system can collapse.

In this way, the framework of the four noble truths can be applied to any pair of factors and bring the web of suffering to a halt.

This fact has important implications for how the Buddha and his disciples taught. To begin with, they didn't have to explain the whole system every time they taught their listeners about how to end suffering. Just focusing on the connection, say, between craving and clinging, or

between contact and feeling, was enough to inspire their listeners to break through to the deathless, either while listening to a talk or later in the course of their meditation.

The fact that the framework of the four noble truths can be applied to any pair of factors also explains why listeners could hear just the framework of the four truths, apply it to develop dispassion for any cause-and-effect connection they could observe in their minds, and gain the Dhamma eye as a result, even if they knew nothing of the sequence of dependent co-arising or the definitions of the four truths beforehand.

## **SĀRIPUTTA & MOGGALLĀNA THE WANDERERS**

This is especially true in the case of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, who were wanderers in another sect when they first heard the Dhamma and gained the Dhamma eye.

The story of how this happened is one of the most famous in the Canon. Sāriputta and Moggallāna were followers of Sañjaya, one of the non-brahmanical contemplative teachers of the Buddha's time. They had made a pact with each other: Whoever of the two first attained the deathless would tell the other one. Sañjaya's teachings are reported in [DN 2](#), and it's obvious that they were not aimed at the deathless. So it would appear that Sāriputta and Moggallāna had lost faith in Sañjaya and were on their own independent paths.

One day, Sāriputta saw Ven. Assaji, one of the group of five monks, going for alms in Rājagaha. Inspired by the serene calm with which Ven. Assaji moved through the city, Sāriputta was convinced that he was either an arahant or else on the path to arahantship. This point, by the way, has been emphasized repeatedly to monks in training over the centuries: The way you behave, even on something as ordinary as an

almsround, can inspire those who see you to open or close their hearts to the Dhamma.

In this case, Sāriputta's heart flew wide open. He followed Assaji until the latter had left the city. Then he approached him, asking him who his teacher was. Assaji replied that he was a follower of the Great Contemplative, a son of the Sakyans. When Sāriputta then asked what Dhamma his teacher taught, Ven. Assaji modestly said that he was newly gone-forth in the Blessed One's teaching, and so couldn't expound the teaching in detail. He could only explain the gist.

When Sāriputta said that the gist was all he wanted, Ven. Assaji taught him a short verse:

“Whatever phenomena arise from cause:  
their cause

& their cessation.

Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata,  
the Great Contemplative.”

Having heard this verse, Sāriputta gained the Dhamma eye.

As Sāriputta returned to find his friend, Moggallāna saw him coming from afar. When Sāriputta arrived, Moggallāna commented on how bright and pure his faculties appeared. Had he found the deathless?

Sāriputta replied that he had. He then told Moggallāna what had happened.

When he repeated Assaji's verse, Moggallāna gained the Dhamma eye as well.

This event was historic for several reasons.

To begin with, it was the first recorded instance in which someone gained the Dhamma eye, not by listening to the Buddha himself, but to

one of his disciples.

And it's noteworthy that Ven. Assaji didn't repeat the Buddha's words. He reframed the teaching using his own words from his own insight. This proved that the Dhamma eye could be inspired by words other than the Buddha's as long as they were in line with the Dhamma.

Finally, the fact that Moggallāna could gain the Dhamma eye by listening to someone who hadn't even met the Buddha proved that the Buddha was right to spend so much time and effort in establishing the Dhamma and Vinaya so that they would last for many generations: People who hadn't even met the Buddha could still inspire others to reach the noble attainments.

Although we'll focus most of our attention on the wisdom of Sāriputta and Moggallāna in being able to gain awakening after hearing such a short teaching, it's good to look first at Ven. Assaji's wisdom in expressing the gist of the Buddha's teaching in the way he did.

Here we can only speculate at his reasons for doing so. Maybe he was following the ancient Indian tradition of intellectual riddles, presented as challenges. If that was the case, he was alerting Sāriputta that he would have to pay extra close attention to what he was saying and what it might mean.

But it's also possible that Ven. Assaji's reasons for expressing the gist of the Dhamma in this way related more to his own experience of reaching the deathless. His personal history shows that his conviction in the possibility of a deathless element had been strong for a long time, and that it had been blocked by a misunderstanding that the Buddha's first discourse pinpointed and cleared away.

In brief, Ven. Assaji must have seen that the Buddha's teachings were distinctive precisely because of their views on causality and on how the principles of causality could be best used. Unlike other teachers of the

time, the Buddha showed that the way to the deathless was to be found by tackling the problem of suffering, and that this problem had to be solved by understanding how things are caused, how the pattern of cause and effect could be manipulated, and how that manipulation should focus on bringing about the cessation of something by putting an end to its cause or causes. This is the underlying dynamic of the four noble truths and of dependent co-arising. Having seen how this understanding cleared up the blockage in his own mind, Ven. Assaji must have assumed that it would be similarly effective for someone like Sāriputta who was also eager to find the way to the deathless.

This eagerness is worth noting. We also find it in the case of Bāhiya, who, like Sāriputta, gained a noble attainment after hearing only a brief passage of Dhamma. We'll consider his case in Chapter 8, but for now we can simply comment that Sāriputta's and Bāhiya's eagerness for the path proves that desire, when properly focused on the path, is not an obstacle to attainment. It's actually a necessary part of the path.

But both Sāriputta and Bāhiya brought more than the eagerness of strong conviction. Their personal histories also show that they believed that the attainment of the deathless would require a path of practice. It didn't just happen on its own. This belief provided both of them with an element of appropriate attention that they brought to the Dhamma.

In Sāriputta's case, we can get a sense of what else he brought to Ven. Assaji's instructions by comparing those instructions with the pattern given in [MN 9](#) for how the framework for the four noble truths should be applied to the sequence of dependent co-arising. This pattern is a useful point of comparison, for two reasons: (a) It provides a general standard that's close to what Ven. Assaji said; and (b) it was formulated by Ven. Sāriputta himself at a later date. In formulating this



general pattern, he may have been reflecting on what he had had to bring to his own attainment of the Dhamma eye.

When we compare Ven. Assaji's instructions to the pattern in [MN 9](#), we can see that those instructions lacked four important elements that Sāriputta had to intuit, using his own discernment.

- One we've already alluded to: Even though the pattern in [MN 9](#) follows the pattern of all four noble truths—event, origination, cessation, path—Ven. Assaji's instructions mention only the first three. They make no mention of a path of practice needed to bring about the cessation of the cause of the events in question. Sāriputta's prior conviction in a path of practice was needed to fill that point in.

- The second point is actually a cluster of points concerning location: where Sāriputta had to look for an example of what Ven. Assaji was talking about. He had to intuit that “whatever phenomena” referred to events appearing directly in the body and mind, that the cause of those events also had to be in the mind, and that the path to the cessation of that cause had to be a mental act or series of mental acts. We know that the Buddha used the word “origination” (*samudaya*) to refer to causes arising in the mind, but we don't know whether that connotation was universal in his time or was distinctive to him. Yet even if it was universal, Assaji didn't even use the term in his verse. Instead, he used the more general term for cause—*hetu*—which could refer to any kind of cause at all, internal or external, mental or physical. So Assaji's verse gave no clues at all as to where to look for phenomena, causes, and the path to the cessation of causes. Sāriputta had to intuit all of this on his own.

- The third point he had to intuit was the fact that cessation means not simply the passing away of the phenomena in question through the passing away of their causes. It has to mean the total ending of both.

- The fourth point is that this cessation has to be brought about through dispassion for the cause. This is an especially remarkable insight, as there were many possible alternatives Sāriputta could have assumed. For example, there were theories at the time that blockages to the deathless could simply be burned away through the intensity (*tapas*) of one's efforts—the Buddha himself had tested this theory in the course of his austerities—so Sāriputta had to intuit that that was not the case here.

Finally, there's one extra element that even the pattern in [MN 9](#) doesn't mention. That's the fact that, once the path has done its work in inducing dispassion, Sāriputta had to note that the path itself arose from causes, so he would have to develop dispassion for the causes of the path as well.

If Sāriputta had been able to intuit even just one of these points when listening to Assaji's verse, it would have been remarkable. The fact that he was able to intuit all five is truly amazing.

While we can marvel at his intuitive discernment, we also have to remember that Moggallāna proved to be just as perceptive in gaining the Dhamma eye when Sāriputta repeated Ven. Assaji's verse to him. The fact that the Buddha later declared Ven. Sāriputta to be foremost among his disciples in terms of discernment thus rested on more than just his ability to gain the deathless after hearing only the gist of the teaching. It also rested on his ability, over the years, to elaborate on the Buddha's teaching and to bring many other people to an experience of the deathless as well ([MN 141](#)).

Finally, it's worth noting that the Canon gives special treatment to the story of how Sāriputta and Moggallāna gained the Dhamma eye. This is one of the few—if not the only—places in the Canon where the narrator of the events pauses to address the characters in the narrative,

expressing amazement at their ability to gain so much from so few words.

This special treatment of the story has extended over the centuries. Ven. Assaji's verse has been inscribed on temple walls and on amulets given to Buddhist pilgrims as a short synopsis of the gist of the Buddha's teachings—a rare honor considering that this gist is not even expressed in the Buddha's own words.

## VEN. CHANNA

Another case in which the teaching on dependent co-arising plays a role in the arising of the Dhamma eye is that of Ven. Channa. His case, however, is in many ways the opposite of that of Sāriputta and Moggallāna. They gained the Dhamma eye after hearing only a short passage of Dhamma. Channa had to have things explained to him in great detail, many times, often to no effect at all. It was only through the patience and compassion of Ven. Ānanda that Channa finally broke through to the deathless after the Buddha's total unbinding.

The story goes that Channa had been a servant of the Buddha when the latter was still a prince. Channa later ordained, but because of his special connection with the Buddha, he showed no respect to the rest of the Saṅgha. The Vinaya contains many stories of his insulting attitude, the most egregious example being this:

“You think *you* are to admonish *me*? It is *I* who should admonish *you*! The Buddha is mine, the Dhamma is mine, it was by my young master that the Dhamma was realized. Just as a great wind when blowing would gather up grass, sticks, leaves, & rubbish, or a mountain-born river would gather up water weeds & scum, so you, in going forth, have been gathered up from various names, various

clans, various ancestries, various families. You think *you* are to admonish *me*? It is *I* who should admonish *you*!” — *Pācittiya* 12

Finally, the Buddha, on the night of his total unbinding, told the Saṅgha to impose the brahmā penalty on Channa: He was to be allowed to act and speak as he liked, yet the Saṅgha would no longer try to criticize or admonish him. When Channa learned of this penalty, he fainted, realizing that he was in serious trouble (see [AN 4:111](#) [§30]). When he regained his senses, he had a total change of heart.

The Canon contains two accounts of what followed. The Cullavagga (XI 1.15) says that he went off alone, practiced diligently, and became an arahant. [SN 22:90](#), the account we follow here, says that he sought instruction from the other monks. They taught him to see the five aggregates as inconstant and not-self, to see that all fabrications are inconstant, and that all phenomena are not-self. He had already heard this teaching many times, to no effect, because he was still agitated by the question, “But who, then, is my self?”

He then sought out Ven. Ānanda and told him of his problem. Ānanda reassured him that he would be capable of attaining the Dhamma. This aroused Channa’s joy and conviction in his ability to learn the Dhamma after all.

Ānanda’s instructions to Channa are best understood in light of the definition of appropriate and inappropriate attention as given in [MN 2](#) [§32]. There, inappropriate attention is defined as paying attention to questions surrounding personal existence and identity in the past, future, and present: such questions as, “Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?” These questions are to be avoided because they lead, not to the end of

suffering, but instead to a “thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views.”

Appropriate attention is defined as ignoring these questions and instead paying attention to the four noble truths as they’re directly experienced: “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.”

Ānanda’s instructions to Channa follow the same outline, attacking inappropriate attention and explaining appropriate attention. However, his explanations of both steps differ in their details. Under the topic of appropriate attention, he replaces the four noble truths with the sequence of dependent co-arising in forward and reverse order. This much is unremarkable. What’s interesting is how he treats inappropriate attention.

Most of the Canon’s treatments for deconstructing the assumption “I am this” focus on taking apart the concepts of “I” or “this.” But given that this approach hadn’t worked for Channa, Ānanda instead quotes a discourse that focuses on the other term of the sentence—the “am”—recommending a state of mind that drops the duality of existence and non-existence. If Channa could cultivate a state of mind in which the terms “existence” and “non-existence” don’t occur to the mind, then the question of the existence or non-existence of the self would be a non-question.

That’s the state of mind the discourse aims at inducing.

In the original discourse, the Buddha was addressing a monk named Ven. Kaccāna Gotta. Ānanda quotes the discourse word-for-word:

“By & large, Kaccāna, this world is supported by [takes as its object] a polarity, that of existence & non-existence. But when one

sees the origination of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, “non-existence” with reference to the world doesn’t occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, “existence” with reference to the world doesn’t occur to one.”

Note that the Buddha here is not saying that phenomena originated by causes can’t be properly described in the abstract as existing or not existing. After all, in [SN 22:94](#), he says clearly that the five aggregates—which are originated by causes—do exist. And he’s not interested in defining what it means to exist. At the same time, he’s not telling Kaccāna simply to stop thinking in terms of “existing” or “not existing.” Instead, he’s describing a state of mind engrossed in directly observing the origination and cessation of the world of the six senses in such a way that the concepts of “existence” and “non-existence” simply don’t occur to the mind.

The discourse goes on to say that when the mind is in this state, it lets go of attachments and clingings to a sense of self, and it views all arising and passing away simply as instances of stress arising and passing away—i.e., things to be comprehended so that any desire or passion for them is to be let go.

“By & large, Kaccāna, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings (sustenances), & biases. But one such as this doesn’t get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions; nor is he resolved on “my self.” He has no uncertainty or doubt that, when there is arising, only stress is arising; and that when there is passing away, only stress is passing away. In this, one’s knowledge is independent of others. It’s to this extent, Kaccāna, that there is right view.”

When the sense of self can be seen, not as a thing, but simply as an instance of stress arising and passing away, it's easier to let go of any desire to identify with it.

The question remains: how to get the mind in a state where it sees things in these terms. The answer is that you contemplate dependent co-arising both in its mode of origination and in its mode of cessation. This is why the Buddha, when addressing Kaccāna Gotta—and Ānanda, when addressing Channa—followed the above discussion with a discussion of dependent co-arising, with its repeated emphasis on origination and cessation. This is their description of appropriate attention. Had they followed the example of [MN 2 \[§32\]](#) in illustrating appropriate attention with the shorter and less explicit example of seeing the four noble truths, it might not have had the same effect.

At any rate, Ven. Channa followed Ven. Ānanda's instructions while Ānanda was speaking. As a result, he broke through to the Dhamma and became a stream-enterer.

The Canon notes elsewhere that the questions of inappropriate attention, concerning the existence and non-existence of the self, are dropped not only for the strategic purpose of completing the path. They're also dropped once and for all after you've seen the deathless. That's because you now see they weren't worth asking to begin with.

“When a disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be, it's not possible that he would run after the past, thinking, ‘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?’ or that he would run after the future, thinking, ‘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 that he would be inwardly perplexed about the immediate present, thinking, ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’ Such a thing is not possible. Why is that? Because the disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be.” — [SN 12:20](#)

## PRINCE ABHAYA

The last two examples of talks inspiring stream-entry are two of the four we mentioned in Chapter 3 in which the Buddha’s listeners question him in the course of his talk.

One of them concerns Prince Abhaya, a son of King Bimbisāra of Magadha. Abhaya is most famous for his role in [MN 58](#), in which the Nigaṇṭhas appeal to his vanity, persuading him to put a trick question to the Buddha, on the grounds that he would become famous far and wide for asking a question that the Buddha couldn’t answer. The question was this: Would the Buddha say anything displeasing to others? If he said Yes, Abhaya could respond: “Then how is there any difference between you, lord, and run-of-the-mill people?” If the Buddha said No, Abhaya could respond, “Then how, lord, did you say of Devadatta that ‘Devadatta is doomed to deprivation, Devadatta is doomed to hell, Devadatta will stay for an eon, Devadatta is incurable’? For Devadatta was upset & disgruntled at those words of yours.”

But when Abhaya actually put the question to the Buddha, the Buddha replied that there was no categorical Yes or No answer to the question. Instead, it required an analytical answer, drawing distinctions that the question neglected to take into consideration.



Using the simile of a child who got a sharp object in his mouth, the Buddha got Abhaya to admit that compassion required getting the object out, even if it meant drawing blood. In the same way, the Buddha would say only things that are true and beneficial, and would know the right time and place to say things that were pleasing or displeasing.

At the end of the discourse, Abhaya declared himself a lay follower who had gone for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

However, the passage in [MN 58](#) that's most relevant to the fact that he later broke through to the Dhamma is the one where Abhaya mentions that he was well-known for his knowledge of the parts of the chariot. This would be equivalent to people at present who are expert in their knowledge of how to fix trucks and cars. It suggests that Abhaya had an inquisitive, practical mind, the kind of mind that, if it focused on issues of stress and its cessation, would immediately try to get to the heart of the problem and figure out its solution: how cessation could be brought about.

That's exactly what happens in [SN 46:56](#). Abhaya approaches the Buddha, who is staying on Vulture Peak Mountain, and asks some questions that go straight to the point. He wants to know about causes: those that obstruct knowledge and vision of things as they have come to be, and those that promote that knowledge and vision. The Buddha teaches him that the five hindrances act as obstructions to that knowledge and vision, whereas the seven factors for awakening "dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go" promote it.

This seems like an incredibly short talk to cause a layperson to break through to the Dhamma, but if Abhaya was actually trying to abandon the hindrances and cultivate the factors for awakening as the Buddha

was describing them, all the necessary factors for stream-entry would have been present in his mind.

Recall for a moment the definition of the stream: the coming together of all the factors of the noble eightfold path. Here, however, the Buddha speaks in terms of the seven factors for awakening. Those seven factors are often described as the final step in the practice leading to clear knowing and release.

“Just as when the devas pour rain in heavy drops & crash thunder on the upper mountains: The water, flowing down along the slopes, fills the branches of the mountain ravines & gullies... the little lakes... the big lakes... the little rivers... the big rivers. When the big rivers are made full, they fill the great ocean. Such is the food of the great ocean, and thus is it made full. In the same way, when associating with people of integrity is made full, it fills [the conditions for] hearing the true Dhamma... conviction... appropriate attention... mindfulness & alertness... restraint of the senses... the three forms of right conduct... the four establishing of mindfulness... the seven factors for awakening. When the seven factors for awakening are made full, they fill [the conditions for] clear knowing & release. Such is the food for this clear knowing & release, and thus are they made full.” — [AN 10:61](#)

This sequence of factors is essentially equivalent to the noble eightfold path. So when these factors are complete, they satisfy the conditions for entering the stream.

The reason the factors of awakening play such an important role in this sequence is because they contain both concentration and discernment. To begin with, to develop them you have to apply the discernment of appropriate attention to starve the hindrances and feed

the causes for each of the factors for awakening ([SN 46:51](#) [[§33](#)]). Also, the second factor for awakening—analysis of qualities—is, in and of itself, a factor of discernment. It focuses directly on observing the mind and on applying the principles of transcendent right view ([MN 117](#)).

This is especially true when all the factors are practiced “dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go.” The seclusion here is the mind in at least the first jhāna. The dispassion and cessation come from abandoning the causes for suffering. The letting go would involve seeing even the drawbacks of the path after it has done its job, and so gaining an escape from it.

Given the fact that Abhaya had an inquisitive and practical mind, focused on how-to questions, we can understand how, on hearing this teaching and putting it into practice right then and there, he could have broken through to stream-entry. As he says at the end of the sutta, the fact of having broken through to the Dhamma allayed the mental and physical fatigue he felt from climbing the mountain where the Buddha was staying.

## **SAKKA THE DEVA-KING**

The conversation between Sakka the deva-king and the Buddha reported in [DN 21](#) is a second instance in which the listener, Sakka, asks some important questions. In this case, though, he asked many questions, and we can only guess which of the Buddha’s answers to those questions sparked Sakka’s attainment of stream-entry.

One way of approaching this issue is to focus on the two most important questions that Sakka asks. The first has to do with the psychological sources for rivalry and hostility. It’s easy to understand

why this issue loomed large in Sakka's mind. He had just defeated an attempt by the asuras, another group of heavenly beings, to seize his realm by force.

The Buddha answers Sakka's question by going step by step through the causes of rivalry and hostility, tracing them back—in a manner very much like dependent co-arising—to the perceptions and categories of objectification (*papañca*), like this:

the perceptions & categories of *papañca* > thinking > desire  
> dear-&-not-dear > envy & stinginess > rivalry & hostility.

Sakka doesn't ask what the perceptions and categories of *papañca* are, but it's a question worth asking. The Canon gives no clear definition for *papañca*, aside from saying that the perceptions and categories of *papañca* always lead to conflict. [Sn 4:14](#) tells where they come from, stating that the root of the categories of *papañca* is the perception, "I am the thinker." From this self-reflexive thought—in which you objectify a "self," a thing corresponding to the concept of "I"—a number of categories can be derived: being/not-being, me/not-me, mine/not-mine, doer/done-to.

Once your self becomes a thing or a being under the rubric of these categories, it's impossible not to be assailed by the perceptions and categories derived from these basic distinctions. When you identify as a being ([SN 23:2](#)), you have to feed, because all beings need to feed ([Khp 4](#)). This gives rise to thoughts of desire. At that point, based on the feelings arising from sensory contact, some feelings will seem endearing and appealing—worth feeding on—and others will seem worth pushing away. From this there grows stinginess, which comes into conflict with the desires of others who are also feeding because they, too, are beings engaging in *papañca*. This is how inner objectification breeds external rivalry.

Perhaps Sakka was already familiar with the term *papañca*, which is why he didn't need for it to be defined. Instead, he expressed joy in the Buddha's answer and then proceeded to the next important question, a how-to question like Prince Abhaya's: how to practice for the right ending of the perceptions and categories of *papañca*.

The Buddha replied by sketching out the practice of concentration based on joy and grief—most likely, the grief that comes when you realize that there is a deathless goal that you haven't yet attained ([MN 137](#))—and then on equanimity, both with and without directed thought. It may have been that Sakka, while listening to this sketch, took his joy in the Buddha's answers, applied it to the practice of concentration, reflected on the causal chain leading to and building on the perceptions and categories of *papañca*, developed dispassion for them, and broke through to the Dhamma.

There are other possible explanations for how Sakka became a stream-enterer during this conversation, but this one seems to be most in line with the Buddha's more general remarks about what's needed to gain the noble attainments while listening to the Dhamma.

[MN 37](#) reports that Sakka later approached the Buddha and asked a question related to arahantship:

“Briefly, lord, in what respect is a monk released through the ending of craving, utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, a follower of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate: foremost among devas & human beings?”

The Buddha answered the question:

“There is the case, deva-king, where a monk has heard, ‘All dhammas are unworthy of adherence.’ Having heard that all

dhammas are unworthy of adherence, he directly knows every dhamma. Directly knowing every dhamma, he comprehends every dhamma. Comprehending every dhamma, 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 totally unbinds right within. He discerns: 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

However, instead of acting on this answer, Sakka simply showed respect to the Buddha and then vanished. He returned to his heaven, where he heedlessly became immersed in his sensual pleasures as before.

This story is cautionary. As the Buddha notes in [SN 55:40](#), it is possible for a person endowed with the qualities of a stream-enterer to become satisfied with those qualities and not to make any further exertion in solitude or seclusion.

"For him, living thus heedlessly, there is no joy. There being no joy, there is no rapture. There being no rapture, there is no calm. There being no calm, he dwells in pain. When pained, the mind does not become concentrated. When the mind is unconcentrated, phenomena do not become manifest. When phenomena are not manifest, he is reckoned simply as one who dwells heedlessly." — [SN 55:40](#)

This may be why, on the night of his total unbinding, the Buddha’s last words to the assembled monks urged them to be heedful, even though the most backward of the monks present were stream-enterers. Although their future attainment of arahantship was assured, they could still face a fair amount of suffering in the meantime if they fell heedless between now and then.

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, “Now, then, monks, I exhort you: All fabrications are subject to ending & decay. Reach consummation through heedfulness.” That was the Tathāgata’s last statement. — [DN 16](#)

## READINGS

§ 39. Now at that time, the wanderer Sañjaya was dwelling in Rājagaha with a large company of wanderers—250 in all. And at that time Sāriputta & Moggallāna were living the holy life under Sañjaya. They had made this pact: “Whoever attains the deathless first will inform the other.”

Then, early in the morning, Ven. Assaji—having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe—entered Rājagaha for alms: gracious in the way he approached and departed, looked forward and behind, drew in and stretched out (his arm); his eyes downcast, his every movement consummate. Sāriputta the wanderer saw Ven. Assaji going for alms in Rājagaha: gracious... his eyes downcast, his every movement consummate. On seeing him, the thought occurred to him: “Surely, of those monks in this world who are arahants or who are endowed with the path to arahantship, this is one. What if I were to go

to him and question him: ‘Friend, on whose account have you gone forth? Or who is your teacher? Or in whose Dhamma do you delight?’”

But then the thought occurred to Sāriputta the wanderer: “This is the wrong time to question him. Having entered among houses, he is going for alms. What if I were to follow behind this monk? The path is found by those who seek it.”

Then Ven. Assaji, having gone for alms in Rājagaha, took his almsfood and left. Then Sāriputta the wanderer went to Ven. Assaji and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he stood to one side. As he was standing there, Sāriputta the wanderer said to Ven. Assaji, “Clear, my friend, are your faculties—pure your complexion, and bright. On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? In whose Dhamma do you delight?”

“There is, friend, the Great Contemplative—a son of the Sakyans, gone forth from the Sakyan clan. I have gone forth on account of that Blessed One. That Blessed One is my teacher, and I delight in his Dhamma.”

“What is your teacher’s doctrine? What is his teaching?”

“I am new, friend, not long gone forth, and have just recently come to this Dhamma & Vinaya. I can’t teach the Dhamma in detail, but I can tell you its essence in brief.”

Then Sāriputta the wanderer said to Ven. Assaji,

“Speak a little or a lot,  
but tell me just the gist.  
Just the gist is what I want.  
What use is a lot of verbosity?”

So Ven. Assaji spoke this Dhamma-explanation to Sāriputta the wanderer:



“Whatever phenomena arise from cause:  
their cause  
& their cessation.

Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata,  
the Great Contemplative.”

Then, when he had heard this Dhamma-explanation, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose for Sāriputta the wanderer: “*Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.*”

Just this Dhamma,  
just this much,  
and you experienced  
the sorrowless state—  
unseen, neglected,  
for many ten-thousands of eons.

Then Sāriputta the wanderer went to Moggallāna the wanderer. Moggallāna the wanderer saw Sāriputta the wanderer coming from afar and, on seeing him, said to him, “Clear, my friend, are your faculties—pure your complexion, and bright. Have you attained the deathless, my friend?”

“Yes, my friend, I have attained the deathless.”

“But how did you attain the deathless?”

“Just now I saw the monk Assaji entering Rājagaha for alms: gracious in the way he approached and departed, looked forward and behind, drew in and stretched out (his arm); his eyes downcast, his every movement consummate. On seeing him, the thought occurred to me: ‘Surely, of those monks in this world who are arahants or are endowed with the path to arahantship, this is one. What if I were to go to him and question him: “Friend, on whose account have you gone forth? Or who is your teacher? Or in whose Dhamma do you delight?”’”

“But then the thought occurred to me: ‘This is the wrong time to question him. Having entered among houses, he is going for alms. What if I were to follow behind this monk? The path is found by those who seek it.’

“Then Ven. Assaji, having gone for alms in Rājagaha, took his almsfood and left. I went to him and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, I stood to one side. As I was standing there, I said to him, ‘Clear, my friend, are your faculties—pure your complexion, and bright. On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? In whose Dhamma do you delight?’”

“‘There is, friend, the Great Contemplative—a son of the Sakyans, gone forth from the Sakyan clan. I have gone forth on account of that Blessed One. That Blessed One is my teacher, and I delight in his Dhamma.’”

“‘What is your teacher’s doctrine? What is his teaching?’”

“‘I am new, friend, not long gone forth, and have just recently come to this Dhamma & Vinaya. I can’t teach the Dhamma in detail, but I can tell you its essence in brief.’”

“Then I said to Ven. Assaji,

‘Speak a little or a lot,  
but tell me just the gist.  
The gist is what I want.  
What use is a lot of verbosity?’

“So Ven. Assaji spoke this Dhamma-explanation:

‘Whatever phenomena arise from cause:  
their cause  
& their cessation.

Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata,  
the Great Contemplative.”

Then, when he had heard this Dhamma-explanation, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose for Moggallāna the wanderer: “*Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.*”...

Then Moggallāna the wanderer said to Sāriputta the wanderer, “Let’s go to the Blessed One’s presence, my friend. The Blessed One is our teacher.”

— [\*Mv 1:23–24.1\*](#)

§ 40. Ven. Ānanda said, “Friends, Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta was very helpful to us when we were newly ordained. He exhorted us with this exhortation:

“It’s with possessiveness, friend Ānanda, that there is “I am,” not without possessiveness. And through possessiveness of what is there “I am,” not without possessiveness? Through possessiveness of form there is “I am,” not without possessiveness. Through possessiveness of feeling... perception... fabrications... Through possessiveness of consciousness there is “I am,” not without possessiveness.

“Just as if a young woman—or a man—youthful, fond of adornment, contemplating the image of her face in a mirror, pure & bright, or in a bowl of clear water, would look with possessiveness, not without possessiveness. In the same way, through possessiveness of form there is “I am,” not without possessiveness. Through possessiveness of feeling... perception... fabrications... Through possessiveness of consciousness there is “I am,” not without possessiveness.

“What do you think, friend Ānanda? Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, friend.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, friend.’

“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, friend.’

“... Is feeling constant or inconstant?’—’Inconstant, friend.’ ...

“... Is perception constant or inconstant?’—’Inconstant, friend.’ ...

“... Are fabrications constant or inconstant?’—’Inconstant, friend.’

...

“What do you think, friend Ānanda? Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, friend.’

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, friend.’

“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, friend.’

“Thus, friend Ānanda, 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 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.”

“Friends, Ven. Puṇṇa Maṇṭāniputta was very helpful to us when we were newly ordained. He exhorted us with this exhortation. And when I had heard this Dhamma-explanation from Ven. Puṇṇa Maṇṭāniputta, I broke through to the Dhamma.”

— [SN 22:83](#)

§ 41. On one occasion many elder monks were staying near Vārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then in the late afternoon Ven. Channa left his seclusion and, taking his key, went from dwelling to dwelling, saying to the elder monks, “May the venerable elders exhort me, may the venerable elders teach me, may the venerable elders give me a Dhamma talk so that I might see the Dhamma.”

When this was said, the elder monks said to Ven. Channa, “Form, friend Channa, is inconstant. Feeling is inconstant. Perception is inconstant. Fabrications are inconstant. Consciousness is inconstant. Form is not-self. Feeling is not-self. Perception is not-self. Fabrications are not-self. Consciousness is not-self. All fabrications are inconstant. All phenomena are not-self.”

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Channa, “I, too, think that form is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, fabrications are inconstant, consciousness is inconstant; form is not-self, feeling is not-self, perception is not-self, fabrications are not-self, consciousness is

not-self; all fabrications are inconstant; all phenomena are not-self. But still my mind doesn't leap up, grow confident, steadfast, & released [alternate reading: firm] in the pacification of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation, unbinding. Instead, agitation & clinging arise, and my intellect pulls back, thinking, 'But who, then, is my self?' But this thought doesn't occur to one who sees the Dhamma. So who might teach me the Dhamma so that I might see the Dhamma?"

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Channa, "This Ven. Ānanda is staying near Kosambī at Ghosita's monastery. He has been praised by the Teacher and is esteemed by his observant companions in the holy life. He is capable of teaching me the Dhamma so that I might see the Dhamma, and I have sudden trust in him. Why don't I go to Ven. Ānanda?"

So, setting his lodgings in order and taking his robes & bowl, Ven. Channa went to Kosambī to where Ven. Ānanda was staying at Ghosita's monastery. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with Ven. Ānanda. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he [told Ven. Ānanda what had happened and added], "May Ven. Ānanda exhort me, may Ven. Ānanda teach me, may Ven. Ānanda give me a Dhamma talk so that I might see the Dhamma."

"Even this much makes me feel gratified & satisfied with Ven. Channa, that he opens up & breaks down his stubbornness. So lend ear, friend Channa. You are capable of understanding the Dhamma."

Then a sudden great rapture & joy welled up in Ven. Channa at the thought, "So I am capable of understanding the Dhamma!"

"Face-to-face with the Blessed One have I heard this, friend Channa. Face-to-face with him have I learned the exhortation he gave to the

monk Kaccāna Gotta [\[SN 12:15\]](#): ‘By & large, Kaccāna, this world is supported by [takes as its object] a polarity, that of existence & non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, “non-existence” with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it has come to be with right discernment, “existence” with reference to the world does not occur to one.

“By & large, Kaccāna, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings (sustenances), & biases. But one such as this does not get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions; nor is he resolved on “my self.” He has no uncertainty or doubt that, when there is arising, only stress is arising; and that when there is passing away, only stress is passing away. In this, one’s knowledge is independent of others. It is to this extent, Kaccāna, that there is right view.

““Everything exists”: That is one extreme. “Everything doesn’t exist”: That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“Now, from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.”

“That’s how it is, friend Ānanda, for those who have companions in the holy life like Ven. Ānanda—sympathetic, helpful, exhorting, & teaching. Just now, listening to Ven. Ānanda’s Dhamma-teaching, I have broken through to the Dhamma.”

— [\*SN 22:90\*](#)

§ 42. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Rājagaha on Vulture’s Peak Mountain. Then Prince Abhaya 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, “Lord, Pūraṇa Kassapa says this: ‘There is no cause, there is no condition, for lack of knowledge & lack of vision. Lack of knowledge & lack of vision are



without cause, without condition. There is no cause, there is no condition, for knowledge & vision. Knowledge & vision are without cause, without condition. What does the Blessed One say to that?”

“Prince, there is a cause, there is a condition, for lack of knowledge & lack of vision. Lack of knowledge & lack of vision are with cause, with condition. There is a cause, there is a condition, for knowledge & vision. Knowledge & vision are with cause, with condition.”

“Then what, lord, is the cause, what is the condition, for lack of knowledge & lack of vision? How are lack of knowledge & lack of vision with cause, with condition?”

“Prince, on the occasion when one remains with an awareness overpowered by sensual desire, overcome by sensual desire, and one doesn’t discern or see, as it has come to be, the escape from sensual desire that has arisen, that is the cause, that is the condition, for lack of knowledge & lack of vision. That’s how lack of knowledge & lack of vision are with cause, with condition.

“Further, on the occasion when one remains with an awareness overpowered by ill will, overcome by ill will ...

“On the occasion when one remains with an awareness overpowered by sloth & drowsiness, overcome by sloth & drowsiness ...

“On the occasion when one remains with an awareness overpowered by restlessness & anxiety, overcome by restlessness & anxiety ...

“On the occasion when one remains with an awareness overpowered by uncertainty, overcome by uncertainty, and one doesn’t discern or see, as it has come to be, the escape from uncertainty that has arisen, that is the cause, that is the condition, for lack of knowledge & lack of vision. That’s how lack of knowledge & lack of vision are with cause, with condition.”

“Lord, what is this Dhamma-sequence called?”

“Prince, they are called hindrances.”

“Yes, they are hindrances, Blessed One! Yes, they are hindrances, One Well-gone! Anyone conquered by any one of these hindrances wouldn’t discern or see what has come to be, to say nothing of all five.

“Then what, lord, is the cause, what is the condition, for knowledge & vision? How are knowledge & vision with cause, with condition?”

“There is the case, prince, where a monk develops mindfulness as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. With a mind that has developed mindfulness as a factor for awakening, he knows & sees what has come to be. That is the cause, that is the condition, for knowledge & vision. That’s how knowledge & vision are with cause, with condition.”

“Further, he develops analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening ...

“He develops persistence as a factor for awakening ...

“He develops rapture as a factor for awakening ...

“He develops calm as a factor for awakening ...

“He develops concentration as a factor for awakening ...

“He develops equanimity as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. With a mind that has developed equanimity as a factor for awakening, he knows & sees what has come to be. That is the cause, that is the condition, for knowledge & vision. That’s how knowledge & vision are with cause, with condition.”

“Lord, what is this Dhamma-sequence called?”

“Prince, they are called factors for awakening.”

“Yes, they are factors for awakening, Blessed One! Yes, they are factors for awakening, One Well-gone! Anyone endowed with any one of

these factors for awakening would discern & see what has come to be, to say nothing of all seven.

“And lord, my fatigue of body & fatigue of mind from climbing Vulture Peak Mountain has grown calm, as I have broken through to the Dhamma.”

— [\*SN 46:56\*](#)

§ 43. Having been given leave by the Blessed One, Sakka the deva-king asked him his first question: “Fettered with what, dear sir—though they think, ‘May we live free from hostility, free from violence, free from rivalry, free from ill will, free from those who are hostile’—do devas, human beings, asuras, nāgas, gandhabbas, & whatever other many kinds of beings there are, nevertheless live in hostility, violence, rivalry, ill will, with those who are hostile?”

Thus Sakka asked his first question of the Blessed One, and the Blessed One, when asked, replied: “Devas, human beings, asuras, nāgas, gandhabbas, & whatever other many kinds of beings there are, are fettered with envy & stinginess, which is why—even though they think, ‘May we live free from hostility, free from violence, free from rivalry, free from ill will, free from those who are hostile’—they nevertheless live in hostility, violence, rivalry, ill will, with those who are hostile.”

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king. Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words: “So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One’s answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity is overcome.”

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words, asked him a further question: “But what, dear sir, is the cause of envy & stinginess, what is their origination, what gives

them birth, what is their source? When what exists do they come into being? When what doesn't exist do they not?"

"Envy & stinginess have dear-&-not-dear as their cause, have dear-&-not-dear as their origination, have dear-&-not-dear as what gives them birth, have dear-&-not-dear as their source. When dear-&-not-dear exist, they come into being. When dear-&-not-dear are not, they don't."

"But what, dear sir, is the cause of dear-&-not-dear, what is their origination, what gives them birth, what is their source? When what exists do they come into being? When what doesn't exist do they not?"

"Dear-&-not-dear have desire as their cause, have desire as their origination, have desire as what gives them birth, have desire as their source. When desire exists, they come into being. When desire is not, they don't."

"But what, dear sir, is the cause of desire, what is its origination, what gives it birth, what is its source? When what exists does it come into being? When what doesn't exist does it not?"

"Desire has thinking as its cause, has thinking as its origination, has thinking as what gives it birth, has thinking as its source. When thinking exists, desire comes into being. When thinking is not, it doesn't."

"But what, dear sir, is the cause of thinking, what is its origination, what gives it birth, what is its source? When what exists does it come into being? When what doesn't exist does it not?"

"Thinking has the perceptions & categories of objectification as its cause, has the perceptions & categories of objectification as its origination, has the perceptions & categories of objectification as what gives it birth, has the perceptions & categories of objectification as its source. When the perceptions & categories of objectification exist, thinking comes into being. When the perceptions & categories of objectification are not, it doesn't."

“And how has he practiced, dear sir: the monk who has practiced the practice leading to the right cessation of the perceptions & categories of objectification?”

“Joy is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Grief is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Equanimity is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued.

“‘Joy is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of a feeling of joy, ‘As I pursue this joy, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline,’ that sort of joy is not to be pursued. When one knows of a feeling of joy, ‘As I pursue this joy, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase,’ that sort of joy is to be pursued. And this sort of joy may be accompanied by directed thought & evaluation or free of directed thought & evaluation. Of the two, the latter is the more refined. ‘Joy is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“‘Grief is of two sorts, I tell you: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of a feeling of grief, ‘As I pursue this grief, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline,’ that sort of grief is not to be pursued. When one knows of a feeling of grief, ‘As I pursue this grief, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase,’ that sort of grief is to be pursued. And this sort of grief may be accompanied by directed thought & evaluation or free of directed thought & evaluation. Of the two, the latter is the more refined. ‘Grief is of two sorts, I tell you: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“‘Equanimity is of two sorts, I tell you: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of a feeling of equanimity, ‘As I pursue this equanimity, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline,’ that sort of equanimity is not to be pursued. When one knows of a feeling of equanimity, ‘As I pursue this equanimity, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase,’ that sort of equanimity is to be pursued. And this sort of equanimity may be accompanied by directed thought & evaluation or free of directed thought & evaluation. Of the two, the latter is the more refined. ‘Equanimity is of two sorts, I tell you: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“This is how he has practiced, deva-king: the monk who has practiced the practice leading to the right cessation of the perceptions & categories of objectification.”

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king. Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words: “So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One’s answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity is overcome.”

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words, asked him a further question: “But how has he practiced, dear sir: the monk who has practiced for restraint in the Pāṭimokkha?”

“Bodily conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Verbal conduct is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Searching is of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued.

“‘Bodily conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of bodily conduct, ‘As I pursue this bodily conduct, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline,’ that sort of bodily conduct is not to be pursued. When one knows of bodily conduct, ‘As I pursue this bodily conduct, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase,’ that sort of bodily conduct is to be pursued. ‘Bodily conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“‘Verbal conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of verbal conduct, ‘As I pursue this verbal conduct, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline,’ that sort of verbal conduct is not to be pursued. When one knows of verbal conduct, ‘As I pursue this verbal conduct, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase,’ that sort of verbal conduct is to be pursued. ‘Verbal conduct is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“‘Searching is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? When one knows of a search, ‘As I pursue this search, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline,’ that sort of search is not to be pursued. When one knows of a search, ‘As I pursue this search, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase,’ that sort of search is to be pursued. ‘Searching is of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued.’ Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

“This is how he has practiced, deva-king: the monk who has practiced the practice for restraint in the Pāṭimokkha.”

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king. Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words: “So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One’s answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity is overcome.”

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words, asked him a further question: “But how has he practiced, dear sir: the monk who has practiced for restraint with regard to the sense faculties?”

“Forms cognizable by the eye are of two sorts, I tell you, deva-king: to be pursued & not to be pursued. Sounds cognizable by the ear.... Aromas cognizable by the nose.... Flavors cognizable by the tongue.... Tactile sensations cognizable by the body.... Ideas cognizable by the intellect are of two sorts: to be pursued & not to be pursued.”

When this was said, Sakka the deva-king said to the Blessed One, “Dear sir, I understand the detailed meaning of the Blessed One’s brief statement. If, as one pursues a certain type of form cognizable by the eye, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline, that sort of form cognizable by the eye is not to be pursued. But if, as one pursues a certain type of form cognizable by the eye, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase, that sort of form cognizable by the eye is to be pursued.

“If, as one pursues a certain type of sound cognizable by the ear....

“If, as one pursues a certain type of aroma cognizable by the nose....

“If, as one pursues a certain type of flavor cognizable by the tongue....



“If, as one pursues a certain type of tactile sensation cognizable by the body....

“If, as one pursues a certain type of idea cognizable by the intellect, unskillful mental qualities increase, and skillful mental qualities decline, that sort of idea cognizable by the intellect is not to be pursued. But if, as one pursues a certain type of idea cognizable by the intellect, unskillful mental qualities decline, and skillful mental qualities increase, that sort of idea cognizable by the intellect is to be pursued.

“This is how I understand the detailed meaning of the Blessed One’s brief statement. Hearing the Blessed One’s answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity is overcome.”

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words, asked him a further question: “Dear sir, do all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal?”

“No, deva-king, not all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal.”

“Why, dear sir, don’t all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal?”

“The world is made up of many properties, various properties. Because of the many & various properties in the world, then whichever property living beings get fixated on, they become entrenched & latch onto it, saying, ‘Only this is true; anything else is worthless.’ This is why not all contemplatives & brahmans teach the same doctrine, adhere to the same precepts, desire the same thing, aim at the same goal.”

“But, dear sir, are all contemplatives & brahmans utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly

consummate?”

“No, deva-king, not all contemplatives & brahmans are utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate.”

“But why, dear sir, are not all contemplatives & brahmans utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate?”

“Those monks who are released through the total ending of craving are the ones who are utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate. This is why not all contemplatives & brahmans are utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, followers of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate.”

Thus the Blessed One answered, having been asked by Sakka the deva-king. Gratified, Sakka was delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words: “So it is, O Blessed One. So it is, O One Well-gone. Hearing the Blessed One’s answer to my question, my doubt is now cut off, my perplexity is overcome.”

Then Sakka, having delighted in & expressed his approval of the Blessed One’s words, said to him: “Yearning is a disease, yearning is a boil, yearning is an arrow. It seduces one, drawing one into this or that state of being, which is why one is reborn in high states & low. Whereas other outside contemplatives & brahmans gave me no chance to ask them these questions, the Blessed One has answered at length, so that he has removed the arrow of my doubt & perplexity.”

“Deva-king, do you recall having asked other contemplatives & brahmans these questions?”

“Yes, lord, I recall having asked other contemplatives & brahmans these questions.”

“If it’s no inconvenience, could you tell me how they answered?”

“It’s no inconvenience when sitting with the Blessed One or one who is like him.”

“Then tell me, deva-king.”

“Having gone to those whom I considered to be contemplatives & brahmans living in isolated dwellings in the wilderness, I asked them these questions. But when asked by me, they were at a loss. Being at a loss, they asked *me* in return, ‘What is your name?’

“Being asked, I responded, ‘I, dear sir, am Sakka, the deva-king.’

“So they questioned me further, ‘But what kamma did you do to attain to this state?’

“So I taught them the Dhamma as far as I had heard & mastered it. And they were gratified with just this much: ‘We have seen Sakka, the deva-king, and he has answered our questions!’ So, instead of my becoming their disciple, they simply became mine. But I, lord, am the Blessed One’s disciple, a stream-enterer, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening.”

“Deva-king, do you recall ever having previously experienced such happiness & joy?”

“Yes, lord, I do.”

“And how do you recall ever having previously experienced such happiness & joy?”

“Once, lord, the devas & asuras were arrayed in battle. And in that battle the devas won, while the asuras lost. Having won the battle, as the victor in the battle, this thought occurred to me: ‘Whatever has been the divine nourishment of the asuras, whatever has been the divine nourishment of the devas, the devas will now enjoy both of them.’ But my attainment of happiness & joy was in the sphere of violence & weapons. It didn’t lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge to self-awakening, to unbinding. But my

attainment of happiness & joy on hearing the Blessed One's Dhamma is in the sphere of no violence, the sphere of no weapons. It leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge to self-awakening, to unbinding."

...

Then Sakka, the deva-king, touched the earth with his hand and said three times, "Homage to the Worthy One, the Blessed One, the Rightly Self-awakened One! Homage to the Worthy One, the Blessed One, the Rightly Self-awakened One! Homage to the Worthy One, the Blessed One, the Rightly Self-awakened One!"

While this explanation was being given, there arose to Sakka the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye—"Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation"—as it also did to [his following of] 80,000 other devas.

— [DN 2](#)

## 6 : *A Talk Inspiring Non-Return*

There is a sutta, [SN 55:3](#), in which a lay follower named Dīghāvu is approaching death. He asks his father, Jotiya, to invite the Buddha to visit him, and the Buddha accepts the invitation. On arrival, the Buddha—in Jotiya’s presence—instructs Dīghāvu to endow himself with the factors of stream-entry. Dīghāvu replies that he is already endowed with them. The Buddha then instructs Dīghāvu to develop six qualities siding with clear knowing: to remain focused on inconstancy with regard to all fabrications, to perceive stress in what’s inconstant, to perceive not-self in what’s stressful, to perceive abandoning, to perceive dispassion, and to perceive cessation. Dīghāvu responds that he already lives in line with those qualities. It’s just that he wanted his father not to be distressed after his passing. The Buddha ends his visit, Dīghāvu dies soon after, and when the Buddha is informed of his passing, he states that Dīghāvu was a non-returner.

This sutta is interesting for two reasons. The first concerns Dīghāvu’s etiquette. In his desire to comfort his father, he didn’t simply claim to be a non-returner. He staged the conversation with the Buddha so that he could make his claims in a more appropriate and effective way. Having the Buddha as his witness was more likely to put his father’s mind at rest.

The second reason is more related to our topic here. It appears that the six qualities siding with clear knowing were the Buddha’s standard instructions for people who have already reached stream-entry so as to inspire them to higher attainments. What’s interesting is that even though sensual desire is one of the next fetters to be abandoned after

stream-entry, it's not explicitly mentioned among the six qualities. Sensual desire would fall under the topics for which the mind should develop dispassion, but it's striking that the Buddha makes no explicit reference to it. The six qualities could just as well be intended for a non-returner aiming at arahantship.

This same point is true of the one discourse in the Pāli Canon where the listener gains non-return while listening to the Buddha speak: At no point in the discourse is sensual desire mentioned. The discourse could have just as well taken the listener, Pukkusāti, to arahantship.

However, unlike the instructions to Dīghāvu, which make no mention of concentration, the Buddha's instructions to Pukkusāti place a great deal of emphasis on developing concentration—the path factor mastered at non-return—and on including the development of discernment in the practice of concentration.

The story is one of the most dramatic in the Canon. The Buddha is wandering alone and, as evening falls, he arrives at the house of a potter named Bhaggava. He informs Bhaggava that he would like to spend one night in his shed and is told that another wanderer has already taken up residence there. Still, if the wanderer doesn't mind, the Buddha is welcome to share it with him.

The Buddha goes to the shed and asks permission to stay. The wanderer, Pukkusāti, calling him "friend," welcomes him.

They both sit up meditating late into the night. The Buddha, impressed with Pukkusāti's demeanor, asks who his teacher is. Pukkusāti replies that he has gone forth out of faith in the Buddha, although he has never met him and wouldn't recognize him if he saw him.

The Buddha offers to teach Pukkusāti the Dhamma. Pukkusāti responds, "As you say, friend."

The Buddha gives him a long discourse. One of the interesting features of the discourse is that it contains many teachings that the Buddha doesn't give anywhere else in the Canon. We don't know how much of the Dhamma Pukkusāti had heard, but the Buddha could have tried to provide him with some hints as to his identity by giving him some of his more famous teachings. But, with only a few exceptions, he doesn't.

He starts with a list of the topics he will touch on: six properties, six media of sensory contact, eighteen considerations, and four determinations. This is followed by a description of the arahant—who the Buddha calls a sage at peace—and then the introduction ends with an admonition: One should not neglect discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for stilling. Only later do we learn that this admonition is related to the four determinations.

After a cursory explanation of the first four items on the list, the Buddha plunges into his real topic: what it means not to neglect discernment.

He reviews the six properties—earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness—and then proceeds to teach a meditation practice based on the properties in which concentration develops in tandem with discernment. The discussion places more emphasis on the discernment side of the practice than on the concentration side, probably because the Buddha had seen that Pukkusāti could already sit long hours in concentration. In fact, the discussion doesn't explicitly deal with concentration until it picks up the topic of how to direct equanimity to the formless states, but because of Pukkusāti's tendency toward concentration, he probably recognized the discussion as dealing with concentration from the very beginning.

The Buddha has Pukkusāti focus on each of the six properties in turn. Starting with the five physical properties, he describes how the property is found in the body, and then he recommends focusing on the fact that the property as found in the body is no different from the property as found in the world outside. This leads to the contemplation of the property as “not me, not mine, not my self”—one of the few of the Buddha’s more famous teachings included in the discussion. This contemplation gives rise to a sense of disenchantment toward the property, which then fades from the mind.

When the instructions have made the first five properties, one by one, fade from the mind, there remains only pure consciousness. Here the analysis changes. Instead of focusing on consciousness as not-self, you use pure consciousness to focus on observing how feelings arise from contact and end when the contact ends.

This insight into the fabricated nature of feelings leaves a state of equanimity. This is the point where it becomes obvious that the Buddha is describing not only a discernment practice here, but also a concentration practice. You realize that the equanimity you’ve developed could be directed to any of the dimensions of the formless states and, as a result, could last for a very long time. But then you realize that these states, too, are fabricated, so they wouldn’t last forever. Dismayed by the unreliable, fabricated nature of feelings—both those in ordinary experience and the feeling of equanimity in the formless states—you stop fabricating for the sake of anything at all: either becoming or not becoming. This develops dispassion for any activity, including the activity of the path. The mind is then without clinging, and so is totally unbound.

There follows a description of how the fully awakened mind then experiences feelings “disjoined” from them, and how it realizes that, at



death, “all that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here.”

Then you learn that, having learned how not to neglect discernment, you have arrived at the highest noble form of all four determinations.

The Buddha’s discourse then expands on the description of the sage at peace, but if Pukkusāti had been following along with the words of the discourse and applying them to his mind, he would have already reached non-return at the point where the Buddha described how not fabricating brought about total unbinding.

This was probably when Pukkusāti realized who the Buddha was. In other words, in seeing the Dhamma, he recognized the Buddha. His amazement at realizing that the Buddha had come to him may have prevented him from giving full attention to the remaining parts of the discourse.

At the end of the discourse, Pukkusāti asks the Buddha’s forgiveness for having called him “friend.” The Buddha readily grants forgiveness, but when Pukkusāti asks for ordination, the Buddha says he will first have to find robes and a bowl. While searching for these things, Pukkusāti is killed by a runaway cow. Monks bring the news to the Buddha, who tells them that Pukkusāti has appeared in a Brahmā realm. There he will gain total unbinding, never to return to this world.

There are several points worth noting here.

- The Buddha’s approach to inspiring Pukkusāti to have conviction in him is unusual. He doesn’t reveal his identity, and—as we’ve already noted—he focuses on teachings that he doesn’t give anywhere else in the Canon. The four determinations are mentioned by the Buddha nowhere else in the suttas, and even though he *does* mention the six properties in other several suttas, this is the only passage that discusses

how all six can be used as objects of concentration and discernment. So, in addressing Pukkusāti, the Buddha provides very few points of doctrine by which Pukkusāti could have recognized him. Instead, he relies on what he called the “miracle of instruction,” which [DN 11](#) defines as follows:

“There is the case where a monk gives instruction in this way: ‘Direct your thought in this way, don’t direct it in that. Attend to things in this way, don’t attend to them in that. Let go of this, enter and remain in that.’”

This mode of instruction is miraculous in that, as the listener follows the instructions, the rewards of doing so become more and more impressive, culminating, ideally, in a noble attainment. That attainment is what proves that the instruction is genuinely miraculous.

We can imagine Pukkusāti’s conviction in the Buddha growing as he sees, step by step, the rewards of following his instructions until he experiences the deathless. That’s when he knows for sure that the person teaching him is the Buddha. This is in line with the discussion of how conviction is verified, as explained in [MN 27](#): You know the Buddha was truly awakened because you’ve directly seen the deathless by following his instructions.

- The discussion of the four determinations is quite complex. They’re described on two levels, as means and ends. As means, each is accompanied by a verb that tells how it should be developed: One should *not neglect* discernment, should *guard* the truth, should *be devoted* to relinquishment, and should *train* only for stilling. On the level of ends, each determination is associated, in its highest noble form, with the attainment of unbinding: The knowledge of the passing away of all suffering and stress is the highest noble discernment. Unbinding, the

undeceptive, is the highest noble truth. The renunciation of all mental acquisitions is the highest noble relinquishment. The stilling of passions, aversions, and delusions is the highest noble stilling.

The organization of the sutta shows that you can attain these noble forms of the four determinations by focusing on the activity associated with only one: not neglecting discernment. None of the other activities associated with the other determinations are explicitly described. This implies that those activities are actually accomplished in the course of not neglecting discernment, and it's good to reflect on how this is so.

We can start with the question that the Buddha says lies at the beginning of discernment: “What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness? ([MN 135](#))” This question lies behind the way discernment is applied to the six properties as described in the Buddha’s meditation instructions. Each property is contemplated as a possible source of a truly reliable happiness. Because unbinding is classed as a truth and is said to be true because it’s undeceptive, that means that the word “truth” is not limited to the truth of statements, as in [MN 95](#), but can also apply to states and objects of mind. When you see that a property you focus on is unreliable—or, in the case of consciousness, when the objects on which it could be established are seen as unreliable—then you let go of it and search for something more reliable. This is how you guard the truth and stay devoted to relinquishment at the same time. This brings the mind to greater and greater levels of stillness, until arriving at the ultimate stillness of unbinding. That’s how you train only for stilling.

- The meditation practice described here is an example of calm and insight developed in tandem ([AN 4:170](#)). What’s distinctive here is that in most other descriptions of how insight is developed based on the practice of jhāna—such as those given in [MN 52](#) [[§18](#)], [MN 64](#) [[§16](#)],

and [AN 9:36](#) [[§17](#)]<sup>17</sup>—the impression is that you first develop concentration until you’ve mastered it, then you analyze it using the perceptions that focus appropriate attention on its drawbacks. Here, however, the discernment is used in the course of the practice of concentration to take it to deeper levels. (Another example of this approach is given in [MN 121](#).) You use the perceptions of appropriate attention to peel away, one by one, each property on which you focus, leaving just pure consciousness. You apply that consciousness to observing feelings as they are originated and pass away, leaving only equanimity. Then, when you see the prospect of reaching the highest levels of concentration based on that equanimity, the insight inherent in the concentration you’ve already developed will naturally focus on the drawbacks of whatever you could focus on, inspiring the dispassion that leads to cessation and unbinding.

- The pure consciousness that remains when the physical properties fade from the mind is sometimes mistaken for awakened consciousness. But the discussion in this sutta shows that it’s fabricated and known through the medium of the intellect, the sixth of the six senses. So it cannot qualify as the awakened consciousness described in [MN 49](#), which is not known through the six senses at all.

- The description toward the end of the discourse as to how an arahant would experience death is very unusual. The Buddha gives this description elsewhere in the Canon, but he never does so in the context of a talk where a listener has gained a noble attainment during the talk. His reason for including it here may have to do with Pukkusāti’s emotional state while listening to the talk. When he experienced the deathless and realized who the Buddha was, his surprise and joy must have been mixed with a sense of embarrassment for not having recognized the Buddha and for having addressed him as “friend.” That

cluster of emotions would then have been the factor preventing him from focusing on abandoning any Dhamma-passion or Dhamma-delight for the deathless and achieving arahantship then and there. To make up for this fact, and perhaps because he foresaw Pukkusāti's imminent passing, the Buddha tried to prepare him for how he should deal with the feelings of pain that would come with his violent death.

The description of how an arahant experiences death is identical to the description given in [Iti 44](#): “All that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here.” This reference to “all” covers all six senses ([SN 35:23](#)). However, as we've noted, awakened consciousness—which the Buddha termed “consciousness without surface”—is known independently of the six sense media ([MN 49](#)), so it will not be affected when they grow cold.

- The discussion of the sage at peace toward the end of the Buddha's talk is expressed in terms of how the sage stands where the currents of supposition do not flow. The image of currents flowing calls to mind the *āsavas*, or effluents, from which the arahant is freed. The suppositions are framed primarily in terms of present and future conceit: “I am,” “I shall be,” “I shall not be.” This conceit is one of the fetters of becoming from which Pukkusāti is not yet released. Perhaps the Buddha's intention here is to give instructions that Pukkusāti can follow when he appears in a Brahmā world.

- At the end of the sutta, when the monks inform the Buddha of Pukkusāti's death, the Buddha comments that Pukkusāti was wise, and then adds, “He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and didn't pester me with issues related to the Dhamma.”

This is an interesting comment coming from someone who was careful to encourage questions from his listeners, and who described the training he gave to the monks as “training in cross-questioning” ([AN](#)

[2:46](#)). Perhaps he was praising Pukkusāti for not treating the Dhamma as a topic for discussion and debate, and for instead putting the teachings into practice for the purpose of solving the problem of suffering and stress then and there.

The Buddha made the same comment with regard to Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth, as we'll see in Chapter 8.

## READINGS

§ 44. I have heard that on one occasion, as the Blessed One was wandering among the Magadhans, he entered Rājagaha, went to the potter Bhaggava, and on arrival said to him, “If it’s no inconvenience for you, Bhaggava, I will stay for one night in your shed.”

“It’s no inconvenience for me, lord, but there’s a wanderer who has already taken up residence there. If he gives his permission, you may stay there as you like.”

Now at that time, a clansman named Pukkusāti had left home and gone forth into homelessness through faith, out of dedication to the Blessed One. He was the one who had already taken up residence in the potter’s shed. So the Blessed One approached Ven. Pukkusāti and, on arrival, said to him, “If it is no inconvenience for you, monk, I will stay one night in the shed.”

“The shed is roomy, my friend. Stay as you like.”

So the Blessed One, entering the potter’s shed and setting out a spread of grass to one side, sat down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. He spent most of the night sitting (in meditation). Ven. Pukkusāti also spent most of the night sitting (in meditation). The thought occurred to the Blessed One, “How inspiring is the way this clansman behaves! What if I were to question

him?” So he said to Ven. Pukkusāti, “Out of dedication to whom, monk, have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Of whose Dhamma do you approve?”

“There is, my friend, Gotama the contemplative, a son of the Sakyans, gone forth from a Sakyan clan. Now, this excellent report about Master Gotama has been spread about: ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed.’ I have gone forth out of dedication to that Blessed One. That Blessed One is my teacher. It is of that Blessed One’s Dhamma that I approve.”

“But where, monk, is that Blessed One—worthy & rightly self-awakened—staying now?”

“There is, my friend, a city in the northern lands named Sāvattthī. That is where the Blessed One—worthy & rightly self-awakened—is staying now.”

“Have you ever seen that Blessed One before? On seeing him, would you recognize him?”

“No, my friend, I have never seen the Blessed One before, nor on seeing him would I recognize him.”

Then the thought occurred to the Blessed One: “It’s out of dedication to me that this clansman has gone forth. What if I were to teach him the Dhamma?” So he said to Ven. Pukkusāti, “I will teach you the Dhamma, monk. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, friend,” Ven. Pukkusāti responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said: “A person has six properties, six media of sensory contact, eighteen considerations, & four determinations. He stands where the currents of supposition do not flow. And when the

currents of supposition do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace. One should not neglect discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for stilling. This is the summary of the analysis of the six properties.

“‘A person has six properties.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? These are the six properties: the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, the wind property, the space property, the consciousness property. ‘A person has six properties.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

“‘A person has six media of sensory contact.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? These are the six media of sensory contact: the eye as a medium of sensory contact, the ear... the nose... the tongue... the body... the intellect as a medium of sensory contact. ‘A person has six media of sensory contact.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

“‘A person has eighteen considerations.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? These are the eighteen considerations: On seeing a form with the eye, one considers a form that can act as a basis for joy, a form that can act as a basis for sadness, or a form that can act as a basis for equanimity. On hearing a sound with the ear.... On smelling an aroma with the nose.... On tasting a flavor with the tongue.... On touching a tactile sensation with the body.... On cognizing an idea with the intellect, one considers an idea that can act as a basis for joy, an idea that can act as a basis for sadness, or an idea that can act as a basis for equanimity. Thus there are six considerations conducive to joy, six conducive to sadness, & six conducive to equanimity. ‘A person has eighteen considerations.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.



“‘A person has four determinations.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? These are the four determinations: the determination for discernment, the determination for truth, the determination for relinquishment, the determination for stilling. ‘A person has four determinations.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

“‘One should not neglect discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for stilling.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? And how does one not neglect discernment? These are the six properties: the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, the wind property, the space property, the consciousness property.

“And what is the earth property? The earth property can be either internal or external. What is the internal earth property? Anything internal, within oneself, that’s hard, solid, & sustained (by craving): head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or anything else internal, within oneself, that’s hard, solid, and sustained: This is called the internal earth property. Now, both the internal earth property & the external earth property are simply earth property. And that should be seen as it has come to be with right discernment: ‘This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it has come to be with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the earth property and makes the earth property fade from the mind.

“And what is the liquid property? The liquid property may be either internal or external. What is the internal liquid property? Anything internal, within oneself, that’s liquid, watery, & sustained: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or anything else internal, within oneself, that’s liquid, watery, & sustained:

This is called the internal liquid property. Now, both the internal liquid property & the external liquid property are simply liquid property. And that should be seen as it has come to be with right discernment: ‘This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it has come to be with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the liquid property and makes the liquid property fade from the mind.

“And what is the fire property? The fire property may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire property? Anything internal, within oneself, that’s fire, fiery, & sustained: that by which (the body) is warmed, aged, & consumed with fever; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed, & savored gets properly digested; or anything else internal, within oneself, that’s fire, fiery, & sustained: This is called the internal fire property. Now, both the internal fire property & the external fire property are simply fire property. And that should be seen as it has come to be with right discernment: ‘This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it has come to be with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the fire property and makes the fire property fade from the mind.

“And what is the wind property? The wind property may be either internal or external. What is the internal wind property? Anything internal, within oneself, that’s wind, windy, & sustained: up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the stomach, winds in the intestines, winds that course through the body, in-and-out breathing, or anything else internal, within oneself, that’s wind, windy, & sustained: This is called the internal wind property. Now, both the internal wind property & the external wind property are simply wind property. And that should be seen as it has come to be with right discernment: ‘This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it

has come to be with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the wind property and makes the wind property fade from the mind.

“And what is the space property? The space property may be either internal or external. What is the internal space property? Anything internal, within oneself, that’s space, spatial, & sustained: the holes of the ears, the nostrils, the mouth, the (passage) whereby what is eaten, drunk, consumed, & tasted gets swallowed, and where it collects, and whereby it is excreted from below, or anything else internal, within oneself, that’s space, spatial, & sustained: This is called the internal space property. Now, both the internal space property & the external space property are simply space property. And that should be seen as it has come to be with right discernment: ‘This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it has come to be with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the space property and makes the space property fade from the mind.

“There remains only consciousness: pure & bright. What does one cognize with that consciousness? One cognizes ‘pleasure.’ One cognizes ‘pain.’ One cognizes ‘neither pleasure nor pain.’ In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure, there arises a feeling of pleasure. When sensing a feeling of pleasure, one discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling of pleasure.’ One discerns that ‘With the cessation of that very sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure, the concomitant feeling—the feeling of pleasure that has arisen in dependence on the sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure—ceases, is stilled.’ In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pain.... In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, there arises a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. When sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns that ‘I am sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain.’ One discerns that ‘With

the cessation of that very sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, the concomitant feeling—the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain that has arisen in dependence on the sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain—ceases, is stilled.’

“Just as when, from the friction & conjunction of two fire sticks, heat is born and fire appears, and from the separation & disjunction of those very same fire sticks, the concomitant heat ceases, is stilled; in the same way, in dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pleasure, there arises a feeling of pleasure.... In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as pain.... In dependence on a sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, there arises a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain.... One discerns that ‘With the cessation of that very sensory contact that is to be felt as neither pleasure nor pain, the concomitant feeling... ceases, is stilled.’

“There remains only equanimity: pure & bright, pliant, malleable, & luminous. Just as if a dexterous goldsmith or goldsmith’s apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up a crucible, and, taking gold with a pair of tongs, place it in the crucible: He would blow on it time & again, sprinkle water on it time & again, examine it time & again, so that the gold would become refined, well-refined, thoroughly refined, flawless, free from dross, pliant, malleable, & luminous. Then whatever sort of ornament he had in mind—whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain—it would serve his purpose.

“In the same way, there remains only equanimity: pure & bright, pliant, malleable, & luminous. One discerns that ‘If I were to direct equanimity as pure & bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of space, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine—thus supported, thus sustained—would last for a long time. One discerns that ‘If I were to direct equanimity as pure

and bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine—thus supported, thus sustained—would last for a long time.’

“One discerns that ‘If I were to direct equanimity as pure & bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of space and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated. One discerns that ‘If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this toward the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated.’ One neither fabricates nor mentally fashions for the sake of becoming or not becoming. This being the case, one is not sustained by anything [doesn’t cling to anything] in the world. Unsustained, one is not agitated. Unagitated, one is totally unbound right within. One discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“If sensing a feeling of pleasure, one discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ One discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ One discerns it as ‘not relished.’ If sensing a feeling of pain, one discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ One discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ One discerns it as ‘not relished.’ If sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ One discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ One discerns it as ‘not relished.’

“If sensing a feeling of pleasure, one senses it disjoined from it. If sensing a feeling of pain, one senses it disjoined from it. If sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one senses it disjoined from it. When sensing a feeling limited to the body, one discerns, ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.’ When sensing a feeling limited to life, one

discerns, ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to life.’ One discerns, ‘With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here.’

“Just as an oil lamp would burn in dependence on oil & wick and, from the termination of the oil & wick, it would go out unnourished; in the same way, when sensing a feeling limited to the body, one discerns, ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.’ When sensing a feeling limited to life, one discerns, ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to life.’ One discerns, ‘With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is experienced, 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, doesn’t 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.

“Whereas formerly he foolishly had taken on mental acquisitions and brought them to completion, he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for relinquishment, for this—the renunciation of all mental acquisitions—is the highest noble relinquishment.

“Whereas formerly he foolishly had greed—as well as desire & infatuation—he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Whereas formerly he foolishly had malice—as well as ill-will & hatred—he has now abandoned them.... Whereas

formerly he foolishly had ignorance—as well as delusion & confusion—he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest determination for stilling, for this—the stilling of passions, aversions, & delusions—is the highest noble stilling. ‘One should not neglect discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted to relinquishment, and train only for stilling.’ Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

“He stands where the currents of supposition do not flow. And when the currents of supposition do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.’ Thus it was said. With reference to what was it said? ‘I am’ is a supposition. ‘I am this’ is a supposition. ‘I shall be’ is a supposition. ‘I shall not be’ ... ‘I shall be possessed of form’ ... ‘I shall not be possessed of form’ ... ‘I shall be percipient’ ... ‘I shall not be percipient’ ... ‘I shall be neither percipient nor non-percipient’ is a supposition. Supposition is a disease, supposition is a cancer, supposition is an arrow. By going beyond all supposition, he is called a sage at peace.

“And further, a sage at peace is not born, doesn’t age, doesn’t die, is unagitated, and is free from longing. He has nothing whereby he would be born. Not being born, will he age? Not aging, will he die? Not dying, will he be agitated? Not being agitated, for what will he long? It was in reference to this that it was said, ‘He stands where the currents of supposition do not flow. And when the currents of supposition do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.’ Now, monk, you should remember this, my brief analysis of the six properties.”

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Pukkusāti: “Surely, the Teacher has come to me! Surely, the One Well-Gone has come to me! Surely, the Rightly Self-awakened One has come to me!” Getting up from his seat,

arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, and bowing down with his head at the Blessed One's feet, he said, "A transgression has overcome me, lord, in that I was so foolish, so muddle-headed, and so unskilled as to assume that it was proper to address the Blessed One as 'friend.' May the Blessed One please accept this confession of my transgression as such, so that I may restrain myself in the future."

"Yes, monk, a transgression overcame you in that you were so foolish, so muddle-headed, and so unskilled as to assume that it was proper to address me as 'friend.' But because you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we accept your confession. For it is a cause of growth in the discipline of the noble ones when, seeing a transgression as such, one makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma and exercises restraint in the future."

"Lord, may I receive full acceptance [ordination as a monk] from the Blessed One?"

"And are your robes & bowl complete?"

"No, lord, my robes & bowl are not complete."

"Tathāgatas do not give full acceptance to one whose robes & bowl are incomplete."

Then Ven. Pukkusāti, delighting & rejoicing in the Blessed One's words, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him, keeping him on his right, and left in search of robes & a bowl.

And while he was searching for robes & a bowl, a runaway cow killed him.

Then a large number of monks approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to him, "Lord, the clansman Pukkusāti, whom the



Blessed One instructed with a brief instruction, has died. What is his destination? What is his future state?”

“Monks, the clansman Pukkusāti was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and didn’t pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. With the destruction of the five lower fetters, he has arisen spontaneously (in the Brahmā worlds), there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

— [\*MN 140\*](#)

## *7 : Same Dhamma, Different Results*

There are a number of passages in the Canon in which one listener gains one level of noble attainment while listening to a talk, while another listener—or other listeners—gain a different level or levels. Most of these talks follow the pattern of the Buddha’s second discourse, so they don’t require much explanation here, aside from one minor point. In [MN 146](#) [[§40](#)], Ven. Nandaka illustrates the meaning of the standard questionnaire about the three perceptions with a large number of vivid similes. When we reach Chapter 8, we’ll find this pattern repeated: Many of the talks that inspire arahantship in the listener(s) make use of vivid similes, far more than in the talks that inspire lower noble attainments.

What’s more important for our purposes here is that only two of the passages that fall into this chapter make any attempt to explain why one person listening to a talk gained one noble attainment while another gained another noble attainment, and even they don’t explain much.

The first case concerns the story of Yasa. Picking up where we left off in Chapter 4: On learning from Yasa’s mother that Yasa is nowhere to be found, Yasa’s father goes in search of him. As he grows near to the Buddha, the Buddha performs a feat of psychic power so that the father can’t see Yasa sitting there.

He then invites Yasa’s father to sit down, saying that perhaps while sitting there he’ll see Yasa. There must have been something about the Buddha’s presence that calmed the father’s mind, because he’s happy to sit down.

The Buddha gives him the graduated discourse, and he gains the Dhamma eye. Meanwhile, we're told:

As Yasa's father was being taught the Dhamma, and as Yasa was reflecting on his own state (of mind) as he saw and knew it, his mind was, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released from effluents.

How he was reflecting, we're not told. We can only assume that as he was reflecting on his experience of the deathless, he detected the remnant of clinging in the delight and passion he felt for the deathless, and so was able to abandon it.

At any rate, the Buddha—seeing that Yasa was now an arahant—relaxed his feat of psychic power so that the father could now see Yasa. The father told Yasa to return home, as his mother was worried about him, but then the Buddha told the father that Yasa was now fully released in the Dhamma that the father had glimpsed. The father exclaimed at Yasa's good fortune, and readily agreed that it would not be possible for Yasa to return to the home life—another indication of how impressive even just a glimpse of that Dhamma could be.

The father then invited the Buddha and Yasa to his home for a meal. After the meal, the Buddha gave the graduated discourse to Yasa's mother and former wife, who both gained the Dhamma eye as a result.

There's a similar case in [MN 74](#), where the Buddha gives a Dhamma talk to a wanderer, LongNails, while Ven. Sāriputta is sitting behind the Buddha, fanning him. The talk is on the topic of abandoning views, the body, and feelings. As a result of the talk, LongNails gains the Dhamma eye. As for Ven. Sāriputta:

The thought occurred to him, “Indeed, it seems that the Blessed One speaks to us of the abandoning of each of these qualities

through direct knowledge. Indeed, it seems that the One Well-Gone speaks to us of the relinquishing of each of these qualities through direct knowledge.” As Ven. Sāriputta was reflecting thus, his mind was released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance.

Here again, we’re not told much as to why this added reflection brought Ven. Sāriputta to arahantship. We can assume that he was reflecting not only on ordinary feelings, but also on the feelings of joy and equanimity that accompanied his experience of the deathless. Abandoning any delight or passion for those feelings, he would be totally released.

The Buddha’s talk in this sutta doesn’t fall into the pattern of the other talks in this chapter, so it’s worth discussing in some detail so as to understand how it could have inspired LongNails to gain the Dhamma eye. The fact that Ven. Sāriputta becomes an arahant while listening to this talk often overshadows the extent to which the talk was strategically very appropriate for addressing LongNails’ problem directly.

LongNails comes to the Buddha proclaiming a view of which he is proud: “All is not pleasing to me.” The Buddha’s challenge is to get LongNails to be willing to abandon that view and not cling to another. His solution is to have LongNails regard the view in terms of appropriate attention—in other words, to regard it as part of a causal process in line with dependent co-arising.

[DN 1](#) describes this approach in general terms: In that sutta, the Buddha lists 62 views that keep beings mired in clinging and suffering. Instead of arguing with the content of the views, he focuses on the act of clinging to the views, where the clinging comes from, and the suffering it leads to. He states that the 62 views all come from repeated contact at the six sense media. The solution is to develop dispassion for the six

sense media, which allows the person holding the view—whatever the view—to escape from it.

“They [the people espousing the views] all experience that [their views] through repeated contact at the six sense media. For them, from feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“But when a monk discerns the origination, passing away, allure, drawbacks of, & escape from the six sense media, he discerns what is higher than all of this.” — [DN 1](#)

In other words, when views are regarded, not as pictures of reality, but as actions in a causal sequence, and when you can see that their role in that sequence leads to suffering far outweighing the pleasure of holding to them, then you can let them go and not cling to any other views. That letting go can lead to what is higher: the deathless.

The aim of the Buddha’s talk in [MN 74](#) is to get LongNails to see his view in this light.

At first, LongNails resists. When he states the view that “All is not pleasing to me,” the Buddha tries to get him to look at the view itself as coming under the concept of “all”: “But even this view of yours, Aggivessana—‘All is not pleasing to me’—is even that not pleasing to you?”

LongNails replies, “Even if this view of mine were pleasing to me, Master Gotama, it would still be the same, it would still be the same.”

The Buddha persists in his approach, though, focusing on the action of holding to views. He notes that, contrary to what LongNails said, it would *not* be the same: There are very few people who can abandon that view and not cling to another view.

He then reviews all the possible views on the topic of whether all is pleasing, all is displeasing, or some things are pleasing and others are not. In passing, he notes that the view, “All is not pleasing to me,” is, among those possible views on the topic, the one that is “close to not being impassioned, close to non-bondage, close to not-delighting, close to not-holding, close to not-clinging.” This accomplishes several things. Most explicitly, it delights LongNails, who remarks that the Buddha is commending his viewpoint. At the same time, this is how the Buddha gets LongNails to feel some conviction and joy in what the Buddha is saying, so that he will be willing to concentrate on his words. It also gets LongNails to view dispassion and not-clinging in a favorable light.

The Buddha then goes on to point out the drawbacks of holding to any of the three views on the topic. They’re views designed for debate, for taking a position that you then have to defend, so if you were to grasp them, that act of grasping would lead to quarreling, annoyance, and frustration. A wise person, seeing this, would let go of those views and not cling to any other.

This observation is what begins to apply the framework of dependent co-arising to the views: The act of clinging to them entails suffering.

The Buddha then turns around to look at the conditions leading up to the act of clinging to views. He has LongNails focus on his body. If we can assume that, as a wanderer, he had some concentration practice in his background, this would focus his attention firmly on what he’s

experiencing in his body. It would also prepare him for the exercises in discernment that the Buddha then teaches him.

Here the Buddha introduces LongNails to perceptions useful for a different sort of view: not for the sake of debate, but for the sake of not-clinging. He tells LongNails to apply the eleven perceptions mentioned in [SN 22:122](#) [§34] and [AN 9:36](#) [§17] to the body so as to abandon any attraction to the body.

Then he has LongNails focus on feelings, to see that all possible feelings are inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to vanishing, fading, ceasing. His purpose here is twofold: First, this puts the analysis explicitly in the terms of dependent co-arising. The factor of feelings appears in many places in dependent co-arising, but its primary location is after contact at the six sense media—the same place where [DN 1](#) says views in general are to be found. LongNails, if he's observant, would finally make the connection that it *does* make a difference that his view was pleasing to him: He felt pleasure in holding to it. That was the allure of the view.

The Buddha's second purpose is to persuade LongNails to see the drawbacks of holding to feelings—and, by extension, to views in general. He gets LongNails to observe that feelings are originated and pass away—this would correspond to the first two steps of the standard five-step program. Observing this would yield a sense of how ephemeral they are, and of how quickly and easily pleasant feelings can be replaced by painful ones. This would undercut their allure and give a strong sense of their drawbacks. This, in turn, would give rise to dispassion for the factors of dependent co-arising leading up to feelings and for those that follow from it. That would be LongNails' escape not only from feelings but also from the views whose allure lies in feelings.

We have no way of knowing which of the relevant factors in dependent co-arising LongNails focused on, but as we noted in Chapter 5, when you apply the framework of the four noble truths to any pair of factors in dependent co-arising, you can make the whole sequence disband.

That, apparently, is what LongNails did, which is why he was able to gain the Dhamma eye while listening to the Buddha's words.

## READINGS

§ 45. Then Yasa's mother, going up into the palace and not seeing Yasa, went to the moneylender and, on arrival, said to him, "Householder, your son Yasa is nowhere to be seen."

So the moneylender sent messengers on horseback out in the four directions whereas he himself went to the Isipatana game reserve. He saw the tracks of the golden slippers and, on seeing them, followed them.

The Blessed One saw him coming from afar, and the thought occurred to him, "Why don't I fabricate a fabrication of supranormal power such that the moneylender, sitting here, wouldn't see Yasa sitting here?" So the Blessed One fabricated such a fabrication of supranormal power.

The moneylender approached the Blessed One and said, "Perhaps, lord, the Blessed One has seen Yasa, the son of a good family?"

"In that case, householder, sit down. Perhaps, sitting here, you might see Yasa sitting here."

Then the moneylender—(thinking,) "He says I might, sitting right here, see Yasa sitting here," thrilled & exultant, bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed



One gave him a graduated talk: a talk on giving, a talk on virtue, a talk on heaven; he proclaimed the drawbacks of, degradation in, & defilement in sensuality, and the rewards of renunciation. Then—when he knew that the moneylender was of ready mind, malleable mind, unhindered mind, exultant mind, confident mind—he proclaimed to him the distinctive teaching of the Buddhas: stress, origination, cessation, path. Just as a clean piece of cloth, free from grime, would properly take dye, in the same way, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose for the moneylender as he was sitting right there: *“Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”*

Then the moneylender, having seen the Dhamma... said to the Blessed One, “Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way, has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the Saṅgha of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life.”

And so he was the first three-statement lay disciple in the world.

As Yasa’s father was being taught the Dhamma, and as Yasa was reflecting on his own state (of mind) as he saw and knew it, his mind was, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released from effluents. Then the thought occurred to the Blessed One, “As Yasa’s father was being taught the Dhamma, and as Yasa was reflecting on his own state (of mind) as he saw and knew it, his mind was, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released from effluents. It would be impossible for Yasa to revert to the lower life and indulge in sensuality as he did before

as a householder. Why don't I make that fabrication of supranormal power subside?"

So the Blessed One made that fabrication of supranormal power subside. The moneylender saw Yasa sitting there and on seeing him said to him, "Yasa, my son, your mother is lamenting and full of grief. Give your mother her life!"

Then Yasa looked to the Blessed One, so the Blessed One said to the moneylender, "What do you think, householder: For one who has seen and known the Dhamma with the knowledge and vision of one in training, just as you have, reflecting on this state (of mind) as he saw and knew it, whose mind was, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released from effluents: Would it be possible for him to revert to the lower life and indulge in sensuality as he did before as a householder?"

"No, lord."

"Householder, Yasa has seen and known the Dhamma with the knowledge and vision of one in training, just as you have. Reflecting on his own state as he saw and knew it, his mind was, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released from effluents. It would be impossible for Yasa to revert to the lower life and indulge in sensuality as he did before as a householder."

"It's a gain for Yasa, lord, a great gain for Yasa, that his mind is, through lack of clinging/sustenance, released from effluents! May the Blessed One acquiesce to my meal tomorrow, with Yasa as your attendant monk."

The Blessed One acquiesced with silence.

Then the moneylender, understanding the Blessed One's acquiescence, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him, keeping him to his right, and left.

Then Yasa, not long after the moneylender had left, said to the Blessed One, “May I receive the Going-forth in the Blessed One’s presence? May I receive the Acceptance?”

“Come, monk,” said the Blessed One. “Well taught is the Dhamma. Live the holy life.”

That was the venerable one’s Acceptance.

Now there were seven arahants in the world.

— [Mv 1:7.7–8](#)

§ 46. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha on Vulture’s Peak Mountain, in the Boar’s Cave. Then LongNails (Dīghanakha) the wanderer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he stood to one side. As he was standing there, he said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama, I am of the view, of the opinion, that ‘All is not pleasing to me.’”

“But even this view of yours, Aggivessana—‘All is not pleasing to me’—is even that not pleasing to you?”

“Even if this view of mine were pleasing to me, Master Gotama, it would still be the same, it would still be the same.”

“Well, Aggivessana, there are more than many in the world who say, ‘It would still be the same, it would still be the same,’ yet they both do not abandon that view and they cling to another view. There are fewer than few in the world who say, ‘It would still be the same, it would still be the same,’ and they both abandon that view and do not cling to another view.

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion, that ‘All is pleasing to me.’ There are some contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion, that ‘All is not pleasing

to me.’ There are some contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion, that ‘A part is pleasing to me; a part is not pleasing to me.’

“With regard to those contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion, that ‘All is pleasing to me’: That view of theirs is close to being impassioned, close to bondage, close to delighting, close to holding, close to clinging. With regard to those contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion, that ‘All is not pleasing to me’: That view of theirs is close to not being impassioned, close to non-bondage, close to not-delighting, close to not-holding, close to not-clinging.”

When this was said, LongNails the wanderer said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama commends my viewpoint. Master Gotama recommends my viewpoint.”

“With regard to those contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion that ‘A part is pleasing to me; a part is not pleasing to me’: Whatever is pleasing to them, their view is close to being impassioned, close to bondage, close to delighting, close to holding, close to clinging. Whatever is not pleasing to them, their view is close to not being impassioned, close to non-bondage, close to not-delighting, close to not-holding, close to not-clinging.

“With regard to those contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion, ‘All is pleasing to me’: An observant person among them considers that ‘If I were to grasp and insist firmly on this view of mine that “All is pleasing to me,” and to state that “Only this is true, all else is worthless,” I would clash with two—the contemplative or brahman who is of the view, of the opinion that “All is not pleasing to me” and the contemplative or brahman who is of the view, of the opinion that “A part is pleasing to me; a part is not pleasing to me.” I

would clash with these two. Where there is a clash, there is dispute. Where there is a dispute, quarreling. Where there is quarreling, annoyance. Where there is annoyance, frustration.’ Envisioning for himself clash, dispute, quarreling, annoyance, frustration, he both abandons that view and doesn’t cling to another view. Thus there is the abandoning of these views; thus there is the relinquishing of these views.

“With regard to those contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion that ‘All is not pleasing to me’: An observant person among them considers that ‘If I were to grasp and insist firmly on this view of mine that “All is not pleasing to me,” and to state that “Only this is true, all else is worthless,” I would clash with two—the contemplative or brahman who is of the view, of the opinion that “All is pleasing to me” and the contemplative or brahman who is of the view, of the opinion that “A part is pleasing to me; a part is not pleasing to me.” I would clash with these two. Where there is a clash, there is dispute. Where there is a dispute, quarreling. Where there is quarreling, annoyance. Where there is annoyance, frustration.’ Envisioning for himself clash, dispute, quarreling, annoyance, frustration, he both abandons that view and doesn’t cling to another view. Thus there is the abandoning of these views; thus there is the relinquishing of these views.

“With regard to those contemplatives & brahmans who are of the view, of the opinion that ‘A part is pleasing to me; a part is not pleasing to me’: An observant person among them considers that ‘If I were to grasp and insist firmly on this view of mine that “A part is pleasing to me; a part is not pleasing to me,” and to state that “Only this is true, all else is worthless,” I would clash with two—the contemplative or brahman who is of the view, of the opinion that “All is pleasing to me” and the contemplative or brahman who is of the view, of the opinion

that “All is not pleasing to me.” I would clash with these two. Where there is a clash, there is dispute. Where there is a dispute, quarreling. Where there is quarreling, annoyance. Where there is annoyance, frustration.’ Envisioning for himself clash, dispute, quarreling, annoyance, frustration, he both abandons that view and doesn’t cling to another view. Thus there is the abandoning of these views; thus there is the relinquishing of these views.

“Now, Aggivessana, this body—endowed with form, composed of the four primary elements, born from mother & father, nourished with rice & porridge, subject to inconstancy, rubbing, pressing, dissolution, and dispersion—should be envisioned as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self. In one who envisions the body as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a disintegration, an emptiness, not-self, any desire for the body, attraction to the body, following after the body is abandoned.

“There are these three kinds of feeling: a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling, and neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling. On the occasion when one feels a pleasant feeling, one doesn’t feel either a painful feeling or a neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling. One feels only a pleasant feeling on that occasion. On the occasion when one feels a painful feeling, one doesn’t feel either a pleasant feeling or a neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling. One feels only a painful feeling on that occasion. On the occasion when one feels a neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling, one doesn’t feel either a pleasant feeling or a painful feeling. One feels only a neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling on that occasion.

“A pleasant feeling is inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to vanishing, fading, ceasing. A painful feeling is also inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending,

subject to vanishing, fading, ceasing. A neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling is also inconstant, fabricated, dependently co-arisen, subject to ending, subject to vanishing, fading, ceasing.

“Seeing this, an instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with pleasant feeling, disenchanted with painful feeling, disenchanted with neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling. Disenchanted, he grows dispassionate. From dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns, ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’ A monk whose mind is thus released doesn’t take sides with anyone, doesn’t dispute with anyone. He words things by means of what is said in the world but without grasping at it.”

Now, at that time Ven. Sāriputta was sitting behind the Blessed One, fanning him. The thought occurred to him, “Indeed, it seems that the Blessed One speaks to us of the abandoning of each of these qualities through direct knowledge. Indeed, it seems that the One Well-Gone speaks to us of the relinquishing of each of these qualities through direct knowledge.” As Ven. Sāriputta was reflecting thus, his mind was released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. While in LongNails the wanderer there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

Then LongNails the wanderer—having seen the Dhamma, having attained the Dhamma, having known the Dhamma, having fathomed the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having no more perplexity, having gained fearlessness, having becoming independent of others with regard to the Teacher’s message—said to the Blessed One: “Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those

with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.”

— [MN 74](#)

§ 47. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then, as he was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking arose in the Blessed One’s awareness: “The mental qualities that ripen in release have ripened in Rāhula. What if I were to lead Rāhula further to the ending of the effluents?”

Then the Blessed One, early in the morning—having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe—went into Sāvattthī for alms. Having gone for alms in Sāvattthī, after the meal, returning from his alms round, he said to Ven. Rāhula, “Fetch your sitting cloth, Rāhula. We will go to the Grove of the Blind to spend the day.”

Responding, “As you say, lord,” to the Blessed One, Ven. Rāhula, carrying his sitting cloth, followed behind the Blessed One. Now at that time, many thousands of devas were following behind the Blessed One, (thinking,) “Today the Blessed One will lead Ven. Rāhula further to the ending of the effluents.”

Then the Blessed One, having plunged into the Grove of the Blind, sat down on a seat made ready at the foot of a tree. Ven. Rāhula, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “What do you think, Rāhula? Is the eye 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.”

“What do you think? Are forms 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.”

“What do you think? Is consciousness at the eye 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.”

“What do you think? Is contact at the eye 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.”

“What do you think? Whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye as a mode of feeling, a mode of perception, a mode of

fabrication, or a mode of consciousness:<sup>1</sup> Is it 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.”

“What do you think, Rāhula? Is the ear constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord” ...

“What do you think, Rāhula? Is the nose constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord” ...

“What do you think, Rāhula? Is the tongue constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord” ...

“What do you think, Rāhula? Is the body constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord” ...

“What do you think, Rāhula? Is the intellect 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.”

“What do you think? Are ideas 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.”

“What do you think? Is consciousness at the intellect 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.”

“What do you think? Is contact at the intellect 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.”

“What do you think? Whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect as a mode of feeling, a mode of perception, a mode of fabrication, or a mode of consciousness: Is it 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.”

“Seeing thus, Rāhula, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with consciousness at the eye, disenchanted with contact at the eye. And

whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye as a mode of feeling, a mode of perception, a mode of fabrication, or a mode of consciousness: With that, too, he grows disenchanted.

“He grows disenchanted with the ear....

“He grows disenchanted with the nose....

“He grows disenchanted with the tongue....

“He grows disenchanted with the body....

“He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas, disenchanted with consciousness at the intellect, disenchanted with contact at the intellect. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect as a mode of feeling, a mode of perception, a mode of fabrication, or a mode of consciousness: With that, too, he grows disenchanted. 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, Ven. Rāhula delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, Ven. Rāhula’s mind, through lack of clinging/sustenance, was released from effluents. And to those many thousands of devas there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: “*Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.*”

— [MN 147](#)

## NOTE

1. The Buddha’s basic approach in this discourse is to take a line of questioning that he usually applies to the five aggregates (see [SN 22:59](#)) and to apply it to the framework of the six sense media as given in [SN 35:28](#). This phrase, however, is the one point where this sutta deviates from that framework. The corresponding phrase in [SN 35:28](#) focuses exclusively

on feelings. The passage here—*vedanāgataṃ, saññāgataṃ, saṅkhārāgataṃ, viññāṇagataṃ*—focuses on all four mental aggregates. For another example of translating *-gataṃ* as “mode,” see the phrase “mode of perception” (*saññāgataṃ*) in [MN 121](#). For another example of a teaching that combines the two frameworks of five aggregates and six sense media, see [MN 28](#). ←

§ 48. Near Sāvatthī. 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, “Lord, in such and such a dwelling a certain monk—newly ordained, not well known—is diseased, in pain, severely ill. It would be good if the Blessed One would visit the monk, out of sympathy for him.”

Then the Blessed One, on hearing the word “newly ordained,” on hearing the word “diseased,” and realizing that the monk was not well known, went to him. The monk saw the Blessed One coming from afar and, on seeing him, stirred in his bed. Then the Blessed One said to him, “Enough, monk. Don’t stir in your bed. There are these seats made ready. I will sit down there.”

The Blessed One sat down on a seat made ready. Having sat down, he said to the monk, “I hope you are getting better, monk. I hope you are comfortable. I hope that your pains are lessening and not increasing. I hope that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing.”

“I am not getting better, lord. I am not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening.”

“Then I hope you have no anxiety, monk. I hope you have no remorse.”

“Yes, lord, I do have not a small amount of anxiety, not a small amount of remorse.”

“I hope you can’t fault yourself with regard to your virtue.”

“No, lord, I can’t fault myself with regard to my virtue.”

“Then what are you anxious about? What is your remorse?”

“I understand that the Blessed One has not taught the Dhamma with purity of virtue as its goal.”

“If you understand that I have not taught the Dhamma with purity of virtue as its goal, then for what goal *do* you understand that I have taught the Dhamma?”

“I understand that the Blessed One has taught the Dhamma with the fading of passion as its goal.”

“Good, good, monk. It’s good that you understand that I have taught the Dhamma with the fading of passion as its goal, for I have taught the Dhamma with the fading of passion as its goal.

“What do you think, monk? Is the eye 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 the ear constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is the nose constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is the tongue constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is the body constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“What do you think, monk? Is the intellect 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.”

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with the ear, disenchanted with the nose, disenchanted with the tongue, disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with the intellect. 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 monk delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, there arose for the monk the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: *“Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”*

— [SN 35:74](#)

§ 49. Near Sāvatthī. 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, “Lord, in such and such a dwelling a certain monk—newly ordained, not well known—is diseased, in pain, severely ill. It would be good if the Blessed One would visit the monk, out of sympathy for him.”

Then the Blessed One, on hearing the word “newly ordained,” on hearing the word “diseased,” and realizing that the monk was not well known, went to him. The monk saw the Blessed One coming from afar and, on seeing him, stirred in his bed. Then the Blessed One said to him, “Enough, monk. Don’t stir in your bed. There are these seats made ready. I will sit down there.”

The Blessed One sat down on a seat made ready. Having sat down, he said to the monk, “I hope you are getting better, monk. I hope you are comfortable. I hope that your pains are lessening and not increasing. I hope that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing.”

“I am not getting better, lord. I am not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening.”

“Then I hope you have no anxiety, monk. I hope you have no anguish.”

“Yes, lord, I do have not a small amount of anxiety, not a small amount of anguish.”

“I hope you can’t fault yourself with regard to your virtue.”

“No, lord, I can’t fault myself with regard to my virtue.”

“Then what are you anxious about? What is your anguish?”

“I understand that the Blessed One has not taught the Dhamma with purity of virtue as its goal.”

“If you understand that I have not taught the Dhamma with purity of virtue as its goal, then for what goal *do* you understand that I have taught the Dhamma?”

“I understand that the Blessed One has taught the Dhamma with total unbinding through lack of clinging as its goal.”

“Good, good, monk. It’s good that you understand that I have taught the Dhamma with total unbinding through lack of clinging as its goal, for I have taught the Dhamma with total unbinding through lack of clinging as its goal.

“What do you think, monk? Is the eye 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 the ear constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is the nose constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is the tongue constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is the body constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” ...

“What do you think, monk? Is the intellect 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.”

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with the ear, disenchanted with the nose, disenchanted with the tongue, disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with the intellect. 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 monk delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, the mind of that monk, through lack of clinging/sustenance, was released from effluents.

— [SN 35:75](#)

§ 50. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, together with about 500 other nuns, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, stood to one side. As she was standing there she said to him, “Lord, may the Blessed One exhort the nuns. Lord, may the Blessed One instruct the nuns. Lord, may the Blessed One give the nuns a talk on Dhamma.”

Now at that time, the elder monks were taking turns in exhorting the nuns, but Ven. Nandaka didn’t want to exhort the nuns when his turn came. So the Blessed One addressed Ven. Ānanda: “Ānanda, whose turn is it to exhort the nuns today?”

“Lord, everyone has taken his turn<sup>1</sup> in exhorting the nuns, except for Ven. Nandaka, here, who doesn’t want to exhort the nuns when his turn comes.”

Then the Blessed One addressed Ven. Nandaka: “Exhort the nuns, Nandaka. Instruct the nuns, Nandaka. Give the nuns a talk on Dhamma, you brahman!”

“As you say, lord,” Ven. Nandaka responded to the Blessed One. Then, early in the morning—having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe—he went into Sāvattthī for alms. After his meal, on returning from his alms round, he went with a companion to Rājaka Park. The nuns saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, arranged a seat and set out water for his feet. Ven. Nandaka sat down on the arranged seat and washed his feet. The nuns, having bowed down to him, sat to one side.

As they were sitting there, Ven. Nandaka said to them: “This will be a question-response talk, sisters. Where you understand, you should say, ‘We understand.’ Where you don’t, you should say, ‘We don’t understand.’ Where you are doubtful or perplexed, you should question

me in response: ‘How is this, venerable sir? What is the meaning of this?’”

“Venerable sir, we are gratified & delighted that you invite us in this way.”

“So then, sisters, what do you think? Is the eye constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, venerable sir.”

“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, venerable sir.”

“... Is the ear constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Is the nose constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Is the tongue constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Is the body constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“What do you think, sisters? Is the intellect constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, venerable sir.”

“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, venerable sir. Why is that? Because we have already seen it well as it has come to be, with right discernment, that these six internal media are inconstant.”

“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.

“Now what do you think, sisters? Are forms constant or inconstant?”  
“Inconstant, venerable sir.” “And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?” “Stressful, venerable sir.” “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, venerable sir.”

“... Are sounds constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Are aromas constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Are flavors constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Are tactile sensations constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“What do you think, sisters? Are ideas constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, venerable sir.”

“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, venerable sir. Why is that? Because we have already seen it well as it has come to be, with right discernment, that these six external media are also inconstant.”

“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.

“Now, what do you think, sisters? Is eye-consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, venerable sir.”

“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, venerable sir.”

“... Is ear-consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Is nose-consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Is tongue-consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“... Is body-consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.” ...

“What do you think, sisters? Is intellect-consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, venerable sir.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, venerable sir.” “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, venerable sir. Why is that? Because we have already seen it well as it has come to be, with right discernment, that these six consciousness-groups, too, are inconstant.”

“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 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?”

“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 external 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 if a dexterous 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?”

“No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because if the dexterous 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 disjointed 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.<sup>2</sup>

“Sisters, there are these seven factors for awakening<sup>3</sup> through whose development & pursuit a monk enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release,<sup>4</sup> having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now. Which seven? There is the case where a monk develops *mindfulness* as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops *analysis of qualities* as a factor for awakening... *persistence* as a factor for awakening... *rapture* as a factor for awakening... *calm* as a factor for awakening... *concentration* as a factor for awakening... *equanimity* as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. These are the seven factors for awakening through whose development & pursuit a monk enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now.”

Then, having exhorted the nuns with this exhortation, Ven. Nandaka dismissed them, saying, “Go, sisters. The time has come.” The nuns, delighting in and approving of Ven. Nandaka’s exhortation, got up from their seats, bowed down to him, circumambulated him—keeping him to the right—and went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, they stood to one side. As they were standing there,



the Blessed One said to them, “Go, nuns. The time has come.” So the nuns, having bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him—keeping him to the right—and departed.

Then not long after the nuns’ departure the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, just as on the uposatha day of the fourteenth, people at large are not doubtful or perplexed as to whether the moon is lacking or full, for it’s clearly lacking<sup>5</sup>; in the same way, even though the nuns are gratified with Nandaka’s Dhamma-teaching, their resolves have not yet been fulfilled.” So he addressed Ven. Nandaka: “In that case, Nandaka, exhort the nuns again tomorrow with the exact same exhortation.”

“As you say, lord,” Ven. Nandaka replied. Then, after the night had passed, early in the morning—having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe—he went into Sāvattthī for alms... [as before, up to:]

Then not long after the nuns’ departure the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, just as on the uposatha day of the fifteenth, people at large are not doubtful or perplexed as to whether the moon is lacking or full, for it’s clearly full; in the same way, the nuns are gratified with Nandaka’s Dhamma-teaching, and their resolves have been fulfilled. Of these 500 nuns, the most backward is a stream-enterer, not destined for the planes of deprivation, headed to self-awakening for sure.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

— [MN 146](#)

## NOTES

1. This phrase is not in the PTS edition. [↩](#)
2. This simile also illustrates the point that the arahant, after awakening, is still aware of contact via the six sense media, but senses it

“disjoined from it.” See [MN 140](#). ↵

3. The commentary explains that Ven. Nandaka introduces the topic of the seven factors of awakening here to indicate where the nuns have more work to do in their practice. From the questions and answers, it is obvious that they have developed the second factor of awakening—analysis of qualities (or dhammas)—which is the factor associated with insight and discernment. However, for their resolves to be fulfilled, they need to focus on developing the factors associated with tranquility and concentration. ↵

4. On awareness-release and discernment-release, see [MN 43](#), [AN 2:30](#), and [AN 9:44](#). Discernment-release is always transcendent; awareness-release, only when effluent-free. ↵

5. Apparently, in the Buddha’s time, the 29-day lunar month was divided so that the half ending in the new moon uposatha had fourteen days, and the half ending in the full moon uposatha, fifteen. How they compensated for the fact that the lunar month is not exactly 29 days isn’t known. ↵

## 8 : Talks Inspiring Arahantship

As was the case in Chapter 7, many of the talks in this chapter work variations on the standard pattern established by the second discourse, so they don't require much explanation. We'll focus instead only on areas where passages depart from the pattern or raise important points of doctrine. Of these, the passage concerning Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth, [Ud 1:10](#), has prompted the largest number of divergent commentaries, so it'll require by far the most explanation to sort through the various interpretations that have been offered. That's why we'll be saving it for last.

As we noted in Chapter 7, the sutta passages that inspired arahantship in the listeners contain far more similes than the passages that inspired lower levels of noble attainments. Why that's the case, the Canon doesn't say.

However, the role of similes in fostering awakening can be explained in terms of the sequence of dependent co-arising. In that sequence, similes count as perceptions, which fall under two factors: fabrication and name-and-form. As we noted in Chapter 5, given the non-linear nature of the sequence of dependent co-arising, when knowledge and dispassion are brought to either of these factors, they can create a chain-reaction that can cause all the other factors to cease.

Many of the similes are quite extreme, which may in part account for their effectiveness in inspiring a strong sense of dispassion or even terror—*samvega*—in the listeners.

## THE FIRE SERMON

This is certainly the case with the talk popularly known as the Fire Sermon. Its governing metaphor focuses on how the six sense media and related phenomena—which encompass the All—should be viewed as being aflame.

It's been widely recognized that this analogy is related to the fact that the talk was given to 1,000 monks who had formerly been brahmanical ascetics, offering sacrifices and oblations to fires. But to understand how the Buddha got the most effect out of the analogy, it's good to know more about the background of the talk and of its listeners.

First, the story: After the Buddha had established a small band of awakened disciples in the first months after his awakening, he sent them out to proclaim the Dhamma in all directions. He then went to Uruvela to convert three groups of famous dreadlocked brahmanical ascetics living in the area. The groups were led by three brothers, the most senior being Uruvela Kassapa, who also had the largest following, 500 in all.

The story of how the Buddha converted Uruvela Kassapa is one of the longest and most amusing in the Vinaya. The Buddha displays miracle after miracle, some of them quite extravagant, but Uruvela Kassapa's reaction is always the same: "He's powerful, the Great Contemplative, and mighty... But still, he's not an arahant like me." Finally, the Buddha decides to terrify him by reading his mind: "You, Kassapa, are neither an arahant nor one endowed with the path to arahantship. You don't even have a way of practice by which you would become an arahant or one endowed with the path to arahantship."

This has the desired effect. Uruvela Kassapa sheds his pride and asks to live the holy life under the Buddha. Before accepting him as a

student, though, the Buddha tells him to inform his following. Their reaction: “For a long time, sir, we’ve been highly impressed with the Great Contemplative. If you’re going to live the holy life under him, all of us will likewise live the holy life under him.”

The other two groups are then quickly converted and receive ordination, giving the Buddha a total of 1,000 new students.

Some people have objected to this story, either because they don’t believe in psychic powers, or because they note the Buddha’s reasons, given in [DN 11](#), for not displaying the types of psychic powers described in this story: People will simply dismiss them as a magic trick. However, the passage in [DN 11](#) focuses on the question of displaying psychic powers to lay people. Here the Buddha is dealing with ascetics who clearly believe in psychic powers, so—because he had them in his arsenal and because they were needed in this case—he used them.

It’s also worth noting that one of the drawbacks of displays like this is that word gets out, and lay people come thronging to see them. (See the origin stories to Nissaggiya Pācittiya 23 and Cv.V.8.) In this case, however, we see that Uruvela Kassapa didn’t want his lay followers to know of the Buddha’s powers, as it would make his own powers seem meager in comparison, so the Buddha was protected from that sort of problem.

So it was through his display of psychic powers that the Buddha inspired conviction in the ascetics. Apparently, as part of their training, they had also developed some powers of concentration. What they still lacked in terms of the qualities needed as ideal listeners was discernment. Yet, instead of teaching the ascetics all five steps of his program for inducing dispassion, the Buddha gave them a talk that focused on one step: the drawbacks of what they were attached to.

As Uruvela Kassapa later admitted, they had been performing sacrifices and oblations to fires in hopes of sensual pleasures in a future life. That was the allure of their earlier practice. So the first order of business for the Buddha was to focus on the drawbacks of the five physical senses, plus the intellect as the sixth.

That's where the fire analogy came in. The Buddha opened his talk by saying that the All was aflame. This statement would have special meaning for the type of fire worship the ascetics had been engaged in. The underlying principle of the cult of the ancient Indian fire god—Agni in Sanskrit, Aggi in Pāli—was that fire existed both as a god who could be appeased and as a latent physical potential suffused in all things. Lighting a fire would put you in touch with that god/potential, and when the proper chants were recited and the proper ritual actions performed, items such as food, livestock, and other forms of wealth sacrificed into the fire along with oblations dedicated to Agni/Aggi could be directed through that universal potential to the world of the afterlife. The more wealth transferred in this way, the longer you could consume it after death: This provided a form of “deathlessness” based, not on being free from conditions or the need to feed, but on being supplied with an ample source of food. Agni/Aggi was worshipped not only for his power but also for his utility in being able to deliver wealth and food to the world after death.

(On this point, see: Jan Gonda, *Some Observations on the Relations between ‘Gods’ and ‘Powers’ in the Veda, a propos of the Phrase, sunuh sahasah*. (s’Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1957.)

In this worldview, the idea of a universal fire potential latent in all things was a source of comfort: Its power could be harnessed to send sustenance wherever you wanted it.

But when the Buddha stated that the All was aflame, that changed the nature of the image. If the fire potential was everywhere ignited, aflame, and out of control, the image of an all-pervasive fire element was no longer a source of comfort. Instead, it became a source of *saṁvega*, or terror.

The Buddha then explained what it meant for the All to be aflame. This All consisted of the six senses, their objects, consciousness at the senses, contact at the senses, and any feelings based on that contact, whether painful, pleasant, or neither painful nor pleasant. That covers all of sensory experience.

This All was burning with three types of flames: one inherent in the All, and two added by the mind's attitude toward the All. The inherent flames included aging, illness, and death. The first type of added flames were the defilements of passion, aversion, and delusion. The second type of added flames were the various forms of suffering that come from the defilements: sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

It's worth noting that of these various forms of burning, the Buddha refers to only three—the most problematic—with the word, *aggi*. Those three are the defilements of passion, aversion, and delusion. This demotes Agni/Aggi from being a god to be worshipped for his good services into psychological factors to be feared.

The Buddha then makes the image even more fearful. Instead of saying that the flames should be put out—as he would in many later talks—he says that the noble disciple “grows disenchanted” with the All. The verb he uses here, *nibbindati*, is primarily associated with food: It's what you feel when you've had so much of a particular food that you don't want any more. The implication in this context is that the 1,000 ascetics have been feeding on fire and performing sacrifices to feed on more fire in the afterlife. That image would be enough to give rise to a

strong sense of dispassion for the All, abandoning any clinging related to it.

This talk inspired the entire group of 1,000 ascetics to gain release.

Some people have objected to the idea that the Buddha could have been consciously aware of the brahmanical idea of a latent fire element pervading all things, on the grounds that this was an esoteric idea that the brahmans would have kept secret. But because it was part of their theory as to why their sacrifices were effective, what reason would they have had for keeping it under wraps? They would have been more likely to advertise it to convince potential clients of the power of their services. So it seems safe to assume that the Buddha was aware of their theory of fire—[Sn 3:4](#) shows that he had very detailed knowledge of many of their other doctrines as well—and that he deliberately used that knowledge to the best possible effect.

Aside from the way the Buddha used the image of fire here, the most striking thing about the talk is what he *doesn't* say.

First, there's no mention either of the four noble truths or of the three perceptions. These teachings are there only implicitly and partially. Of the three perceptions, only two are even implicit: inconstancy in the flames of birth, aging, and death; stress in the flames of sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. Of the four noble truths, in addition to the reference to the various forms of stress, the only truths implicitly referred to are craving in the flames of passion, and the end of suffering in the reference to dispassion. But for the ascetics, even just this much was enough.

Second, unlike the pattern of the second discourse, there's no extrapolation to past or future. Here again, the fire-worshippers' image of fire permeating the entire cosmos well into the future may have made any further reference to the future unnecessary. The ascetics were



primed to make that connection themselves. The image of a universal fire potential everywhere aflame, one that they had been ignorantly taking as food, was enough to give rise to an all-embracing (and All-embracing) sense of *saṃvega*, leaving their minds no place to stand. They could only let go of everything.

## TWO MORE TALKS INDUCING SAṂVEGA

In addition to the Fire Sermon, the Buddha gave two other talks that brought his listeners to full awakening by inducing within them a strong sense of *saṃvega*.

In one case—[SN 15:13](#) [[§52](#)][\[§52\]](#)—he impresses a group of thirty wilderness-dwelling monks with the amount of suffering they have endured in the past. Given that *saṃsāra* has an inconceivable beginning, he asks them which they think is greater: the amount of water in the four great oceans or the amount of blood they have lost from having their heads cut off. Their correct answer: the blood. The Buddha then lists various reasons they would have had their heads cut off: They were born as cows, as water-buffalos, as rams, as goats, as deer, as chickens, as pigs—and here the Buddha adds a sting to the image by referring to their heads as cow-heads, water-buffalo-heads, and so forth. They also lost their heads as human beings arrested for being village thieves, highway thieves, and adulterers. In each category, they had had their heads cut off so many times that the blood they lost was more than the water in the four great oceans. That immense amount of blood, plus the realization of the many lowly births they had experienced, yielded an overwhelming sense of terror.

As a result of being questioned with regard to each case like this, the thirty monks all gained full awakening.

The other case of a discourse inducing saṃvega—[AN 7:69](#) [§53]—focuses not on past sufferings but on the potential for future sufferings that come from illegitimately enjoying sensory pleasures in the present. The Buddha is sitting with a group of monks near a large bonfire and asks them: “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? To sit or lie down hugging that great mass of fire—aflame, blazing, aglow—or to sit or lie down hugging a noble-warrior maiden or brahman maiden or householder maiden with soft & tender hands & feet?”

Their foolish answer: It would be better to hug the maiden.

He then warns them that, for a sham monk, it would be better to hug the fire. Why is that? Because hugging the fire would not send him to hell, but hugging the maiden would.

The Buddha then asks six more questions of a similar sort, and receives six more foolish answers. The correct answer to each question is that, for a sham monk, it would be better to endure a gruesome, life-threatening pain in the present life than to accept the homage and respectful salutations of affluent lay-people, or to use the various gifts they had given out of conviction.

As a result of this discourse, approximately sixty monks coughed up hot blood, approximately sixty disrobed, and approximately sixty gained full awakening.

There are two points worth discussing here. The first has to do with the fact that in [AN 5:26](#) [§22], the Buddha identified joy as a requisite quality for gaining a noble attainment while listening to a talk. But what kind of joy is there in these terrifying examples—or, for that matter, in the Fire Sermon? The answer lies in remembering the conditions that [SN 12:23](#) [§23] says underlie the proper sort of joy conducive to awakening: That joy is based on conviction, and conviction is based on the experience of suffering and stress. Some people need a strong sense

of *saṃvega* in order to appreciate the practices taught by the Buddha. When they are vividly aware of the sufferings of the six senses and the worlds of rebirth, they are more likely to value the Buddha's teachings and to find joy in taking advantage of the opening those teachings provide to escape from those sufferings.

In this case, the fact that the Buddha is not sugar-coating the pill for them, that he's addressing them in an uncompromising way, would be an extra source of admiration and joy. As [AN 7:69](#) shows, not everyone can take this sort of medicine, but there are others for whom it's exactly what they want and need.

The second point worth discussing is the fact that, in the Fire Sermon, the Buddha provides a detailed map of the factors that fall under the All, as a sort of checklist for possible places where clinging might lurk. In the two examples given here, though, he provides nothing of the sort. There are just the graphic and terrifying images. It's possible that the monks listening to these talks were already aware of the Buddha's maps of the five aggregates and the six sense spheres, so they knew what they had to look out for. It's also possible, though, that the overwhelming force of images was enough, in that it provided no foothold for craving and clinging to land.

## **VEN. YAMAKA**

The story of Ven. Yamaka is of a very different sort, although the talk that led him to full awakening does contain a graphic image very conducive to disenchantment.

The story begins with the news that Yamaka is holding to an evil viewpoint: "As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is

annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.” Other monks try to convince him that the viewpoint is evil and should be abandoned, but to no avail.

To understand how the story progresses from there, we have to understand how and why this viewpoint is evil. The most obvious reason is that it’s a form of annihilationism, a view that—together with its opposite, eternalism—the Buddha denounced as especially pernicious. That, though, begs the further question: Why did the Buddha denounce these two views in such extreme terms?

To understand why, we have to look at the question that both views were supposed to answer: one that’s so wrong-headed and obstructive to the end of suffering that the Buddha refused to take any position in answer to it at all. The question is whether a fully awakened person—a Tathāgata—exists after death.

This question was one of the hot issues of the Buddha’s time. Four positions were staked out in response to it: The Tathāgata, after death, either:

1. exists,
2. doesn’t exist,
3. both exists and doesn’t exist, or
4. neither exists nor doesn’t exist.

Because this question has four possible answers, it’s called a tetralemma, after the Greek stem-word for “four”: *tetra*.

Various reasons have been proposed for why the Buddha refused to take any of these four positions. One modern interpretation is based on assuming that the Buddha’s teaching on not-self is an assertion that there is no self. Then, because the Tathāgata doesn’t exist before death, there’s no way he could exist after death, either.

On the surface, this would appear to fall under option (2), Ven. Yamaka's view: After death, the Tathāgata doesn't exist. However, people supporting the modern interpretation claim to avoid that option, and the tetralemma as a whole, by claiming further that the question behind the tetralemma assumes that the Tathāgata exists before death. In other words, "exists"—in the case of this question—means, "continues to exist." Because there is nothing to continue to exist, none of the four options would apply. The awakened person would accurately be described by another option: doesn't exist either before or after death.

Now, there is nothing in the Canon to indicate that the question behind the tetralemma assumes that the Tathāgata exists before death. But even if we accept this modern interpretation here, we find that, on closer examination, it actually answers the question behind its version of the tetralemma. Even on its own terms, it falls—without intending to—under option (4).

Look carefully at what it says. From its reasoning, the first option in the tetralemma is this:  $a$  = The Tathāgata continues to exist after death.

The second option is: *not a* = The Tathāgata stops existing after death.

The Buddhist position, in their interpretation, is: The Tathāgata doesn't continue to exist or stop existing after death, because he didn't exist to begin with.

But this, in their depiction of the tetralemma, would actually yield: *neither a nor not-a*.

That's the fourth option of the tetralemma as they define it.

Which means that they don't really escape the tetralemma, and that their interpretation can't really explain how the Buddha did.

The Buddha never stated the position they attribute to him. In fact, he stated that *any* attempt to describe the Tathāgata before or after death, either within the framework of the tetralemma or outside it, would misrepresent his teachings ([SN 22:86](#)). This would rule out the option, “doesn’t exist either before or after death,” or any variation on it.

So the only way the Buddha could legitimately hold to his silence on this question would be to say that the fully awakened person can’t be defined, period.

And as we noted in Chapter 1, that’s exactly what he said. People are measured and defined as beings in terms of their attachments ([SN 23:2](#)). When they have no more attachments, they can’t be defined ([SN 22:36](#)), so they can’t be properly described. To try to define a Tathāgata is to imply that the Tathāgata still has attachments. It’s an attempt to limit a fully awakened person to the narrow confines of an unawakened mind. That’s what was evil about Yamaka’s view, and of any other view—such as any variety of annihilationism or eternalism—that attempts to place such limitations on what, by its nature, has no limitations at all.

The suttas, in explaining the reasons for why no one should adopt any of the positions in the tetralemma, explicitly apply these principles to the issue. The Buddha’s explanation of this point to King Pasenadi does this most explicitly and puts it in vivid terms:

“What do you think, great king? Do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can count the grains of sand in the river Ganges as ‘so many grains of sand’ or ‘so many hundreds of grains of sand’ or ‘so many thousands of grains of sand’ or ‘so many hundreds of thousands of grains of sand’?”

“No, lord.”

“Then do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can count the water in the great ocean as ‘so many buckets of water’ or ‘so many hundreds of buckets of water’ or ‘so many thousands of buckets of water’ or ‘so many hundreds of thousands of buckets of water’?”

“No, lord. Why is that? The great ocean is deep, boundless, hard to fathom.”

“Even so, great king, any form by which one describing the Tathāgata would describe him: That form the Tathāgata has abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, great king, the Tathāgata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the ocean. ‘The Tathāgata exists after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata doesn’t exist after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata both exists & does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply. ‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ doesn’t apply.

“[Similarly with the other aggregates.]” — [SN 44:1](#)

In [SN 44:4](#), Ven. Sāriputta shows the best way to make this point convincing. The four positions of the tetralemma, he says, would occur only to someone who hasn’t seen, as they’ve come to be, the aggregates, their origination, their cessation, and the path of practice leading to their cessation. For those who *have* seen these things, these positions simply don’t occur to their minds.

So when a group of monks ask Ven. Sāriputta to help persuade Ven. Yamaka to abandon his evil view, the best approach open to him would be to get Yamaka to see directly that the fully awakened person can’t be defined. And the best way to do that would be to get Yamaka himself to

see the origination and cessation of the aggregates through gaining at least a glimpse of the deathless.

That's precisely what Sāriputta does.

He avoids arguing with Yamaka or criticizing his evil view—after all, he wants Yamaka to feel conviction in him—so he simply starts with a series of questions: the standard questionnaire concerning the three perceptions as applied to the aggregates. By the end of the questionnaire, Yamaka has gained the Dhamma eye.

Sāriputta then quizzes him further on the various ways he might define the Tathāgata, going through almost every imaginable way of trying to define the Tathāgata vis-à-vis the aggregates in the here and now. Yamaka, having seen what happens when there is no craving or clinging for the aggregates, replies in each case that he can't define the Tathāgata in any of those ways. Sāriputta then asks him, given that he can't define the Tathāgata even in this lifetime, how can he say that he perishes after death?

Yamaka replies that he used to hold to that evil viewpoint, but now that he has gained the Dhamma eye, he no longer holds to it. When Sāriputta asks how he would describe what *does* happen at the Tathāgata's death, Yamaka replies, "Form is inconstant... Feeling... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness is inconstant. That which is inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has ceased and gone to its end."

What he doesn't say, but what we can conclude from what we learned about the Dhamma eye in Chapter 2, is that the aggregates cease and don't exist in the deathless, but that the deathless does exist and doesn't cease.

Ven. Yamaka's story is unique in that he gains two noble attainments in the course of one talk: the Dhamma eye after the first part of the talk,



and total release after the second. Both halves of the talk follow the pattern of the second discourse, the only difference being that the second time around, Ven. Sāriputta illustrates the drawbacks of the aggregates with striking similes.

Perhaps the most effective of the similes is that of the man who plans to murder a king, and so works his way into the king's trust: getting up before the king, going to bed after the king, diligently doing whatever the king tells him to do. Then, when the man finds himself alone with the king, he kills him. As Sāriputta says, the man was actually already the king's murderer while he was still in the process of making himself appealing to the king, working his way into the king's trust.

If we compare this image with the Buddha's five-step program for inducing dispassion, we can see the implication: The allure of whatever we're attached to actually contains the drawbacks deceptively within it, just as the king's murderer was deceptively his murderer even when he was diligently doing the king's bidding. This perception helps to get rid of any remaining nostalgia or anticipation that Yamaka might have for the allure of the aggregates in any of their past or future forms.

## THE FULL-MOON NIGHT

In [MN 109](#) [[§55](#)], approximately sixty monks gain full awakening on receiving the standard questionnaire about the five aggregates and the three perceptions. What's special about this sutta is the string of events leading up to the questionnaire. One of those events involves a monk who misuses the teaching on not-self.

The sutta begins with the Buddha sitting in a large open-air assembly of monks on a very full-moon night. An unnamed monk asks

the Buddha a series of detailed questions about the aggregates. This means that this sutta is the third of the four instances we mentioned in Chapter 3 in which a listener asks questions in the course of a talk that leads to awakening then and there.

Of special interest are two of the Buddha's answers to the monk's questions: (1) The clinging-aggregates are rooted in desire and, (2), whatever passion-and-delight there is for the aggregates counts as the clinging that turns them into clinging-aggregates.

Now, *passion-and-delight* and *desire* are often treated as synonymous in the Canon. So, put together, these two answers mean that the aggregates are not only objects of desire, but also products of desire. When you cling to the aggregates, you're not only suffering in the present moment, but you're also creating the conditions that will produce further aggregates into the future. If you don't abandon your desires for the aggregates now, you keep creating more aggregates to which you could cling in the future. This process, if you don't put an end to it by ending desire, has the potential to go on indefinitely, creating the conditions for suffering that goes on without end.

However, not all the monks in the assembly listening to these questions and answers are directing their minds toward to the end of suffering. One of them, on hearing that the aggregates are not-self, treats the idea as the basis for a metaphysical question: "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?" In other words, he turns the not-self teaching into a no-self teaching. And in that no-self teaching, he sees a loophole in the teaching on kamma: If there's no self, there's no one responsible for actions, and no one to be harmed by actions. So you can do whatever you want.

The Buddha sees what's going on in the monk's mind and says, "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."

After exposing the monk's thoughts as a misuse of the not-self teaching, the Buddha doesn't argue with those thoughts. Instead, he shows the right way to use the not-self teaching. Here he follows the same strategy that Ven. Sāriputta used with Ven. Yamaka: He gives the assembled monks the questionnaire on the five aggregates and the three perceptions. In other words, he shows that the teaching is meant to be used not as a basis for a doctrine of no self, but as a strategy for leading to the escape from clinging. Listening to the questionnaire, approximately sixty monks use it to examine their minds and gain release from effluents. Unfortunately, we're not told whether the monk who quizzed the Buddha or the monk who entertained the wrong view about not-self were among the sixty.

## **VEN. KHEMAKA**

To understand the story of Ven. Khemaka, we have to understand a custom among the monks of the Buddha's time. If a monk was severely ill, his fellow monks would quiz him on the level of his attainment. The purpose was twofold: If the monk had a high level of attainment, they could ask him about the Dhamma in hopes of learning from him and being inspired by his example to energize their own practice. If he didn't, they would encourage him to set his mind on whatever level he *had* attained, in hopes that he would, at the very least, not fall from it, and perhaps attain something higher.

Ordinarily, monks were not supposed to discuss their attainments, even to their fellow monks, but if a monk was approaching death, any claims he might make were considered more likely to be reliable and pure in their motivation.

This is what happens in the case of Ven. Khemaka. He falls sick, and a group of elder monks send a messenger to inquire about his illness. When they learn that his condition is worsening, they quiz him, via the messenger, about his understanding of the aggregates. The messenger gets sent back and forth so many times that Ven. Khemaka eventually decides to get up and, leaning on his staff, goes to answer the questions in person.

We learn that he's a non-returner, and the elders' questions give him the opportunity to explain the difference between the fetter of self-identity views, which he has already abandoned, and the fetter of conceit, which he hasn't. Self-identity views apply the perception, "I am this," to the aggregates in any of four ways: The "I am this" is defined as *identical* to the aggregates, as the *owner* of the aggregates, as *in* the aggregates, or as *containing* the aggregates within it ([MN 109](#); [[§55](#)]). Ven. Khemaka has abandoned all these ways of defining, "I am this." However, he still has a lingering "I am" around the aggregates. His attachment to that "I am" is the fetter of conceit.

He illustrates this "I am" with two similes: One is that it's like the scent of a lotus, which is not identical with any of the parts of the lotus. The other is that it's like the scent of a cleaning agent that still lingers around newly-washed cloth. This second simile carries the implication that this lingering scent is the remnant of the sense of "I am" that plays a role as the agent cleansing the mind of unskillful qualities while developing the path, and that's abandoned only when the path has completed its work and the "I am" as agent is no longer needed.

In the course of giving this explanation, Ven. Khemaka gains full release, as do approximately sixty other monks who were among those who asked him questions. That means that this sutta is the fourth of the four instances we mentioned in Chapter 3 in which listeners ask questions in the course of a talk that leads to awakening then and there [AN 5:26 \[§22\]](#) says that it's possible for a monk to gain a noble attainment while explaining the Dhamma to others. This is the only case of that sort actually reported in the Canon.

## THE SIX SEXTETS

[MN 148 \[§57\]](#) reports a talk in which the Buddha applies the pattern of the second discourse to an extended analysis of the six senses and the mental phenomena based on them: in other words, the internal sense media, the external sense media, consciousness, contact, feeling, and craving. In this way, the analysis incorporates a section of dependent co-arising as well: all the factors from the six sense media through craving. The discussion focuses first on the topic of not-self, but goes on to discuss themes of inconstancy and stress as well. The Buddha concludes by saying:

“That a person—through abandoning passion-obsession with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing resistance-obsession with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting ignorance-obsession with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: Such a thing is possible.”

When an instructed disciple of the noble ones sees this, the Buddha says, he grows disenchanted with the six sense media and the mental events based on them. From disenchantment comes dispassion; from dispassion, release.

Approximately sixty monks gain full release while listening to this discourse.

The discussion contains one distinctive point of special interest. The Buddha says that it's not tenable to say that any of the phenomena he discusses are the self. His reasoning, exemplified in his first example, is this:

“If anyone were to say, ‘The eye is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising & falling away of the eye are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises & falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘The eye is the self.’ So the eye is not-self.”

Some commentators, focusing on this argument, say that it’s proof that, for the Buddha, the term “self” must mean “permanent self.” However, that’s taking the argument out of the context of the suttas as a whole. [DN 1](#) and [DN 15](#) report a wide range of ideas of “self” current in the Buddha’s time, many of which were defined as impermanent. If he had wanted to limit the word “self” just to “permanent self,” he would have had to explain why he did so, given that “self,” in the context of discussions on the topic at his time, could mean “impermanent self,” too. But he never did.

And if he had used the perception of not-self to pry away acts of clinging only to ideas of a permanent self, that would have limited the usefulness of the perception. It wouldn’t have applied to ideas of an impermanent self. The implication would then be that clinging to ideas

of an impermanent self would not be a cause of suffering, something blatantly untrue. It's natural for people to cling fiercely to their sense of self when they feel that it could come to an end. Even a sense of a fluid self can be an object of obsessive clinging.

A better way to interpret the Buddha's argument here is to apply it to any possible notion of self: Whether you believe that the self is permanent or impermanent, if you can observe the arising and passing away of what you claim to be your self, it can't possibly be your self. If it were, you wouldn't be there to watch it arise, and you wouldn't be there to watch it pass away. The fact that you can see it arise and pass away means it's not you.

The advantage of this interpretation of the argument is that it broadens the application of the perception of not-self so that it can be used to pry away *any* sense of clinging to *any* sense of self, no matter how you define it.

## CONTEMPLATION OF DUALITIES

In [Sn 3:12](#) [§58], the Buddha is addressing a large group of monks. He states repeatedly that the purpose of listening to the Dhamma is to contemplate dualities as they have come to be—an interesting refutation of the widespread idea that the Dhamma is all about contemplating non-duality. The Buddha states further that a monk who contemplates dualities in the right way—heedful, ardent, and resolute—can expect one of two fruits: either arahantship in the here and now or non-return.

He then presents sixteen dualities, each followed by a verse. Of the sixteen, twelve follow the pattern of Ven. Assaji's instruction to Sāriputta

the wanderer: origination on the one side of the duality; cessation on the other.

The first duality presents the general framework of the four noble truths: stress and its origination on one side; its cessation and the path to its cessation on the other. It doesn't define any of these terms, and perhaps the Buddha saw no need to, as the monks he was addressing would have been familiar with the definitions. Or, as we have seen in the case of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, simply the framework of origination and cessation could have been enough for some of the monks to apply it fruitfully to their minds.

The next eleven dualities, however, fill in the term for the origination of stress in a variety of ways. In seven cases, the origination is drawn from the standard sequence of dependent co-arising: ignorance, fabrications, consciousness, contact, feeling, craving, and clinging. In the case of clinging, which on the surface would appear to come under stress rather than the origination of stress, the Buddha points to the fact that clinging leads to becoming, which is followed by the suffering of birth and death.

The remaining four cases list causes for stress that do not appear in the standard sequence of dependent co-arising: acquisition, arousal, nutriment, and what is perturbed.

“Acquisition” (*upadhi*), in its everyday sense, denotes the possessions, baggage, and other paraphernalia that a nomadic family might carry around in the course of its wanderings. On the psychological level, it denotes anything for which one might have a sense of “I” or “mine” and which, consequently, one would carry around as a kind of mental baggage.

“Arousal” (*ārambha*) is a word with many possible meanings in Pāli. Among them: disruption; seizure of an object; inception of action, often



with violent connotations. The verse connected to this duality associates arousal with craving.

“Nutriment” (*āhāra*) is defined in [SN 12:63](#) as follows: “There are these four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second, intellectual intention the third, and consciousness the fourth.” This term appears in a few non-standard descriptions of dependent co-arising, where it takes the place of clinging. Given that the Pāli word for clinging, *upādāna*, also means sustenance and the act of taking sustenance, this place for “nutriment” is appropriate.

“What is perturbed” (*iñjita*) is not defined in the Canon. The verse connected to this duality seems to imply that it covers any state of mind that’s agitated to the point of giving rise to fabrications.

From the structure of the Buddha’s list of dualities, it appears that the dualities up to this point are offered as alternatives for the monks to contemplate so that they can see what’s causing stress in their minds as they’re listening to the Buddha talk, and what they need to abandon so as to experience the cessation of stress.

The remaining four dualities reflect on the experience of unbinding and the steps of the third noble truth leading up to it. These dualities function in two ways: For those listeners who have already attained the highest goal, they celebrate that attainment. For those who are not there yet, these dualities point out areas where they may still have remaining traces of clinging around the experience. This encourages them to abandon those traces for the sake of total release.

The first two of these reflections point out that the goal is unwavering because it’s independent, and more refined than even the formless levels of concentration.

The other two point out how unbinding is true and blissful in ways that ordinary people can't understand. For ordinary people, the truth is that name and form are their self, whereas anything more unchanging than this truth would be impossible. Noble ones, however, see that name and form change so fast that by the time you've formed an assumption that they're you or yours, they've already turned into something else. That's how they're deceptive. Unbinding, however, is unchanging and so doesn't deceive.

Similarly, the people of the world regard the pleasures of the six senses as blissful, and the ending of those pleasures as stressful, whereas noble ones have seen the pleasures of the senses as stressful, and that there's a far greater bliss that comes with the cessation that leads beyond the six senses entirely. This bliss brings a freedom to which only those who are truly worthy can awaken.

By examining their minds while listening to this talk, approximately sixty monks gained full release.

## **BĀHIYA**

One of the most famous and controversial stories of awakening gained while listening to a Dhamma talk is that of Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth. The instructions the Buddha gives him are, on the surface, unrelated to the patterns established by the more standard awakening accounts. As a result, those instructions have inspired a wide variety of interpretations, many of which depart widely from what the Canon has to say about awakening in other suttas. So we'll have to look carefully to see exactly what the Buddha said and what he later reported to have meant when he said it. When we do, we find that his instructions actually follow the pattern established by Ven. Assaji's instructions to

Sāriputta the wanderer. The Buddha focused Bāhiya's attention on one of the causal connections contained in dependent co-arising. As a result, Bāhiya—like Sāriputta before him—was able to intuit the implications of that focus. He surpassed Sāriputta, however, in gaining full release when he did.

His story is a dramatic one. An ascetic who lived by the seashore on the west coast of India, Bāhiya was worshipped and honored by the local lay people. He began to suspect that he might be an arahant or at least practicing the way to arahantship. A female deva who had been a relative in a previous lifetime saw this question in Bāhiya's mind and, out of compassion, appeared to him and told him that he wasn't even on the path to arahantship, much less an arahant. He asked her if there were any arahants in the world, and she pointed him to the Buddha, who was approximately 1,200 miles away, near the city of Sāvattthī, in the northern part of the Ganges Valley.

Bāhiya immediately left to find the Buddha. The story says that he made the journey in one night, which implies that he had some psychic powers derived from practicing concentration. The speed with which he traveled may have also symbolized the speed of his mind. Arriving early the next morning, he went to the Buddha's monastery outside of Sāvattthī, only to learn that the Buddha had gone into the city for alms. Bāhiya tracked him down and, impressed by his consummate demeanor, threw himself down on the ground with his head at the Buddha's feet and implored him to teach the Dhamma.

At first the Buddha refused Bāhiya's request, saying that the alms round wasn't the proper time or place to teach. But Bāhiya insisted, arguing that there was no guarantee for how much longer he or the Buddha might live. After Bāhiya repeated the request two more times, the Buddha relented and taught him. The instructions he gave were

cryptic, and perhaps intentionally so. We've already noted, in connection with Ven. Assaji's instructions to Sāriputta the wanderer, the ancient Indian tradition of intellectual riddles presented as a challenge. Perhaps the Buddha was intentionally challenging Bāhiya. But as we'll see, Bāhiya was up to the challenge.

The Buddha said:

“Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed [i.e., the smelled, the tasted, the touched], only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself.

“When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering.” — [\*Ud 1:10\*](#)

Immediately on hearing these instructions, Bāhiya attained full awakening. Not long after that, he was killed by a cow protective of her young calf. When the monks informed the Buddha of Bāhiya's death, he told them to cremate the body and build a memorial over it. Even though Bāhiya had not ordained, his awakening qualified him as one of them. Later, the Buddha cited him as foremost among his disciples in gaining quick realization.

The story has become famous, both for the drama of the events and for the brief instructions that had such a momentous effect. Some people treat the instructions as a streamlined guide to awakening, shorn

of what they see as extraneous explanations in the Buddha's other teachings. However, there's another sutta in the Canon—[SN 35:95](#) [[§60](#)]  
—in which the Buddha explains these instructions to the monk Ven. Māluṅkyaputta in such a way as to show (a) that they contain many implications that only a person of sharp intelligence would even suspect, and (b) that the Buddha's other teachings contain nothing in excess. But even the explanations to Māluṅkyaputta are relatively brief. So it's no surprise that many people over the centuries have tried to tease out even further the implications of [Ud 1:10](#) [[§59](#)] and [SN 35:95](#)—both for the first part of the instructions, the training they recommend; and for the second part, the rewards the training is supposed to yield—to see how these instructions can be applied in practice.

Of course, in Bāhiya's case, the instructions were not the whole story. There were also the character traits he brought to them. He wasn't a blank slate. And an important key to understanding what he saw in the instructions lies in knowing what was on the slate.

Details in Bāhiya's story suggest that he possessed all five of the qualities for listening successfully to the Dhamma listed in [AN 5:151](#) [[§27](#)]. His desire to find the Buddha immediately, the lengths to which he went to track the Buddha down, and the extreme homage he paid to the Buddha on meeting him are all signs that he respected the Buddha and was primed to respect whatever Dhamma lesson the Buddha gave. A detail that might be easy to overlook is the fact that his homage to the Buddha was in immediate response to seeing the latter's demeanor while on his alms round. In the symbolic language of the Canon, this is a sign of the integrity that holds virtue in respect. There were cases where other people, on seeing restrained monks on their alms round, ridiculed them—"Who is this weakest of weaklings, this dullest of dullards, this most snobbish of snobs? Who, if this one

approached, would even give him alms?”—a sign that they didn’t appreciate virtue. But Bāhiya did.

Bāhiya’s self-respect is shown in his courage in not getting deflected by the Buddha’s first two refusals. He wouldn’t let etiquette get in the way of his ardent desire for awakening.

His powers of concentration are suggested by his ability to travel long distances in so short a time. It seems reasonable to assume that he applied those powers to listening to the Buddha’s instructions.

And as for appropriate attention, again we can only assume that Bāhiya applied it, but he was steered in that direction by the format of the Buddha’s instructions, which follow the format of the fourth and third noble truths: what training to follow so as to arrive at the cessation of suffering.

**The Training.** What exactly is that training? In other words, how do you practice in a way that in the seen there is only the seen, and so forth?

Many answers have been given to these questions over the centuries, but three in particular are popular at present: With reference to the seen there is only the seen—

1. when the act of seeing is regarded from the perspective of a mind in deep concentration;
2. when bare attention is applied to the act of seeing, while at the same time maintaining choiceless awareness with regard to all phenomena, free from judgment or any conceptual framework at all; or
3. when the act of seeing occurs without *papañca*: the mental proliferation that starts with the perception, “I am the thinker,” and that eventually leads to conflict.

All three of these interpretations are problematic, although each is problematic in its own way.

- The first interpretation is problematic because Bāhiya was already practicing concentration before meeting the Buddha, and his concentration was strong enough to give him psychic powers. In the Canon's standard description of psychic powers, that would mean at least the fourth jhāna. If the simple act of viewing sensory input from the perspective of a concentrated mind were automatically enough to gain awakening, Bāhiya would have become awakened while staying on the seashore. As the noble eightfold path makes clear, concentration is needed for awakening, but discernment is required as well. And while concentration is necessary for fostering discernment, it doesn't automatically lead to it.

- The second interpretation is contradicted by the fact that, while listening to the Dhamma, Bāhiya would have to have been using the conceptual framework of appropriate attention. This is a framework that makes distinctions and requires choices based on value judgments, as you figure out what should be developed and what should be let go.

As we noted in Chapter 1, when the Buddha discusses attention elsewhere in the Canon, he mentions only two kinds: appropriate and inappropriate. He never mentions bare attention, and there appear to be two reasons why.

1. Given that he defined attention in connection with the right and wrong way to frame questions ([MN 2 \[§32\]](#)), it's hard to see what bare attention would mean in that context. If bare attention has no framework, what questions would there be without a frame? And given that the Buddha's own quest for awakening was framed and guided by the questions he asked, what kind of awakening could come to a mind with no questions?

2. Given that the factor of attention appears in dependent co-arising after other factors with many sub-factors, it's hard to see how bare attention would even be possible. Every act of attention would have to be conditioned by the preceding factors, and so couldn't possibly be bare.

So neither of the first two interpretations would fit into the larger framework of the Buddha's teachings on how best to listen to the Dhamma.

- The third interpretation, that you have to cut away *papañca*, seems more likely on its face, in that it fits into the framework of appropriate attention: *Papañca*, as we noted in Chapter 4, is a type of thinking that assails the person who thinks it, meaning that it falls under the first noble truth and so has to be comprehended. This implies that its cause—the perception “I am the thinker”—falls under the second noble truth and so has to be abandoned. The practical upshot then—in order to regard the seen only as the seen and so forth—would be to abandon any extraneous thinking around the seen, starting with the thought “I am this.” In other words, if you can avoid such thoughts as, “I am seeing,” or, “This sight is appearing to me,” you would be left with only the seen.

This is precisely what many people who follow this interpretation recommend. As they explain it, all that's required is a conceptual paradigm shift, in which the processes of sensory experience are regarded in impersonal rather than personal terms. When the conceptual error of “I am this” has been removed, all sensory experiences—from sights through ideas, good or bad, skillful or unskillful—are simply registered for what they are on their own. Once the idea of “person” is taken out of the picture, there's no one who has any further responsibilities beyond that point. This doesn't mean that there won't be any responses, simply that there's no person responsible



for them. Some even suggest that this freedom from further responsibilities is the end of suffering.

But there are two passages in the Canon suggesting that the Buddha is actually recommending something that goes deeper than erasing “I am this” as a conceptual error.

The first is the standard description of dependent co-arising ([SN 12:2](#)), which lists many steps between sensory contact and the act of assuming a sense of self-identity. Sensory contact conditions feeling. Feeling conditions craving—which is equated to desire and passion ([SN 42:11](#))—for sensuality, for becoming, or for non-becoming. *Sensuality* is fascination with sensual fantasies and plans. *Becoming* is the conceiving of a self-identity in a world—mental or physical—in which the desired object or activity is found. *Non-becoming* is the desire to see a state of becoming destroyed. All three of these types of craving lead to states of becoming, meaning that they all contain the seed of a sense of “I am.”

The steps in dependent co-arising that we’ve mentioned so far—from contact through craving—fit under the second noble truth, the cause of suffering, which is to be abandoned.

Craving then conditions clinging. Clinging, like craving, is equated to desire and passion ([SN 22:122](#) [§34]; [SN 35:110](#)). The difference between craving and clinging is indicated by the Pāli terms used for them. As we noted in Chapter 4, the term for craving, *taṇhā*, also means thirst. The term for clinging, *upādāna*, also means taking sustenance. Craving is the act of hungering for food for the mind; clinging is the act of taking hold of that food and continuing to hold on to it as you consume it. In either case, the desire and passion are what is to be abandoned. Under the first noble truth, the fact that suffering consists of the act of clinging to any of the aggregates—form, feeling, perceptions, thought fabrications, or consciousness—is what is to be comprehended.

The desire and passion for those aggregates are what is to be abandoned ([SN 22:139](#); [SN 22:142](#); [SN 22:145](#)).

The Buddha lists four types of clinging: for sensuality, for views, for habits and practices, and for ideas of a self. The last of the four is implicit in the other three.

If you look carefully at these steps, you'll see that a sense of identity doesn't appear right after sensory contact. It appears a few steps later, as a potential under craving and clinging, and as realized in the "I am this" of becoming. In all these cases, it serves the purposes of desire and passion. This indicates that to go beyond any suffering involved in a sense of identity, you can't drop it simply as a conceptual error. You have to cut away the desires and passions it serves.

This is exactly the point of the Buddha's explanation of his instructions to Bāhiya in [SN 35:95](#). There, he gives the same instructions to Māluṅkyaputta—who, we are told, was already ardent and resolute in his practice. Then he asks Māluṅkyaputta how he understands them. Māluṅkyaputta's reply focuses on the first part of the instructions, the training, and explains it in two sets of verses, each set containing one verse for each of the six senses. The first set of verses describes the problem the training is supposed to solve; the second set, the solution. After Māluṅkyaputta states these verses, the Buddha repeats them, saying that his understanding is correct. So they can be taken as the words of the Buddha himself.

The verses in each set all follow the same pattern, so we can focus on the first verse in each set, dealing with the act of seeing.

First, the problem:

Seeing a form  
—mindfulness lapsed—

attending  
to the theme of “endearing,”  
impassioned in mind,  
one feels  
and remains fastened on it.  
One’s feelings, born of the form,  
grow numerous,  
Greed & annoyance  
injure one’s mind.  
Thus amassing stress,  
one is said to be far  
from unbinding.

Then the solution:

Not impassioned with forms  
—seeing a form with mindfulness firm—  
dispassioned in mind,  
one knows  
and doesn’t remain fastened on it.  
While one is seeing a form  
—and even experiencing feeling—  
it falls away and doesn’t accumulate.  
Thus one fares mindfully.  
Thus not amassing stress,  
one is said to be  
in the presence of unbinding.

Notice that neither verse mentions the issue of identity or the thought, “I am this.” Instead—and in line with the standard definition of the second noble truth—the verse from the first set attributes the problem to passion, sparked by the act of attending to the “theme of endearing,” which in turn comes from a lack of mindfulness.

To take these points in order:

*Passion* denotes the desire and passion found in craving and clinging.

*Attending to the theme of endearing* denotes the act of looking for something desirable in the sight, even to the extent of *making* it look desirable if nothing endearing is immediately obvious. Notice that the verse places this act between the sense contact and the resulting feeling. This means that it occurs well before any sense of “I am this.” In fact, according to the standard sequence of dependent co-arising, the act of attention actually occurs *before* sensory contact, under the factor of name-and-form. This means that the mind is already primed to look for something endearing in a particular sight, even before the sight occurs.

This is a case of inappropriate attention. So to solve the problem, you have to be mindful to develop appropriate attention—and then to remember not to attend to the theme of the endearing the next time you see a sight. Because appropriate attention frames things in terms of right view, this means that the approach Māluṅkyaputta recommends is in line with the fourth noble truth, which begins with right view.

*Mindfulness* is what keeps right view in mind. Here it’s important to remember that mindfulness doesn’t mean bare attention or choiceless awareness. The Buddha defines it as a faculty of the active memory, the ability to call to mind even things that were done or said long ago ([SN 48:10](#)). The verse stating the problem doesn’t explicitly mention what you’re supposed to keep in mind in the case of the seen, etc., although the verse describing the solution seems to imply that you should also be

mindful of the drawbacks—the suffering in the greed and annoyance—that have come from attending to the theme of endearing in the past.

The verse from the second set emphasizes the point that you have to become dispassionate toward sights if you want to solve the problem. It doesn't say explicitly how to do this, but implicitly it refers to the Buddha's five-step program for escaping from passion, which we discussed in Chapter 1. As the Buddha points out in [SN 48:4 \[§9\]](#), this approach can be applied not only to unskillful qualities, but also to the factors of the path after they've completed their work. This approach can thus take you to an all-around liberation—which is apparently how Bāhiya attained full awakening.

What this means is that to practice in such a way that, in reference to the seen, there is only the seen, etc., you have to develop appropriate attention well before the stage where *papañca* arises. The problem is not the “I am” of *papañca*; it's the passion that the “I am” is generated to serve. So, in line with the Buddha's general approach in the four noble truths, you have to attack the “I am” not directly, but at the cause that makes it unskillful.

Because appropriate attention is a mental framework that involves discernment, makes distinctions, and requires choices, the practice of concentration on its own isn't equal to the task, nor are the practices of bare attention or choiceless awareness. You have to actively want to overcome the passion that feeds and is fed by the desire to look for what's endearing in the objects of the senses. Developing appropriate attention and skillful intentions in this way requires work.

**The Rewards.** [SN 35:95](#) doesn't explicitly discuss the other cryptic part of the Buddha's instructions to Bāhiya—the rewards that come from

this practice—but it does contain a passage that provides a background for understanding those rewards.

The issue revolves around the question of location. What did the Buddha mean when he said, “When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering”?

A first step in understanding this passage lies in knowing what it means for the mind to have a location. This is a point that the Buddha hints at in [SN 35:95](#). Before quoting to Māluṅkyaputta the instructions to Bāhiya, he raises a series of questions about the six senses. The questions all take the same form, so we can focus on the first:

“What do you think, Māluṅkyaputta? The forms cognizable via the eye that are unseen by you—that you have never before seen, that you don’t see, and that are not to be seen by you: Do you have any desire or passion or love there?”

“No, lord.”

Obviously, it’s possible to have desire for a sight you haven’t seen. However—and this distinction is important—the desire is not “there” at the unseen sight. Rather, it’s there at the *idea* of the unseen sight, as that idea is cognized in the present. Knowing precisely where in the present your passion and desire are located—where craving is located—is a necessary step in ferreting out the craving and abandoning it. If you think it’s located in one spot when it’s actually located in another—as when you think you love another person but are actually in love with your ideas of the person—all your efforts to abandon the craving will be off target. This point has important implications for finding the allure of

something so that you can effectively compare the allure with the drawbacks.

Yet the connection between craving and location goes deeper. The Buddha treats craving as a *creator* of locations, “now here, now there.” Think of the process of becoming: You focus on an object you desire, you identify the world in which that object is found, and then you take on an identity within that world. This can happen in connection with a physical world or a mental world. When this happens, you’ve assumed a mental location in that world. It’s in this way that consciousness gets established and proliferates ([SN 22:54](#)).

But when there are no cravings, then concepts of self-identity and even of existence and non-existence that would serve those cravings get called into question ([SN 12:15](#)). At the same time, no becomings can form. So when the Buddha says that there is no you in connection with a sight, etc., he’s saying that you haven’t entered into a becoming inspired by that sight. When there’s no becoming, there’s no identity within a becoming, so you have no place to stay or to go ([SN 1:1](#)). Because time and space allow for only two alternatives here—staying and going—when you engage in neither, you’re released from space and time. That’s when you’re free from location.

This point is in line with many other passages in the Canon stating that those who are fully awakened cannot be located and so are “everywhere released” ([Dhp 348](#); [Thag 14:1](#); [Thig 14](#)).

The dimension experienced at this point, apart from the six senses, is also devoid of the attributes of space and time.

“There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor

non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished, unevolving, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress.” — [Ud 8:1](#)

“One who is dependent has wavering. One who is independent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no yearning. There being no yearning, there is no coming or going. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a yonder nor a between-the-two. This, just this, is the end of stress.” — [Ud 8:4](#)

If, after experiencing this dimension, your past kamma brings you back to the six senses, you experience them disjoined from them ([MN 140](#); [SN 36:6](#); [SN 47:4](#)). In other words, there’s no desire or passion for the objects of the senses that would inspire you to feed on them. This is the point of Ven. Nandaka’s image of the butchered cow [[§50](#)] that we saw in Chapter 7.

Those who are awakened in this way have cut through the conceit, “I am.” They can perceive the world of the senses without assuming a being who senses an object or an object to be sensed. In other words, they don’t assume anything extra on the near or far side of a sensation.

“Thus, monks, the Tathāgata, when seeing what is to be seen, doesn’t suppose an (object as) seen. He doesn’t suppose an unseen. He doesn’t suppose an (object) to-be-seen. He doesn’t suppose a seer.

“When hearing....

“When sensing....



“When cognizing what is to be cognized, he doesn’t suppose an (object as) cognized. He doesn’t suppose an uncognized. He doesn’t suppose an (object) to-be-cognized. He doesn’t suppose a cognizer.”  
— [AN 4:24](#)

From this point of view, those who are awakened can still use the concepts of “I” and “me,” but not in the service of the desires and passions that would lead them to cling to the conceit, “I am” ([SN 1:25](#)) or the identity, “I am this” ([SN 22:89](#)). They can act on intentions, but can burn any seeds coming from those intentions that would lead to karmic results ([AN 3:34](#)). How they have mastered these skills, though, only they would understand.

**In Context.** The Buddha’s instructions to Bāhiya, when taken out of context, have often been interpreted as directions not to engage in any processing of sensory input. We’ve been told that for there to be, “in reference to the seen, only the seen,” we have to approach the seen while keeping in check any conceptual framework, any choice, any act of judgment, any assumption of an agent to do the seeing or to process what is seen. Mindfulness, from this perspective, means maintaining an attitude of non-judging acceptance toward whatever happens.

However, when we take the Buddha’s instructions in context, we can see that he’s actually recommending a skillful pro-active processing of what is seen. The mental event that has to be kept in check is something very specific: the passion that would lead to suffering and stress. To do this, you have to develop appropriate attention toward any impulse to regard the seen as endearing, which in turn requires that you judge the allure of the seen—or of the thought of “endearing”—as not worth the drawbacks of falling for that allure. Then you have to keep this

judgment in mind with everything you see, hear, sense, and cognize. The ability to keep this judgment in mind is the actual function of mindfulness in this case.

In other words, instead of truncating your mental faculties, you use them wisely to attack the problem precisely at its cause: the passion that wants to find in the six senses endearing things to feed on. When your attack is strategically on target, you have a chance of getting the best results.

When we understand the instructions to Bāhiya in this way, we can see that they fall in line with the teaching that provides the framework for all the Buddha's teachings and all experiences of awakening: the standard definition of the four noble truths. Suffering is caused not by conceptual frameworks or judgments in general, but by the desire and passion that constitute craving. The path to its ending starts with appropriate attention to that craving—in other words, the distinctions drawn by the framework of right view, and the choices and duties following on those distinctions.

This explanation of the Buddha's instructions to Bāhiya may sound more complex than many of the one-factor solutions proposed by other interpretations, and you might ask how Bāhiya could comprehend all this while bowing at the Buddha's feet. But remember: Bāhiya was fast. He could see immediately that the problem following on the seen was passion, and that it had to be attacked at whatever fed the passion. Once he had clearly gained that insight, all the factors for a noble attainment were in place: joyous conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. Everything else followed in a flash.

## READINGS

§ 51. Then the Blessed One, traveling by stages, arrived at Uruvelā. At that time, three dreadlocked ascetics were dwelling near Uruvelā: Uruvelakassapa, Nadīkassapa, & Gayākassapa. Among them, Uruvelakassapa was the leader of five hundred dreadlocked ascetics—their trainer, head, foremost, & chief. Nadīkassapa was the leader of three hundred dreadlocked ascetics—their trainer, head, foremost, & chief. Gayākassapa was the leader of two hundred dreadlocked ascetics—their trainer, head, foremost, & chief.

Then the Blessed One went to Uruvelakassapa's ashram and said to Uruvelakassapa, "If it's not a burden for you, Kassapa, we would stay one night in your fire hall."

"It's not a burden for me, Great Contemplative. But there is a fierce nāga king there—powerful, a fanged snake, terrifyingly poisonous. May he not harass you."

A second time... A third time, the Blessed One said to Uruvelakassapa, "If it's not a burden for you, Kassapa, we would stay one night in your fire hall."

"It's not a burden for me, Great Contemplative. But there is a fierce nāga king there—powerful, a fanged snake, terrifyingly poisonous. May he not harass you."

"Perhaps he wouldn't harass me. Please, Kassapa, allow the fire hall."

"Stay as you like, Great Contemplative."

Then the Blessed One, having entered the fire hall and laid out a grass mat, sat down cross-legged with his body erect, establishing mindfulness to the fore. The nāga saw that the Blessed One had entered and, on seeing him, was upset, disgruntled, and emitted smoke. The thought occurred to the Blessed One, "Why don't I—without damaging

his outer skin, inner skin, flesh, tendons, bones, or bone marrow—consume the nāga’s fire with my own fire?”

Then the Blessed One fabricated such a fabrication of supranormal power that he emitted smoke. The nāga, unable to bear the insult, blazed up. The Blessed One entered the fire property and blazed up. With both of them all ablaze, the fire hall was as if on fire—flaming & glowing.

Then the dreadlocked ascetics surrounded the fire hall and thought, “That handsome Great Contemplative is being harassed by the nāga!”

Then, as the night was ending, the Blessed One, having consumed the nāga’s fire with fire—without damaging his outer skin, inner skin, flesh, tendons, bones, or bone marrow—put him in his bowl and showed him to Uruvelakassapa, the dreadlocked ascetic, “Here, Kassapa, is your nāga, his fire consumed by fire.”

The thought occurred to Uruvelakassapa, “He’s powerful, the Great Contemplative, and mighty, in that he consumed with fire the fire of the fierce nāga king, the fanged snake, terrifyingly poisonous! But still, he’s not an arahant like me.” ...

*[Here follow many psychic powers displayed by the Buddha.]*

At that time, a great, out-of-season storm cloud rained down, and a great flood was produced. The place where the Blessed One was staying was inundated with the water. He thought, “Why don’t I, pushing the water back all around, walk back & forth in the middle on dusty ground?”

Then the Blessed One, pushing the water back all around, walked back & forth in the middle on dusty ground.

Then Uruvelakassapa, (thinking,) “May the Great Contemplative not be carried away by the water!” went by boat with many dreadlocked ascetics to the place where the Blessed One was staying. Uruvelakassapa saw the Blessed One, having pushed the water back all around, walking back & forth in the middle on dusty ground. He said, “Are you here, Great Contemplative?”

Saying, “Yes, I am, Kassapa,” the Blessed One rose up into the air and came down in the boat.

The thought occurred to Uruvelakassapa, “He’s powerful, the Great Contemplative, and mighty, in that he wasn’t carried away by the water. But still, he’s not an arahant like me.”

Then it occurred to the Blessed One, “For a long time this worthless man keeps having the thought, ‘He’s powerful, the Great Contemplative, and mighty, but still, he’s not an arahant like me.’ What if I were to terrify this dreadlocked ascetic?”

So he said to Uruvelakassapa, “You, Kassapa, are neither an arahant nor one endowed with the path to arahantship. You don’t even have a way of practice by which you would become an arahant or one endowed with the path to arahantship.”

Then Uruvelakassapa, putting his head down at the feet of the Blessed One, said, “May I receive the Going-forth in the Blessed One’s presence? May I receive the Acceptance?”

“Kassapa, you are the leader of five hundred dreadlocked ascetics—their trainer, head, foremost, & chief. Inform them of this, (so that) they will do what they think (is appropriate).”

Then Uruvelakassapa went to the dreadlocked ascetics and, on arrival, said to them, “Sirs, I want to live the holy life under the Great Contemplative. Do what you think (is appropriate).”

“For a long time, sir, we’ve been highly impressed with the Great Contemplative. If you’re going to live the holy life under him, all of us will likewise live the holy life under him.”

So the dreadlocked ascetics—having let the water carry away the mingled mess of their hair, their dreadlocks, their ritual vessels, carrying poles, & fire-worship paraphernalia—went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having put their heads at the Blessed One’s feet, they said, “May we receive the Going-forth in the Blessed One’s presence? May we receive the Acceptance?”

“Come, monks,” said the Blessed One. “Well taught is the Dhamma. Live the holy life for the right ending of stress.”

That was the venerable ones’ Acceptance.

— [\*Mv 1:9–20.19\*](#)

*[The two remaining bands of ascetics are quickly converted.]*

Then the Blessed One, having stayed near Uruvelā as long as he liked, set out for Gayā Head with a large Saṅgha of monks—a thousand monks, all of them the former dreadlocked ascetics. And the Blessed One stayed right there at Gayā Head with the thousand monks. There he addressed the monks:

“Monks, the All is aflame. Which All is aflame? The eye is aflame. Forms are aflame. Eye-consciousness is aflame. Eye-contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on eye-contact—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging & death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs.

“The ear is aflame. Sounds are aflame....

“The nose is aflame. Aromas are aflame....

“The tongue is aflame. Flavors are aflame....

“The body is aflame. Tactile sensations are aflame....

“The intellect is aflame. Ideas are aflame. Intellect-consciousness is aflame. Intellect-contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on intellect-contact—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I say, with birth, aging & death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs.

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with eye-consciousness, disenchanted with eye-contact. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on eye-contact, experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain: With that, too, he grows disenchanted.

“He grows disenchanted with the ear....

“He grows disenchanted with the nose....

“He grows disenchanted with the tongue....

“He grows disenchanted with the body....

“He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas, disenchanted with intellect-consciousness, disenchanted with intellect-contact. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on intellect-contact, experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain: With that, too, he grows disenchanted. 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 the thousand monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

— [\*Mv 1:21\*](#)

§ 52. Now on that occasion, the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha, in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels' Sanctuary. Then thirty monks from Pāva—all wilderness dwellers, all alms-goers, all cast-off rag wearers, all triple-robe wearers, all still with fetters—went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side.

Then the thought occurred to the Blessed One, “These thirty monks from Pāva... are all still with fetters. What if I were to teach them the Dhamma in such a way that in this very sitting their minds, through lack of clinging, would be released from effluents?”

So he addressed the monks: “Monks.”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, “From an inconceivable beginning comes the wandering-on. A beginning point is not discernible, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. What do you think, monks? Which is greater, the blood you have shed from having your heads cut off while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time, or the water in the four great oceans?”

“As we understand the Dhamma taught to us by the Blessed One, this is the greater: the blood we have shed from having our heads cut off while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time, not the water in the four great oceans.”

“Excellent, monks. Excellent. It is excellent that you thus understand the Dhamma taught by me.



“This is the greater: the blood you have shed from having your heads cut off while transmigrating & wandering this long, long time, not the water in the four great oceans.

“The blood you have shed when, being cows, you had your cow-heads cut off: Long has this been greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“The blood you have shed when, being water buffaloes, you had your water buffalo-heads cut off... when, being rams, you had your ram-heads cut off... when, being goats, you had your goat-heads cut off... when, being deer, you had your deer-heads cut off... when, being chickens, you had your chicken-heads cut off... when, being pigs, you had your pig-heads cut off: Long has this been greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“The blood you have shed when, arrested as thieves plundering villages, you had your heads cut off... when, arrested as highway thieves, you had your heads cut off... when, arrested as adulterers, you had your heads cut off: Long has this been greater than the water in the four great oceans.

“Why is that? From an inconceivable beginning comes the wandering-on. A beginning point is not discernible, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries—enough to become disenchanted with all fabrications, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.”

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 the thirty monks from Pāva—through lack of clinging—were released from effluents.

§ 53. On one occasion the Blessed One was wandering among the Kosalans with a large Saṅgha of monks. He saw, as he was going along the road in a certain district, a large mass of fire—aflame, blazing, aglow. Seeing it, he went down from the road and sat down on a seat made ready at the root of a certain tree.

Seated, he said to the monks, “Monks, do you see that large mass of fire—aflame, blazing, aglow?”

“Yes, lord.”

[1] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? To sit or lie down hugging that great mass of fire—aflame, blazing, aglow—or to sit or lie down hugging a noble-warrior maiden or brahman maiden or householder maiden with soft & tender hands & feet?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to sit or lie down hugging a noble-warrior maiden or brahman maiden or householder maiden with soft & tender hands & feet. It would simply be painful to sit or lie down hugging that great mass of fire—aflame, blazing, aglow.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better to sit or lie down hugging that great mass of fire—aflame, blazing, aglow.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character... filthy by nature were to sit or lie down hugging a noble-warrior maiden or

brahman maiden or householder maiden with soft & tender hands & feet, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death, he would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

[2] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? For a strong man, having wrapped a rough horse-hair rope around both your shins, to tighten it so that it would cut through the skin; having cut through the skin, it would cut through the inner skin; having cut through the inner skin, it would cut through the flesh; having cut through the flesh, it would cut through the tendons; having cut through the tendons, it would cut through the bone; having cut through the bone, it would destroy the marrow—or for you to consent to the homage paid by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to consent to the homage paid by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders. It would simply be painful for a strong man, having wrapped a rough horse-hair rope around both our shins, to tighten it so that it would cut through the skin; having cut through the skin, it would cut through the inner skin; having cut through the inner skin, it would cut through the flesh; having cut through the flesh, it would cut through the tendons; having cut through the tendons, it would cut through the bone; having cut through the bone, it would destroy the marrow.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better for a strong man, having wrapped a rough horse-hair rope around both his shins, to tighten it so that it would cut through the skin; having cut through the

skin, it would cut through the inner skin; having cut through the inner skin, it would cut through the flesh; having cut through the flesh, it would cut through the tendons; having cut through the tendons, it would cut through the bone; having cut through the bone, it would destroy the marrow.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character... filthy by nature were to consent to the homage paid by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death, he would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

[3] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? For a strong man to stab you in the chest with a sharp spear smeared with oil, or for you to consent to the reverential greetings of affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to consent to the reverential greetings of affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders. It would simply be painful for a strong man to stab us in the chest with a sharp spear smeared with oil.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better for a strong man to stab him in the chest with a sharp speared smeared with oil.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after

death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character... filthy by nature were to consent to the reverential greetings of affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death, he would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

[4] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? For a strong man to wrap your body in a hot iron sheet—aflame, blazing, aglow—or for you to use a robe given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to use a robe given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders. It would simply be painful for a strong man to wrap our body in a hot iron sheet—aflame, blazing, aglow.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better for a strong man to wrap his body in a hot iron sheet—aflame, blazing, aglow.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character... filthy by nature were to use a robe given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death, he

would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

[5] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? For a strong man, having forced open your mouth with an iron stake—aflame, blazing, aglow—to stick in a hot copper ball—aflame, blazing, aglow—that would burn your lips, burn your tongue, burn your throat, burn your chest, and come out below, dragging along your small & large intestines—or for you to eat the alms food given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to eat the alms food given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders. It would simply be painful for a strong man, having forced open our mouth with an iron stake—aflame, blazing, aglow—to stick in a hot copper ball—aflame, blazing, aglow—that would burn our lips, burn our tongue, burn our throat, burn our chest, and come out below, dragging along our small & large intestines.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better for a strong man, having forced open his mouth with an iron stake—aflame, blazing, aglow—to stick in a hot copper ball—aflame, blazing, aglow—that would burn his lips, burn his tongue, burn his throat, burn his chest, and come out below, dragging along his small & large intestines.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character... filthy by

nature were to eat the alms food given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death, he would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

[6] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? For a strong man, having seized you by the head or shoulders, to force you to sit or lie down on a hot iron chair or iron bed—aflame, blazing, aglow—or for you to use a chair or bed given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to use a chair or bed given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders. It would simply be painful for a strong man, having seized us by the head or shoulders, to force us to sit or lie down on a hot iron chair or iron bed—aflame, blazing, aglow.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better for a strong man, having seized him by the head or shoulders, to force him to sit or lie down on a hot iron chair or iron bed—aflame, blazing, aglow.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character... filthy by nature were to use a chair or bed given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death,

he would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

[7] “What do you think, monks: Which would be better? For a strong man, having seized you and turned you upside down, to throw you in a hot copper cauldron—aflame, blazing, aglow—where, boiling in a heap of froth, you would sometimes sink, sometimes rise, sometimes go side-to-side, or for you to use a dwelling given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders?”

“Of course this would be better, lord: to use a dwelling given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders. It would simply be painful for a strong man, having seized us and turned us upside down, to throw us in a hot copper cauldron—aflame, blazing, aglow—where, boiling in a heap of froth, we would sometimes sink, sometimes rise, sometimes go side-to-side.”

“I inform you, monks. I warn you, monks: For someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—it would be better for a strong man, having seized him and turned him upside down, to throw him in a hot copper cauldron—aflame, blazing, aglow—where, boiling in a heap of froth, he would sometimes sink, sometimes rise, sometimes go side-to-side.

“Why is that? For that reason he would undergo death or death-like pain, but he would not on that account, at the breakup of the body, after death, fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But if someone who is unprincipled, of evil character—unclean and suspect in his dealings, hidden in his actions, not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to



do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—were to use a dwelling given out of conviction by affluent noble warriors, affluent brahmans, or affluent householders, it would be for his long-term harm & pain. At the breakup of the body, after death, he would fall into a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

“Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves: ‘The services of those whose robes, alms-food, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick that we use will bring them great fruit & great reward; and our going forth will not be barren, but fruitful & fertile.’ That’s how you should train yourselves. For one who envisions his own good, it’s enough to achieve consummation through heedfulness. For one who envisions the good of others, it’s enough to reach consummation through heedfulness. For one who envisions the good of both, it’s enough to reach consummation through heedfulness.”

That is what the Blessed One said. And while this explanation was being given, sixty-some monks vomited hot blood, sixty-some monks renounced the training and returned to the lower life [saying,] “It’s so hard to do, Blessed One, so very hard to do,” while the minds of sixty-some monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

— [AN 7:69](#)

§ 54. I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Sāriputta was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now, at that time this evil viewpoint [*diṭṭhigata*] had arisen to Ven. Yamaka: “As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.” A large number of monks heard, “They say that this evil viewpoint has arisen to Ven. Yamaka: ‘As I understand the

Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.” So they went to Ven. Yamaka and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, they sat to one side. As they were sitting there they said to Ven. Yamaka, “Is it true, friend Yamaka, that this evil viewpoint has arisen to you: ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.’

“Yes, friends. As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.”

“Don’t say that, friend Yamaka. Don’t misrepresent the Blessed One. It’s not good to misrepresent the Blessed One, for the Blessed One would not say, ‘A monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.’”

But even though Ven. Yamaka was thus rebuked by those monks, he—from stubbornness & attachment—maintained his adherence to that evil viewpoint: ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.’

When those monks could not pry Ven. Yamaka loose from his evil viewpoint, they got up from their seats and went to Ven. Sāriputta. On arrival they said to him: “Friend Sāriputta, this evil viewpoint has arisen to Ven. Yamaka: ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.’ It would be good if you would go to Ven. Yamaka out of sympathy for his sake.”

Ven. Sāriputta consented by remaining silent.

Then, having left his seclusion in the late afternoon, Ven. Sāriputta went to Ven. Yamaka 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. Yamaka, “Is it true, friend Yamaka, that this evil viewpoint has arisen to you: ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.’”

“Yes, friend Sāriputta. As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death.”

“What do you think, friend Yamaka? Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, my friend.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, my friend.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, my friend.”

“... Is feeling constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, my friend.” ...

“... Is perception constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, my friend.”

...

“... Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, my friend.” ...

“Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, my friend.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, my friend.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, my friend.”

“Thus, friend Yamaka, 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, friend Yamaka, the 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.’

“What do you think, friend Yamaka? Do you regard form as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard feeling as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard perception as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard fabrications as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard consciousness as the Tathāgata?”

“No, my friend.”

“What do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as being in form? ... Elsewhere than form? ... In feeling? ... Elsewhere than feeling? ... In perception? ... Elsewhere than perception? ... In fabrications? ... Elsewhere than fabrications? ... In consciousness?... Elsewhere than consciousness?”

“No, my friend.”

“What do you think? Do you regard the Tathāgata as form-feeling-perception-fabrications-consciousness?”

“No, my friend.”

“Do you regard the Tathāgata as that which is without form, without feeling, without perception, without fabrications, without consciousness?”

“No, my friend.”

“And so, friend Yamaka—when you can’t pin down the Tathāgata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, ‘As I understand the Teaching explained by the Blessed One, a monk with no more effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, & does not exist after death’?”

“Previously, friend Sāriputta, I did foolishly hold that evil viewpoint. But now, having heard your explanation of the Dhamma, I have abandoned that evil viewpoint and have broken through to the Dhamma.”

“Then, friend Yamaka, how would you answer if you are thus asked: ‘A monk, a worthy one, with no more effluents: What is he on the break-up of the body, after death?’”

“Thus asked, I would answer, ‘Form is inconstant... Feeling... Perception... Fabrications... Consciousness is inconstant. That which is inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has ceased and gone to its end.’”

“Very good, friend Yamaka. Very good. In that case I will give you an analogy for the sake of making your understanding of this point even greater. Suppose there were a householder or householder’s son—rich, wealthy, with many possessions—who was thoroughly well-guarded. Then suppose there came along a certain man, desiring what was not his benefit, desiring what was not his welfare, desiring his loss of security, desiring to kill him. The thought would occur to this man: ‘It would not be easy to kill this person by force. What if I were to sneak in and then kill him?’

“So he would go to the householder or householder’s son and say, ‘May you take me on as a servant, lord.’ With that, the householder or householder’s son would take the man on as a servant.

“Having been taken on as a servant, the man would rise in the morning before his master, go to bed in the evening only after his master, doing whatever his master ordered, always acting to please him, speaking politely to him. Then the householder or householder’s son would come to regard him as a friend & companion, and would fall into his trust. When the man realizes, ‘This householder or householder’s son trusts me,’ then encountering him in a solitary place, he would kill him with a sharp knife.

“Now what do you think, friend Yamaka? When that man went to the householder or householder’s son and said, ‘May you take me on as a servant, lord’: wasn’t he even then a murderer? And yet although he was a murderer, the householder or householder’s son didn’t know him as ‘my murderer.’ And when, taken on as a servant, he would rise in the

morning before his master, go to bed in the evening only after his master, doing whatever his master ordered, always acting to please him, speaking politely to him: wasn't he even then a murderer? And yet although he was a murderer, the householder or householder's son didn't know him as 'my murderer.' And when he encountered him in a solitary place and killed him with a sharp knife: wasn't he even then a murderer? And yet although he was a murderer, the householder or householder's son didn't know him as 'my murderer.'"

"Yes, my friend."

"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 to be the self....

"He assumes perception to be the self....

"He assumes 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.

"He doesn't discern inconstant form, as it has come to be, as 'inconstant form.' He doesn't discern inconstant feeling, as it has come to be, as 'inconstant feeling.' He doesn't discern inconstant perception.... He doesn't discern inconstant fabrications.... He doesn't discern inconstant consciousness, as it has come to be, as 'inconstant consciousness.'

"He doesn't discern stressful form, as it has come to be, as 'stressful form.' He doesn't discern stressful feeling.... He doesn't discern stressful perception.... He doesn't discern stressful fabrications.... He doesn't

discern stressful consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful consciousness.’

“He doesn’t discern not-self form, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self form.’ He doesn’t discern not-self feeling.... He doesn’t discern not-self perception.... He doesn’t discern not-self fabrications.... He doesn’t discern not-self consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self consciousness.’

“He doesn’t discern fabricated form, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated form.’ He doesn’t discern fabricated feeling.... He doesn’t discern fabricated perception.... He doesn’t discern fabricated fabrications.... He doesn’t discern fabricated consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated consciousness.’

“He doesn’t discern murderous form, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous form.’ He doesn’t discern murderous feeling.... He doesn’t discern murderous perception.... He doesn’t discern murderous fabrications.... He doesn’t discern murderous consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He gets attached to form, clings to form, & determines it to be ‘my self.’ He gets attached to feeling.... He gets attached to perception.... He gets attached to fabrications.... He gets attached to consciousness, clings to consciousness, & determines it to be ‘my self.’ These five clinging-aggregates—attached to, clung to—lead to his long-term loss & suffering.

“Now, 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 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....



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

“He doesn’t assume 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 discerns inconstant form, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant form.’ He discerns inconstant feeling.... He discerns inconstant perception.... He discerns inconstant fabrications.... He discerns inconstant consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘inconstant consciousness.’

“He discerns stressful form, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful form.’ He discerns stressful feeling.... He discerns stressful perception.... He discerns stressful fabrications.... He discerns stressful consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘stressful consciousness.’

“He discerns not-self form, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self form.’ He discerns not-self feeling.... He discerns not-self perception.... He discerns not-self fabrications.... He discerns not-self consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘not-self consciousness.’

“He discerns fabricated form, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated form.’ He discerns fabricated feeling.... He discerns fabricated perception.... He discerns fabricated fabrications.... He discerns fabricated consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘fabricated consciousness.’

“He discerns murderous form, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous form.’ He discerns murderous feeling.... He discerns murderous perception.... He discerns murderous fabrications.... He discerns murderous consciousness, as it has come to be, as ‘murderous consciousness.’

“He doesn’t get attached to form, doesn’t cling to form, doesn’t determine it to be ‘my self.’ He doesn’t get attached to feeling.... He doesn’t get attached to perception.... He doesn’t get attached to fabrications.... He doesn’t get attached to consciousness, doesn’t cling to consciousness, doesn’t determine it to be ‘my self.’ These five clinging-aggregates—not attached to, not clung to—lead to his long-term happiness & well-being.”

“Even so, friend Sāriputta, are those who have people like you as their companions in the holy life, teaching them, admonishing them out of sympathy, desiring their welfare. For now that I have heard this explanation of the Dhamma from you, my mind—through lack of clinging/sustenance—has been released from effluents.”

— [SN 22:85](#)

§ 55. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra’s mother. And on that occasion—the uposatha of the fifteenth, the night of a very full moon—he was sitting out in the open with the Saṅgha of monks.

Then a certain monk, rising from his seat, arranging his robe over one shoulder, and placing his hands palm-to-palm over the heart, said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, there is an area where, if the Blessed One would give me leave, I would like the answer to a question.”

“Very well, then, monk. Sit back down in your seat and ask whatever you want.”

Responding to the Blessed One, “Yes, lord,” the monk sat back down in his seat and said to the Blessed One, “Aren’t these the five clinging-aggregates, i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate.”

“Monk, these are the five clinging-aggregates, i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk delighted & approved of the Blessed One’s words and then asked him a further question: “But in what, lord, are these five clinging-aggregates rooted?”

“Monk, these five clinging-aggregates are rooted in desire.”<sup>1</sup>

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “Is clinging the same thing as the five clinging-aggregates, or is clinging separate from the five clinging-aggregates?”

“Monk, clinging is neither the same thing as the five clinging-aggregates, nor is it separate from the five clinging-aggregates. Just that whatever passion & delight is there, that’s the clinging there.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “Might there be diversity in the desire & passion for the five clinging-aggregates?”

“There might, monk. There is the case where the thought occurs to someone, ‘May I be one with such a form in the future. May I be one with such a feeling... perception... fabrications... such a consciousness in the future. This is how there would be diversity in the desire & passion for the five clinging-aggregates.’”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “To what extent does the designation ‘aggregate’ apply to the aggregates?”

“Monk, whatever form is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the form aggregate. Whatever feeling is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near:

That is called the feeling aggregate. Whatever perception is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the perception aggregate. Whatever fabrications are past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Those are called the fabrications aggregate. Whatever consciousness is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: That is called the consciousness aggregate. This is the extent to which the term ‘aggregate’ applies to the aggregates.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “Lord, what is the cause, what the condition, for the delineation<sup>2</sup> of the form aggregate? What is the cause, what the condition, for the delineation of the feeling aggregate... the perception aggregate... the fabrications aggregate... the consciousness aggregate?”

“Monk, the four great existents [earth, water, fire, & wind] are the cause, the four great existents the condition, for the delineation of the form aggregate. Contact is the cause, contact the condition, for the delineation of the feeling aggregate. Contact is the cause, contact the condition, for the delineation of the perception aggregate. Contact is the cause, contact the condition, for the delineation of the fabrications aggregate. Name-&-form is the cause, name-&-form the condition, for the delineation of the consciousness aggregate.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “Lord, how does self-identity view come about?”

“There is the case, monk, 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—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 to be the self, or the self as possessing feeling, or feeling as in the self, or the self as in feeling. He assumes perception to be the self, or the self as possessing perception, or perception as in the self, or the self as in perception. He assumes fabrications to be the self, or the self as possessing fabrications, or fabrications as in the self, or the self as in 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.

“This, monk, is how self-identity view comes about.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “Lord, how does self-identity view no longer come about?”

“There is the case, monk, 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 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.... doesn’t assume perception to be the self.... doesn’t assume 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.

“This, monk, is how self-identity view no longer comes about.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “What, lord, is the allure of form? What is its drawback? What is the escape from it? What is the allure of feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness? What is its drawback? What is the escape from it?”

“Monk, whatever pleasure & joy arises dependent on form: That is the allure of form. The fact that form is inconstant, stressful, subject to change: That is the drawback of form. The subduing of desire & passion, the abandoning of desire & passion for form: That is the escape from form.

“Whatever pleasure & joy arises dependent on feeling: That is the allure of feeling....

“Whatever pleasure & joy arises dependent on perception: That is the allure of perception....

“Whatever pleasure & joy arises dependent on fabrications: That is the allure of fabrications....

“Whatever pleasure & joy arises dependent on consciousness: That is the allure of consciousness. The fact that consciousness is inconstant, stressful, subject to change: That is the drawback of consciousness. The subduing of desire & passion, the abandoning of desire & passion for consciousness: That is the escape from consciousness.”

Saying, “Very good, lord,” the monk... asked him a further question: “Knowing in what way, seeing in what way, is there—with regard to this body endowed with consciousness, and with regard to all external signs—no longer any I-making, or my-making, or obsession with conceit?”

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

“One sees any feeling whatsoever... any perception whatsoever... any fabrications whatsoever...

“One sees any consciousness whatsoever—past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near

—every consciousness—as it has come to be with right discernment: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’”

“Monk, knowing in this way, seeing in this way is there—with regard to this body endowed with consciousness, and with regard to all external signs—no longer any I-making, or my-making, or obsession with conceit.”

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 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-some monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

— [\*MN 109\*](#)



## NOTES

1. As [AN 10:58](#) notes, all phenomena (*dhamma*) are rooted in desire. ↵
2. Delineation (*paññāpana*) literally means, “making discernible.” This apparently refers to the intentional aspect of perception, which takes the objective side of experience and fabricates it into discernible objects. In the case of the aggregates, the four great existents, contact, and name-&-form provide the objective basis for discerning them, while the process of fabrication takes the raw material provided by the objective basis and turns it into discernible instances of the aggregates. This process is described in slightly different terms in [SN 22:79](#). ↵

§ 56. On one occasion, many elder monks were staying near Kosambī at Ghosita’s monastery. And at that time Ven. Khemaka was staying at the Jujube Tree Park, diseased, in pain, severely ill. Then in the late afternoon the elder monks left their seclusion and addressed Ven. Dāsaka, (saying,) “Come, friend Dāsaka. Go to the monk Khemaka and on arrival say to him, ‘The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, “We hope you are getting better, friend. We hope you are comfortable. We hope that your pains are lessening and not increasing. We hope that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing.”’”

Replying, “As you say, friends,” to the elder monks, Ven. Dāsaka went to Ven. Khemaka and on arrival said to him: “The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, ‘We hope you are getting better, friend. We hope you are comfortable. We hope that your pains are lessening and not increasing. We hope that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing.’”

“I am not getting better, my friend. I am not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening.”

Then Ven. Dāsaka went to the elder monks and, on arrival, said to them, “The monk Khemaka has said to me, ‘I am not getting better, my friend. I am not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening.’”

“Come, friend Dāsaka. Go to the monk Khemaka and on arrival say to him, ‘The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, “Concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: Do you assume anything with regard to these five clinging-aggregates to be self or belonging to self?”’”

Replying, “As you say, friends,” to the elder monks, Ven. Dāsaka went to Ven. Khemaka and on arrival said to him, “The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, ‘Concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: Do you assume anything with regard to these five clinging-aggregates to be self or belonging to self?’”

“Friend, concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, there is nothing I assume to be self or belonging to self.”

Then Ven. Dāsaka went to the elder monks and, on arrival, said to them, “The monk Khemaka has said to me, ‘Friend, concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form

clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, there is nothing I assume to be self or belonging to self.”

“Come, friend Dāsaka. Go to the monk Khemaka and on arrival say to him, ‘The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, “Concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: If, with regard to these five clinging-aggregates, Ven. Khemaka assumes nothing to be self or belonging to self, then Ven. Khemaka is an arahant, devoid of effluents.”’”

Replying, “As you say, friends,” to the elder monks, Ven. Dāsaka went to Ven. Khemaka and on arrival said to him, “The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, ‘Concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: If, with regard to these five clinging-aggregates, Ven. Khemaka assumes nothing to be self or belonging to self, then Ven. Khemaka is an arahant, devoid of effluents.’”

“Friend, concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, there is nothing I assume to be self or belonging to self, and yet I am not an arahant. With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, ‘I am’ is found, although I don’t assume that ‘I am this.’”

Then Ven. Dāsaka went to the elder monks and, on arrival, said to them, “The monk Khemaka has said to me, ‘Friend, concerning these five clinging-aggregates described by the Blessed One—i.e., the form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrications clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate: With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, there is nothing I assume to be self or belonging to self, and yet I am not an arahant. With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, “I am” is found, although I don’t assume that “I am this.”’”

“Come, friend Dāsaka. Go to the monk Khemaka and on arrival say to him, ‘The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, “Friend Khemaka, this ‘I am’ of which you speak: What do you say ‘I am’? Do you say, ‘I am form,’ or do you say, ‘I am something other than form’? Do you say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ or do you say, ‘I am something other than consciousness’? This ‘I am’ of which you speak: What do you say ‘I am’?’”’”

Replying, “As you say, friends,” to the elder monks, Ven. Dāsaka went to Ven. Khemaka and on arrival said to him, “The elders, friend Khemaka, say to you, ‘Friend Khemaka, this “I am” of which you speak: What do you say “I am”? Do you say, “I am form,” or do you say, “I am something other than form”? Do you say, “I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,” or do you say, “I am something other than consciousness” ‘? This “I am” of which you speak: What do you say “I am”?’”

“Enough, friend Dāsaka. What is accomplished by this running back & forth? Fetch me my staff. I will go to the elder monks myself.”

Then Ven. Khemaka, leaning on his staff, went to the elder monks and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with them. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he

was sitting there, the elder monks said to him, “Friend Khemaka, this ‘I am’ of which you speak: What do you say ‘I am’? Do you say, ‘I am form,’ or do you say, ‘I am something other than form’? Do you say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ or do you say, ‘I am something other than consciousness’? This ‘I am’ of which you speak: What do you say ‘I am’?”

“Friends, it’s not that I say ‘I am form,’ nor do I say ‘I am something other than form.’ It’s not that I say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ nor do I say, ‘I am something other than consciousness.’ With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, ‘I am’ is found, although I don’t assume that ‘I am this.’

“It’s just like the scent of a blue, red, or white lotus: If someone were to call it the scent of a petal or the scent of the color or the scent of a filament, would he be speaking correctly?”

“No, friend.”

“Then how would he describe it if he were describing it correctly?”

“As the scent of the flower: That’s how he would describe it if he were describing it correctly.”

“In the same way, friends, it’s not that I say ‘I am form,’ nor do I say ‘I am other than form.’ It’s not that I say, ‘I am feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness,’ nor do I say, ‘I am something other than consciousness.’ With regard to these five clinging-aggregates, ‘I am’ is found, although I don’t assume that ‘I am this.’

“Friends, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters, he still has with regard to the five clinging-aggregates a lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, an ‘I am’ desire, an ‘I am’ obsession. But at a later time he keeps focusing on the phenomena of arising & passing away with regard to the five clinging-aggregates: ‘Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling.... Such is

perception.... Such are fabrications.... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.’ As he keeps focusing on the arising & passing away of these five clinging-aggregates, the lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, ‘I am’ desire, ‘I am’ obsession is fully obliterated.

“Just like a cloth, dirty & stained: Its owners give it over to a washerman, who scrubs it with salt earth or lye or cow-dung and then rinses it in clear water. Now, even though the cloth is clean & spotless, it still has a lingering residual scent of salt earth or lye or cow-dung. The washerman gives it to the owners, the owners put it away in a scent-infused wicker hamper, and its lingering residual scent of salt earth, lye, or cow-dung is fully obliterated.

“In the same way, friends, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower fetters, he still has with regard to the five clinging-aggregates a lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, an ‘I am’ desire, an ‘I am’ obsession. But at a later time he keeps focusing on arising & passing away with regard to the five clinging-aggregates: ‘Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling.... Such is perception.... Such are fabrications.... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.’ As he keeps focusing on the arising & passing away of these five clinging-aggregates, the lingering residual ‘I am’ conceit, ‘I am’ desire, ‘I am’ obsession is fully obliterated.”

When this was said, the elder monks said to Ven. Khemaka, “We didn’t cross-examine Ven. Khemaka with the purpose of troubling him, just that (we thought) Ven. Khemaka is capable of declaring the Blessed One’s message, teaching it, describing it, setting it forth, revealing it, explaining it, making it plain—just as he has in fact declared it, taught it, described it, set it forth, revealed it, explained it, made it plain.”

That is what Ven. Khemaka said. Gratified, the elder monks delighted in his words. And while this explanation was being given, the

minds of sixty-some monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents—as was Ven. Khemaka’s.

— [SN 22:89](#)

§ 57. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Monastery. There he addressed the monks: “Monks!”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded to him.

“Monks, I will teach you the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end; I will expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its essence, entirely complete, surpassingly pure—in other words, the six sextets. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

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

The Blessed One said: “The six internal media should be known. The six external media should be known. The six classes of consciousness should be known. The six classes of contact should be known. The six classes of feeling should be known. The six classes of craving should be known.

“‘The six internal media should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? The eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. ‘The six internal media should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the first sextet.

“‘The six external media should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? The form-medium, the sound-medium, the aroma-medium, the flavor-medium, the tactile sensation-medium, the idea-medium. ‘The six external media should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the second sextet.

“‘The six classes of consciousness should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. ‘The six classes of consciousness should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the third sextet.

“‘The six classes of contact should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. ‘The six classes of contact should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the fourth sextet.

“‘The six classes of feeling should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling.



Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. ‘The six classes of feeling should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the fifth sextet.

“‘The six classes of craving should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is

craving. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. 'The six classes of craving should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the sixth sextet.

"If anyone were to say, 'The eye is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable. The arising & falling away of the eye are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that 'My self arises & falls away.' That's why it wouldn't be tenable if anyone were to say, 'The eye is the self.' So the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Forms are the self,' that wouldn't be tenable.... Thus the eye is not-self and forms are not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Consciousness at the eye is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable.... Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Contact at the eye is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable.... Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Feeling is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable.... Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self, feeling is not self. If anyone were to say, 'Craving is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable. The arising & falling away of craving are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that 'My self arises & falls away.' That's why it wouldn't be tenable if anyone were to say, 'Craving is the self.' Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self, feeling is not self, craving is not-self.

"If anyone were to say, 'The ear is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable....

“If anyone were to say, ‘The nose is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable....

“If anyone were to say, ‘The tongue is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable....

“If anyone were to say, ‘The body is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable....

“If anyone were to say, ‘The intellect is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising & falling away of the intellect are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises & falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘The intellect is the self.’ So the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Ideas are the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable.... Thus the intellect is not-self and ideas are not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Consciousness at the intellect is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable.... Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Contact at the intellect is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable.... Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Feeling is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable.... Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self, feeling is not self. If anyone were to say, ‘Craving is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising & falling away of craving are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises & falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘Craving is the self.’ Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self, feeling is not self, craving is not-self.

“This, monks, is the path of practice leading to self-identity. One assumes about the eye that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’ One assumes about forms.... One assumes about consciousness at the eye.... One assumes about contact at the eye.... One assumes about feeling.... One assumes about craving that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’

“One assumes about the ear....

“One assumes about the nose....

“One assumes about the tongue....

“One assumes about the body....

“One assumes about the intellect that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’ One assumes about ideas.... One assumes about consciousness at the intellect.... One assumes about contact at the intellect.... One assumes about feeling.... One assumes about craving that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’

“Now, this is the path of practice leading to the cessation of self-identity. One assumes about the eye that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’ One assumes about forms.... One assumes about consciousness at the eye.... One assumes about contact at the eye.... One assumes about feeling.... One assumes about craving that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’

“One assumes about the ear....

“One assumes about the nose....

“One assumes about the tongue....

“One assumes about the body....

“One assumes about the intellect that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’ One assumes about ideas.... One assumes about consciousness at the intellect.... One assumes about contact at the

intellect.... One assumes about feeling.... One assumes about craving that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’

“Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one relishes it, welcomes it, or remains fastened to it, then one’s passion-obsession gets obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats one’s breast, becomes distraught, then one’s resistance-obsession gets obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one doesn’t discern, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then one’s ignorance-obsession gets obsessed.

“That a person—without abandoning passion-obsession with regard to a feeling of pleasure, without abolishing resistance-obsession with regard to a feeling of pain, without uprooting ignorance-obsession with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, without abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: Such a thing isn’t possible.

“Dependent on the ear & sounds....

“Dependent on the nose & aromas....

“Dependent on the tongue & flavors....

“Dependent on the body & tactile sensations....

“Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one relishes it, welcomes it, or remains fastened to it, then one’s passion-obsession gets obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one sorrows,

grieves, & laments, beats one's breast, becomes distraught, then one's resistance-obsession gets obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one doesn't discern, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then one's ignorance-obsession gets obsessed.

“That a person—without abandoning passion-obsession with regard to a feeling of pleasure, without abolishing resistance-obsession with regard to a feeling of pain, without uprooting ignorance-obsession with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, without abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: Such a thing isn't possible.

“Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one doesn't relish it, welcome it, or remain fastened to it, then one's passion-obsession doesn't get obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one doesn't sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat one's breast or become distraught, then one's resistance-obsession doesn't get obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, & escape from that feeling, then one's ignorance-obsession doesn't get obsessed.

“That a person—through abandoning passion-obsession with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing resistance-obsession with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting ignorance-obsession with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: Such a thing is possible.

“Dependent on the ear & sounds....

“Dependent on the nose & aromas....

“Dependent on the tongue & flavors....

“Dependent on the body & tactile sensations....

“Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one doesn’t relish it, welcome it, or remain fastened to it, then one’s passion-obsession doesn’t get obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one doesn’t sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat one’s breast or become distraught, then one’s resistance-obsession doesn’t get obsessed. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns, as it has come to be, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, & escape from that feeling, then one’s ignorance-obsession doesn’t get obsessed.

“That a person—through abandoning passion-obsession with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing resistance-obsession with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting ignorance-obsession with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: Such a thing is possible.

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with consciousness at the eye, disenchanted with contact at the eye, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with craving.

“He grows disenchanted with the ear...

“He grows disenchanted with the nose...

“He grows disenchanted with the tongue...

“He grows disenchanted with the body...

“He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas, disenchanted with consciousness at the intellect, disenchanted with contact at the intellect, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with craving. 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 at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of sixty-some monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

— [\*MN 148\*](#)

§ 58. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī in the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra’s mother. Now on that occasion—the uposatha day of the fifteenth, a perfect full-moon night—the Blessed One was sitting in the open air surrounded by the Saṅgha of monks. Surveying the silent Saṅgha of monks, he addressed them: “Monks, if there are any who ask, ‘Your listening to teachings that are skillful, noble, leading onward, going to self-awakening is a prerequisite for what?’ they should be told, ‘For the sake of knowing qualities of dualities as they have come to be.’ Which duality are you speaking about? ‘This is stress. This is the origination of stress’: This is one contemplation. ‘This is the cessation of stress. This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either



gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Those who don’t discern stress,  
what brings stress into play,  
& where it totally stops,  
without trace;  
who don’t know the path,  
the way to the stilling of stress:  
lowly  
in their awareness-release  
& discernment-release,  
incapable  
of making an end,  
they’re headed  
to birth & aging.

But those who discern stress,  
what brings stress into play,  
& where it totally stops,  
without trace;  
who discern the path,  
the way to the stilling of stress:  
consummate  
in their awareness-release  
& discernment-release,  
capable  
of making an end,

they aren't headed  
to birth & aging.<sup>1</sup>

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from acquisition<sup>2</sup> as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very acquisition, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“From acquisition as cause  
the many forms of stress  
come into being in the world.  
Whoever, unknowing,  
makes acquisitions  
—the dullard—  
comes to stress  
again & again.  
Therefore, discerning,  
you shouldn't create acquisitions  
as you stay focused on  
the birth & origin of stress.”

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is

all from ignorance as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Those who journey the wandering-on  
through birth & death, again & again,  
in this state here  
or anywhere else,  
that destination is simply through ignorance.  
This ignorance is a great delusion  
whereby they have wandered-on  
a long, long time.  
While beings immersed in clear knowing  
don’t go to further becoming.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from fabrication as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very fabrication, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Any stress that comes into play  
is all from fabrication  
as a requisite  
condition.

With the cessation of fabrication,  
there is no stress  
coming into play.

Knowing this drawback—  
that stress comes from fabrication  
as a requisite  
condition—

with the tranquilizing of all fabrication,  
with the stopping of perception:

That’s how there is  
the ending of stress.

Knowing this as it actually is,  
an attainer-of-knowledge

sees rightly.

Seeing rightly,

the wise—

conquering the fetter of Māra—  
go to no further becoming.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from consciousness as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very

consciousness, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Any stress that comes into play  
is all from consciousness  
as a requisite  
condition.

With the cessation of consciousness,  
there is no stress  
coming into play.

Knowing this drawback—  
that stress comes from consciousness  
as a requisite  
condition—

with the stilling of consciousness, the monk  
free from hunger  
is totally unbound.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from contact as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very contact, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, &

resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“For those overcome by contact,  
flowing along in the stream of becoming,  
following a miserable path,  
the ending of fetters  
is far away.  
While those who comprehend contact,  
delighting in stilling through discernment,  
they, by breaking through contact,  
free from hunger,  
are totally unbound.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from feeling as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very feeling, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Knowing that  
whatever is felt—  
pleasure, pain,

neither pleasure nor pain,  
within or without—  
is stressful;  
seeing        its deceptive nature,  
                 its dissolving,  
                 its passing away  
at each contact,  
                 each  
                 contact,  
he knows it right there:  
                 With just the ending of feeling,  
                 there is no stress  
                 coming into play.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from craving as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very craving, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“With craving his companion, a man  
wanders on a long, long time.  
Neither in this state here  
nor anywhere else  
does he go beyond

the wandering- on.  
Knowing this drawback—  
that craving brings stress into play—  
free from craving,  
devoid of clinging,  
mindful, the monk  
lives the mendicant life.”<sup>3</sup>

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from clinging as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very clinging, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“From clinging as a requisite condition  
comes becoming.  
One who has come into being  
goes  
to stress.  
There is death  
for one who is born.  
This is the coming into play  
of stress.  
Thus, with the ending of clinging, the wise  
seeing rightly,



directly knowing  
the ending of birth,  
go to no further becoming.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from arousal<sup>4</sup> as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very arousal, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Any stress that comes into play  
is all from arousal  
as a requisite  
condition.

With the cessation of arousal,  
there is no stress  
coming into play.

Knowing this drawback—  
that stress comes from arousal  
as a requisite  
condition—  
with the relinquishing  
of all arousal,  
a monk released in non-arousal,  
his craving for becoming crushed,

his mind at peace,  
his wandering-on in birth totally ended:

He has no further becoming.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from nutriment<sup>5</sup> as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of that very nutriment, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Any stress that comes into play  
is all from nutriment  
as a requisite  
condition.

With the cessation of nutriment,  
there is no stress  
coming into play.

Knowing this drawback—  
that stress comes from nutriment  
as a requisite  
condition—

|                      |                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| comprehending        | all nutriment,                 |
| independent          | of all nutriment, <sup>6</sup> |
| rightly seeing       |                                |
| freedom from disease |                                |

through the total ending  
of effluents,  
    judiciously associating,  
    a judge,  
he, an attainer-of-knowledge,  
goes beyond judgment,  
    beyond classification.<sup>7</sup>

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever stress comes into play is all from what is perturbed as a requisite condition’: This is one contemplation. ‘From the remainderless fading & cessation of what is perturbed, there is no coming into play of stress’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“Any stress that comes into play  
is all from what is perturbed  
    as a requisite  
    condition.

With the cessation of what is perturbed,  
    there is no stress  
    coming into play.

Knowing this drawback—  
that stress comes from what is perturbed  
    as a requisite

condition—  
the monk thus renouncing perturbation,  
putting a stop to fabrications,  
free from perturbation, free  
from clinging,  
mindful he lives  
the mendicant life.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘For one who is dependent, there is wavering’: This is one contemplation. ‘One who is independent doesn’t waver’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“One independent  
doesn’t  
waver.  
One dependent,  
clinging  
to this state here  
or anywhere else,  
doesn’t go beyond  
the wandering-on.  
Knowing this drawback—  
the great danger in  
dependencies—

in-  
dependent,  
free from clinging,  
mindful the monk  
lives the mendicant life.<sup>8</sup>

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Formless phenomena are more peaceful than forms’: This is one contemplation. ‘Cessation is more peaceful than formless phenomena’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

Those beings headed to forms,  
and those standing in the formless,  
with no knowledge of cessation,  
return to further becoming.  
But, comprehending form,  
not taking a stance in formless things,  
those released in cessation  
are people who’ve left death                      behind.<sup>9</sup>

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told, ‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever is considered as “This is true” by the world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, by this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk, is rightly seen as it has come to be with right discernment by the noble ones as

“This is false”: This is one contemplation. ‘Whatever is considered as “This is false” by the world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, by this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk, is rightly seen as it has come to be with right discernment by the noble ones as “This is true”’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“See the world, together with its devas,  
supposing not-self to be self.  
Entrenched in name-&-form,  
they suppose that ‘This is true.’  
In whatever terms they suppose it,  
it turns into something other than that,<sup>10</sup>  
and that’s what’s false about it:  
Changing,  
it’s deceptive by nature.  
Undeceptive by nature  
is unbinding<sup>11</sup>:  
That the noble ones know  
as true.  
They, through breaking through  
to the truth,  
hunger-free,  
are totally unbound.

“Now, if there are any who ask, ‘Would there be the right contemplation of dualities in yet another way?’ they should be told,

‘There would.’ How would that be? ‘Whatever is considered as “This is bliss” by the world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, by this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk, is rightly seen as it has come to be with right discernment by the noble ones as “This is stressful”’: This is one contemplation. ‘Whatever is considered as “This is stressful” by the world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, by this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk, is rightly seen as it has come to be with right discernment by the noble ones as “This is bliss”’: This is a second contemplation. For a monk rightly contemplating this duality in this way—heedful, ardent, & resolute—one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis right here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

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

“All sights, sounds, smells, tastes,  
tactile sensations, & ideas  
that are      welcome,  
            appealing,  
agreeable—  
as long as they’re said  
            to exist,  
are supposed by the world  
together with its devas  
            to be bliss.  
But when they cease,  
that’s supposed by them  
            to be stress.  
The stopping of self-identity  
is viewed by the noble ones

as bliss.

This, when seen,  
runs counter  
to the whole world.

What others say            is blissful,  
the noble ones say        is stress.  
What others say            is stressful,  
the noble know            as bliss.  
See the Dhamma, hard to understand!

Here those who don't know  
are confused.

For those who are veiled,  
it's    darkness,  
blindness  
for those who don't see.

But for the good it is blatant,  
like light for those who see.

Though in its very presence,  
they don't understand it—  
dumb animals, unadept in the Dhamma.

It's not easy  
for those overcome  
by passion for becoming,  
flowing along  
in the stream of becoming,  
falling under Māra's sway,<sup>[12](#)</sup>  
to wake up  
to this Dhamma.



Who, apart from the noble,  
is worthy to wake up  
to this state?—  
the state that,  
through rightly knowing it,  
they're effluent-free,  
totally  
unbound.”

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 approximately sixty monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

— [Sn 3:12](#)

## NOTES

1. See SN 56:22. [↵](#)

2. The term ‘acquisition’ (*upadhi*), in its everyday sense, denotes the possessions, baggage, and other paraphernalia that a nomadic family might carry around with it in its wanderings. On the psychological level, it denotes anything for which one might have a sense of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ and which, consequently, one would carry around as a kind of mental baggage. The verse following this prose passage is identical with the Buddha's first answer to Mettagū in [Sn 5:4](#). [↵](#)

3. See [Iti 15](#). [↵](#)

4. Arousal = *ārambha*, a word with many possible alternative meanings. Among them: disruption; seizure of an object; inception of action (often with violent connotations). [↵](#)

5. “There are these four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second,

intellectual intention the third, and consciousness the fourth.” — [SN 12:63](#).

For more on this topic, see [SN 12:63–64](#). ↵

6. See [Dhp 92–93](#). ↵

7. See [Iti 63](#), [SN 1:20](#), and [SN 22:85–86](#). ↵

8. See [Ud 8:4](#). ↵

9. See [Iti 72–73](#). ↵

10. See [MN 113](#), note 3. ↵

11. “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](#)

↵

12. On Māra’s sway, see [SN 4:19](#), [SN 35:115](#), [SN 35:189](#), and [SN 35:199](#). ↵

§ 59. I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And on that occasion Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was living in Suppāraka by the seashore. He was worshipped, revered, honored, venerated, and given homage—a recipient of robes, alms food, lodgings, & medicinal requisites for the sick. Then, when he was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking appeared to his awareness: “Now, of those who in this world are arahants or have entered the path of arahantship, am I one?”

Then a devatā who had once been a blood relative of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth—compassionate, desiring his welfare, knowing with her own awareness the line of thinking that had arisen in his awareness—went to him and on arrival said to him, “You, Bāhiya, are neither an arahant nor have you entered the path of arahantship. You don’t even have the practice whereby you would become an arahant or enter the path of arahantship.”

“Then who, in this world with its devas, are arahants or have entered the path to arahantship?”

“Bāhiya, there is a city in the northern country named Sāvattḥī. There the Blessed One—an arahant, rightly self-awakened—is living now. He truly is an arahant and teaches the Dhamma leading to arahantship.”

Then Bāhiya, deeply chastened by the devatā, left Suppāraka right then and, in the space of one night, went all the way to where the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattḥī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now on that occasion, a large number of monks were doing walking meditation in the open air. He went to them and, on arrival, said, “Where, venerable sirs, is the Blessed One—the arahant, rightly self-awakened—now staying? We want to see that Blessed One—the arahant, rightly self-awakened.”

“The Blessed One has gone into town for alms.”

Then Bāhiya, hurriedly leaving Jeta’s Grove and entering Sāvattḥī, saw the Blessed One going for alms in Sāvattḥī—serene & inspiring serene confidence, calming, his senses at peace, his mind at peace, having attained the utmost tranquility & poise, tamed, guarded, his senses restrained, a Great One (*nāga*). Seeing him, he approached the Blessed One and, on reaching him, threw himself down, with his head at the Blessed One’s feet, and said, “Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & happiness.”

When this was said, the Blessed One said to him, “This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms.”

A second time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, “But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One’s life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed

One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & happiness.”

A second time, the Blessed One said to him, “This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms.”

A third time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, “But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One’s life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my long-term welfare & happiness.”

“Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself.

“When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress.”

Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Having exhorted Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth with this brief explanation of the Dhamma, the Blessed One left.

Now, not long after the Blessed One’s departure, Bāhiya was attacked & killed by a cow with a young calf. Then the Blessed One, having gone for alms in Sāvattthī, after the meal, returning from his alms round with a large number of monks, saw that Bāhiya had died. On

seeing him, he said to the monks, “Take Bāhiya’s body, monks, and, placing it on a litter and carrying it away, cremate it and build him a memorial. Your companion in the holy life has died.”

Responding, “As you say, lord,” to the Blessed One, the monks—placing Bāhiya’s body on a litter, carrying it away, cremating it, and building him a memorial—went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to him, “Bāhiya’s body has been cremated, lord, and his memorial has been built. What is his destination? What is his future state?”

“Monks, Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and didn’t pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, monks, is totally unbound.”

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

Where water, earth,  
fire, & wind  
have no footing:  
There the stars don’t shine,  
the sun isn’t visible.  
There the moon doesn’t appear.  
There darkness is not found.  
And when a sage,  
a brahman through sagacity,  
has realized [this] for himself,  
then from form & formless,  
from pleasure & pain,  
he is freed.

— [\*Ud 1:10\*](#)

§ 60. Then Ven. Mālun̄kyaputta, who was ardent & resolute, 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: “It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief so that, having heard the Dhamma from the Blessed One, I might dwell alone in seclusion: heedful, ardent, & resolute.”

“Here now, Mālun̄kyaputta: What will I say to the young monks when you—aged, old, elderly, along in years, come to the last stage of life—ask for an admonition in brief?”

“Lord, even though I’m aged, old, elderly, along in years, come to the last stage of life, may the Blessed One teach me the Dhamma in brief! May the One Well-Gone teach me the Dhamma in brief! It may well be that I’ll understand the Blessed One’s words. It may well be that I’ll become an heir to the Blessed One’s words.”

“What do you think, Mālun̄kyaputta? The forms cognizable via the eye that are unseen by you—that you have never before seen, that you don’t see, and that are not to be seen by you: Do you have any desire or passion or love there?”

“No, lord.”

“The sounds cognizable via the ear...

“The aromas cognizable via the nose...

“The flavors cognizable via the tongue...

“The tactile sensations cognizable via the body...

“The ideas cognizable via the intellect that are uncognized by you—the you have never before cognized, that you don’t cognize, and that are not to be cognized by you: Do you have any desire or passion or love there?”

“No, lord.”

“Then, Mālun̄kyaputta, with regard to phenomena to be seen, heard, sensed, or cognized: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Mālun̄kyaputta, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress.”

“I understand in detail, lord, the meaning of what the Blessed One has said in brief:

Seeing a form  
—mindfulness lapsed—  
attending  
to the theme of ‘endearing,’  
impassioned in mind,  
one feels  
and remains fastened on it.  
One’s feelings, born of the form,  
grow numerous,  
Greed & annoyance  
injure one’s mind.  
Thus amassing stress,  
one is said to be far  
from unbinding.

Hearing a sound...  
Smelling an aroma...  
Tasting a flavor...  
Touching a tactile sensation...

Knowing an idea  
    —mindfulness lapsed—  
attending  
    to the theme of ‘endearing,’  
impassioned in mind,  
    one feels  
    and remains fastened on it.  
One’s feelings, born of the idea,  
    grow numerous,  
Greed & annoyance  
    injure one’s mind.  
Thus amassing stress,  
    one is said to be far  
    from unbinding.

Not impassioned with forms  
    —seeing a form with mindfulness firm—  
dispassioned in mind,  
    one knows  
    and doesn’t remain fastened on it.  
While one is seeing a form  
    —and even experiencing feeling—  
it falls away and doesn’t accumulate.  
Thus one fares mindfully.  
Thus not amassing stress,



one is said to be  
in the presence of unbinding.

Not impassioned with sounds...  
Not impassioned with aromas...  
Not impassioned with flavors...  
Not impassioned with tactile sensations...

Not impassioned with ideas  
—knowing an idea with mindfulness firm—  
dispassioned in mind,  
one knows  
and doesn't remain fastened on it.  
While one is knowing an idea  
—and even experiencing feeling—  
it falls away and doesn't accumulate.  
Thus one fares mindfully.  
Thus not amassing stress,  
one is said to be  
in the presence of unbinding.

“It's in this way, lord, that I understand in detail the meaning of what the Blessed One said in brief.”

“Excellent, Mālun̥kyaputta. Excellent. It's excellent that you understand in detail this way the meaning of what I said in brief.”

[The Buddha then repeats the verses.]

“It's in this way, Mālun̥kyaputta, that the meaning of what I said in brief should be regarded in detail.”

Then Ven. Mālun̥kyaputta, having been admonished by the admonishment from the Blessed One, got up from his seat and bowed down to the Blessed One, circled around him, keeping the Blessed One

to his right side, and left. Then—dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute—he in no long time entered & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, directly 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. Māluṅkyaputta became another one of the arahants.

— [SN 35:95](#)

## *Conclusions*

In the Introduction, we noted the patterns that the Buddha established in his earliest discourses for bringing his listeners immediately to awakening. He started first with the four noble truths and their duties, prefacing this topic with the graduated discourse for lay people who needed to have their minds weaned from sensuality and into a state of concentration before they could fully benefit from learning the four truths.

Once listeners were familiar with these truths—either through direct experience of all four, or through conviction in them—the Buddha would then introduce them to the questionnaire applying the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self to the five aggregates or six sense media. For those familiar with the four truths, these perceptions were effective in getting them to abandon any clinging for the aggregates and thus fulfill the duties of the truths.

How far the Buddha's listeners advanced along the noble attainments while listening to these topics, though, depended on what they brought to the act of listening. According to him, as we have noted, they had to bring three faculties—conviction based on an acute awareness of suffering, concentration, and discernment—in order to awaken then and there. Because right concentration also entails persistence and mindfulness—equivalent to right effort and right mindfulness—this means that the listener had to engage in all five of the faculties while listening in order to gain a noble attainment at the same time.

Their conviction also had to be accompanied by joy—a sense of relief over having found a teaching that could release them from the sufferings of which they were intensely aware.

Although this pattern remained standard throughout the Buddha's teaching career, we've also noted ways in which he and his disciples worked variations on it, sometimes seeming to diverge from it quite widely. Among the most striking examples are the discourses in which the Buddha doesn't mention the four truths or the three perceptions at all, and which gain their force from striking similes. Also striking are the short riddles that challenged their listeners to figure out how those riddles applied to their own minds.

In all cases where the talks depart from the standard pattern, though, we've found that the departures can be explained by the nature of dependent co-arising, the Buddha's most complex explanation of the sequence of causes of suffering. The sequence's non-linear structure, with many interdependent feedback loops, means that a person can focus on developing dispassion for any cause-and-effect pair of factors in the sequence and, as a result, bring the whole sequence down.

The important point to keep in mind with regard to all the talks that bring their listeners to awakening is that the words are meant to be performative. They don't just describe the truth, they're also aimed at inducing a change in the listener's heart. The clinging that constitutes suffering is based on a value judgment: that whatever stress is involved in the clinging is adequately repaid by the pleasure it affords. The purpose of the Dhamma is to get the listener to reverse that value judgment, seeing that whatever pleasure is entailed in clinging is *not* worth the pain. The Buddha and his disciples used whatever means they could—long analyses, short verses, riddles, similes, questions—to induce this change of heart.

It's informative, though, to consider three things that they *didn't* do in these talks.

- First, even though the talks are aimed at inducing an experience that will cut through the ten fetters that bind the mind to the processes of birth and death, the talks following the standard pattern mention issues that touch on only four of the fetters: sensual desire and ignorance of the four noble truths in the graduated discourse, and issues of self—related to the fetters of self-identity view and conceit—in the questionnaire. None of the other fetters are addressed. Among the outliers from the standard pattern, only two—[MN 140](#) and [Sn 3:12](#)—touch on the drawbacks of concentration, which would be related to the fetters of passion for form and passion for the formless. But those are rare exceptions. Some of the talks don't mention anything connected to the fetters at all.

- Second, it's also the case that none of the talks seem specifically aimed at inducing this or that noble attainment. The graduated discourse discusses the four noble truths in detail, but in only one case—Yasa's—does it lead the listener to abandon the corresponding fetter of ignorance. The questionnaire on the three perceptions would sometimes lead its listeners to arahantship, yet sometimes—as in the case of Ven. Ānanda [[§40](#)]*—only to stream-entry.*

So there's no telling from a talk what attainment the listener will attain. This is in line with the fact that the listener doesn't need to know anything of the fetters beforehand. What cuts the fetters is the experience of the deathless. And how many fetters are cut will depend on the acts of discernment that follow on that experience.

- This connects with the third point: The Buddha's discussions of what goes on in the experience of awakening show that there are two

critical junctures where the individual's ability to commit and reflect play a crucial role.

1. To begin with, he or she has to see that the value judgments fostered by the Buddha's five-step program, to lead to a noble attainment, must be applied not only to the objects of clinging and craving in the first and second noble truths, but also to the path factors that constitute the fourth: seeing the origination, passing away, allure, drawbacks, and escape from the five faculties. Anyone who is not quick to reflect in this way and find the escape even from the path that he or she has been following will not be able to reach any of the levels of awakening. At all.

2. Further, when a meditator attains any of the levels of right concentration, reflects on the drawbacks of concentration, and inclines the mind to the deathless, he or she has to be quick to reflect to see if any clinging remains around the experience of the deathless itself. Those who reflect successfully in this way, abandoning even the subtlest forms of clinging even for what is not fabricated, will achieve full awakening; those who don't, will reach a lower level, non-return.

Yet even though both these moments of reflection are crucial, none of the talks that induce an immediate experience of the deathless mention them. The two outlying passages that we just noted—[MN 140](#) and [Sn 3:12](#)—come close when they describe the drawbacks of and escape from concentration. But even they don't hint at the drawbacks of and escape from discernment. So, aside from these partial exceptions, it's totally up to the listeners to intuit, on their own, the need to reflect in these ways on the practices to which they have committed themselves.

Why they're left to intuit this on their own, the texts don't say. Perhaps the speaker saw there would be no need to mention these reflections, in that the listeners already had developed the habit of being thoroughly meticulous in reflecting on their own actions. Or perhaps their attainments required moments of totally independent insight, when they had to exercise their own discernment in an unexpected and unscripted way so as to abandon all acts of discernment and be truly free from fabrications and anticipations of all kinds.

Either way, the need for this type of commitment and reflection shows that the Buddha was wise in training his disciples who *didn't* gain immediate awakening to develop their ability to reflect on their own commitment to their actions all along the path. That way, they could develop this habit and have it on hand when they really needed it as the path reached its end.

We can see the Buddha teaching this ability from the very beginning, in his instructions to his son, Rāhula, on how to reflect on his intentions, his actions, and their results with regard to all his thoughts, words, and deeds ([MN 61](#)). These instructions are among the most elementary in the Dhamma, and yet they're among the most consistently relevant. They keep getting repeated on higher and higher levels of the practice, as in the Buddha's instructions to Ven. Ānanda on the topic of emptiness, when he explains how a monk should reflect on the disturbances that his own perceptions are causing in one level of concentration so that he can drop those perceptions and bring the mind to levels of concentration that are progressively deeper and more devoid of disturbance, all the way to awakening ([MN 121](#)).

People often complain, when reading the words of a talk that led a listener to experience the deathless: "Why don't I experience the

deathless when listening to the same words?” The answer: “You need greater powers of commitment and reflection.”

The good news is that those powers can be trained, and that the Dhamma offers thorough instructions in how to train them.



## Glossary

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

*Āsava*: Effluent; fermentation. Three qualities—sensuality, becoming, and ignorance—that “flow out” of the mind and create the flood of the round of death and rebirth. Sanskrit form: *Āsrava*.

*Asura*: A member of a race of beings who, like the Titans in Greek mythology, battled the devas for sovereignty in heaven and lost.

*Bhava*: Becoming—an identity in a particular world of experience. These identities and worlds can exist either on a micro scale, in the mind, or on a macro scale, in the world outside, and can occur on any one of three levels: the level of sensuality, of form, or of formlessness.

*Brahmā*: A deva inhabiting the realms of form or formlessness.

*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(tā)*: Literally, “shining one.” An inhabitant of the terrestrial or celestial realms higher than the human.

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

*Dukkha*: Suffering; stress; pain.

*Gandhabba*: A deva on one of the lower celestial levels, often portrayed as a trickster obsessed with music and sex.

*Gotama*: The Buddha's clan name. Sanskrit form: *Gautama*.

*Jhāna*: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration, devoid of sensuality or unskillful thoughts, focused on a single physical sensation or mental notion that is then expanded to fill the whole range of one's awareness. Sanskrit form: *Dhyāna*.

*Kamma*: Intentional act. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

*Māra*: The personification of death, temptation, and all forces, within and without the mind, that create obstacles to release from the round of rebirth.

*Nāga*: A magical serpent, technically classed as a common animal but possessing many of the powers of a deva, including the ability to take on human shape.

*Nibbāna*: 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. “Total unbinding” in some contexts denotes the experience of awakening; in others, the final passing away of an arahant. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa*.

*Pāli*: The language of the oldest extant complete Canon of the Buddha's teachings.

*Pāṭimokkha*: The basic code of rules for monks and nuns. The monks' code contains 227 rules; the nuns', 311.

*Sakya*: The name of the Buddha's extended family.

*Samsāra*: Transmigration; the process of wandering through repeated states of becoming, entailing repeated birth and death.

*Samvega*: A sense of overwhelming terror or dismay over the pointlessness of life as it is normally lived.

*Saṅgha*: On the conventional (*sammati*) level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns. On the noble or ideal (*ariya*) level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry.

*Sutta*: Discourse. Sanskrit form: *Sūtra*.

*Tathāgata*: Literally, “one who has become authentic (*tatha-āgata*),” or “one who is really gone (*tatha-gata*),” an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In the Pāli Canon, this usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

*Uposatha*: Observance day, coinciding with the full moon, new moon, and half moons. Lay Buddhists often observe the eight precepts on this day. “Uposatha” also refers to the ceremony in which monks meet to listen to the recitation of the Pāṭimokkha on the full moon and new moon uposathas.

*Vinaya*: The monastic discipline, whose rules and traditions comprise six volumes in printed text.

## *Abbreviations*

|             |                         |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| <i>AN</i>   | <i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i> |
| <i>Cv</i>   | <i>Cullavagga</i>       |
| <i>Dhp</i>  | <i>Dhammapada</i>       |
| <i>DN</i>   | <i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>     |
| <i>Iti</i>  | <i>Itivuttaka</i>       |
| <i>MN</i>   | <i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>  |
| <i>Mv</i>   | <i>Mahāvagga</i>        |
| <i>SN</i>   | <i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>  |
| <i>Sn</i>   | <i>Sutta Nipāta</i>     |
| <i>Thag</i> | <i>Theragāthā</i>       |
| <i>Thig</i> | <i>Therīgāthā</i>       |
| <i>Ud</i>   | <i>Udāna</i>            |

*References to DN, Iti, and MN are to discourse (sutta); references to Dhp, to verse. References to Cv and Mv are to chapter, section, and sub-section. References to other texts are to section (nipāta, saṃyutta, or vagga) and discourse.*

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